TITLE
Empowering Students through Creative Technologies: A Digital Literacy Primer

ABSTRACT
During today's luncheon, Justin Hodgson, Associate Professor of Digital Rhetoric at Indiana University and founding editor of *The Journal for Undergraduate Multimedia Projects*, will share insight into the importance of digital literacy and digital creativity in higher education. By using compelling student examples, this short presentation will show how critical and creative digital literacy skills can empower students (from underrepresented to advanced) to better engage course content, to discover new capacities for expression, and to learn to thrive (as thinkers, creators, and communicators) in a rapidly-changing, digitally saturated world.

TALK
Hello, everyone, my name is Justin Hodgson and I am an Associate Professor of Digital Rhetoric at Indiana University, and I am thrilled to be here today to talk with you all not only because I find myself back in the great state of Texas, which strangely always feels like home even though I only live here for four to five years, but more importantly because my educational and professional career was shaped by my experiences at the community college level and I welcome any and every opportunity to give back to all of you amazing faculty, staff, and adminstrators who, on an everyday basis, guide and influence people like me. So thank you. Thank you for all you do.

Now, what I want to do with the next 29 minutes or so, is twofold. First, I want to share, through stories, information, and student examples, insights into the power and potential of bringing digital literacy and digital creativity into the classroom. Second, and just as important, I hope to pique your interest enough so that you might join me during my afternoon session for a more extended conversation on these matters – where I intend to offer strategies for deploying digital literacy in the classroom and/or practices for integrating digital creativity into one's pedagogy.

That said, while I have spent the last 10-plus years as a tenured or tenure-track faculty member at major research universities, currently at IU, before that at UT Austin, I actually want to start my talk today with where it all began for me, which was back in 2004, back when I was adjuncting at Southwestern Illinois College (also known as SWIC), which is a wonderful community college in Belleville, IL (catering to the greater East St. Louis region and serving primarily underrepresented populations in higher education). There I taught basic and developmental writing.

Now, for those who don't know, basic and developmental writing are two courses designed to help students who cannot write coherent sentences or paragraphs develop the skill to be able to be successful in freshman composition. These courses do not transfer credit, and traditionally are seen as remedial (though I am not a fan of that label as it tends to stigmatize the course).

What I quickly realized in my first semester there was that there was a fundamental disconnect between the instructional material of the course and the students. It wasn't that the instructional materials were bad. In fact, it was just the opposite. But the way we talk about writing, technically and academically, was just notably removed from where the students were at. So I started thinking about ways to get them to better understand the practices.

We were, at that point, talking about transitions and one of the most visually accessible ways I had for explaining transitions to them was through video editing. So I had the 13 students build short 45 second image-based video essays using windows movie maker.

EXTEMPORANEOUS: Describe process, focus on discussion of rhetorical significance of transitions and bringing that back into traditional writing practices.

This began in me an incredible interest in the role media could play in not only how we communicated, but in how we might make complex concepts, like rhetorical strategies, more tangible, more self-evident, more readily available to novices. So I did what anyone does who has a passion and a driving critical inquiry: I went to get a Ph.D.

I went to Clemson University. Go Tigers if there are any fans in the crowd. And have spent the last 15 years or so studying the intersections of digital media and writing, digital creativity and rhetoric, digital literacy, digital humanities, and innovation in higher education. And what I have learned, from my research and teaching experiences and consulting at institutions across the country is four things:
(1) when we give students the opportunity to learn new media authoring skills, we quite literally **expand their capacities for expression.** This helps them not only to tell better stories but, more importantly, take on greater (or different) degrees of agency in an increasingly digital world.
(2) when we invite students to work in and across different forms of mediation, we create opportunities for them to access ideas in new ways. This is not only meant in terms of what they might make, but fundamentally in the ways in which they might engage our course content.
(3) as an extension of two, working in new media can also help students find a voice (or have meaningful success) in ways outside the traditional or expected modes of **academic discourse** … this is especially important for 1st gen, non-traditional, and international students, for whom traditional academic discourse can be a major hurdle if not insurmountable barrier.
(4) When creating digital things, students **actively want to share their work**, sharing the creations with family and friends or as part of work portfolios. There is a kind of built-in public-facing condition of making digital things, and students see and feel the reality of that audience, that 'meant to be seen' condition as they engage in digital making.

To highlight the impact and potential of these implications, I want to share with you a few of student examples, starting with the stories of Tanya and Tianqi, which actually occurred nearly 10 years apart, but offer interesting resonances.

Tanya was a first generation, Hispanic student who enrolled in my Advanced Digital Rhetoric course her senior year. She was, by her own account, a horrible writer, had put off this last writing requirement as long as she could, and just wanted to know what she needed to do to get a C. But, modeling my great mentors, I told her she wasn't a horrible writer; she just had hadn't had any positive writing experiences yet.

In her defense, she did struggle with some of the early writing work in the course. But as we shifted into digital writing practices, working with Photoshop and other tools, Tanya found a point of access. But more importantly, for the first time in her life the playing field had been leveled, as she and her peers equally struggled to learn and work with Photoshop, which was a surprising confidence boost for her.

And then when I introduced my "interactive image" project, which pairs Photoshop work with wix.com to leverage the power of visual metaphors to create interactive engagements, Tanya really took off.

EXTEMPORANEOUS: Walk through her project, detail goals and intent, and focus on the complexity of the work. Also touch on the success, publishing in JUMP+, and being reproduced in textbooks across the country.

Now Tianqi, in contrast to Tanya, was an international student from China, who enrolled in my Expository Writing course a couple summers ago. She carried many of the writing issues of second language learners, particularly with usage issues with articles and prepositions. But much like Tanya, once we began working in other modes of exposition, she really began to thrive.

The media gave her access to communication in a way that the language barrier had prevented. And I want to show you a bit of the project she created, about 2 minutes, where she storyboarded her "essay", recorded her sand-artist friend creating the visuals, and then brought it altogether, with voice over and video effects, in Adobe Premiere Pro. And for good measure, it is important to know that, much like Tanya, Tianqi's first exposure to working in these Adobe tools was in my class.

I really enjoy Tianqi's project, which is a beautiful 8-minute informative essay about her hometown and her connections to it. But what is most impactful for me is that both Tanya and Tianqi demonstrate one of the values of expanding student capacities for expression—finding their voice amid the struggles of academic writing and Standard English. But this kind of impact happens in varying degrees with nearly every student, whether advanced, 1st gen, international,

or otherwise, as developing different media authoring skills simply helps them tell better stories, produce better content, and create better engagements.

In more recent years, since about 2016, I have turned to having students create course work that is (a) important to them and (b) has the potential to make a difference in the world.

Just last semester I had a student who took up this challenge, focusing on mental health on college campuses. What I like about Carolyn's Adobe Spark Page, a scrolling digital creation, is not only that it blends together text and visuals, infographics and video, but also research-based exposition and personal narrative. It is not only a living digital artifact, available online, but it offers a wonderful exploration of the tensions and conversations of mental health and stigma at college.

It is projects like these that prompted me to create the Journal for Undergraduate multimedia projects, which you can find at jumpplus.net. We are in our 10th year of operation, and our goal has always been to (a) champion the undergraduate research and digital creations that come from your classes, and (b) to operate as a pedagogical resource. So, with each accepted project, which goes through a standard journal review, we publish a student reflection, an instructor reflection, as course and assignment description, a project timeline, and two response pieces from members of our editorial collective, creating a little ecology for each work.

Over the years we have published a wide variety of projects—from audio mashups to informative webtexts, remixes to remediations, PSA videos to video games (in fact, we were the first journal in our field to publish a video game). What this means for me is that I have spent the last decade being exposed to an incredible depth and breath of projects and platforms from courses all across the country. And what remains true for me is that there is just something unbelievably powerful in creating opportunities for students to use digital creative tools to reimagine critical issues, remake existing artifacts, and breathing new life into a longstanding and emerging topics and tensions.

And so I want to show you one last example of this kind of thing, a digital remix project by Andrew Williams, first generation African-American male student, who created this video remix in response to the guiding inquiry of the class: What is our relationship with technology?

What Andrew did here was take an existing video on depression and augment it using Photoshop, Audition, and Premiere—adding the tweets, shutter stock images, sound effects, music, and the like—to transform its message and offer commentary on the false representations of our lives and livelihoods, the falsities we create on and portray through social media. And I've shown this project in many venues and it never fails that someone takes it home to show their kids, as there is something important not only in the original message on depression by Kat Napiorkowski, but in Andrew's remake.

These kind of projects inspire me every semester and make me want to help others learn to do these things with students. Because when we provide students with digital creativity

opportunities, we provide them new ways of envisioning and transforming their worlds. And while I am an advocate and have been fortunate as an Adobe Digital Literacy Thought Leader to work with faculty and institutions all across the country, the truth is that this creativity-for-all mission is far larger than me. There is, simply put, a critical importance to these things in higher education, especially for next-gen students and their employability.

And here I want to take us back to 2009, where, as a newly minted graduate student, I had an interview at UT Austin. I gave my job talk on digital scholarship, digital rhetoric, and the future of writing studies, and when I finished showing and situating all these digital media kind of things, a senior faculty member said, "Thank you for your presentation, Justin. The stuff you are talking about is really exciting. But I wonder, who is qualified to teach these things?"
His question wasn't meant as a challenge, but rather a sincere inquiry. Writing teachers, for example, become experts in writing, not necessarily working with digitally creative media. Just as graduate students in biology become experts in biology, not digital media. And my response, which was perhaps one of my better moments on the job market, was 2 fold.

First, my response was "Me." I'm qualified. I do these things. I'm the guy. They should hire me. But my second response was that this was the wrong question. It wasn't a matter of who was qualified to do this back in 2009, but rather who would be qualified in 2019. Because if you weren't qualified by 2019, you would be obsolete by 2025.

While I was focused on writing studies, which was moving well beyond the flatness of the page to a world of manipulating screens, exchanging the ink of the pen with the light of the pixel, trading the pencil for the iPhone, if you will. And I knew we had to prepare writing studies for that increasingly digital future. But I think the premise holds for all of higher education today, whether you are a chemist or economics professor.

Let me put it another way: most students today have never known a world devoid of the digital, never a world absent social media or without networked friendships. They see technologies as a lifeline to knowledge, to practice, to purpose – it is a learning aid to them, not a distraction.
And like it or not they bring the expectations of mediated engagements to our brick and mortar classroom. So how are we responding to this mediated expectation?

Moreover, in 2017 the Institute for the Future (IFTF) produced their "The Next Era of Human | Machine Partnerships" report, which projects some of the coming complexities of 2030 to help prepare education and industry leaders. In that report, using advanced data analytics and trajectory modeling, IFTF forecasted that nearly 85% of all jobs that will be available in 2030 do not currently even exist.

We aren't talking about Bob from Accounting retiring and Omar, the new grad, taking his place. Rather, we are talking altogether new creations, entirely new positions for entirely new audiences and purposes. Think, for example, of the evolution over the past 5-10 years that led to jobs like Instagram Content Producer or Social Media Strategist. And while 2030 may seem a

ways off, particularly if you are like me and February feels like the longest year, but the process will be gradual, as the 2018 World Economic Forum projected that we'd see nearly 30% increase in altogether new jobs by 2022. So how, then, do we prepare students for future careers that do not currently exist?   (Pause. Repeat question)

One way is to focus more on the core capacities and abilities they will need to be successful, whatever their discipline or career path. We typically refer to these as the soft skills, but I see them as essential, and they are the 3Cs of employability: communication, collaboration, and creativity.

What is important for this conversation is that communication includes not only verbal and written communication, but increasingly digital communication; collaboration is more and more being linked with digital collaborative practices (video conferencing, doc share, slack, etc.); and creativity is frequently linked with digital creativity and digital problem solving.

Thus, if we want to prepare our students to be successful, to be competitive on the job market, to thrive within and beyond our disciplinary boundaries in an increasingly digital world, we have to give them access to digital creative opportunities, we have to prepare them to leverage greater degrees of agency across emerging mediascapes, we have to enable them to be thought leaders for a digital-future-to-come. How, then, will you help prepare your students for the challenges of this digital tomorrow?

Thank you for your time and for listening. If you want to learn more, feel free to join me during the afternoon session or to reach out to me. My email is hodgson@indiana.edu. Or you can ping me on twitter @postdigitalJH.

Thank you.