

TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING

NEWSLETTER OF THE RU TECHNOLOGY IN LEARNING CENTER - WWW.RADFORD.EDU/TLC

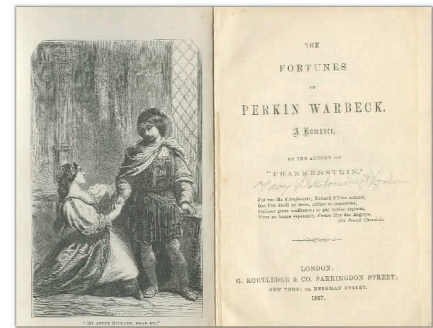
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The Web of Mind: Using WIKIS for Collaborative Writing *spotlight on faculty innovator dr. erin webster-garrett*

English professor and Victorian scholar, Dr. Erin Webster-Garrett struggled with two issues as an instructor: one, how to provide students with access to 19th century texts unavailable in affordable teaching editions? Second, how to enlist students as active, engaged learners in the editorial and research processes surrounding the recovery of under read and under appreciated texts? The answer was found in electronic textuality and the realm of digital humanities.

After obtaining an 1857 edition of Mary Shelley's fifth novel, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), Dr. Webster-Garrett worked with the staff at the Technology in Learning Center to create the Web of Mind Project which showcases students' collaborative interpretational work in the digital archiving and exploration of challenging nineteenth century texts. The Project utilized blogs and WIKIs as a further means of collect-

ing reflections from students on higher order learning processes and cognition.

RU's Web of Mind created an electronic text of Mary Shelley's 400+ page novel using the WebCT course management system as a text design center. Students also experienced the text in a social computing context and were asked to read and comment upon it in a WIKI space. This assignment called upon students to actively engage with and change the text and to engage in an intertextual praxis with which very few are comfortable. Through the Web of Mind, students were able to engage in not only metacognitive tasks that helped them evaluate their own reading and meaning making processes (and, thus, exert control over those processes); they were also able to have structured and self-paced encounters with a difficult and obscure Romantic text.

Through the process students were able to immerse themselves in the digital environment and collaborate with the text and with each other in ways that

were not typical of literary scholarship. Students' reflections on their experience indicate an initial stage of frustration followed by a sense of satisfaction of their contributions and "knowing" the text better because of the level of immersion they experienced. To this effect, one student posted in her journal, "my experience. . .has been eye-opening and informative. It is a disorienting, yet interesting, experience to be a part of something that is so much larger than the contribution you've put in . . ."

The Web of Mind Project was featured as a Spotlight Project by the New Media Consortium due to the projects' innovative use of new media technologies: <http://www.nmc.org/spotlight/member/web-mind>

To hear more about methods for engagement Dr. Webster-Garrett has used in her classes, come to her best practices session on Weds., Feb. 13 from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. in the Bonnie, room 249.

Is There a WIKI in Your Students' Future?

by Charley Cosmato

After reading the lead story in this issue you, no doubt, have come to the conclusion that a wiki is a web based application that extends editing privileges to the reader of a web page. At first glance it may seem counter intuitive to give such authority to the readership of a web site. Totally unfettered editorial license bestowed to the readers would certainly be a disaster in some instances. For example, the 2./4/08 online edition of the NY Times includes the headline, "Giants' Improbable Run Becomes Reality". Imagine the tug-of-war that would ensue if the readers could simply double-

click the text of the article and re-write the story to suit their own view.

Fortunately, many topics of academic interest are scrutinized by a much smaller audience of well-informed readers than the sports section of the Times. Skirmishes of opinion are certainly not uncommon on academic wiki sites, but dissension tends to come in the form of extensive discussion and incremental changes to posted content.

Wiki software includes the ability for the reader/writer to review the history of contributed edits and even revert the content to an earlier state when poor editing decisions are discovered. So, the unchecked editorial free-for-all is rarely realized. In fact, the more frequent occurrence of collaboratively developed knowledge tends to comport well with the goals of many disciplines, making Wikis a great choice.

If you are considering the use of a wiki within your own field or classes there are many options to help you get

started. For a custom solution you can download and install [mediawiki software](#) into a computer account and begin a wiki from scratch. An example of this approach can be found in the [RU Mac Users Wiki](#) sponsored by the TLC. The downside of this approach is that it requires you to fully develop the theme of the site, perform upgrades as needed, and generally requires a high level of technical involvement.

If, however, you want to hit the ground running, investing as little development time as possible, there are several wiki hosting services available free of charge to educators. Among them [pbwiki.com](#) and [wikispaces.com](#) consistently get top reviews from educators. Both services claim that you can get started in 30 seconds. Experience suggests that it takes more on the order of a minute; --but that's still pretty good if you have the extra thirty seconds to burn.

The TLC on iTUNES U

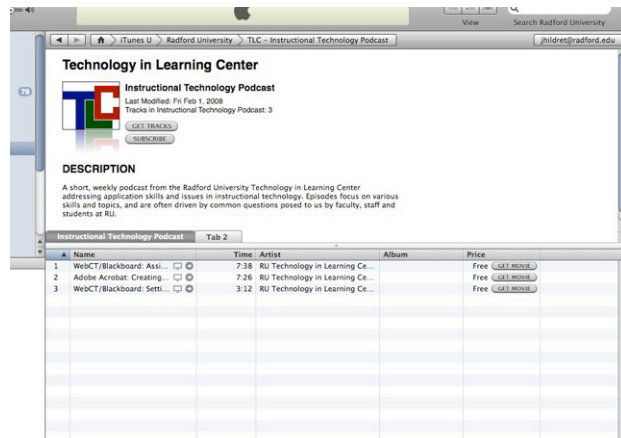
by John Hildreth

In addition to offering workshops and support to faculty interested in podcasting, the TLC is now officially entering the business.

With the start of the spring 2008 semester, the TLC is launching a weekly Instructional Technology Podcast. Each week will feature a short episode (5-8 minutes) covering a specific application skill area. Episodes are in video format, and topics are derived from common questions we get from faculty, staff and students.

The podcast is available in iTunes U (accessible via the Highlander portal). WebCT/Blackboard and Adobe Acrobat are among the topics covered in January's episodes.

Topic suggestions from faculty are welcome, and can be sent via e-mail to tlc@radford.edu.



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