

Digital Tower

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“The interest in life does not lie in what people do, nor even in their relations to each other, but largely in the power to communicate with a third party, antagonistic, enigmatic, yet perhaps persuadable, which one may call life in general.” —Virginia Woolf

::: What I Did this Year :::

AL 860

During the summer semester I was enrolled in, Visual Rhetoric for Professional Writers with Danielle DeVoss. As in my previous class with Danielle, Digital Rhetoric, this class was a lot of fun. The pace was challenging but I was really engaged in the coursework. The set of modules we did pertaining to document design, presentation, color, fonts and typography, all of these were relevant to my professional work. As I was working on the modules I had some great discussions with the graphic designers I work with. These discussions opened up new ways for me to communicate with the creative team and help me to more effectively lead creative projects.

My favorite project from AL 860 and the one I found really rewarding—from a standpoint of being able to creatively and effectively blend effective design and writing principles with multimedia development skills, was taking one of our module projects (playing with words | designing with text,) and turning it into a multimedia piece. I really enjoyed the opportunity to push the design concepts to new heights through reinterpreting them in a multimedia format. These kinds of exercises allowed me to think of new ways that I could refresh the communications I do in my professional work—to leverage the Internet as a more viable communications platform for my clients.

One of the most important things that happened for me in this class was the feedback and guidance I received that started me on my way to reading, writing, and thinking in a more focused way. When I began thinking of my final project it was too big and all over the place. One of the best things Danielle was able to help me in was to tighten and refine my focus. This

process of narrowing my focus has clearly led to better results in my writing since taking 860. In essence, the work in Danielle's class prepared me to take AL 805, which before, I was hesitant to take because I didn't think I was ready for that level of writing. It turned out, however, that AL 805 turned out to be one of the best classes I have ever taken.

AL 805

As I've mentioned, I was really unsure about taking AL 805—now I wish it hadn't ended. There were only nine of us, so we were able to have some fantastic discussions and everyone was really engaged, as was our professor, Rochelle Harris. There was A LOT of reading, but we had an opportunity to really dig into the texts and deconstruct and make connections. The great thing about the readings, is that we had text that accompanied our main texts that acted as interruptions to the rhetorical tradition and this whole idea of interrupting was something I grabbed onto with both hands. One of my cognates in my undergraduate work was in women's studies, so being able to critically analyze where voices were missing from a very white, very privileged tradition, was of great interest to me.

Through this work of interrupting the rhetorical tradition, I began with Virginia Woolf and Adrienne Rich. As we read more work by Latino and African American rhetors, I knew my focus needed to be more inclusive. Woven among the readings and analysis, Rochelle introduced our class to the collage essay. This is when things really began to take off for me and my writing. I read some phenomenal pieces by Malea Powell and also Reza Crane Bizarro. One piece from Malea had a strong impact on me, "Listening to ghosts: an alternative (non) argument." I read and re-read this piece and found a style I could learn from and adapt for my own writing. The power of this hybrid style comes in the weaving of traditional essay-style writing with tight pieces of personal narrative. By using the collage-style of interruptions or crots, the personal pieces give more substance to the formal parts.

Coming to a better understanding of how I could borrow from my poetry craft and carefully blend it with the new analytical and critical writing skills I was forming, was a breakthrough for me. It was as if a light had turned on in my brain and I was enjoying writing again and learning how to turn my thinking and understanding into effective writing.

Another breakthrough I had during this class was that, although I was collecting a lot of great books to read, I wasn't actually doing enough reading. I was so obsessed with acquiring books, that I wasn't affording myself the time to read them—read carefully and thoroughly. I was busy gobbling up this little snippet of text here and there, but as soon as I slowed down and read and re-read, and thought through a piece, I was ready to respond and my responses were much more thoughtful and well-constructed. Once I came to this understanding, it made me feel a bit stupid, as it now seems so obvious that you have to read carefully before you can respond

thoughtfully, but I suspect many more students than just me have failed at one time or another to simply read with care and reap the benefits of that seemingly simple process.

There was another success that came from my work in AL 805. When I began the class, I was uncertain of how I could connect the work I had been doing in digital and visual rhetoric to, what I thought, would be more traditional writing and theory. However, as I dug deeper into the idea of rhetorical listening and I began to critically compare and contrast the ideas of ethnicity and class, it became apparent to me that the work I had done on my “No more hungry” piece in WRA 420, tied right in to the work I was doing on rhetorical listening with Woolf, Rich, Lorde, and Walker. Not having enough to eat or enough money to shelter and cloth yourself and your family, these are the real, forefront concerns of many women. They can't afford the time or energy to think about a room of their own and money of their own for the luxury of writing. Not to mention, the luxury of books and an education. To that, Alice Walker adds, “chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion...” (*Available Means*, 314). For me, I can't just start at gender issues, I have to go beyond that to issues of class and ethnicity and listen hard and try to make connections there, first. This led me to talk with Rochelle. I wanted to get her opinion on whether it would be appropriate to revisit my hunger piece as an accompaniment to my final paper. She felt that the key issue was that I was planning to update and revise it and if I did that, it was good plan to repurpose the piece.

I did some new research in order to update the data. I implemented feedback from Danielle, classmates and others who had viewed it before. I worked to make the type more legible and improve the timing of the piece. I removed some of the images and refined the text in order to tighten the messaging. All in all, it was a great experience to come back to a piece that I had put a lot of time and effort into, before, and view it with fresh eyes. It's something I would like to do with more of my work, to return to it and keep refining it and finding new purpose for it. In the end, the revised piece was very well received. The connection between the multimedia piece and the paper was clearly evident, each piece enhancing the other. In the end, I think this is how the digital and traditional methods should work together, as compliments to one another.

::: How all of this Contributes to Who I Am :::

Back to the light that went off in my head—I feel more awake and engaged. I am taking the lessons of reading carefully, to heart and I am taking my time to read through the many wonderful texts I have accumulated. I wish I had more time to give to reading, but that seemingly small breakthrough I had, made such a difference in my last class. The work I did on my final paper in AL 805 made me feel very proud and hopeful for the work I have before me. I can do this! I can be good at this work, it can make a difference in me,

professional and personally. I can share the positive energy this work has started in me and turn it into action to help others.

::: Where I am Going in the Coming Year :::

I am very excited about starting classes again. I expect my focus this next year will be more community oriented. I will be doing my internship in professional writing with the Greater Lansing Women's Center, so I will be there for several hours each week. I have always cared about helping others and I am really looking forward to doing something more active.

I think this will be a great year for my writing. I plan to get my best pieces through final edits and figure out where would be best to submit them. Along with that, I want to do more strong and well-focused writing in my upcoming classes. I hope to find more ways of continuing to work on the topic of my final paper in AL 805, making cross-cultural feminists connections through rhetorical listening. I'd like to further explore the possibility of this as a thesis project.