2010-2011 Seminar Participants

"Technology and Pre-Modern Literature"
Prof Helga Duncan

In 2009 newly available classroom technology here at Stonehill has prompted me to rethink my teaching strategies. As an early modernist I am very fortunate to have access to a wonderful website now: Early English Books Online (or EEBO). The second major change in the classroom this year was the launch of Stonehill's eLearn course management system. While I have attempted to incorporate both technologies into my teaching this semester (please see attached syllabus for details), I have yet to take full advantage of these teaching/learning tools and make them an organic part of my courses on early modern literature and drama.

Above all, I am searching for ways in which the use of EEBO will bring students closer to the complex historical, social, and cultural contexts of a period that is largely foreign to them, and deepen their understanding of primary literary texts, from Shakespeare to Spenser, and from Marlowe to Milton, while generating new inter-disciplinary conversations about the relationship between literary and non-literary discourses.

Project Description:
Although it may seem as though I am proposing two separate projects here—one dealing with the curricular exploration and integration of EEBO, and the other with fashioning a syllabus around the newly available learning management system ANGEL, or eLearn (as it has been branded here at Stonehill)—I believe that these two undertakings are essentially different manifestations of the same questions generated by newly available classroom technologies: When is new technology helpful for students and instructor? How much technology in the classroom is too much? Does this new technology support and encourage student learning? Does it engage students innovatively and thoughtfully? Does it make students understand and work with course materials and ideas in new and constructive ways? Does it encourage independent and creative thinking?

I hope to generate thoughtfully amended teaching strategies that fully accommodate newly available technologies without losing sight of what is most important in the classroom: wholly engaged students who are empowered, encouraged, and inspired by technology to explore new ideas. In other words, I want to avoid enslavement by technology!

More particularly I hope to develop carefully thought-out projects (for use in, as well as out of, the classroom), that help students gain a greater understanding of historical and cultural difference; not only that, I wish to use EEBO to introduce students to textual, historical, and cultural scholarship in new and innovative ways.

With eLearn I want to explore the system's potential for involving students more fully and creatively in the classroom experience, especially through discussion forums, through student-generated questions and projects that stimulate the exchange of ideas, and motivate students who are a bit more shy and quiet in a classroom setting to contribute in different and hopefully more comfortable venue.

Benefit:

The most important and immediate benefit of participating in the seminar will be to student learning; another would be generating a panel proposal for MLA that deals with the benefits and challenges of EEBO and other new technologies in the teaching of pre-modern literatures and cultures. Finally, I hope to produce a model syllabus which incorporates a substantial "research component," consisting of archival work and cyberspace research methods (taking full advantage of electronic resources such as EEBO), a syllabus that showcases the English department's academic preparedness to offer demanding four-credit courses, in preparation for the arrival of Stonehill's new "Credit Model."

Community Outreach Plans:

I would like to share my experiences with eLearn in particular with my colleagues in the English department and across the disciplines in Learning Roundtables as well as during upcoming Academic Development Days. Even if EEBO is not a site most Stonehill faculty will utilize, I expect that my thinking through the use of this particular technological tool in the classroom and my formulating ways of integrating its resources will be of interest on a general and theoretical level to colleagues in other disciplines, in the humanities and beyond.