

**Ventura College Sabbatical Leave Proposal**  
Curriculum Development and Enhancement Project for Fall 2015  
Submitted by Eric Lars Martinsen  
English Department  
November 2014

**Instructor's Sabbatical Leave Status**

**Full-time hire date:** August 2009

**Previous Sabbaticals:** 0

**Digital Writing and Literacies in the Computer-Assisted Classroom**

*"Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies are multiple, dynamic, and malleable."*

~ From *The NCTE Definition of 21st Century Literacies*

**Background of Sabbatical Project**

Student writers at Ventura College spend a lot of time at the BEACH, that is, the Learning Resource Center's Best Educational Access to Computers and Help. The vast majority of English composition classes (ENGL V03, V02 and V01A) split their in-class time equally between traditional classrooms and the BEACH's computer-assisted classrooms. Each year over 4,000 students take at least one composition class, and 70 percent of our students take two or more composition courses to meet the transfer-level requirements.

Our deep integration of computer-assisted writing instruction is unique within the VCCCD district and uncommon within writing programs across the California Community College system, and we are well positioned to educate our students in 21<sup>st</sup> century digital writing and literacy. However, the full potential of teaching writing with computers remains unrealized at Ventura College because of the lack of discipline-specific professional development on campus and a need for easily accessible digital activities based on the best practices in the field.

In spring 2013, I volunteered to develop and present the first (and so far only) training session for English faculty specifically on teaching writing with computers in the BEACH. Several senior English instructors reported that they had received no training when the department began using computer-assisted classrooms in the late 1990s. In fall 2013 and spring 2014, most of my faculty observations as department chair were of class sessions in the BEACH, and while a handful of instructors masterfully integrate technology into the composition classroom, many instructors shared with me their struggles to make full use of the technology.

## **Purpose of Sabbatical Project**

My goal is to use the one-semester sabbatical leave, first, to advance my own repertoire in the computer-assisted classroom in order to better teach writing, promote digital literacies and serve the 21<sup>st</sup>-century demands of Ventura College students. To apply and share what I learn, I will then create a resource library and bibliography for composition faculty on computer-assisted instruction; an online repository of BEACH writing and literacy activities for instructors to use in their classes; and a professional development workshop (with a D2L shell) for English faculty on teaching writing and digital literacy in the BEACH.

## **Components of Sabbatical Project**

- Research and Bibliography on Writing with Computers and Digital Literacies

The first phase of my sabbatical leave project includes research and academic study on effective computer-assisted writing instruction, including digital writing, multimodal writing and digital literacies. I have taught fully online courses since 1999 using a wide variety of instructional technologies and CMSs, but it is only since I arrived at Ventura College in 2009 that I have taught in a face-to-face setting with computers. I will review current research on teaching writing with computers with an eye toward developing a selected bibliography for English faculty. Also, I will participate in a MOOC such as "e-Learning Ecologies," "Learning to Teach Online," "Blended Learning: Personalizing Education for Students" among others. Since instructional technology is such a fast-moving discipline, my sabbatical leave will allow me opportunity to strengthen my knowledge and expertise in this field with the goal of applying and sharing what I learn to enhance the use of technology for all instructors who teach writing and digital literacy in the BEACH.

- Online Repository of Writing and Digital Literacy Activities for the BEACH

To encourage English faculty to adopt new practices in the BEACH, I will begin an online repository of digital writing and literacy activities in Desire2Learn that can easily be imported for use in any composition class. These computer-assisted learning activities will cover the spectrum of technology and writing abilities for use by students in basic skills and transfer-level composition classes. Faculty already proficient in the use of instructional technology will be invited to contribute BEACH activities they have developed as well. As a campus leader in distance education, I am well versed in the capacities of Desire2Learn. With the expiration of Course Studio, all courses on campus are now automatically set up with a D2L Lite shell. Faculty who may be hesitant to create their own activities in D2L Lite can be taught quite easily to import repository activities that are appropriate for their courses. According to Karen Kelly in "Computer-Assisted Writing Instruction: A Marriage of Effective Instruction and Technology," instructors' "own feelings of inadequacy and intimidation towards technology are a significant deterrent in their decision to incorporate it into teaching the writing process." By providing easy-to-access activities that are designed specifically for Ventura College students, faculty of all technology skill levels will

be able to teach more effectively in the computer-assisted classroom, particularly with a rigorous professional development program to support them.

- Professional Development Workshops and D2L Courses on Computer-Assisted Instruction

English instructors at Ventura Collage are already facing the challenge of teaching writing with computers and have begun to engage the issues of digital writing and literacy, but in many cases without adequate training. According to the CCCC Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments, writing programs should "assure that faculty have ready access to diverse forms of technical and pedagogical professional development before and while they teach in digital environments. Such support should include regular and just-in-time workshops, courses, individual consultations, and Web resources."

Clearly, a more systematic and on-going regimen of professional development activities is essential for composition instructors at Ventura College to use computer-assisted writing instruction most effectively to prepare our students for the academic and workplace demands of the 21st century.

As the final component of my sabbatical project, I will design and create a professional development workshop on computer-assisted writing instruction with attention to newer approaches to digital writing and literacies into the English classroom. A component of this workshop will be specifically designed for new adjunct English faculty who are often teaching in a computer-assisted classroom for the first time at Ventura College. To make this professional development workshop as accessible as possible, it will also be made available as an online training shell in Desire2Learn that can be accessed at any time by interested faculty.

### **Value of Sabbatical Project to VCCCD and Ventura College**

The elements I have outlined in my sabbatical project will be valuable both to the Ventura County Community College District and Ventura College. Improving writing instruction in computer-assisted composition classes at the BEACH will increase student success for over 4,000 students each year and help the district to meet the board's Strategic Goal #1: "Increase Assess and Student Success." Ventura College's current Strategic Implementation Plan focuses on teaching with technology to meet this broader district goal: the college will "enhance and support systems and training for faculty teaching and students taking online courses and promote the use of technology to enhance instruction and increase accessibility of course information for students" (1.1). Furthermore, the college's implementation plan seeks to "enhance the effectiveness of basic skill programs" (1.4). By creating a repository of best practices in computer-assisted writing instruction for basic skills and transfer-level students and designing a professional development workshop specifically for writing instructors, my project speaks directly to these district and college strategic goals.

## **Value of Sabbatical Project to Ventura College Students**

Enhancing the integration of technology with writing and addressing the complexities of digital literacy in the composition classroom will have a direct and immediate impact on Ventura College students by better preparing them for the academic and workplace writing requirements of our technology-driven 21<sup>st</sup> century society. Improving student success and preparation in the sequence of composition courses will be valuable for a large number of Ventura College students. In FY 13, 4360 students were enrolled in at least one course in the English composition sequence (ENGL V03, V02, V01A). With only 30 percent of students placing directly into the transfer-level ENGL V01A course, about 70 percent of Ventura College students spend at least two semesters in a writing classroom and a substantial amount of time in the BEACH.

While there is a tendency to view our students as “digital natives,” their so-called native abilities with technology are often limited to smartphones and social media. In contrast, a digitally literate person should be able to, in the terms of the NYC Department of Education’s website, “use technology strategically to find and evaluate information, connect and collaborate with others, produce and share original content, and use the Internet and technology tools to achieve many academic, professional, and personal goals.”

Educating our students to be digitally literate has become by default the task of English instructors at Ventura College but without the readily available technical and pedagogical professional development support recommended by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Since we already have the technology infrastructure for computer-assisted writing instruction in place at Ventura College, better trained instructors with easy access to the best practices in the field will provide better preparation for our students to succeed in 21<sup>st</sup> century universities and workplaces.

## **Value of Sabbatical Project to the Instructor**

While I have almost 15 years experience teaching with technology in a variety of modes, I have not had the time and opportunity for deep exploration, learning and incorporation of the latest composition theories and practices on how to teach writing for a digital age and how to teach students to be literate across various forms of media and in a range of contexts. In their 2013 *English Journal* article “No Longer a Luxury: Digital Literacy Can’t Wait,” Troy Hicks and Kristen Hawley Turner argue that “English teachers must embrace a new role: We must advocate for digital literacy, not just technology, in a way that reconceptualizes our discipline” (61). This sabbatical project represents not only an opportunity to refresh and reconceptualize my own teaching but also to develop professional development resources to provide my colleagues with the opportunity to adopt new strategies for teaching writing with computers and digital literacy in the BEACH. I thank the committee for your time and consideration.

With gratitude,  
Eric Lars Martinsen, Ph.D.  
Chair, Associate Professor of English

## **Key Terms**

### **Digital Literacy:**

Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to

- Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
- Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/21stcentdefinition>

Digital literacy is more than knowing how to send a text or watch a music video. It means having the knowledge and ability to use a range of technology tools for varied purposes. A digitally literate person can use technology strategically to find and evaluate information, connect and collaborate with others, produce and share original content, and use the Internet and technology tools to achieve many academic, professional, and personal goals. <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/innovation/ConnectedFoundations/EDL/default.htm>

### **Digital Writing:**

Digital writing is networked, and because of this, often deeply collaborative or coordinated.... Digital writing challenges what counts as writing and reveals the gap between how writing works in the world and how we teach it in schools.

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/why-digital-writing-matters-jeff-grabill>

Digital writing can be anything. It can be a blog post, an e-mail, a text message. It can be a tweet, or a Facebook update, or a conversation on Tumblr. It can be comments on blog posts, responses to news articles, book reviews shared on GoodReads, or fan fiction. It can also look a lot more traditional: poems posted on the web, self-published novels on Amazon and iBooks, or short stories uploaded to an online 'zine.

<http://www.digitalwritingmonth.com/what-is-digital-writing/>

### **Multimodal Writing:**

Creating images, sounds, designs, videos and other extra-alphanumeric texts is an aesthetic, self-originated, self-sponsored activity for many writers. Digital technologies have increasing capacity for individuals to adapt the tools for their own information and communication purposes. Students have the capability to apply literacy skills to real world problems and knowledge building. They are able to exercise creativity, work for social justice, and pursue personal passions (CCCC Feb. 2004 position statement). They have the means to publish their work to a global audience.

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/multimodalliteracies>