

## Strategic Priority Funding Proposal One-Time Non-Base Investment Proposal: Step 2

*(Please limit the proposal narrative and attachments to 10 pages)*

Proposal Name: Composition Program Development for 100% Online Learners

### 1. Provide a description of the project being proposed. (5 points)

**Opportunity** – A number of prospective 100% online learners have inquired about opportunities for teaching assistantships within the English department. **These are highly motivated learners, with MA degree in hand and with online teaching experience**, and they are interested in pursuing either the graduate certificate in technical communication or the MA degree in technical communication—either of which can be completed entirely through online study. They are seeking credentials in technical communication to improve their opportunities for employment—within either industry or higher education.

**Challenge** – The English Department faces two major challenges in awarding teaching assistantships to 100% online learners:

- We need funding to develop training and seminars (corresponding to that required of our on-campus TAs) for 100% online TAs.
- We need funding to support reduced class sizes for online (synchronous) sections of Composition (Eng 101).

**Proposal** – We request funding for five TA positions for 100% online learners to teach online sections of Composition (Eng 101) and funding for development of a workshop for 100% online TAs (comparable to our on-campus workshop) and for supervision of those 100% online TAs.

Specifically, for the 2012-13 academic year, we will award 5 teaching assistantships to 100% online learners who will teach a total of 10 online sections of Composition (Eng 101). In addition, faculty will develop online training and supervision for the TAs, comparable to what is done for our on-campus TAs.

**Benefits** – Funding our proposal provides a number of direct and indirect benefits:

- increases the number (and quality) of 100% online learners (from the US and around the world) in the English (primarily technical communication) graduate programs;
- provides an impetus to develop (and grow) our graduate program in composition, which in turn provides extended support for graduate students, increasing their skill set and opportunities for employment after graduation;
- increases the number of undergraduates who are 100% online learners, and introduces a number of on-campus students to online learning;
- supports the university initiatives for extended and global learning as well as for quality and excellence;
- supports the development of a cultural shift affecting administration, faculty, staff, and students as we shift from a bricks and mortar, regional university to a comprehensive, international university.

2. Explain how this project is specifically targeted to one or more strategic priorities. (10 points)

This project targets three strategic priorities:

- **Global Solutions** – This project targets 100% online learners who may reside anywhere in the US or internationally.

The technical communication program has enrolled 100% online learners residing in 40 or more states and 8 or more countries, which is remarkable for a program that relies upon synchronous online meetings. In that respect, our program mirrors the professional experience of many of our graduates who are working in industry—professionals who begin their day by corresponding with colleagues in Europe and end the day by corresponding with colleagues in the Asian rim.

Furthermore, the technical communication program relies upon teaching and training methods as well as software and hardware that is used within industry and as well as within academia. Increasing numbers of companies are relying upon synchronous and asynchronous online training in the wake of increased travel costs and on-site learning costs. We use the same or comparable software and web applications as used by industry professionals for developing online documentation, tutorials, training, and webinars.

The majority of the graduate students within the technical communication program are employed by international industries and have immediate application for the research and training that they receive in technical communication—topics ranging from instructional design to structured authoring and single sourcing, from simplified technical English and plain language training to internationalization and localization, from online documentation to accessibility, usability, and user experience.

Faculty and students within the technical communication program have provided webinars and presentations to international audiences through professional organizations and conferences.

- **Extended learning** – This project provides money to increase the number of 100% online learners in our (technical communication, TESL, and composition) English graduate programs and in all undergraduate programs.

According to Institutional Research (Graduate Majors: <http://www.mnsu.edu/institres/enrollment/enrollmentstats/majors/gr.pdf>), in Fall 2010, technical communication was the third largest graduate program in the University, and 100% online learners make up approximately 80% of all new admits to the program; furthermore, 100% online learners within the technical communication program have effectively served as graduate assistants both within the English Department (as publication specialists) as well as within CESR (as editors) and have completed internships for offices on campus as well as for businesses within Mankato and the region.

Note that resident graduate students cannot complete the graduate certificate or the MA degree program in technical communication without taking online classes—partly because of scheduling and staffing limitations but mostly because skills in online learning and communication are essential to the success of technical communicators.

In addition to supporting new 100% online learners at the graduate level, the project would support new 100% online learners at the undergraduate level as well provide online options for resident students.

Development of an online Composition (Eng 101) course along with recent development of online general education courses will make it possible for some students to complete their entire undergraduate studies online from Minnesota State Mankato; consequently, several programs that were previously considered bachelor completion programs may now be advertised as bachelor degree programs available entirely online (<http://www.mnsu.edu/ext/online/undergraduate.html>).

Over the past three academic years, credit generation in resident (on-campus) courses has remained flat while credit generation in online courses has climbed substantially (<http://www.mnsu.edu/institutes/enrollment/enrollmentstats/credithours.html>).

Perhaps in part due to the online tuition differential, in part due to limitations in resources (large classrooms), and in part due to demand, departments are offering more and larger sections of online courses. This spring semester 2012, Perspectives on technology (EET 125) has an enrollment limit of 85, Nutrition Healthcare Prof (FCS 242) has an enrollment limit of 100, Coming of Age: Gender and Culture (GWS) has an enrollment limit of 50, Oceans of the World (GEOL) has an enrollment limit of 100, Principles of Marketing (MRKT 310) has an enrollment limit of 190, and Psychology (PSYC 101) has an enrollment limit of 150. Indeed, the course schedules shows nearly 50 online courses with an enrollment limit of 30 or more.

Clearly more students are 100% online learners, and vastly more resident students are taking online courses. This trend will continue, and this trend extends to high school and indeed to middle school. David Nagel, in an article for *THE Journal* (<http://thejournal.com/articles/2010/06/29/report-online-learning-nearly-doubles-among-high-school-students.aspx>), cites evidence that 27% of all high schools students and 21% of all middle school students took at least one online class in 2009.

- **Quality and excellence** – This project promotes quality and excellence through the development of effective training programs and supervision and through the addition of TAs with considerable teaching experience.

Note that with the exception of courses offered in English (including technical communication) and Humanities, all online courses at Minnesota State Mankato are offered asynchronously. However, based upon research available 10 years ago, the technical communication program chose to offer synchronous online meetings as a part of each course in order to increase interaction between students and between students and instructors, which we believed would promote student retention. Indeed, that has been the result.

Our experience has also been that synchronous communication courses require greater effort on the part of instructors. (See, for example, Lee Tesdell and Wanda Worley's "Instructor Time and Effort in Online and Face-to-Face Teaching: Lessons Learned," *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 52.2 [2009]: 138-151.) Consequently, we have recommended lower enrollment limits for online sections than for comparable on-campus sections. That, of course, increases the cost of online sections.

We believe that a well-developed synchronous Composition course will help prepare students for academic and professional writing as well as for other online coursework at the university level. Project funds are crucial for the development of training materials and supervision of TAs, and experienced, well-trained, experienced TAs are crucial for the providing effective and efficient online composition instruction.

**3. Describe the impact this project will have on students and/or others whom we serve. (10 points)**

This project allows us

- to hire TAs who have experience teaching composition—who see online instruction as valuable for themselves and who are committed to providing excellent instruction for undergraduates;
- to develop our composition curriculum and our supervisory practices for TAs to include 100% online learners, providing opportunities for growth in our graduate programs and our mentoring of TAs and instructors;
- to increase the number of undergraduates taking composition and to increase learning options for those students;
- to increase the number of 100% online learners in our programs while simultaneously increasing the general level of expertise of our students;
- to continue to develop an online culture at MSU that expands our local, regional, national, and international presence.

Bottom line, increasing numbers of college students will take online courses, including the introductory composition course; our hope is that they will take the course from us (Minnesota State Mankato) rather than from another college or university. Our desire is to provide the best course possible by using experienced, well-trained instructors (TAs).

The Grant Project Director will

- design online versions of the English department's training seminars for new TAs, including the summer pre-service seminar and the fall semester seminar;
- teach the two seminars to the selected students; and
- supervise their teaching during both semesters, in keeping with the usual TA procedures of the English department.

**Summer Seminar (English 621)**

New TAs are required to take a two week summer workshop (English 621), which is 30 contact hours face to face. This workshop is designed to prepare TAs to plan their course syllabus and be prepared to introduce the course to their students and run the course for the first week or so. Because we want the online 101 sections and the face-to-face 101 sections to be equivalent courses, many of the training materials used in face-to-face training (both during the summer and during the fall) will be used in the online training as well. However, because these TAs are experienced and because they will be teaching online, new workshop materials focusing particularly on online teaching will be designed as well. For the summer workshop for online instructors, we will concentrate on

- discussing and understanding of the student learning outcomes for MSU's Eng 101;

- discussing the textbook, requirements, and traditional assignments and rubrics for the course;
- developing their own syllabus as well as reviewing and revising the syllabus;
- discussing and practicing basic online teaching methods, including designing the course site, introducing the course to the students and running the first week's activities (orientation, discussion, and chat) online.

### **Fall Seminar (English 622)**

New TAs are required to attend a semester-long workshop (English 622), which is 30 hours contact time face to face. They are also required to visit a peer's classroom and be visited in turn during fall semester. All of these requirements would be carried out by the online TAs and evaluated by the Grant Project Director during the time of the grant. In addition to discussing 622 materials used in the face to face version of the course, the online section of 622 will provide work especially related to online teaching methods, including

- introducing and clarifying assignments;
- creating questions for Discussion and Chats that will foster understanding of the readings and support writing processes;
- designing online activities that will lead to drafts and revisions;
- preparing for and running online peer response conferences on student drafts;
- responding to student writing online, including written comments and conference strategies  
Designing feedback and assessment instruments to improve a teacher's online teaching.

### **Supervision**

In addition to designing and conducting the two training seminars, the Project director will observe each TA during the fall semester and conference with the TA online following the observation. During both semesters, the Project Director will conference with each TA in response to their memos analyzing and responding to their student mid-course and final course evaluations.

4. Identify the "SMART" outcomes for the project (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). (5 points)

This project will

- increase the number of 100% online learners in our graduate programs;

At the least, the project will increase the number new 100% online graduate students within the program by five; in practice, more students end up applying and attending than actually receive awards.

- increase the overall level of expertise of our TAs;

The initial group of prospective TAs targeted by this project have a graduate degree in hand and have online teaching experience; consequently, they will bring considerable expertise and experience into our program; they should prove valuable colleagues to other faculty and adjuncts teaching online and should prove able mentors to other TAs interested in teaching online.

- increase the number of graduates of our program who exit with online teaching experience, which should increase their chances of employment;

Once we have developed training and supervision practices for 100% online TAs, we expect that some resident TAs as well as other 100% online learners will want to take advantage of that training. Although many of our current graduates find employment teaching online, training that we develop and provide should increase their chances of employment and qualify them for better teaching appointments reserved for those with online teaching experience.

- increase the number of undergraduate 100% online learners; and

If Minnesota State Mankato makes it possible for students to complete their entire undergraduate degree, we should increase the number of students who attend; adding online sections of Composition is an important step in that direction. The University needs to develop procedures to be able to identify students who are 100% online learners, to integrate them into the campus community, and to facilitate their registration and matriculation.

- increase the skills and satisfaction of students for whom online learning is an effective option.

Five TAs will each teach one section of Composition per semester, each section consisting of 20 students; consequently, 200 undergraduate students will be directly affected the first year of the project. We have seen at the graduate level that 100% online learners do recruit other 100% online learners from within their corporate community; we expect to see a similar affect at the undergraduate level (within students' business and social communities).

**5. Discuss what this project will do for the university that warrants the investment. (5 points)**

On-campus credit generation has remained stable the past academic years; however, online credit generation has increased significantly. We must continue to foster an environment that includes online learning as an integral part of Minnesota State Mankato—not as an extension.

That 100% online learners in technical communication have received GA positions has significantly increased applications. This is a major marketing advantage that we hold over online programs at other universities.

Graduate students who have professional expertise raise the bar (for performance) for other graduate students and challenge us as instructors to continue to hone our pedagogical skills and develop our expertise.

The new Chancellor has indicated concern about duplication of online programs and courses; consequently, we should stake out (virtual) territory in our areas of expertise. Training (composition) instructors to teach online is a growth area.

6. Describe how the activities generated by this project would be sustained after one-time funding has ended, or if applicable, explain why the project does not need to be sustained. (5 points)

This is a pilot project. We believe that the University can attract new students (100% online learners) at the graduate and undergraduate levels as well as better serve current resident students by offering online sections Composition (Eng 101). The funding we have requested is essential

- for developing graduate coursework and providing supervision for 100% online teaching assistants, and
- for staffing reduced-seat, online sections of Composition to be taught by teaching assistants who are 100% online learners.

Development of curriculum is a one-time cost; however, on-going instructional and supervisory costs would be assumed by the English Department. After the training has been designed, offered, and reviewed, the department will adjust the TA Director's load or seek additional revenue for extra duty days/overload funding.

Funding for smaller (20-student) online sections of Composition would be provided through use of the online tuition differential.

Funding for TAs (either 100% online learners or resident students) to teach Composition would come from the current English Department TA budget; however, if the demand for Composition grows, the Department would request that the administration increase its TA lines—not simply its budget for adjuncts.

7. Budget (5 points): Outline the funding requested using the categories listed below. Please note, budget revisions beyond 10% total change from the initial proposal require approval. Budget revisions of more than 20%, constitutes a major change in the project scope and will not be approved.

	FY12	FY 12 Matching Funds	FY13	FY 13 Matching Funds	FY14	FY13 Matching Funds
<b>Personnel</b>						
Unclassified Salary (in-load, overload)			5,868			
Classified Salary						
Fringe <sup>a</sup> (Classified and Unclassified)			1,467			
Graduate Assistant Salary			45,000			
Graduate Assistant Tuition Reduction/Waiver <sup>b</sup>			32,720			
<b>Non-Salary</b>						
Student Help						
Purchased Services/Travel Expenses						
Supplies and Materials						
Building Improvement/Construction Costs						
Equipment						
<b>Total Budget Requested</b>			<b>85,055</b>			

<sup>a</sup> Note: All current employees must be paid fringe benefits. Fringe should be estimated based on salary and position classification: Unclassified 30%, Classified 37%, Adjunct 7.65%.

<sup>b</sup> Estimated Tuition Reduction/Waiver for full-year enrollment: Masters \$5,858, Doctoral \$10,000.

**Budget Justification**

Project Director salary:  $\$82,149/168 = \$489$  (daily pay rate) x 12 extra duty days = **\$5868**

Fringe:  $\$5868$  (Project Director salary) x 25% (extra duty day fringe rate) = **\$1467**

TA Salary:  $\$9000$  (English TA salary per academic year) x 5 TAs = **\$45,000**

TA Tuition Reduction:  $\$363.55$  (*online* graduate tuition per credit) x 18 cr (credits allowed for remission) =  $\$6544$  x 5 TAs = **\$32,720**

8. Identify any special considerations or needs required for this project (e.g. physical space, contractual obligations, IT support, or collaborations with/implications for other units). (5 points)

This project does not require special considerations or needs.

9. Provide a project timeline outlining key tasks, milestones and dates for completion. (5 points)

Advertise availability of teaching assistantships for 100% online learners	ASAP
Select TAs by reviewing applications and interviewing applicants	July 31, 2012
Provide TA workshop for 100% online TAs	August 6-17, 2012
Provide TA seminar and supervision for 100% online TAs	Fall semester 2012
Progress report	January 18, 2013
Provide TA supervision for 100% online TAs	Spring semester 2013
Final report	June 30, 2013