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Reading: “Going Multimodal,” Adsanatham, et al.

English 998, Multimodality, Multimedia and Digital Rhetoric in Composition

As Adsanatham et al. describe their program at Miami and their intentional move towards digital technologies (e.g. Listservs, Blackboard, wiki spaces, and laptop/computer oriented classrooms), I began to get a bit anxious. Not because of their course goals which align (mostly) with what we do at KU – awareness of rhetorical situations, rhetorical flexibility, genre, etc. – but because of a potential future realization of institutional change: online composition courses. They talk about the stakeholders and having to convince them that these multimodal oriented classrooms “were not diluting the intellectual focus of our writing classes” (p. 285). They made the case for how digital technologies afforded them new means for composing and creating and did so “successfully” which led Miami to purchase a laptop program. All of this seems progressive and inclusive of multimodality, which is a good thing, but I’m wondering about future implications. What’s the next step? In my opinion, I feel like administrators, particularly the higher-ups on campus (not within the department), could make a strong case for this same course to be taught totally online. The incorporation of technology may afford the classroom opportunities, but it may also hinder the writing classroom in certain aspects. In our courses, we’re cultivating community because of the individuals within the classroom and the participation needed for our classrooms to be effective and “successful”.

Question: are there instances where digital technologies and the use of multimodality isolates individuals? Could this lead to institutional change within English departments, specifically first-second year English programs that operate solely on digital technology?

Question: what do we say in future instances where administration challenges us to move all our composition courses online due to the incorporation of digital technology, etc.? That saves them a buck. Are we thinking about those situations?

They mention digital archiving (on p. 290) and how that was a challenge (I’m assuming because of the upkeep and energy used to maintain an archive), but it seems to be only be a challenge for the first year, the gathering of materials and the process of instituting that as a source of information. I find that encouraging for what Casey and I are doing for this final project. I feel like we’re setting the groundwork for future successes and, mainly, resources for students to pull from in regards to teaching material and scholarship on multimodality. They include instructor reflections on modes and multimodal assignments, something I see also incorporated in the website at some point in time. I think that helps to see the direction of the assignment and the purpose / goals / outcomes the assignment takes into consideration. I feel like this is a good chapter to read while at the position of director or incoming role of directing a writing program. They write: “it’s not enough to revise curriculum or even make it more appealing for students. Administrators also must be able to show that what they are doing is ‘working’ – both to university stakeholders and grant sponsors who have supported curricular change” (p. 300). I think this goes into: who is buying in to your ideas, and how are you showing that they’re working? Ultimately, you have to have someone listen and be receptive, and I feel like that can be a challenge within itself.