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Laura A. Ewing

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I feel as if I live online. Be it for work or recreation, my Internet persona is an important part of my daily life. I look at my students and see them updating Facebook pages, saving websites on Pinterest, and uploading videos to YouTube, and I wonder if they understand the importance of the person they appear to be online. In the spring 2011 semester, I had the opportunity to test these thoughts as I was assigned a section of Composition II Online. The program was in a developmental stage and needed projects to teach students how to write in nontraditional discourses. I saw my chance to share my love of crowd sourcing (and maybe build our town's Yelp page a bit).

This assignment was motivated not only by my own interest in crowd sourcing, but also by Kathleen Yancy's 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication keynote address, "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," where she addresses the need to integrate multimodal composition into the writing classroom and demonstrate to our students how their writing can be rhetorical and relevant in cyber space. Yancy asks how educators can harness the passion that students demonstrate in their writing out of the classroom (i.e., text messaging, instant messaging) and use it to teach composition: "Don't you wish the energy and motivation that students bring to some of these other genres they would bring to our arguments? How is it that what we teach and what we test can be so different from what our students know as writing?" (298).

While the initial goal of this project was to open up digital spaces for composition and tap into the excitement that first-year writing students have for digital technology, there was an opportunity to offer students the chance to test the rhetorical waters in the online sphere. Jason Palmeri (2012: 37) suggests in his recent work *Remixing Composition* that the goal of using multimodal media is to make students capable of making the best rhetorical choice of medium/mode: "By providing students with the options to compose using media other than print, we may greatly proliferate the kinds of ideas they can express in their analytical work." Therefore, the composition class becomes a place to discover and select the best medium and mode for their ideas.

Additionally, by asking students to compose in public, collaborative arenas, I called upon Kenneth Bruffee's (1984) assertion that collaborative learning is a necessity in writing classrooms, in terms of both the effect of socialization on cognitive development and the understanding of rhetorical considerations (e.g., audience, context). Working in spaces like Yelp and YouTube required students to consider the rhetorical context of the space while pulling from what had previously been posted. I further anticipated that this project might also provide advantages to students who would otherwise shrink in my classroom. Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe's "The Politics of the Interface" (1994: 483) acknowledges that within computer-supported spaces, "cues of gender, race, and socio-economic status are minimized; students speak without interruption; and marginalized individuals acquire more central voices." These online sites are not "innocent," however, and I needed to take care to prepare students for operating in a public online setting. I sought to do this through continual analysis of the spaces where we were working.

Throughout this project, students moved from creating a traditional composition essay, to taking an active role in their community and creating something that existed beyond the boundaries of our classroom while incorporating the ideas of writers outside of our immediate community. Clay Shirky (2010) refers to this as cognitive surplus, "the ability of the world's population to volunteer and contribute on large, sometimes global projects," where the outcome is a representation of many minds working together. My goal as a writing teacher was to demonstrate to my students how their writing may be utilized in the forms they already knew but for distinct rhetorical purposes.

This project, titled "Rhetorically Analyzing New Media Arguments," consists of three distinct parts: "Internet Persona," "YouTube as a Stage," and "Yelp It!," culminating in a formal writing assignment but also incorporating analysis of the students' own personae online, as well as the use of rhetorical strategies in various online situations. The final outcome of the project focused on students recognizing rhetorical moves that they implemented themselves when reading and reacting to an online discussion.

The Project

The project required students to use a variety of composition modes, ranging from a podcast to a formal essay. Since the class was taught completely online, I needed to find ways to get my students "talking" and engage them

in writing. Class discussion boards were utilized to connect classmates and discuss each week's topics. Students were also required to regularly view and comment on each other's posts.

Additionally, I tasked each student to start a blog about something he or she found interesting and maintain it throughout the semester. Blogs were composed using the open-source Tumblr blog website (www.tumblr .com) and ranged from travel destination discussions to music reviews; my only guidance was that the posts be consistent and well written and that the students read and comment weekly on each other's blogs using the blogs' comment functions. This practice allowed students to practice writing with a topic they enjoyed in a low-stakes situation while still acknowledging that Tumblr was a public sphere and, therefore, taking the necessary precautions for protecting their own online image. Prior to this project, appropriate online interactions were discussed and students were made aware of the likely permanence of online publication.

Part One: Internet Persona

The first part of this project began a month into the course and asked students to reflect on their blogs and any other online social networking they may conduct. Students were asked to synthesize their responses with the assigned readings on fallacy and ethos we had completed. The assignment asked the students to analyze their online personae.

Evaluate your blog, Twitter account, and any social networking services that you visit daily (Facebook, MySpace, etc.).

- What kind of personae do your online activities have? What made you choose your profile picture?
- What made you select to include and exclude certain pieces of information?
- What choices do other people make, and what do you suspect motivates those choices?

Post your response as a (two- to five-minute) podcast on the discussion board.

Students did not submit a written transcript, just the podcast, and they were graded not only on their delivery but also on their content—how well they addressed the questions, as they would have been in a traditional writing assignment. Most students reported that they had to write out their responses and record their podcasts two or three times before they felt it could be submitted. The podcasts were submitted via BlackBoard, so they were not public

in the fullest sense, but students could hear one another's work and freely comment on the quality of their podcasts.

I was intrigued by how much consideration the students took in creating online representations of themselves. By comparing their Facebook "self" to their Tumblr "self," they were able to recognize the distinct choices they made and the ethos they created. Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter were much more personal and afforded them more freedom to post pictures, comments, and videos that may be considered unsuitable in other contexts. I was comforted by the fact that despite my own expectation that first-year college students would post inappropriate material to these social networks, the majority were highly cognizant of parents, relatives, and potential employers seeing their pages, and so they took due diligence in selecting what was posted and, perhaps more important, what was not posted.

The Tumblr blogs posed a different challenge, however, as students knew they were being observed by each other and graded by me. I found a high amount of reflection on the blogs, with many students choosing to first write and edit in a familiar word processing program like Word or Pages before pasting their work into the blog. Furthermore, students were careful to post on topics they thought would be of interest to readers, as opposed to status updates and tweets they deemed more casual. While the term "ethos" was new to many, the concept was not, and this concept opened the class discussion to their responsibility when writing publicly.

Part Two: YouTube as a Stage

Once students had analyzed their own online ethos, it was time to explore the ethos of others, both positive and negative. They were asked to find an argumentative video on YouTube (www.youtube.com) and consider how the authors employ rhetorical strategies. The assignment consisted of the following activities:

• Search YouTube for a video presenting an argument. The author may be arguing for or against a political or social issue, an opinion on entertainment or the media. It could also be a clip from a documentary or political ad. Speeches and rallies are often recorded and posted online as well.

• After watching the video, post a 500–word explanation of the video and your opinion of the argument being made on the discussion board. Please also provide the link to your video.

Student selection of videos varied greatly, with some electing to review videos that had been introduced in other classes (a global warming video previously seen in an environmental science class) and others choosing videos reminiscent of their own interests ("The Great Debate: Twilight vs. Harry Potter"). Students found that many of the video arguments were initially persuasive but lacked evidence and credibility. This led us into discussions of pathos and the ethical use of visual rhetoric.

While the content of the videos was initially key for this element of the project, many students found themselves drawn to the ways commentators reacted to the videos. While students all recognized commenters who "flamed" during the conversation (posting incendiary remarks with the sole intention of angering others), they were particularly interested in the reaction to flame comments and the lack of support many participants used in these discussions. In reviewing the videos, we concluded that the video arguments that most effectively utilized visual rhetoric and recognized the rhetorical situation had much less incendiary commentary and more thoughtful discussion.

Part Three: Yelp It!

The final segment of this project asked students to consider how the writer and reader operate in an online space. Students composed reviews on the website Yelp (www.yelp.com) and acted as composers in an online space. Yelp is a crowd-sourcing site where individuals can share their reviews and experiences using various businesses and services in their area. While much of Yelp is directed toward food service (allowing people to review their local restaurants and coffee shops), the site has grown in recent years to include everything from vehicle maintenance to government offices. Additionally, "Yelpers" (those using Yelp) can rate reviews as "useful," "funny," or "cool."

Students were able to review any service they chose, though most did select restaurants, and reviews were posted on Yelp.com with links to the reviews available to the class on the discussion board. The goal of part three of the assignment was to show students where digital composition converged with traditional composition, and students wrote an analysis essay examining their online writing experiences. The assignment consisted of the following activities:

- Write and post a short review (approximately 100 words) on Yelp.com. This can be for any establishment you have visited, though it is easier if the page for

this establishment already exists. Post a 250– to 300–word explanation on the discussion board of the rhetorical choices that you made when writing your review. Please include a link to your Yelp review.

- Consider the rhetorical choices that people make when utilizing new media. How are logos, ethos, pathos, and kairos used to present an argument online? Submit a 750– to 1000–word essay drawing on sources and analyzing the online spaces you encountered during this project.

- Your analysis should draw from at least four sources that inform your discussion of the rhetorical techniques that you saw online. These sources may be other videos or presentations that help you compare or contrast the arguments that you viewed.

Student reviews were mostly favorable with negative reviewers taking care to support their opinions with specific details from their experience. We discussed the problems we saw in the YouTube commentary and how to avoid these pitfalls when writing reviews. Students also examined the need to maintain a professional tone so that their reviews would be rated favorably by other users of Yelp! readers.

This element of the project allowed students to see how their own writing can be used outside the classroom. Opening themselves up to public writing in this manner made them part of an ongoing conversation, with some students becoming involved in discussions with business owners about ways to improve service or praise employees. I noticed that student reviews tended to be longer than other reviews on Yelp! and garnered more favorable ratings. In their reflections, students seemed irritated by reviews that were not rhetorically aware or unprofessional. The space created by Yelp was one that the class overall seemed to consider as a means by which businesses could converse with patrons and increase customer satisfaction—not a space to simply complain or harass. The Yelp It! segment of the class thereby led to a discussion about purposeful writing and our own goals as writers in online forums.

Conclusion

This project's aim was to demonstrate to students the modes of composition available in an online and multi-modal setting. Each segment of the project incorporated online discussion and online peer review as a means of creating a collaborative classroom space. We addressed the ways in which writing changes as we move online, both as a class in a protected space in the BlackBoard setting and as individuals working in public sites. Moving from traditional composition to the responsibilities inherent with cognitive surplus

and crowd-sourcing requires class discussion about the ethical treatment of content as well as the permanent and public nature of their own persona online. Convincing students to treat public, online interfaces as sites for composition is no easy task. Students frequently do not see academic value in these sites or classify them as "fun" websites, which are separate from their school life and intellectual discourse. Addressing multimodal composition requires that these barriers be broken down so that students can recognize that not all composition occurs in the parameters of a classroom or within a Word document. Using the tools presented by social media and crowd-sourcing websites, students actively engaged in the public writing space and saw immediate value in their work. As a teacher of writing, I reflected on the ways my students would use the skills from a composition class when my course was complete. By creating this project, I aimed to provide tools for writing outside of my classroom (online or otherwise) and to offer my students the opportunity to be an active member in their community. The spaces that we used were both public and private, providing me a safety net to ensure that students did not post inappropriate material and allowing me adequate time to engage students in conversations about public writing before their first public publication.

I found this project to be successful, though it required a good deal of effort on my part to review all online forums and keep track of the various spaces students used. In the final stage of the project, students understood the importance of thinking rhetorically when considering the impact online writing may have on an audience and how it may be perceived in various contexts. Had this class been taught in a traditional classroom, access to computers would be imperative to engage in the discussions we held and share each other's work. The discussions themselves made this project much more collaborative than I had initially expected and ultimately resulted in fruitful conversations about what modes of writing would be the most effective in certain situations. The next time I teach this project, I plan to engage that collaborative nature more fully, turning elements like Yelp It! into group assignments and allowing cognitive surplus to be a driving force behind the project.

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