



Zoom(ing) Towards Online Pedagogies

The year 2020 has been full of surprising twists and challenges in the program, chief among them the shift to 100% online teaching. However, conversations around Online Writing Instruction (OWI) have been happening within the program for several years. To address the growing number of TAs teaching online, in 2018-19 the College Composition Program (CCP) created a new administrative support position, Online Writing Coordinator, which was filled by doctoral candidate Brendan Hawkins. Hawkins became a liaison with the Office of Distance Learning (ODL) to develop training and support for OWI. He explained that the training was modeled after Dr. Michael Neal’s OWI summer seminar, which is a hybrid course where graduate students explore the scholarship of OWI while experiencing and practicing online interactions, which was especially important pre-COVID-19.

Now with all classes online, Hawkins encourages OWI instructors to consider accessibility as well as relatability. In an effort to foster more equitable participation, Hawkins drafts assignment sheets in Google Docs and asks students to make comments and suggestions to improve them. Hawkins isn’t the only instructor experimenting with creative OWI assignments. Amory Orchard, who is teaching Peer Tutoring this semester, is also challenging her students in new digital spaces this semester. She uses

Zoom breakout rooms to facilitate richer discussions: “My students, just the other day, did a mock peer review session using the breakout rooms and alternated playing the role of tutor and student.” Orchard also suggests, however, that Zoom might not be the best platform for all online teaching and tutoring, so one of her course objectives is testing a variety of tools that might be helpful for consulting. For example, her students have met synchronously in a Google Doc to workshop their projects using the chat function. Effective online teaching and tutoring isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach. Like Hawkins and Orchard, other instructors in the program are experimenting with new ways to engage and interact with students, and having the summer OWI seminars and the ODL liaison in place is welcome support for online teaching during the pandemic.

A “3+2” CURRICULUM

This year the program made a few minor curricular adjustments, most notably in the “3+2 Curriculum” for PhD students, who will take the three core courses (Rhetoric, Composition, and Research) along with a selection of at least two of the following regular options: Digital Revolution and Convergence Culture, Visual Rhetoric, and Theories of Difference. Dr. Lathan suggested the name Theories of Difference to be inclusive of a larger range of diversity issues (e.g. race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, linguistics). In addition, MAs continuing to the PhD program can be more selective about which core classes they retake. Another curricular change is that Reading Group is now offered only once a year. While none of these changes are major, the goal is to remain flexible and responsive to student feedback.



GUEST SPEAKER: DR. ELAINE RICHARDSON



This semester, Dr. Rhea Lathan is teaching a version of her Critical Race Theory course, titled “Rac(ing) Around Composition.” In conjunction with this course, the Rhetoric and Composition Program will be virtually hosting guest speaker Dr. Elaine Richardson, Professor of Literacy Studies at Ohio State University on November 12th. In her talk “Underlying Conditions: Black Women and Girl-Identified People and Corona,” Dr. E. will share a performance she is developing that uses storytelling, monologues, and songs about news events to “illuminate how a gender lens on Black women and girls influences probabilities and specificities in a range of outcomes.” Connecting this project to COVID-19, she contends that the pandemic exposes violence against Black women and girls that has long existed within our culture. Even though the visit will be virtual this semester, we are excited to host Dr. E. and introduce her to our community!

The “Social Life” of Conferences

Like our pedagogies, academic conferences have changed this past year due to the global pandemic. Conferences play several important roles for scholars, providing opportunities to present new research, hear from others, and network with like-minded academics from around the world. Well over a dozen FSU faculty and students were accepted into conferences last year including, but not limited to, CCCC, RSA, CWWCA, GSOLE, and NCPTW. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, face-to-face conferences were canceled. While some conferences like CCCC shifted to an online format, other conferences like RSA did not. This has not stopped faculty and students from presenting their work. The RSA-FSU Student Chapter hosted an online round table for those accepted to RSA to present their papers. Likewise, individuals like Brendan Hawkins and Dr. Amanda May are embracing online formats, participating in virtual panels in conferences like GSOLE and NCPTW. Other individuals like Katelyn Stark, Michael Healy, and Tricia Rizza have been accepted to CCCC for 2021 and are currently exploring face-to-face and online options. Regardless of their decisions, FSU is poised to be well-represented in person or online.

