The Writing Program launches online Writing 2 course
By Lené Whitley-Putz, Lecturer, Writing Program

Many people wonder there has been so much interest in distance education, or why you would want to put a course online. As a teacher who prides herself on her rapport with students, one of my first hesitations about teaching online was the loss of teacher-student connection. When I took my first online course, however, I soon learned there are differences between a traditional course and an online course, but these differences are not inherently ‘distancing’. In fact, the title of “distance education” may be a misnomer.

There are many advantages to a technologically-mediated writing class. For instance, students have the ability to review video lectures, and with captioning, the lectures are not only visual and auditory, but also written, which is a benefit to all students, but particularly multi-lingual students. In addition, online interaction—both student-teacher and student-student—privileges written work, so the students practice writing in a variety of different rhetorical situations, including informal and ungraded writing (via emails or messages), formative peer feedback (through drafts and discussions), and more formal/academic writing (essay, projects, and portfolios). In essence, the modality of the class directly aligns with the learning objectives, helping to create a rich learning environment.

In my experiences teaching online, one of the great benefits of the type of interaction supported by online activities is greater teacher-student interaction. While quiet students in a face-to-face class may skate through with very little active participation, in an online class, all students are required to participate. This is especially beneficial to students who may not think well on their feet. The asynchronous nature of online discussions allows these students to think through and edit their contribution, and the discussion is not bounded by the time constraints of a face-to-face class.

Ultimately, online courses may not be for every student or every teacher, but technology is making an indelible impact (as it has since the invention of the printing press!) on our classrooms—both the physical and virtual spaces. Developing an online class broadens the delivery modalities available to the Writing Program, and it also offers valuable opportunities for exploring the myriad ways technology tools can be used to augment and enhance our face-to-face courses. And the facts are clear, as technology continues to revolutionize the ways we interact with one another, the writing is on the wall. And that wall? Well, it’s digital.
About Lené Whitley-Putz

Lené Whitley-Putz received her PhD in Rhetoric and Communication from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where she studied the ways grassroots movements used a variety of rhetorical genres, including zines, discussion lists, and protests, to further their causes. Her work with marginalized groups led her to early interest in how the internet could be used by groups to create coalitions, foster community, and disperse information.

At Rensselaer, she worked with a research group designing a ‘wired’ classroom, and taught technical writing courses in this revolutionary classroom. Researching the impact of technology on learning created a natural path for exploring the use of course management systems, like eCommons and Canvas, in writing classes. In 2011, she completed a certification program sponsored by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office in online teaching and learning. In addition to teaching writing, she leads professional development workshops for CCC faculty interested in integrating technology in their classrooms.