

Request for Title III Project Funds

Submitted by Alison Kuehner, Professor of English

1. Project Description

“Integrating Audio and Visual Materials into an Online Class”

The purpose of this project is to make the literature in an online class (English 115: Women in Literature) more accessible and understandable to students in the class. Since the course is taught entirely online, students must rely primarily on reading the literature on their own before discussing it on the class bulletin board. The intent of this project would be to make the women writers’ lives more accessible and better connected to the readings and the literature itself more understandable.

For instance, in the beginning of the class students must read poems written by women writers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Despite the footnotes and annotations in the texts as well as my written instructions about how to approach and read the poems, students often report that the archaic language is difficult to understand and rather off-putting. I believe that reading the poems aloud, commenting briefly on significant passages and making these readings available as audio files on the class website would help students better understand the language and the meaning of these poems. Similarly, some students have problems seeing the humor in *Pride and Prejudice* or distinguishing among the various characters. As the course is currently constructed, it is primarily through online discussion and dialogue that the humor can be explained and the characters realized (the first week’s online discussion assignment, for instance, is to post a character analysis). However, audio recordings of the instructor reading aloud the dialogue might better reveal the wit and humor behind the characters’ words, as well as the characters’ personalities.

Another important aspect of the class is to provide information on the authors’ lives—the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (the required text for the class) gives a brief biography of each woman writer and links are provided to online pictures and other brief biographical information on websites about the women writers. However, not all this information makes clear the connection between the women writers’ lives and their writings. For instance, I would like to record a brief explanation of the parallels between Charlotte Bronte’s life and the events in *Jane Eyre*, for instance, how Bronte, like Jane, attended a charity school for girls and watched her beloved sister die, just as Jane experienced the death of her beloved friend Helen at the Lowood Charity School. I would like to point out how behind the famous words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem “How Do I Love Thee” was her love for her husband, with whom she eloped and who supported her writing throughout her life. Again, I believe audio files—along with visual images of these women writers and significant places in their lives—would help to make the words on the page more vivid and understandable.

2. Project Outcomes

The project should help fulfill four of the five student learning outcomes on the course outline:

1. Read, discuss, and analyze selected examples of British and American literature by women writers.

Comment: Reading the literature aloud should help students with their own reading of the literature. The teacher's voice and instructions can serve as both a model and a guide for how to approach reading the literature and how to analyze it.

2. Differentiate how women from various ethnic backgrounds and social classes describe in their literature the differing and similar roles, problems, experiences and lives of women in British and American society.

Comment: One focus of the audio and visual files would be to help students better understand the connection between the literature they read and the authors' lives.

3. Examine and evaluate the traditional and changing standards of judgment that have been applied to literature written by women.

4. Recognize and give examples of the quantity and quality of literature written by women from various cultural and social backgrounds.

Comment: By providing audio files, students will be given examples of the literature written by women writers and be able to hear the quality of the language.

5. Think, read, discuss, and write critically and analytically about literature.

Comment: Hearing the literature read aloud should help student think about, read for themselves, and discuss online the literature. Rather than struggle with basic, literal comprehension, the extra material should help move students more efficiently into analysis the literature.

3. Assessment Strategies

During early implementation of the audio and visual files, the teacher will ask for student feedback via an anonymous bulletin on the class website--basically asking students what works and what doesn't.

At the end of the course, students will complete a survey about the various teaching tools used in the class, asking them to rate the effectiveness of each (for instance, instructor's written directions for the lesson, the audio files, the visual materials, the links to websites, background reading in the textbook, etc.)

The teacher will consider whether students have effectively understood the readings by their weekly posts and by their midterm and final exam essays.

4. Project Implementation Timeline

January 2007

- Purchase software (SnapZ Pro) and learn how to use it to record audio and visual files and how to post these to the online class
- Develop audio and visual files for the first few weeks of the online class

February-May 2007

- Continue to create and upload audio and visual files to the online class, based on students' response to the ones already posted online

5. Faculty Responsible for Development and Implementation

Although I plan to be the faculty primarily responsible for developing and implementing this project, I plan to enlist the aid of William Paoli to help me learn and use the software, and to provide advice about creating effective audio/visual files for online classes. I also hope to consult with colleagues, such as Perri Gallagher or Paul Mueller, who have previous experience using audio and visual materials in their online classes.

6. Technology and Software Requirements

The primary software requirement will be the purchase of SnapZ Pro (for \$70), which runs on MacOSX and has been successfully used by other faculty at Ohlone in their online classes (in conjunction with WebCT).