Small TLEF Project – Final Report

Report Completion Date: (2016/08/23)

1. **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

    1.1. General Information

Project Title:	Flexible Online Delivery for ENGL 301 (Technical Writing)		
Principal Investigator:	Tiffany Potter		
Project Initiation:	April 2015	Project Completion:	August 2016

   1.2. Project Summary

   1.3. Team Members – *(Please fill in the following table and include __students__, undergraduate or graduate, who participated in your project).*

Name	Title/Affiliation	Responsibilities/Roles
Erika Paterson	Sessional Lecturer	Course revision; teaching of pilot section
Jasmine Spencer	Teaching Assistant	TA for pilot section

   1.4. Student Impact – *Please fill in the following table with __past__, __current__ and __future__ courses that have been or will be impacted by your project, including any courses not included in your original proposal. [Note: Adapt this section to the context of your project as necessary].*

Course	Section	Enrolment	Term
ENGL 301	All online sections	Shifted from 30 to 55	ongoing
ENGL 301	On-campus sections	40	Ongoing in development of blended delivery model

2. **PROJECT EVALUATION**

   2.1. Project Outcomes – *Please list the intended outcomes or <u>benefits of the project</u> for students, TAs and/or instructors.*

   The primary intended benefit from this project was to create an online version of ENGL 301 (Business and Technical Writing) that would take full advantage of the online delivery, teaching not just the writing and rhetoric elements the course has always addressed, but also the specific applications of those elements in a selection of professional online platforms. The old version of the course was designed around a 2004 textbook, with whole units devoted to paper memos and other late twentieth-century business practices, with no instruction at all on what are now essential elements of communications around online platforms. This project transforms an online course that merely replicates old paper courses into one in which the online medium becomes part of both the content and the pedagogy. As digital natives, our students are more and more interested in locating their university experience within the realms of their existing technology practices, and this course design attempts to facilitate student benefit from their knowledge as they look ahead to their working futures.

   The benefits that we sought for students from this complete rebuilding was in teaching the modes of technical communication that will be required as our students move through UBC and into their careers. The benefits to students will be lifelong, and the practical benefits to teaching and learning at UBC will be long term if the ENGL 301 course revision creates a valuable cross-disciplinary curriculum resource that can be administered by the Department of English and assigned to a variety of faculty members year to year.

   A longer-term goal is to use the final version of the ENGL 301 online as a resource for faculty who choose to create course sections on a blended model. The usual instructor for face-to-face sections of ENGL 301 has notified us that she will not request the course in future years (to focus on teaching in a new research area); the instructor taking on the face-to-face course starting in 2016W has designed and taught online courses before (though not 301) and is looking into the potential for a blended model for 2017W.

   The other positive outcome intended for undergraduate students relates to access: ENGL 301 is a high-demand course that always has waiting lists, but because it is a writing-intensive course, sections are traditionally capped at 35. With the current Arts/English budget models having a K-factor of 50, every section of 35 students is a budget negative, and so fewer sections tend to be offered. Creating the new online format offers both the essential update to course content and platforms and a restructuring to facilitate the employment of a Teaching Assistant to increase capacity to 55 per section. This course is required for the BCS degree and recommended for students in Dentistry and Geography, so expanding available seats allows those students to be confident that they will find a seat, and allows students from other Faculties to gain access to this valuable course.

The anticipated benefit for graduate students was the opportunity to gain experience teaching in an online environment, an increasingly useful skill for young academics. Few TAs in English have the opportunity to teach in upper-level courses, and 301 will be the only online course with attached TA positions.

Findings – *Briefly describe the methods and findings of your project evaluation effort: to what extent were intended project outcomes achieved or not achieved?*

The pre-revision survey outlined in the proposal was completed, with 10 respondents accepting the invitation to comment. The survey recommended a new textbook, having the textbook available electronically, and updating the course content for the digital era.

Taking these suggestions into account, the course redesign was completed on schedule, per the plan submitted with the application. The new version of the course was offered first by Instructor alone in 2015W T1. That version was revised in response to student feedback (on both the UBC SEoT and an in-course reflection assignment), and then the TA-assisted version of the course piloted in 2015W T2. ENGL 301 is now an up-to-date course on business and technical writing that situates itself firmly in multiple online platforms, going beyond Connect to include LinkedIn, WordPress, Google Docs, and Facebook, for example. The new course remains very writing intensive, recognizing that the foundation of all good professional communication is practice in effective writing within a specific genre or mode. There are two to four short assignments *per week*, and the course is designed to take students through a reflective writing process that emphasizes peer reviews and reflective self-editing procedures. Each assignment builds on the last and the process facilitates review and reflection *previous* to evaluation for marks. One particular innovation here is that the peer review component of each assignment is given substantial marked weight to ensure full student commitment to providing complete and thoughtful peer feedback; this, in turn, ensures that students' reflective self editing is carried out with good advice at hand. One goal of the new ENGL 301 is to develop skill sets related to effective, professional collaboration in an online environment.

To increase the instructor's capacity to support students individually, students complete a detailed reflection blog at the completion of each unit, which keeps the instructor and TA informed on struggles and successes and provides a valuable overview of student progress through the course.

> Quotation from student reflection:
> *"By participating in the course through our own blogs, ENGL 301 takes an innovative and up-to-date approach to learning. Armed with a digital textbook, my peers and I interact through Facebook and our own websites to showcase our work. Furthermore, we explore professional social networking strategies, created a LinkedIn profile, and develop an online resume. ENGL 301 is unique because it not only focuses on technical writing, but*

also does so through the modern technological mediums that are becoming standard. Put simply—this is not your father's English course!"

Following the TA-assisted pilot, both instructor and TA wrote reflections on the process and on ways to distribute workload more efficiently. The SEoT suggested that the students were not fully aware of the impact of a TA; rather, having a TA allowed the course to offer more available seats (in a more fiscally sustainable model) without causing a significant difference in students' perceptions of the course. Some students still wished work could come back more quickly, and some, as always, wished for fewer assignments and course requirements. The course is indeed very assignment-intensive, but most assignments are short, and an equal number of students reported finding course requirements appropriate. Most students appear to have found that the course contributed a recognizably useful knowledge base for their academic and professional futures. This outcome was despite the fact that a significant proportion of students taking ENGL 301 are students who have already had some years of workplace experience (second-degree students in the Bachelor of Computing Studies and Dental Hygiene students who have work experience following their college program, for example).

Assessment of student reflections and SEoT have led to the following outcome: both online sections of ENGL 301 are offered for 2016W as TA-assisted sections of 55 students; and the on-campus section is being considered for a move to a blended format.

2.2 Dissemination – *Please provide a list of scholarly activities (e.g. publications, presentations, invited talks, etc.) in which you or anyone from your team have or intend to disseminate the outcomes of this project.*

The TA-assisted pilot term ended in April 2016, and the instructor and TA reports and reflections were submitted in July 2016. We wish to have one more section of student reflections and SEoT results for the TA-assisted model of the revised course before moving ahead on any decisions about dissemination. While the outcomes of this grant are being thoroughly assessed and could perhaps generate publishable data, this particular project has been more practically focused on improving the learning, accessibility, and experience of students at UBC, rather than on creating original scholarship of teaching and learning.

The experiment with a TA in an online course will be one of the topics in the 2016W Department of English Brown Bag series on research and teaching, along with the ComPAIR teaching technology pilot in ENGL 110 and a two-campus collaborative blended version of a senior literature course.

Given the success of the new online format and the fact that this particular grant was directed more to teaching and less to SoTL, I feel that the amount of money set aside for data analysis and dissemination ($2588) would be better spent in funding development of a blended-format model of ENGL 301. If the final SEoT and reflections indicate a publishable outcome, I can

pursue that during my year as a CTLT fellow at no additional cost. Instead, I would like to support Gisele Baxter's efforts at developing a blended course (of which there is currently exactly one in the Department of English, in no small part dependent on the resources of another institution). ENGL 301 could be taught on a blended model to excellent effect in the long term, but it is not ethical to ask a sessional faculty member to pursue such design without some financial compensation.

3. **TEACHING PRACTICES** – *Please indicate if **your** teaching practices or those of **others** have changed as a result of your project. If so, in what ways?*

The teaching practices connected to the specific course content on business and technical communications in ENGL 301 have been critically altered to recognize the online and mediated modes of professional communication in the (relatively) new millennium. This integration of teaching *though* multiple platforms is a major change for teaching in the Department of English, which is—with notable significant exceptions—one in which traditional teaching methodologies continue to be embraced and are still very effective (particularly given that literary study has been operating in ways that reflect the values of a "flipped" model for generations).

Because more traditional teaching methodologies and face-to-face collaborative discussion-based pedagogies are very effective in our discipline, English faculty members are often more resistant than others to using teaching technologies and online platforms. Having Erika Paterson's models for online collaboration has led me to reflect on ways that I can expand my own teaching to take advantage of the available technologies, in a way that I have not felt compelled to do in the past—I am hopeful that our in-department presentations in the brown-bag series will encourage others to engage in similar reflections.

4. **PROJECT SUSTAINMENT** – *Please describe the sustainment strategy for the project components. How will your work be sustained and/or potentially expanded (e.g. over the next five years)?*

The course redesign is expected to be in use for at least the next five years, though of all of our online courses, this one—being about technical communication—is perhaps the most likely to find itself in need of another update in the medium-term rather than longer term future as our media/business/communications platforms continue to evolve. Still, such evolutions will not constitute a full course redevelopment, but rather ongoing updates, now that we have completed the move away from assumptions around paper-based offices and old-fashioned models of business.

Assuming that current budget models continue, and that funds continue to be available to support a TA position, I anticipate that the TA-assisted model will be sustained over the next several years. That this course has worked well may provide evidence for an extension of

TAships in online courses, but that will depend heavily on the Faculty's funding of TAships in the Department of English. That this new model allows for increased student access and larger total per-section enrollments bodes well for its priority in future planning models for the Department.

As noted earlier, the expansion of this project is in its early stages, as we look into using the materials developed within this TLEF as part of a blended model for the on-campus version of ENGL 301.