AT&T FACULTY-STAFF AWARDS IN INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY
2012-2013 Faculty-Staff Competition
Course APPLICATION FORM

Course Identifier: ENG126

Course Name: Introduction to Literary Genres

Department: English   College: Arts & Letters

Primary contact name, phone number, and email *(normally this will be the lead instructor)*

Stephen Grandchamp; (906) 360-3604; grandcha@msu.edu

Faculty and Staff Involved in Developing and Offering the Course *please list full name, position at MSU, email address, and project role for each person*

NAME	MSU Affiliation	PROJECT ROLE
Scott Schopieray schopie1@msu.edu	Director of Academic Technology	Provided essential feedback in conceptualization and development of course
Judith Stoddart stoddart@msu.edu	Associate Professor; Assistant Dean of The Graduate School	Provided consultation in developing models of student interaction in online setting
Stephen Rachman rachman@msu.edu	Associate Professor	Associate Chairperson for Graduate Studies (aided in scheduling first online course)
Edward Watts wattse@msu.edu	Professor	Associate Chairperson for Undergraduate Studies (aided in scheduling first online course)
Stephen Arch arch@msu.edu	Professor; former Chairperson	Chairperson of department during initial scheduling of course
Patrick O'Donnell pod@msu.edu	Professor, Chairperson	Chairperson of department during offering of course

Which Competition Are You Entering (select one):
FULLY ONLINE COURSE (no required face to face component)

Semester(s) offered in 2012-2013 and number of students enrolled:

SEMESTER: Summer 2012   # STUDENTS: 27

Please address these categories:

I. Course Description (400 word limit)

ENG126 is a liberal studies course designed to give MSU students the critical skill set associated with literary studies. It aims to provide students with an awareness of key literary concepts like genre and form, as well as facilitate practice in individual analytical writing. Student performance is assessed based on individual projects (argumentative essays, digital adaptations) and community interaction (engaging with the texts through reading communities).

This online version (the first fully online course offered by the Department of English at MSU) blended the traditional skill set of literary studies with a concern for digital spaces, digital media, and interaction facilitated through digital means. Students started with the basics of the field: learning about the history of poetry, drama, and the novel through first-hand contact with generative texts. Students were then taught to build arguments based on the texts from the ground up, citing textual evidence in the service of a larger cultural or historical contention. This engagement with history, as well as literature, continued throughout the course.

Students then built on this engagement through interaction with reading communities. These reading communities varied in size from three to seven students and were designed to give students a comfortable space to share ideas. On a weekly basis, students would post their individual argumentative essays about the assigned texts to a message board. By midweek, students would respond to the arguments of other members of their small group on this board: pointing out strengths, asking for clarification, and often pushing the original argument further. By Friday, each student was expected to have a command of the discussion that took place in their group and to bring their comments, questions, and observations to the synchronous chats.

These chats were facilitated through the use of Adobe Connect. This program allowed for a strong degree of interaction between instructor and students, as well as peer to peer. Every Friday, the instructor facilitated six sessions (one for each small group) of one hour each. In these sessions, the instructor would appear on video, briefly covering key ideas and subsequently facilitating interactive analysis of the text.

Students were also assigned a digital adaptation of a play, in which they used the source text in a way that highlighted a particular theme through the incorporation of digital media. They were assessed based on the unity of their theatrical interpretation, as well as their command of the media.

II. Learning and Interaction Goals of the Course or Technology-enhanced Innovation

The traditional English classroom is a space uniquely suited to the mutual development of ideas. Students come to class with questions, comments, and arguments about the assigned literary texts. Over the course of the semester, they develop the critical tools that allow for strong argumentation in both writing and speaking; moreover, they begin to connect these literary arguments to culture and history more broadly, demonstrating that literature does not exist in a vacuum but rather is an interactive component of the human experience.

In developing ENG126 for an online setting, I wanted to make sure that students would feel this strong sense of community despite not seeing each other in a face to face classroom. My solution was to create small reading communities that worked together the entire semester. In these small reading communities of three to seven students, ideas could be exchanged in an increasingly safe space for intellectual inquiry. Additionally, these groups interacted in a variety of modes: traditional literary analysis essays, message board discussions, and weekly video and textual chats. At the end of the semester, the students had built durable reading communities that facilitated their engagement with the assigned literary texts, and consequently culture and history more broadly. In the end, this organizational structure allowed for a richer, deeper, and more sustained method of peer interaction than the traditional literature classroom.

In addition to developing reading communities, I designed ENG126 to go beyond the traditional assignments found in English literature courses. These traditional courses typically assign a series of literary analysis essays in which students use evidence from a literary text to make an argument. Online ENG126 used this traditional starting point as the foundation for a more digitally-aware and forward-looking approach to English education. Students were first required to write brief essays in this traditional style. For each essay students wrote, they received abundant and individualized feedback on how to improve their reading, writing, and interpretative skill sets. Later in the semester, students were given the opportunity to create digital projects that used these traditional literary skills in a more dynamic fashion. In their Dramatic Adaptation Project, students were required to take a scene from one of the course's assigned plays and adapt it in a digital setting. I guided the students' raw ideas, and by the end of the major project sequence they presented uniformly excellent projects that offered an interpretation of the text put into practice. Acting as their own digital directors, the students created adaptations across a variety of digital media: video clips, audio clips, mixed media visual art, digital comics, remixed film clips, VoiceThread conversations, songs, animations, and Xtranormal clips. By allowing students to direct their own projects in their own chosen media, I was able to encourage them to engage with the classic drama of Shakespeare and Sophocles on a level not typical of English courses.

This is an award-worthy course due to innovations in literary pedagogy as well as its experimental use of digital technology in service of literary analysis. Literature courses are notoriously difficult to teach successful in a fully online setting, and instructors are frequently hesitant to create course offerings in this venue. Online ENG126 confronted many of the most common anxieties of these teachers directly by creating small reading communities, allowing for digital projects not typical of English courses that nevertheless remain loyal to literary studies' goals, and giving each student abundant and frequent individual feedback on their work. Online ENG126 was not a translation of a traditional English course; rather, it was a reconceptualization of how we can teach literature in more engaging ways in the digital age.

III. Points of Interest and Innovation
The creation of sustained, closely-knit reading communities was a key feature of ENG126. Students worked with the same small group of peers throughout the semester, developing their skills as readers, writers, and ultimately interpreters of literature and culture. The facilitation of interaction of these small groups followed the same pattern each week. On Monday, students would post traditional analytical essays on the assigned texts to their groups' message board:

Figure 1. A five-student reading community's initial argumentative essay thread postings.

By requiring students to frequently compose argumentative essays on the assigned texts that were mindful of culture and history, the course facilitated the development of reading and writing skills traditionally honed in the English classroom.

These small reading communities would respond to each other's initial arguments by Wednesday each week. This often led to robust and provocative investigation of the course's literary texts:

Figure 2. The five-student reading community responds to each other's initial arguments.

This structured exchange allowed for a similar learning experience to that typically found in a traditional English classroom, in which the instructor would lead student analysis and discussion of a text. In this online setting, however, student responses were even more original and thoughtful due to the nature of generating responses carefully over a period of days.

By Friday, reading communities were required to read all responses to each initial argument within the group and be prepared to discuss key themes and problems that were uncovered. In regularly scheduled Friday chat sessions facilitated through Adobe Connect, students would respond to other members of their reading community in real time. In this venue, students shared their thoughts through text, while I was on a live video feed to offer pertinent information and guide the discussion:
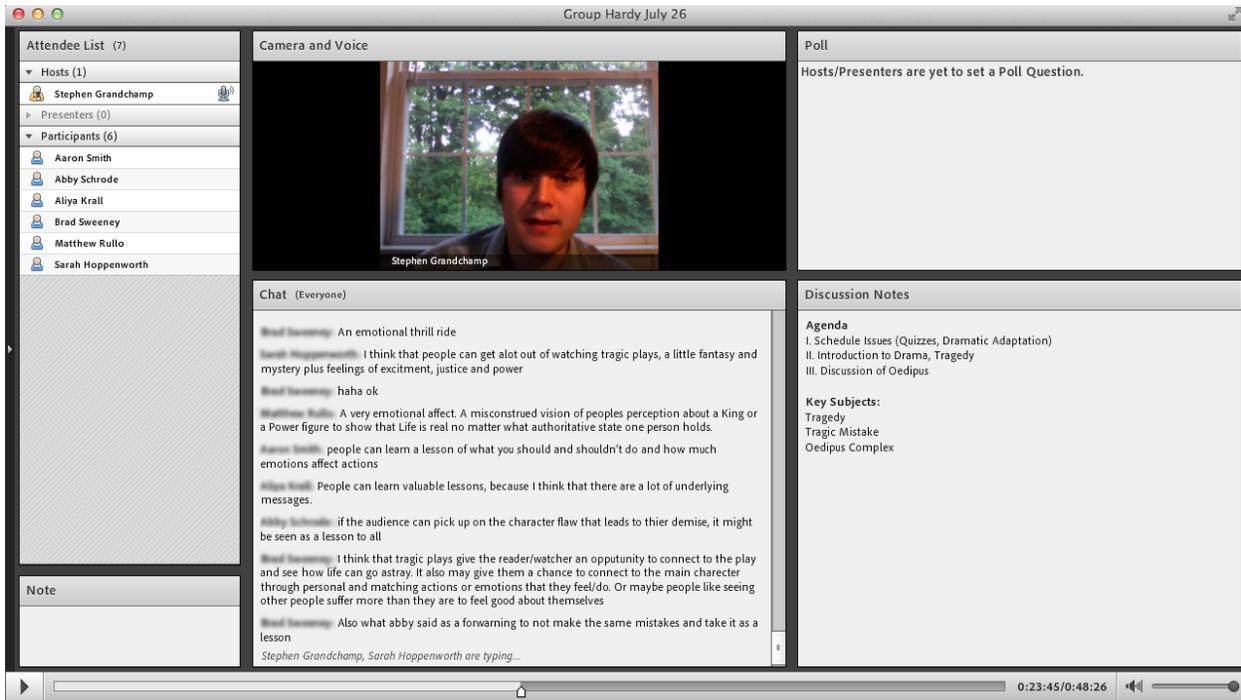

Figure 3. Typical Friday live chat with students, using Adobe Connect. In this frame, the instructor leads discussion through a live video feed, while students explore course themes. The session's agenda is located in the bottom right box, while the active participants are listed on the far left.

The robust features of Adobe Connect allowed for a variety of approaches to these sessions. The program obviously accommodates lecturing, which is essential to relay important information to students. However, its interactive features facilitate learning in a more dynamic and exciting manner for the students. The chat function allowed students to respond to each other in real time, thereby exploring the texts in a generative and open way:

Chat (Everyone)

████ ██████ An emotional thrill ride

████ ████████ I think that people can get alot out of watching tragic plays, a little fantasy and mystery plus feelings of excitment, justice and power

████ ██████ haha ok

███████ ████ A very emotional affect. A misconstrued vision of peoples perception about a King or a Power figure to show that Life is real no matter what authoritative state one person holds.

████ ████ people can learn a lesson of what you should and shouldn't do and how much emotions affect actions

████ ████ People can learn valuable lessons, because I think that there are a lot of underlying messages.

████ ██████ if the audience can pick up on the character flaw that leads to thier demise, it might be seen as a lesson to all

████ ██████ I think that tragic plays give the reader/watcher an opputunity to connect to the play and see how life can go astray. It also may give them a chance to connect to the main charecter through personal and matching actions or emotions that they feel/do. Or maybe people like seeing other people suffer more than they are to feel good about themselves

████ ██████ Also what abby said as a forwarning to not make the same mistakes and take it as a lesson

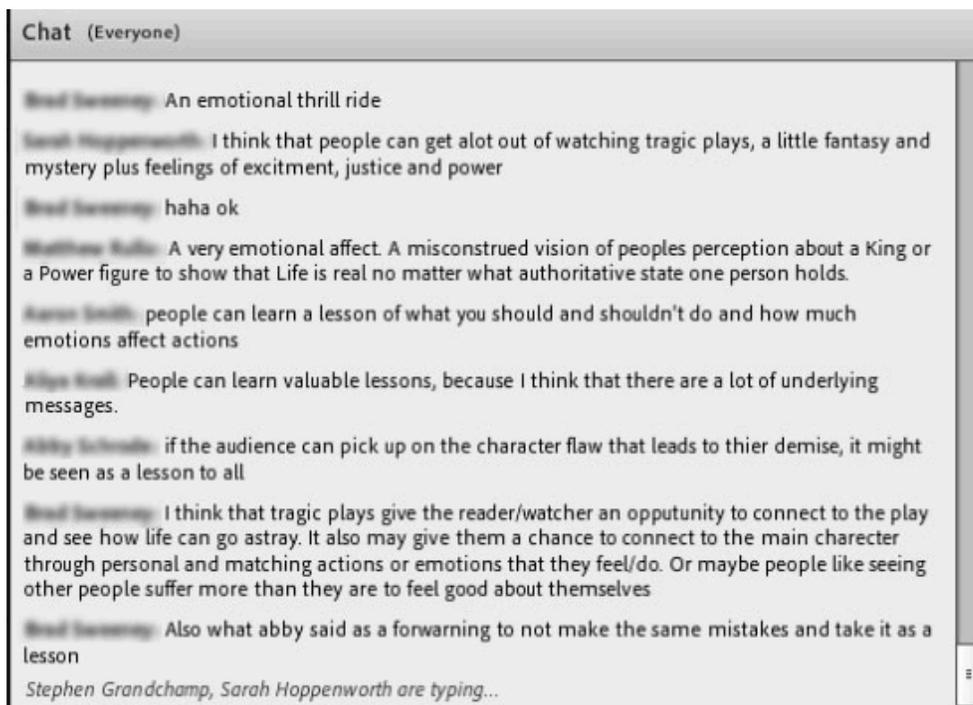*Stephen Grandchamp, Sarah Hoppenworth are typing...*

Figure 4. Students informally discuss the enduring appeal of tragedy as a literary genre for audiences in the chat box of Adobe Connect. This real time component of the reading community structure allows for innovation that might be stifled in more formal essays or message board venues.

Another useful function that allowed for the spontaneous generation of discussion was the snap polling feature:

Poll

| Prepare | View Votes | | Close |

Which full-length literary work most realistically depicts life?

○ Oedipus the King   0% (0)

○ A Midsummer Night's Dream   0% (0)

○ Pride & Prejudice   60% (3)

○ Tess of the d'Urbervilles   40% (2)
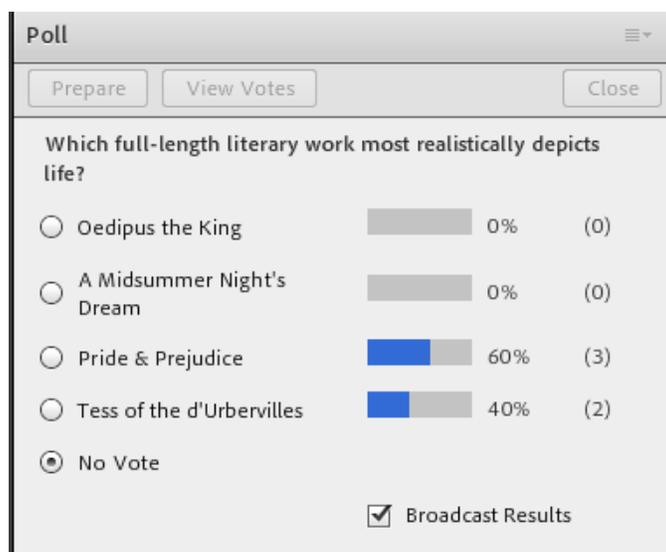
◉ No Vote

☑ Broadcast Results

Figure 5. Students quickly respond to a question regarding literary realism. The results of this poll will generate further discussion in the chat session.

In following this schedule each week, the reading community members became quite comfortable sharing their intellectual ideas. Hence these spaces became hotbeds of student inquiry in a manner wholly unique from the traditional English classroom.

The interaction in the reading communities was assessed on a regular basis, with the instructor giving specific feedback and grades on each student argument posted according to the categories stipulated in the syllabus. Additionally, students were encouraged to ask for individual general assessments of their participation in reading communities throughout the semester. Outside of these requests, students were assessed thoroughly in this way at the mid-point and end of the course.

In addition to reading communities, students were required to create digital adaptations of one of the assigned plays (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare [the comedy] and *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles [the tragedy]). Acting as directors of digital adaptations, they were required to create projects that presented a coherent interpretation of the text. For instance, this video project—wholly conceived, shot, and edited by the student—puts a modern spin on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Through changing the characters into modern college students, the student director was able to highlight the universal theme of love's capriciousness in a new, effective manner:

Figure 6. The mischievous sprite Puck nimbly approaches the unsuspecting college student. In this scene, Puck uses magic to change the student's affections—thus updating Shakespeare's theme for the modern era.

In another project, a student utilized the popular platform Xtranormal to bring a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to life. The student, acutely aware of the conventions of this platform—usually highlighting absurd humor—uses it to press a particular interpretation of Shakespeare's play:

Figure 7. Shakespeare's lovers humorously bumble through the enchanted forest in this student's depiction of a scene using Xtranormal.

Students were also given the option of presenting original artistic work in a digital form. This student's mixed media project presents a particularly harrowing reading of the themes of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*:
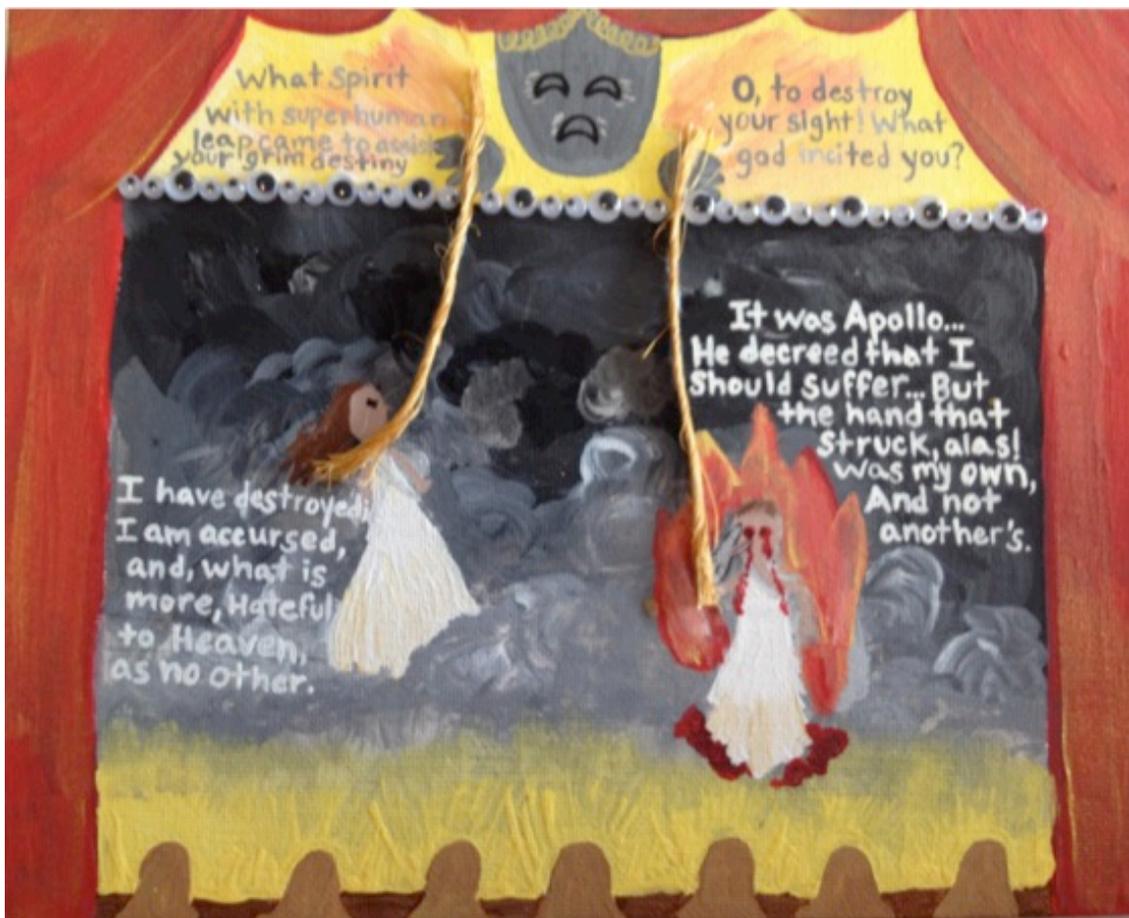

Figure 8. In the climax of Oedipus' tragedy, Iocasta hangs herself and Oedipus blinds himself. Note the student's use of multiple textures—including twine and beads—to

enhance the depth of the depiction. Also, note the student's portrayal of *Oedipus* as a play, complete with curtains and an audience—demonstrating an ironic awareness of the genre's artificiality.

Each Dramatic Adaptation Project was assessed using the same rubric. Within this system, students were asked to submit an essay along with their adaptation that outlined their goals, thoughts, and reflections on their presentation of the scene. In this way, grading was uniform to ensure student engagement with the themes of the unit but also flexible enough to accommodate the unique directorial vision of each student.

IV. Accessibility

Due to the flexible and student-defined nature of the Dramatic Adaptation Project, students would be able to define and outline a rigorous project that meets the needs of the course. Though no projects were specifically designed with an accessibility component, each of the course assignments were flexible enough to allow for any necessary accommodation.

V. Evidence of Effectiveness with Students

Prior to teaching ENG126 in an online version, I taught two sections of the course during the 2011-12 academic year. In these sections, I was able to get a comprehensive sense of typical student capabilities, as well as their improved abilities leaving the course. Compared to these sections, online 126 allowed for a more dynamic engagement with the literature, bringing everything from sixteenth-century poetry, to classical drama, to the modern novel to life in a more active way for the students. The incorporation of small reading communities, as opposed to the traditional classroom's focus on the entire course population, also facilitated a more nuanced, comfortable, and sustained approach to the literature throughout the semester. This is evidenced by the following student testimonials:

Student Testimonial #1
I entered into the English 126 online classroom over the summer of 2012 apprehensive because I am not great with online technology and it was the first English based class I had taken online. However, I was pleasantly surprised how easy it was to learn and communicate in an online setting. The group discussions were designed to create smaller group interactions, which allowed the initial and response post to be more comfortable and more involved. These groups were also used for Adobe chats, which allowed the students to expand upon conversations of the text as a normal classroom would. In this type of environment I was able to see my instructor and communicate easily with him and the other students through text, and this provided the back and forth dialogue that is usually missed in online classrooms. The digital final project also gave me the opportunity to explore different media forms and allowed me to be creative with original ideas that could be used to remake a literary piece. My overall learning experiences I believe were comparable to a normal classroom. I was able to develop my understanding of classic literary novels and poems through group dialog, reflections, and assessments. Leaving the classroom I feel I am more comfortable taking online classes, more knowledgeable with educational technology, and well versed in my understanding of classical literary novels and poems. I encourage all of those that are contemplating participating in the online experience to take the leap!

Abigail Schrode
Junior, Elementary Education
schrod19@msu.edu

Student Testimonial #2
Taking English 126 online was a great experience for my first English class at Michigan State University. I got more out of this online class than I did from any other online class. This was due to the fact that there were several online resources. The online chats were the most beneficial for me because we could talk directly to the professor which was even better than any other lecture hall I have been in. I am a theatre student as Michigan State University. When we talked about William Shakespeare's play "Midsummer Night's Dream" in the English 126 class over a video chat, I was able to talk in a deep and personal level with my small group. It was extremely beneficial to have the personal attention, and it allowed me to think on a heavier level compared to other classes.

Sara Anne Ostrowski
Junior, Theatre
ostrow48@msu.edu

Student Testimonial #3
The past three of my summers have had a very similar experience, i.e. taking online political science classes and working part-time in my hometown. But the trend changed after I hesitantly enrolled into an online ENG 126 summer section to satisfy some of my degree requirements. Unexpectedly, this class proved to be the best experience I ever had in the MSU's summer online program. I not only enjoyed the way we were taught with sheer passion, but factors such as weekly video chat sessions and digital projects managed to bridge the essential audio/visual communication gap that I have always found missing in other online classes. Angel board or routine comments are a norm of every online course, but the additional element of weekly video feedback was indeed very effective.

Shaharyar Shahid
Senior, Public Policy
shahidsh@msu.edu

SurveyMonkey Poll
At the end of the semester after the completion of coursework, I also administered an anonymous detailed course evaluation through SurveyMonkey—an online tool tailored for data collection and analysis. This anonymous survey reflected an overwhelmingly positive reception to the course. In terms of learning goals, 100 percent of respondents felt that their "understanding of literary genres had improved over the semester." Likewise, 91.7 percent of the respondents noted improvement in "analytical thinking and writing skills," and the same percentage noted an improved ability "to read, talk about, and critically consider literature." More generally, 83.3 percent of respondents characterized ENG126 as "much more satisfying than other online courses" at MSU. The students were particularly focused on the reading communities in their more detailed responses, with one student noting: "I really enjoyed the online chats and the small group experience. It allowed me not to only grow as a reader and writer but also see my group

grow. It also allowed for a lot deeper discussion rather than simply discussion posts—more back and forth quick responses which wouldn't happen on the discussion boards. I also was very glad we had the same groups each week because it really allowed us to get to know one another."

Overall performance improved in the online version of ENG126 versus the previous traditional offerings. This increase is due to the students' increased willingness to engage creatively and consistently in the online structure:

Course	Semester	Format	Final Average
ENG126	Fall 2011	Traditional	2.99
ENG126	Spring 2012	Traditional	3.04
ENG126	Summer 2012	Online	3.12

Figure 9. Students' average final scores across semesters.

From the instructor's vantage point, the students in the online version of ENG126 were more actively engaged over the entire semester. The weekly reading community schedule became naturalized for them quite quickly, and they consequently were able to present original and provocative takes on the literature on a regular basis. Moreover, their projects, given the greater degree of technological freedom, proved to demonstrate a more refined and nuanced understanding of the way literary genres function.

Finally, as an English teacher highly invested in the development of student skills in reading, writing, and critically thinking about history and culture, I left this course with no reservations about the limitations of the online medium. In fact, my response was quite the opposite: I saw that the increased integration of digital technology into English courses could facilitate better learning outcomes. The students in online ENG126, as evidenced by their strong projects, papers, and final exams, exited the course with a mature skill set and a more acute awareness of how literary genres develop, work, and change over time

VI. Plans for Sustainability
ENG126 was the first fully online course offered by the Department of English at MSU. After designing and teaching the course, I was appointed to a graduate research assistantship. In this role, I was expected to "provide support to the Department of English graduate students to incorporate digital technology into their classroom." This year, I have helped other graduate students and faculty develop online course offerings for the summer semester 2013, at which point we will offer four fully online courses. This number is expected to increase at a similar pace for subsequent summers, with graduate students being increasingly encouraged by the Department of English to develop online courses for summer teaching assignments. In order to meet this goal, I have hosted an "Online Pedagogy Workshop Series" for graduate students, from which many online syllabi and digital projects have developed.

Online ENG126 will furthermore serve as the foundation for my next online course offering this summer, ENG210: The Foundations of Literary Study. This course, which serves as the introduction to the English major, teaches students the basic skills required of someone pursuing a degree in English. My experiences in teaching ENG126 will surely shape my instruction in

ENG210; for instance, I plan to install reading communities again in this course, thus allowing for more comfortable and substantial engagement with peers. Moreover, I plan to incorporate more expansively the opportunities to utilize digital means for fulfilling assignments. The students in ENG126 demonstrated the strong possibilities for using digital platforms to develop skills in literary analysis; I would like this tendency to continue when teaching those who will shape the future of our field.

This section of ENG210 will provide a reusable template for future instructors of the course. Others will use my design in terms of pacing, student interaction, and project shape. In this way, other instructors will be able to change the texts students are required to read but nevertheless remain true to the proven effectiveness of the structure of the course. It is my hope that the seeds planted in online ENG126 will thereby shape the online curriculum of course offerings in MSU's Department of English for years to come.