Chapter 12
Streaming Media for Writing Instruction: Drexel’s Streaming Media Server and Novel Approaches to Course Lessons and Assessment

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ABSTRACT
The Information Resources and Technology Department of Drexel University has developed an ambitious, flexible streaming media system to help Drexel faculty use various types of media in their teaching. This system, Drexel DragonDrop, allows faculty to upload a wide variety of file types and then encodes and converts them to media files that students (and others) can easily access and view. DragonDrop provides media options that can be used in any academic discipline, but this chapter focuses on how the system simplifies the use of video applications specifically for those who teach writing or writing-centered courses. As has been discussed throughout this book, video enables innovative teaching practices, but instructors have had to solve core issues including creating and distributing files and ensuring that students can access that material. Drexel’s system eliminates many of these logistical obstacles, allowing faculty to focus on creative teaching uses of technology.

INTRODUCTION
Using streaming video, instructors of writing can engage in teaching-centered practices such as

• Assessing, evaluating, and responding to their students’ writing in innovative ways, creating “virtual conferences.”
• Modeling the writing process for students.
• Creating activity-oriented workshops in which students follow short instructions and then engage in self-paced, workshop-like activities.
• Conducting course lessons and introducing course materials.

I will focus on the uses of this technological application in perhaps the most novel and
course-specific ways first—using AV methods for modeling and to provide responses to students about their writing—and I will then describe some other teaching strategies. Because writing is an interdisciplinary activity, I will also discuss how writing teachers and administrators can use streaming media to open new instructional methods for teachers across the disciplines who want to enhance the practice of using writing in their courses.

The uses of streaming media that I discuss here all involve creating media presentations with screen capture software, so in demonstrating the value of these streaming media applications I am also advocating for the value of screen capture software itself. This type of software—and while there are a number of products, I used Camtasia for everything I describe—facilitates creative teaching activities for the writing course. By capturing via video, with accompanying audio, the movements and activities on their computer screen, writing instructors can develop teaching approaches and specific tools that enhance their teaching. While some of these practices are ways of expanding what teachers do in a face-to-face classroom to the virtual environment, the use of video itself, as with most thoughtful uses of learning technologies, also provides an opportunity for teachers of writing to re-think what they are doing in their classes, how they teach, and why they teach in that way. As Klass (2003) said, streaming media inherently can help learners understand complex concepts and procedures by helping instructors move beyond the use of just text or even graphics: “The immediacy of the moving image and the impact of the human voice is powerful [sic].”

I also want to note that I am primarily talking about these types of applications in terms of conducting asynchronous course experiences—and by that I mean courses that do not require students to all be in the same place with you at the same time. A basic function of streaming media, as the editors of this book point out in the beginning, provides students with control over the progress of a video, and this can greatly enhance the asynchronous course experience.

DREXEL DRAGONDROP

First, I want to describe the Drexel DragonDrop system’s operation. For those of you strictly interested in the pedagogical applications of streaming media, this section may be only of passing interest, as it describes in some detail the technological scaffolding of the system. You may want to skip ahead to “Special media needs for writing teachers.” The system was featured in Campus Technology as a 2007 Campus Technology Innovator, which described the initial version of it (called then RMCP—the Rich Media Conversion Project) in this way: “Built entirely inhouse (originally written in PERL and now being converted to ASP.NET2), RMCP is a user-friendly web-based graphical user interface (GUI) that automates the rich media deployment process” (“Technology…”, 2007). Drexel’s Information Resources and Technology (IRT) further describes DragonDrop:

as a feature-rich, multi-institution enabled, web-based application for capturing, encoding and publishing rich media for web access. It significantly simplifies the process of getting audio, video, text and other rich media formats into highly compressed and streamable formats suitable for web delivery. (Drexel, 2009)

According to a series of PowerPoint materials created by Drexel’s IRT Department, “DragonDrop is a home-grown, internally developed Drexel software.” Faculty and staff began using an early version of the system in 2004, and the first Web-based version became available in 2006. Drexel’s IRT says that the “raison d’etre” for DragonDrop is to simplify the handling and accessing of rich media: “This project was developed as a response to the need to minimize the staff handling time necessary to encode and
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