

## **Web Forums for Advanced English Courses at the University of Minnesota, Morris**

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## **Web Forums for Advanced English Courses at the University of Minnesota, Morris**

### **Project Description**

This project seeks to enhance student learning through the development of web forums for all English 3000 and 4000-level courses as well as Creative Writing courses. Discussion is a vital part of these upper-level courses and workshops are a vital part of our Creative Writing courses. Web forums will give students another avenue to collaborate, discuss, and provide peer review. Our 3000 level topics courses are capped between 25-35 students, a number which sometimes make it difficult to include everyone in discussion and can intimidate some students; web forums will increase the number of students who can join in discussion. Finally, our discipline requires all majors to take a 4000-level research seminar. This course is designed to foster not only written research, but also dialogue regarding primary and secondary readings and student-generated research. Because discussion is such a vital part of the class, enrollment is capped at 12 students. While the small class size does aid in discussion, we believe that a web forum will dramatically enhance the debate and thus the learning that takes place in our research seminars. The primary enhancement will be in the opportunity for students to continue class discussion outside of the seminar. Students will have time to respond to comments made in class, to discuss concepts and texts in greater detail, and in general to expand the conversation beyond class time constraints. In addition, this discussion format benefits those students who feel less comfortable speaking in class and will lead to a more balanced discussion that allows all students an equal opportunity to participate.

We are requesting that permanent forums be established on the English Discipline Website for our 3000 and 4000-level courses and our Creative Writing courses. We are requesting funds for training faculty with little or no experience in web-based teaching practices who want the opportunity to make IT-supported learning part of their pedagogy.

This project will benefit the entire English discipline and its majors. However, we are including only the names of myself as the principal investigator, Gretchen Minton, and Janet Schrunk Ericksen as the core faculty for this project.

### **Specific Aspect of Learning Outcomes Expected from Project**

Web forums offer a long-range base for extending the classroom work and intellectual development of English majors. This technology will provide our students with the opportunity to further develop collaborative discussion through both student-to-student and student-to-faculty interaction. Students can continue discussion outside the constraints of class time and can introduce outside material that they feel is related to the topic at hand. Forums can also be liberating for a range of students who, for a variety of reasons from shyness to learning disabilities to second language issues, may not feel comfortable speaking in class. Students will have more time to formulate a response and can join the discussion when they are comfortable and prepared. Students will also be able to review the material generated by their peers, giving them more time to reflect. Moreover, these written discussions will promote student writing, an important part of their development as English majors. Finally, this project will encourage both student and faculty “technophobes” to attempt technology-based learning and pedagogies.

### **Specific Activity**

The specific activity this grant will support is a collaborative forum for learning and teaching. Students will be asked to continue class discussion, to respond to specific prompts, and to provide feedback to their peers.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Investigators, Assistants, and University Support Staff Members**

The core investigative team will be responsible for investigating different software options to decide which program will work best for our discipline. We will also be the first to receive training in the use of this technology. We will need the support of University Staff to help with software selection and training for the core team and, eventually, all English faculty who are interested in using the forums as part of their pedagogy. We will also need a student assistant to help maintain the forums and assist with trouble-shooting.

**Timetable and Budget**  
**PROPOSED TIMELINE**

GRANT ACTIVITY	TIMELINE	BUDGET
INITIAL TRAINING & PROJECT ENRICHMENT STAGE	JANUARY 18-MAY 13, 2005	JANUARY 18-MAY 13, 2005
Initial Work		Bush Grant: Faculty Stipends \$2000
Training		Bush Grant: Software \$1000
Type of Training		TEL Matching Funds: Student TA and Staff Support \$1000
Pedagogical (Diverse learning styles)		
Technological		
Detailed Plan Addressing Student Learning, Diverse Learning Styles, and technology		
Training Stage Assessment Faculty Survey		
Progress Report (Training Stage)		
DEVELOPMENT STAGE	MAY 16-JULY 29, 2005	
Development of Instructional Materials		TEL Matching Funds: Faculty Stipends \$2000
Development Stage Assessment Faculty Survey		TEL Matching Funds: Continuation of Student TA and Staff Support \$1000
Progress Report (Development Stage)		
IMPLEMENTATION STAGE	FALL SEMESTER, 2005 AUGUST 28-DECEMBER 22, 2005	
Use of Developed Materials in Class		TEL Matching Funds: Continuation of Faculty Stipend and Student TA and Staff Support \$1000
Implementation Stage Assessment Faculty Survey		
Progress Report (Implementation Stage)		
DISSEMINATION STAGE	SPRING SEMESTER, 2006 JANUARY 17-MAY 12, 2006	
Participant Presentations		
Students' Learning Assessment		
Final Report		
Overall Assessment Faculty Survey		

We will need to review software options to see which package best meets the needs of our department. We will also need to receive training in the use and maintenance of this software. Our goal is to have web forums in place for our Research Seminars in the fall of 2005 and all 3000 and 4000-level courses as well as Creative Writing courses by the spring of 2006. The core investigators will receive most of their training in the spring and summer of 2005 with additional faculty receiving training during the 2005-2006 school year. We have received a \$3000 Archibald Bush Foundation Grant for this project, money which will support faculty stipends and the purchase of software. We are asking for \$3000 in matching TEL funds for additional faculty stipends, a student assistant salary, and University Staff support salary.

**Departmental Support and Connection with Strategic Initiatives**

Our college strives to provide all of our students with the opportunity to be part of a liberal arts learning community based on research and dialogue. This project offers a new learning path for all of our students that will enhance their ability to debate, to write a persuasive argument, and to collaborate with their peers and their professors as they work towards their degree. In short, this project allows all of our students to feel that they are a vital part of their learning community.