

## **Using On-Line Writing Instruction to Bring College Students into Academic Community**

We share our best practices in teaching writing to freshman college students in a joint project between New York University and Long Island University. In this effort, we have found that appropriating rather than resisting technological fluency facilitates many of the problems arising out of the changed academic environment. As teachers at an urban university with students from diverse backgrounds, we find ourselves working, in our first year writing courses, to complicate both the writers' identities our students bring and the teacher identities they expect us to enact. Online media have offered some new opportunities for the exploration and complication of both identities in the commonly-used Blackboard. BlackBoard is a generic virtual classroom, not designed specifically for a writing class. Its communicative tools have limitations. We designed and developed the E-Discussions site to meet the specific writing needs of our student population.

E-Discussions site is designed to create a dynamic writing community online. The site is user-friendly and easy to navigate. By keeping navigation simple and having fewer custom design features, the site maintains its focus on writings and discussions in an academic setting. We consider the transformed environment of higher education and the kinds of impacts these discussions have on the relationship between teacher and student. We focus on the kinds of on-line work we do to establish the identity of our multicultural community and to get each student to establish membership in the community. We also consider the sometimes suggested, sometimes explicit conventions and discursive practices that structure processes of inquiry, critique, and presentation for individuals, relationships and communities of intellectual activity. We outline directly the tactics we have taken up to best bring our students into our academic communities as active participants. These include:

- Familiarizing students with academic purposes and goals
- Increasing student confidence in grappling with difficult or controversial subjects
- Formalizing and routinizing habits of academic discussion, such as challenging a speaker's ideas, revising their own ideas
- Outsourcing work on mechanical skills
- Computerizing rote assessment work, like grading quizzes