

## **Faculty Development Research Grant Proposal For Summer 2002**

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### **I. Project Summary**

My research examines a range of teaching scenarios—from academic spaces like composition classrooms and online classrooms to nonacademic learning environment such as a dance class—through a rhetorical and pedagogical perspective. My intent is to argue for an "embodied pedagogy" that re-configures the classroom as a place where our physical presence is honored. Through a rhetorical analysis of prominent texts in composition studies, teacher research, and analyses of student papers, classroom discussions, and interviews, I argue that teaching must be understood as a situated practice involving the body in both face-to-face and virtual spaces.

This summer, I will revise sections of my dissertation that address what I am calling "embodied pedagogy" and will produce a condensed version of my ideas for publication as a journal article. I presented earlier versions of this project at the two major conferences in my field, the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (1999) and the biannual Rhetoric Society of America Conference (2000). The editor of *The Journal of Advanced Composition*, a leading peer-reviewed journal in rhetoric and composition, expressed interest in my more recent presentation. This summer represents my first opportunity to move from formulating my ideas in the dissertation and presenting them at academic conferences to sharing them as a formal, public document in my field.

A Faculty Research Grant would enable me, as a new faculty member and beginning scholar, to publish this work in a timely manner. I will use this grant to 1) produce an academic article to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal in my field and 2) draw upon this research to update guidelines for English 105 and 106 that the English department is currently revising.

### **II. Narrative**

#### **1. Current Situation**

As the student population at colleges and universities continues to diversify, it becomes increasingly difficult to describe the "typical" student at any institution. In 2000, almost 20 percent of Elmhurst's first-year students were students of color. Representing 22 countries and twice as many states, these students come from a variety of language backgrounds and racial and ethnic backgrounds. My project addresses the question, "What does it mean for us to 'read' these bodies in our classrooms and to acknowledge difference?" This strikes me as a crucial question at a time when writing instruction and communication in general are becoming increasingly dominated by technology, a medium that some have claimed to be disembodied. At Elmhurst, for instance, "smart" classrooms allow both face-to-face and virtual interactions, and each forum enables and disables certain communicative acts.

My research argues that theories of teaching, and especially theories of teaching writing, should take into account the body and therefore issues of embodiment. Some theories of composition pedagogy have neglected corporeality or disfigured it, which has led to narrow and abstracted constructions of "the student" and "the teacher." We cannot teach effectively without theorizing the body and difference, without considering our own assumptions about our bodies and our

teaching. The role of the body in our culture, and specifically in the classroom, has implications for feminism, pedagogy and composition. Influential texts on pedagogy and in composition studies do not offer complicated notions of the body, if they offer a notion of “the body” at all. By not considering the body, such texts miss the sacrifices students and teachers are asked to make in the academy—in terms of their identity, their creation of knowledge, their constructions of texts and of themselves.

While my project explicitly addresses teaching writing in a postmodern culture and incorporates feminist theories, Russian philosopher Michael Bakhtin’s ideas factor significantly into my thinking about the body. Though not considered a “body” scholar, Bakhtin is useful in elucidating the body because of his “radical insistence on the situatedness of perception [that] results inevitably in an emphasis on the human body” (Holquist “Bakhtin” 218). As I investigate various teaching scenarios, this radical situatedness provides a fundamental framework for my analysis. Specifically, I draw upon Bakhtin’s idea of the “surplus of seeing” or “surplus of vision.” Bakhtin’s surplus of seeing involves the physically situated nature of the body. Bakhtin maintains that each person possesses a surplus of seeing, given his own unique physical positioning in a given context.

As Bakhtinian scholar Michael Holquist defines it, a surplus of seeing involves my authoring “a unified version of the event of our joint existence from my unique place in it by means of combining the things I see which are different from (in addition to) those you see, and the thing you see which are different from (in addition to) that difference” (*Dialogism* 37). On a literal level, if I am sitting across from you, you will see things behind me that I can not possibly see (including my own physical self at that moment). On the other hand, just because I cannot see those things does not mean they do not exist. On a figurative level, we each offer our own perspective because, at least according to Bakhtin, we are situated in a unique space that allows us our own perspective. In other words, “what we see is governed by how we see, and how we see has already been determined by where we see *from*” (Holquist *Dialogism* 164). In fact, “Everything must be approached from the point of view of—point of view. And point of view is always situated. It must first of all be situated in a physical body that occupies time and space, but time and space as embodied in a particular human at a particular time and in a particular place” (Bakhtin xxviii).

What I most emphasize about Bakhtin’s surplus of seeing is its concern with embodiment, difference, and the situated nature of perspective. Bakhtin’s surplus of seeing parallels feminist Susan Bordo’s “metaphor of the body” as a way of understanding our own epistemological limitations. Bordo asks,

What sort of body is it that is free to change its shape and location at will, that can become anyone and travel anywhere? If the body is a metaphor for our locatedness in space and time and thus for the finitude of human perception and knowledge, then the postmodern body is no body at all. (145)

My project aims to “reclaim” the body for postmodern theory and especially for contemporary writing instruction. The body acts as a metaphor, particularly in composition handbooks; the body presents itself as text to be read; and the literal text (such as the blinking cursor on the computer monitor) gets conflated with the body. The “body” is a general category, an abstraction. By contrast, “embodiment” refers to specific people enmeshed in particular situations.

Though there has been a recent proliferation of publications on the body<sup>1</sup> and though most of the work is interdisciplinary nature, little has been written about the body and teaching. Despite the many scholars who write about the body, and the few scholars who write about the body in relation to education, only a few book-length publications have appeared on the topic of pedagogy and the body, notably two collections of essays from Australia, Pedagogy, Technology and the Body (1996) and Taught Bodies (2000), and Sherry Shapiro's work in the field of dance, Pedagogy and the Politics of the Body (1999). My project joins this conversation on body theory, but applies this theory to the writing classroom. With the field of composition studies just starting to explore how body theory can inform writing instruction, I am especially eager to pursue my work this summer and contribute to this evolving conversation as further issues are raised and new technologies developed.

## 2. The Project Plan

My objective is to articulate the ways that body theory can inform writing instruction both theoretically and practically. I am arguing for interactions that involve attention to the actual participants, the context, the classroom, and the institution. I am proposing a literal reading of the classroom site—who occupies what space, who talks/who listens, who moves and who is stationary. I am also articulating a rhetorical reading of this space, with rhetoric understood here as a cultural practice. In analyzing various pedagogical scenarios, I pose the following research questions:

- Who embodies the role of teacher and student?
- How are those bodies read culturally and what tensions exist when a particular body *embodies* one of these institutional roles?
- How do we *embody* our texts online?
- How do *virtual* embodiments influence readings and interactions?

These are not only questions that we must answer individually in terms of our own pedagogy and courses; they raise issues we need to discuss with our students, who are developing their academic voices in writing and speech and who are learning new writing technologies that offer different relationships between communication and the body. Teaching is, as C. Mark Hurlbert designates it, a “phenomenologically overloaded act” (Blitz and Hurlbert 93). In this research agenda, I explore just how phenomenologically overloaded an act it is.

My research strategies include a close reading of the most recent scholarship, as this grant would allow me to spend considerable time over the summer at Northwestern University library, where I have access to the latest articles, books, and resources. As a teacher-researcher, I compiled data from student papers, classroom discussions, and interviews while writing the dissertation and I am eager to revisit these materials. In addition, my current teaching has offered other sources of data. This semester, I have incorporated Blackboard software into all three of my classes—100-level research writing, 200-level advanced writing, and 300-level professional writing. In each course, students construct appropriate personas online—as researchers, nonfiction writers, and workplace communicators, respectively. The fluidity and disruptions between these online and “offline” personas—both textually and corporeally—intrigue me, especially as more courses at

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<sup>1</sup> A few examples include N. Katherine Hayles' How We Became Posthuman (1999); Women's Bodies (1999), edited by Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw; Feminist Theory and the Body (1999), edited by Price, Janet and Margrit Shildrick; and Taught Bodies (2000), edited by Clare O'Farrell, Daphne Meadmore, Erica McWilliam, and Colin Symes.

the College incorporate Blackboard and as students (and teachers) face increasing opportunities to construct personas and relationships (academic and otherwise) in a range of forums.

In addition to making me a better teacher of writing, this research has scholarly potential. This grant will allow me my first opportunity to revise my dissertation ideas for publication. A journal publication in the Journal of Advanced Composition or in an equally distinguished journal in my field, such as College Composition and Communication or College English, will expose my work to a broad audience.

My goals this summer are to 1) revise my dissertation work into a journal article 2) submit this work to a peer-reviewed journal for publication and 3) incorporate my research into current faculty development initiatives in the English Department, most notably the revised guidelines for teaching English 105 and English 106.

### **3. Faculty Expertise**

This project grows out of my dissertation, Teaching the Student Body: Towards an Embodied Pedagogy, completed in August of 2001. My Ph.D. training is in rhetoric and composition, with my research focusing on issues of feminism, embodiment and technology. Currently, I am collaborating on an innovative project funded and sponsored by Bedford/St. Martin's Press, an online journal called "Lore: An e-Forum for Teachers of Writing." I created the site with colleagues from the University of Illinois at Chicago and am one of the editors of the site. As this website and my online work for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) demonstrates, I am particularly interested in translating pedagogical theory and composition research into sensible strategies for teachers. It is my hope that my proposed project will result in furthering the scholarly links between body theory and composition studies and will produce both an academic product (a journal article) and a practical document (revised guidelines for teaching English 105 and English 106).

### **4. Plans for Evaluation and Dissemination**

After further library research and revision, I plan to submit my project to an accredited, refereed journal in my field. I see this article as the first of several that will articulate pedagogical theory pertinent to composition studies. In addition to this national dissemination, I envision sharing this work with the College community in a number of ways beyond my classroom. The research will contribute directly to departmental initiatives, as the English Department revises its guidelines for first-year composition. Beyond the departmental level, I hope to make a research presentation to the campus community; I would be pleased to present, for instance, at next year's Faculty Women's Caucus Research Symposium. Finally, I envision drawing upon this research for outside grant applications that would assist me in implementing my ideas into my department's first-year writing program.

### **III. Timeline**

If given the research grant, I would not teach during the summer or do assessment consulting for Education Testing Services, as I have in previous summers. Most of June will be spent visiting Northwestern University's library, securing materials through interlibrary loan, photocopying articles and procuring books. From mid-June to mid-July, my reading, note taking, and analysis of primary data already collected will enable me to produce a rough draft that I will revise and polish by early August. In early August, I will send out the article for review and meet with my department chair to share ideas for revision of the department's first-year writing guidelines.

**IV. Budget**

Faculty Stipend	\$ 3,000
Photocopying at research library	\$ 200
Supplies (book, paper and miscellaneous)	\$ 200
Travel Expenses (to other research libraries as necessary for journal articles)	\$ 100

**V. Current and Previous grants**

I have received no current or previous grants. I am in my first year as an Assistant Professor at Elmhurst College.

**VI. Publications and Presentations of the Past Three Years****Dissertation**

Teaching the Student Body: Towards an Embodied Pedagogy (August 2001)

**Articles**

“Lore: An e-Journal for Teachers of Writing.” Website sponsored by Bedford/St. Martin’s Press. (Spring 2001).

“Technology and Teaching.” The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Teach 2000 Cyberbrief Project.

**Conferences**

“The Rhetoric of Writing Instruction: Composing Bodies.” Professing Rhetoric Conference, Rhetoric Society of America, Washington, D.C. May 2000.

“Teaching the Student Body: Towards an Embodied Pedagogy.” Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, GA, March 1999.

### Appendix 1: Works Cited

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