Chapter 68

Invention in Two Parts:
Multimodal Communication and Space Design in the Writing Center

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ABSTRACT

In writing about new media during the last decade, new media scholars in composition studies have focused on pedagogical challenges of teaching multimodal communication such as reconsidering literacy conventions, creating multimodal assignments, or considering material infrastructure. However, composition literature has not explored in depth multimodal production in the invention stage. Derived from the Latin word invenire ("to find"), invention is critical in composition studies, not only because of its role in creating new knowledge, but also because of its role in helping us discover heuristic practices leading to persuasive texts. As more writing centers begin to consult multimodal products, practitioners have begun to grapple with ways to help students become "inventive" in producing new media texts, particularly storyboards or ePortfolios. This chapter explores in what ways the invention process of digital media composition may be different from that of traditional written texts and implications for designing effective writing center spaces.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Representing spaces at Stanford University and Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), we offer perspectives on two different digital media initiatives based on sustained conversation between Stanford's Hume Writing Center and EKU's Noel Studio for Academic Creativity. In this chapter, we use the terms "digital media" and "multimodal" to describe the modes and media with which students compose in these two spaces. Although a great deal more research remains in front of writing center scholars, our study of digital media tutoring at our two centers helped us to reflect on nature

of multimodal invention. Moreover, we began to see a correlation between space design of writing centers and the learning goals of multimodal communication. This chapter provides a modest inquiry—and a start for longer and deeper conversations—into the relationship between digital media tutoring and the design of space.

Of course, we recognize that writing centers on all campuses are different, bringing unique reporting lines, political structures, and strategic directions, but we aim to provide writing center scholars and practitioners with information that is adaptable across a variety of contexts. In fact, our understanding of the difference between institutional contexts and constraints has informed this project and collaboration from its inception. While the Hume Writing Center (HWC) represents a traditional writing center that needed to repurpose its existing physical space to new media consulting, the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity is a multiliteracy center whose design and focus from its inception integrated written, oral, and multimodal communication practices. A brief background summary of the creation of these two spaces (the HWC and the Noel Studio) underscores the way that each approaches a similar goal—discovering how to implement an effective digital media tutoring program—in a manner dictated or, in some cases, facilitated by its own unique physical setting and design.

The HWC provides an example in which a writing center needed to adapt its existing physical space to support new media consulting. It was founded in 2001 in the basement of one of Stanford's historic building, Margaret Jacks Hall. Formerly a laboratory room, the writing center space measured 2,759 square feet and was renovated to accommodate traditional writing tutorials with three private glass conversation rooms, three private offices for the director and administrators, and a large open space with a smart panel for workshops on one end of the room. In 2010, the HWC launched its digital media initiative, providing digital media workshops and consul-

tations through a team of six lecturers from the Program of Writing and Rhetoric with scholarship and extensive teaching experience in new media, multimedia rhetoric, and film. Consequently, the HWC converted one of the office spaces and a storage room into private digital media spaces that include tables and chairs, white boards, large iMac monitors, and necessary software packages. Digital media consultants collaborate with other existing units that provide services that complement the rhetorical support at the HWC: oral communication tutors at the Speaking Center support all aspects of oral communication, and multimedia consultants at the Meyer Multimedia Lab provide technical expertise in software and hardware. Currently, students who visit the center primarily visit for feedback on storyboards and video composition, PowerPoint or slideware design, or website design.

In contrast, the Noel Studio, encompassing 10,000 square feet in the heart of EKU's Crabbe Library, was specifically designed for digital media consultations and composition. The Noel Studio was officially dedicated in October 2010 in front of over 200 friends, alumni, and donors after over seven years of intense planning. Initial conversations would have the writing center relocate to the library. However, several planning meetings brought together members of the university community from across campus and offered opportunities for larger, sustained collaboration that would involve insight from communication, writing, research, and technology areas on campus. The Noel Studio was imagined as a space for multimodal invention with mobile dry-erase boards, touch-screen monitors, and image-capture systems that encourage students to compose through the written, visual, and spoken word. With the pieces assembled in conversation with one another, the project could provide a home to texts that students often produce but did not have life outside of the classroom: ePortfolios, videos, presentations, websites, and other multimodal products.

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