NEW COURSE FOR IU SOUTH BEND

Check Appropriate Boxes: Undergraduate credit [X] Graduate credit [ ] Professional credit [ ]

1. School/Division Liberal Arts and Sciences 2. Academic Subject Code ENG

3. Course Number W315 (must be cleared with University Enrollment Services)

4. Instructor Ken Smith

5. Course Title Writing for the Web

Recommended Abbreviation (Optional) (Limited to 32 Characters including spaces)

6. First time this course is to be offered (Semester/Year): fall 2004

7. Credit Hours: Fixed at 3.0 or Variable from _______ to _______

8. Is this course to be graded S-F (only)? Yes [ ] No [X]

9. Is variable title approval being requested? Yes [ ] No [X]

10. Course description (not to exceed 50 words) for Bulletin publication: Introduces students to new forms of writing (beyond word processing and desktop publishing) made possible by computers—hypertext, electronic mail, and computer conferencing—and explores what impact these new forms have on literacy skills for writers and readers of such computer-delivered texts.

11. Lecture Contact Hours: Fixed at 3.0 or Variable from _______ to _______

12. Non-Lecture Contact Hours: Fixed at 0.0 or Variable from _______ to _______

13. Estimated enrollment: 20 of which 0 percent are expected to be graduate students.

14. Frequency of scheduling: Annual Will this course be required for majors? No

15. Justification for new course: Informatics program needs new interdisciplinary electives.

16. Are the necessary reading materials currently available in the appropriate library? Yes

17. Please append a complete outline of the proposed course, and indicate instructor (if known), textbooks, and other materials.

18. If this course overlaps with existing courses, please explain with which courses it overlaps and whether this overlap is necessary, desirable, or unimportant.

19. A copy of every new course proposal must be submitted to departments, schools, or divisions in which there may be overlap of the new course with existing courses or areas of strong concern, with instructions that they send comments directly to the originating Curriculum Committee. Please append a list of departments, schools, or divisions thus consulted.

Submitted by: ___________________________ Date __11/5/03________

Department Chairman/Division Director

______________________________ Date ____________

Dean of Graduate School (when required)

______________________________ Date ____________

Dean

______________________________ Date ____________

Chancellor/Vice-President

______________________________ Date ____________

University Enrollment Services

Approved by: ___________________________ Date __11/5/03________

Dean

______________________________ Date __11/14/03________

Chancellor/Vice-President

After School/Division approval, forward the last copy (without attachments) to University Enrollment Services for initial processing, and the remaining four copies and attachments to the Campus Chancellor or Vice-President.
Question 17. Course outline, attached.

Question 18. There is no known overlap with other courses.

Question 19. The course was developed to meet needs of IU South Bend's Informatics Program, in consultation with their faculty. Nevertheless, we reminded them that they have the opportunity to express any reservations to the originating Curriculum Committee.
Proposal for offering W315 at IUSB, taught by Ken Smith in the English Department and cross-listed as an elective in Informatics, as part of the English Department's commitment to supporting that new program by offering one or two appropriate courses. The course is currently offered at Indianapolis. The English Department would like W315 to fulfill the Second-Level Writing requirement.

W315 Writing for the Web

The course investigates best writing practices for the new types of software that have made it possible for individuals, groups, corporations, and others to prepare frequently and easily-updated, content-rich web sites that actively engage their audiences on topics of concern to them. We will study how to use the data-base driven writing software that make this new kind of web site possible, as well as the research, composing, and revising strategies appropriate for using this software.

Less than a decade ago most web sites were static -- after visiting them once, you probably would find nothing new there upon returning a month later. Writers hesitated to add new content because each change required new HTML codes and file transfers in order to become available to others in a web browser. This labor-intensive posting process has largely been discarded, however, with the advent of template and data-base driven web sites. Periodicals like the New York Times and the Christian Science Monitor offer new content on attractive pages, updated several times a day, thanks to the standard formats contained in page templates and the pre-sorted documents loaded into data bases. For both writers and readers, the web now offers a huge number of dynamic sites, each one growing and changing in response to changing times. As a result, the nature of writing for the web has changed.

This course will investigate best writing practices for some types of software that have helped create the new dynamic web. Most importantly, we will study and work with template and data-base publishing tools. These come, roughly, in three kinds. First we have the free, simple personal weblog products offered by companies such as Blogger, which most users can master in an hour and which pay for themselves through advertising. A second tier of publishing tools, such as Radio Userland and pMachine, require some investment in time and money but allow individuals, groups, and companies to create complex sites that can be set up as such things as magazines, weblogs, campaign headquarters. Finally, the most complex of these software tools allow large corporations to publish flexible, fast-moving editions of daily newspapers on the web or to create internal information systems that preserve and support the corporate culture.

No person can hope to use, or even skim, all the information being produced for these dynamic sites each day by thousands of writers all over the world. Even readers interested in focused topics, such as national politics, cannot read all the relevant serious writing presented on dynamic sites. In response to this problem, writers at sites like Robot Wisdom created vast research lists, often called portals. Using Google and other search engines, writers attempted to locate, link to, and annotate every web resource on a given topic. Portals exhaust their writers with the endless tasks of searching and annotating, but if work stops a portal immediately begins to go out of date.

One important response to these problems of information overload has been web syndication. If people can't hope to read all that is written in their field, they might instead be able to scan
headlines from a range of sites, quickly judging which documents to call up and read more carefully. The process called RSS syndication, often marked on a weblog by a small XML button, strips current headlines from a dynamic site -- that is, from its data base -- and packages them in a format that can be read by software tools called news aggregators. Aggregators can be set up at a person's site with HTML codes, but many people subscribe to services that allow them to select from thousands of RSS feeds. Readers select feeds that suit their research interests and, in effect, create a personal web magazine, newspaper, or research page that is updated as often as new posts appear on the source sites. Reading and research, then, and not just writing, have found a new dynamic structure on the web.

Template and data base weblogs supported by RSS syndication are excellent tools for supporting lively day-by-day developments in a field. Weblogs now have other standard features that make them valuable for individuals, groups, and corporations. Weblogs typically include links to other web resources in the posts and in a link collection called a blogroll. Usually organized in reverse chronological order, weblogs open in a reader's browser with the freshest content at the top of the screen. Weblogs usually have archives and search engines for locating older posts. Weblogs take advantage of their data bases to sort their contents into categories or threads, helping readers find the particular content they seek. Sophisticated sites offer several RSS feeds that reflect the categories of information published on the site. Weblogs are also enriched when the writers offer readers a chance to contribute comments to the site. This practice builds a community of readers who take an active interest in a site, an invaluable accomplishment for political campaigns and service or sales-oriented sites. Only writers who do not understand the dynamic nature of the new web software need ever create a static web site again.

To some degree, however, the new software has created a new problem. Readers of weblogs know that an interesting post soon slips down the screen and evaporates into the archive, where only a careful researcher is likely to find it again. As posts vanish into the archive, writers leave some of their best work behind as they are drawn endlessly onward by the process of creating new content. In addition, template and data base tools tend to isolate writers from each other -- one writer will write the posts for this department, another for that department, without necessarily achieving a meaningful collaboration.

In response to these two problems, software designers have worked out new tools that seek to capture and develop further the best of the daily content through collaboration. One notable tool, called a wiki, preserves the code-free writing process of weblogs in web pages that any community member can instantly edit from any browser window. Because the writing is easy, wiki pages are also dynamic, but more in their openness to collaboration than in their daily updates. Wiki sites are often devoted to building a body of knowledge about something. One fascinating example is the Wikipedia, an entirely open collaboration among dozens of writers on a web-based encyclopedia. The Wikipedia is a model for creating and preserving knowledge through collaboration, as we can see from revision reports on any fast-breaking news story, like this spring's SARS outbreak. Another important example is the 500-page wiki manual that technicians for the New York Times created for their own use as they designed the online edition of the paper. Instantly updatable by any team member, a wiki invites people to create and refine knowledge, rather than let it slip into a weblog archive. Where a weblog site excels in a certain kind of process, a wiki site turns process toward product without terminating the process as book or magazine publication must, by their natures, do.
Writers need to adapt to the virtues and limitations of these tools in order to make the most of them. Weblog writers often develop a lively style or voice in order to engage readers with daily posts; they often risk a more personal relationship to their material and their audience as part of the informality of publishing every day. Wiki writers build tolerant collaborative relationships with team members and return to revise repeatedly, refining and building complexity into their articles and offering something of increasing substance to readers. Both kinds of writing take practice and benefit from study of good models.

This course will be a writing course for students who are already solid writers but who are interested in these new kinds of writing. We will briefly study the history of the dynamic web and its main software tools, and we will also quickly learn how to use weblog and wiki software. Our main tasks, however, will be to practice writing in these two environments, developing skills appropriate to each and creating web sites with substantial content as weblogs and wikis. We will practice both the solo and the collaborative kinds of writing necessary for the dynamic web, with students creating their own weblog and wiki sites as well as collaborating on class sites. By the end of the semester students should be able to understand the nature of the two kinds of sites, choose the appropriate software for individual, group, or corporate use, design a site that takes advantage of the software's virtues, and, through research, collect and compose a substantial body of good material for the site. They should be able to advise an employer about the uses they might make of the dynamic web and serve as a major writer on a company site. They should also be able to evaluate their own writing and the writing of others with greater skill and confidence, and revise accordingly.

The course will be offered for the first time in the Fall semester of 2004. We ask that it be granted status as fulfilling the Second-Level Writing requirement for those students who have already taken 56 hours. The course will call for frequent writing, mostly using the wiki and weblog software, substantial research necessary to compose quality content for each student's web site, careful structuring of short and longer pieces in order to make them useful to readers, and appropriate attention to formal matters such as proofreading errors, organization, the needs of a particular audience, brevity. Students will be responsible for evaluating research materials and making judgments about how they can be cast persuasively into short and longer web-based documents of use to a variety of readers, including specialists and non-specialists.

While some of the required reading for the course is available in journals, most theoretical and instruction material about writing for the new software exists on web sites that address social, political, and educational uses of the web. Students will have access to weblog and wiki software already owned by the English Department or readily available elsewhere.