

Analyzing Multimodal Projects in the UNO Composition Classroom

Project Description

The First-Year Writing Program at UNO touches almost every student who attends UNO. What we teach – and how we define composition, specifically “good writing” – is vitally important, and also ever-shifting. The widespread availability of new technology and digital networking have changed the scope of writing so much that our writing program needs to continue to try to teach writing that employs *all* of the available rhetorical means to help students become proficient writers, paying special attention to audiences and purpose. The national Writing Program Administration Outcomes for US post-secondary education includes the following objectives:

- Understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences
- Adapt composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities

And UNO’s own course objectives include:

- Demonstrate an understanding of writing as a complex, recursive process whereby ideas are explored, developed, and communicated to a particular audience for a particular purpose.

The idea of audience is something that our students are already familiar with. Students are constantly composing for social media with a keen awareness of audience and purpose. With these new forms of writing, the world changes, which then changes the classroom (Clark 29). For well over 20 years, composition scholars have been defining best practices for incorporating new technology and rhetorical situations into the first-year writing classroom (see, for example, Yancey, Eyman, Shipka, Anderson, Baker and Ryalls, Delagrange, Hartelius et al., and Lutkewitte). Like most 4-year institutions across the US, UNO’s first-year writing program has not yet fully taken advantage of the ways multimodal composition can be effectively incorporated throughout the class - beyond a final product - such as discussions, drafting, and reflection.

This study will support an in-depth textual analysis of multimodal compositions (primarily videos) produced in a full-time UNO first-year writing instructor’s Comp I class at specific points in the class and for various purposes, including introductions, discussion, and reflection moments. The analysis will help uncover and articulate if (and how well) multimodal composing in Comp I helps students meet the course objectives, particularly in terms of audience and purpose. By studying the multimodal projects that are produced in a composition class here at UNO, I will be able to analyze the affordances and constraints that are presented and generate data that could benefit the entire first-year writing faculty as they incorporate new literacies into the writing classroom.

Methodologies

The first step in my study will be to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board and to identify a full-time first-year writing instructor who assigns multimodal composing throughout their class. I have already completed the required CITI training and I plan to submit my IRB application in March. After obtaining IRB approval, I will identify the instructor with the help of Dr. Christensen and obtain their permission to analyze the multimodal projects that are produced by students at three different times in the semester. I will also obtain the students' permission as determined by the IRB protocol.

As the multimodal projects are submitted, I will collect, organize, and transcribe a random sample of the videos for each of the projects. I will code the data using Stuart Blythe's method of coding digital texts. This process will include using both verbal and nonverbal units of analysis. I will examine the verbal elements with a focus on rhetorical units, which is "a segment that is classified as one type of rhetorical move—a move with the same author, intended audience, and purpose" (Blythe 210). I will also examine the nonverbal units by exploring "how something is communicated" (Blythe 211).

Then I will analyze the data using a method of rhetorical analysis identified by Sonja Foss as cluster analysis. This type of analysis identifies five or six key terms for each project, selected by frequency and intensity across the projects to keep the focus manageable. For visual cluster analysis, Foss recommends identifying "representational images or visual aspects of the key terms" (65). Then I will categorize the ideas, images, or other words that appear or "cluster" around these recurring key terms (Foss 63-65). This rich, in-depth textual analysis allows comparison not only with objectives of the specific assignment but also with the overall course objectives, for example, student understanding of their audience and purpose or the affordances of the new media.

Finally, I will apply Odell and Katz's principles of evaluating the effectiveness of multimodal compositions in the first-year writing classroom to create holistic scores of the effectiveness of each of the submitted videos. I will compare these holistic scores with the results of the cluster analysis to highlight any correlation or discrepancies. This rich analysis should yield results that point in productive directions for other composition instructors.

Product

As part of this study, I intend on submitting a conference proposal to the Conference on College Composition & Communication for the spring 2023 conference, where I would also participate in the Research Network Forum. Once the research and analysis are completed, I intend to submit the final product as an article to a journal such as *CCC*, *Computers and Composition*, or *Composition Forum*. Finally, I will present my findings at the Research and Creative Activity Fair in March 2023.

Project Timeline

March 2022	Submit IRB Approval Application.
April 2022-May 2022	Prepare Literature Review and Identify FYW Instructor; review assignments for Fall 2023
May 2022	Submit a proposal for 2023 <i>Conference on College Composition & Communication</i> .
June 2022-August 2022	Develop the coding terms, cluster analysis methods, and rubrics I intend to use
Fall 2022	Collect data and begin to analyze the data.
December 2022-January 2023	Analyze data
February/March 2023	Draft article; complete revisions and abstract
March 2023	Submit article and present at UNO's Research and Creative Activity Fair.

Student and Faculty Mentor Roles

Currently, I am a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the English M.A. program at UNO. My role as a student researcher will be to review current literature that is written about digital rhetoric and multimodal composition in the Composition classroom, reach out to the Composition instructor that Dr. Christensen and I select, create rubrics, transcribe and analyze data, write the article and conference proposal, and prepare to present at the UNO Research and Creative Activity Fair.

My faculty mentor will be Dr. Margarete Christensen, a scholar in Rhetoric and Composition with a specific interest in digital rhetoric, as well as the Director of UNO's First-Year Writing Program. Dr. Christensen will mentor me throughout this process while I prepare to collect data, analyze the data, and submit my research for conferences and publications. We will have regular meetings throughout this process as she will serve as my guide and editor.

Budget Justification

Expense	Description	Budget
Materials and Supplies	Office supplies (paper, pens, transcription printing, accessing scholarship not available through NU libraries, presentation materials).	\$100
Transcription Software	Pro price for 5 months of transcription editing. https://otter.ai/pricing	\$41.65
Student Stipend	I will use the summer salary to cover my living expenses, so, I can spend my entire work week completing this GRACA research and begin analysis. From May until August 2020, I will spend 40 hours a week working on this project.	4,858.35
	Totals:	5,000

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28 February 2022

To the GRACA Selection Committee:

I am pleased to write in support of Emily Kersten's 2022 GRACA application "Analyzing Multimodal Projects in the UNO Composition Classroom." For many reasons, the First-Year Writing Program (FYWP) at UNO has underutilized multimodal and multi-media composition in the academic writing classroom, while outside the academy students' use of video writing and creation continues to expand exponentially. Students' digital literacies are not fully engaged in more traditional, text-based approaches to the writing classroom, and this gap represents an important opportunity for writing programs like ours.

Keep in mind that we are not necessarily talking about supplanting the traditional academic essay with a "video project;" rather, we are seeking ways to incorporate video/audio composition into the fabric of the classroom and the writing process, including but not limited to online discussions, peer feedback, research proposal "pitches," responses to readings, and various reflective writing moments. Each of these integral stages can be enhanced with the use of additional modes beyond alphabetic texts. UNO's FYWP is currently sponsoring a study group developing ways to incorporate multimodal writing throughout the writing program, and Emily's research would supplement this work by providing a wealth of granular data we need to determine feasibility at specific junctures in the writing process, and also by possibly pointing out some of its more effective uses.

Once images and sound are added to textual analysis, the complexities of text-based research become more pronounced. Emily's approach of rhetorical analysis of students' videos – and cluster analysis specifically – is well-suited for her inquiry into multimodal/video projects in the composition classroom. As Emily describes in her proposal, the use of Blythe's coding methods and Foss' cluster analysis around key terms will serve her well to address her question of whether (and how well) these types of multimodal projects address specific aspects of the comp I course, particularly audience and purpose awareness. Furthermore, I'm confident she has sufficiently narrowed her focus and scope to complete her work in the given timeframe.

Emily's research would not only enhance the work of UNO's FYWP but would also contribute to current multimodal composition scholarship by moving analytical focus away from the "end" product itself, to more of the important day-to-day work throughout a writing course. Composition scholars would welcome Emily to present her findings at a national conference such as 4Cs, and a published journal article would likely follow. Emily is well-suited for this research project: she is currently outstanding in the writing classroom as one of our graduate Teaching Assistants, and I am her direct supervisor and instructor. In addition, she is currently enrolled in our graduate level qualitative research methods course, which will prepare her to complete the steps of this research project.

Thank you for your consideration of Emily's GRACA proposal; I encourage you to support her proposal for this important project. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



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