

2005-2007 LITRE Grant Proposal

1. Project Title:

Hypertext as a Learning Tool in History of Philosophy Courses

2. Project Coordinator:

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3. Other Participants:

N/A

4. College or Unit:

CHASS

5. Department:

Philosophy and Religion

6. Project Description:

This project is thought as the continuation of the 2004-05 LITRE pilot project entitled "A Hypertext as a Means of Interactive Learning in a History of Philosophy Course." The pilot project has been aimed at creating an active hypertext of a section of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit" (its 'Preface') that is assigned as a required reading in the PI's PHI 302 (The 19th Century History of Western Philosophy) course. The proposed project will continue this work and create hypertexts of other primary sources assigned as required readings not only in PHI 302, but also in other history of philosophy courses that the PI teaches. (See below.) In this way, the project will have a larger impact on teaching and learning by affecting the higher number of students. (On that issue see #8. Estimated number of students affected.)

As it is well known, courses in history of philosophy rely heavily on the use of primary sources and secondary literature to interpret the primary texts. The traditional approach to teaching requires the use of a textbook or other (primary or secondary) text. Being delivered in a traditional book format (even if they are available electronically), all these texts are passive sources of knowledge. They do not assume an active involvement on the part of the student in the reading process. Students are just recipients of information provided ("prepackaged") by a book; they are not actively engaged in the process of acquiring information. Students read such texts passively. This reading is generally uncritical and relatively superficial and selective, often

resulting in a quick simplistic interpretation that pays no attention to complexities, gaps or contradictions in the text, lacking its deep and adequate comprehension.

The PI proposes the development of a new tool for student use. It is expected that in a long term the introduced tool will change the situation and enhance the students' learning by engaging them in an interactive learning process. The main goal is to create at least two new active hypertexts to be used as the main learning tools in the PI's PHI 302 (The 19th Century History of Western Philosophy), PHI 310 (Existentialism), and PHI 375 (Kantian Ethics) courses. The PI plans to create a hypertext of the full text of Kant's "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" (the main primary source assigned in the PI's PHI 375 course and also partly covered in her PHI 302 course) and a hypertext of a number of excerpts from Nietzsche's works assigned as required readings in both PHI 302 and 310 courses.

By designing the hypertexts of the most important philosophical sources the PI will create terminological and definition links that pop up in a window with a text in it as well as reference links that transfer the reader to other materials or to other parts of the text (providing bridges between similar or related passages). Other, to be also added, hyper elements include expansions that open up new information even to several levels and interpretative links that explain often hard to understand concepts and ideas discussed in a primary source at a highly adequate but more accessible for students level. One of the most important hyper levels developed will be the level of open (kind of "why") questions that will not only highlight gaps, contradictions, and issues in the text, but also evoke certain kinds of responses, even lead toward particular lines of interpretation. Students will then be required to respond to these questions by developing their own interpretations or critiques of somebody's interpretation of the text and posting their writings to the class discussion board for others to view and comment on. After rethinking their own interpretations "publicly" on-line, students will be required to compose short papers, in which they should elaborate on main issues discussed in primary sources. These papers will be then reviewed and graded as a required homework assignment.

The PI is confident that generating and criticizing multiple interpretations of a text is the ideal way to study a complex work. The PI has no doubt that combining the two elements – creating hypertext and initiating interactive on-line learning – into a dynamic syllabus will empower students as readers and writers in unique ways which challenge traditional paradigms of teaching philosophy as well as its history.

In some respect, the proposed project is very ambitious, especially taken into consideration the complexity and volume of the work that has to be accomplished. It should be obvious that the realization of the project requires not only technical, but also research effort and cannot be carried out very fast. This is why the work will be spread out over the 2-year period and the support funds are required for both fiscal years. The PI is confident that a hypertext document will allow students to go beyond just the surface level, help them enact the questions and thought processes that a skilled reader would

experience, and make it possible for them to get a deeper understanding of the text. The reading of a hypertext document will encourage more imaginative questioning and interactive reading; will push students beyond those preliminary interpretations and toward critical and analytical thinking.

The PI is also confident that the proposed technological innovation and a new learning tool will be widely disseminated and will affect a wide range of courses, not only in philosophy, but also in other disciplines.

7. Project Objectives:

The PI's primary pedagogical goal is to help students empower themselves as close readers and stronger interpreters of philosophical texts. This will allow them to develop more sophisticated critical thinking skills for dealing not only with special philosophical works, but also with everyday issues and dilemmas. Special learning outcomes are described in section 9 below.

Education at its best is a conversation between students and a variety of sources (i.e., texts, professors, and other students). One of the PI's goals as a professor is to provoke a discussion that does not stop when the class is over. Implementing technology in teaching philosophy provides a great way to keep discussion fire going, building a good foundation for enhancing students learning.

Main objectives for designing hypertexts are the following:

- creating terminological and definition links to allow students to better comprehend ideas and concepts discussed in the text
- creating reference links that transfer the reader to other web materials providing some additional information on topics and issues under consideration
- bridging conceptually related text passages
- providing interpretative links that explain often hard to understand concepts and ideas discussed in a primary source at a level accessible for undergraduate students

Being designed as HTML texts, the hypertexts will engage students in a more interactive learning experience than a simple printed text requiring active involvement on the part of the student in the reading and learning process. Clicking on key words and phrases will help the students to "drive down" to greater levels of specificity, by means of which they may learn more about topics they are interested in, or seek clarifications about topics they do not fully understand or are not able to interpret correctly.

Introducing active hypertexts of primary sources will enhance students learning in the following ways:

- Students will read the text in greater depth, attentively and critically.
- Students will gain the skills to access a variety of rich resources useful for the understanding of the text (information resources from a variety of sources, from dictionaries to historical archives, will be made available). However, students will not get lost in a vast quantity of information; the resources will be chosen selectively and in an appropriate manner to "fit" the students' needs.

- Students will collaborate and interact with a teacher and other students to use their expertise and get feedback to their work.
- In order to acquire information and make sense of it, students must be actively engaged in the process. Information will not be just presented to them; it must be found, and once found, be processed. Therefore the students will be actively interacting with the text.
- Instead of relying on the teacher alone to provide information, the hypertext will provide a rich matrix of decentralized sources leading to a variety of interpretations of the selection.
- The ready availability of a variety of resources will promote individual exploration.

The proposed innovations (here: creating hypertexts of the primary sources and using them as the main teaching/learning tools) may be easily applied to other disciplines and used in a variety of courses offered by other CHASS departments, affecting a great number of students across the campus. In addition, it can also be successfully used in DE courses offered by the college and university.

8. Estimated number of students affected:

While the hypertext of the 'Preface' of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit" (the result of the pilot project) will be used only by students enrolled in the PI's PHI 302 course (currently 40 students), the number of students affected by the proposed hypertexts will be much greater. The project will be expanded to other PI's courses in History of Philosophy and the new hypertexts will be used as essential learning tools by students in PHI 310 and PHI 375 courses, both with enrollment of 40-45 students per semester each. The PI also plans to modify her Introduction to Philosophy course (PHI 205) to allow the use of the hypertexts. Due to the proposed use of hypertexts in the PHI 205 course, the number of students affected by the proposed project will rise dramatically and go up up to 100 additional students per semester. The PI also plans to make the developed hypertexts useful for the PHI 205 course available to other instructors, who teach the course for the Department of Philosophy and Religion. This will further increase the number of affected students to 300-400 per semester. It is also worth noticing that the proposed technological innovation will have an impact not only on on-campus, but also on distance education students, since the PI also teaches DE sections of the PHI 205 course.

In a long run, it is anticipated that the proposed innovations will be applied to courses in other philosophical and humanitarian disciplines.

9. Outcomes of the Project:

The expected outcomes are mutually beneficial for both teachers and students.

Main Teacher Outcomes:

1. Change the teaching paradigm from the lecture/discussion mode to the collaborative mode (Hypertext documents will allow the teacher to share

information in a much less intrusive, “authoritarian” manner, essentially “behind” the text; the readers/students are expected not only to passively “participate” in a discussion, but to take the initiative.)

2. Less directive and more student-centered teaching that increases emphasis on individualized instruction
3. Rethinking the roll of technology in education and technology implementation in teaching (history of) philosophy

Main Student Outcomes:

1. Increased analytical skills performance of students when interacting with a teacher and other students on computer related projects; “at risk” students will dramatically improve their motivation and gain self-confidence.
2. Improved student critical thinking skills because of interacting with a hypertext and commenting on other student’ interpretations of a primary text during on-line discussions.
3. Mastery of reading and writing skills by answering the “why” questions and providing own interpretations of a primary text

10. Project impact on NCSU:

The proposed project aims at developing technology-rich, inquiry-based learning experiences. It focuses on an “innovative” use of already available technology (the Internet along with WebCT) attempting to enhance student learning by creating hypertexts and incorporating on-line discussions in teaching. The implementation of the proposed innovations will have a significant impact on the NCSU community.

As already mentioned above, the innovations proposed in the project have applications far beyond a single course and even a subject matter. They may be easily applied to other humanitarian disciplines and used in a variety of courses offered by other CHASS departments, affecting a great number of students across the campus. In addition, it can be also successfully used in DE courses offered by the university.

11. Project Assessment Plan:

Project assessment will consist of the four parts:

- (1). Assessment of students’ learning outcomes by reviewing students’ papers.
- (2). Assessment of both the PI’s effort that is put in creating a hypertext as well as “teacher outcomes”.
- (3). Evaluation of the developed hypertexts by students.
- (4). Using the data collected by the tracking system built into a new version of WebCT (WebCT Vista) to see how technology (in this case: introducing and use of a hypertext) impacts students’ learning.

(1). As it was mentioned above, students enrolled in the PI’s PHI 302, PHI310, and PHI375 courses are required to write short papers elaborating on main issues discussed in primary sources, which will be introduced in the form of a hypertext. The PI will evaluate students’ papers by using appropriate rubrics that will attempt to measure the students’ ability to go “beyond” the textual

facts and identify the problems and issues at stake (problem-based instead of fact-acquisition oriented learning), as well as the ability to rework one's own position in response to criticism of others. The PI plans to further detail the rubrics based on the writing guidelines that she developed earlier. (The list of rubrics as well as the guidelines on How to write a critical summary and How to write a philosophy paper are to find on the PI's website.) Using rubrics for judging students' papers will allow the PI to see whether the students are learning successfully and how attentive they are. If students are not just trying to reproduce what the teacher says or thinks, but give evidence of careful reading and re-reading of texts, enabling them to defend their own thoughts and to negotiate some interesting questions that a particular text suggests, then they are progressing in their learning and enhancing their analytical and critical thinking skills.

The best evidence of improvement of students' learning will be shown by the students' ability to develop strong interpretations which are their "own" and let others "hear" their voice in on-line discussions. The PI will also use rubrics to evaluate students' on-line discussion. This will help the PI assess students' analytical skills and ability to critical thinking. To measure "motivation and self-confidence, the PI will look for more open-minded and in-depth discussions by students who have been, up to that point in class, more shy about class participation. It is anticipated that the hypertext will help these less motivated students to become more confident in their on-line discussions.

In addition, the current students' papers will be reviewed in comparison with papers from the previous years' classes, when the hypertexts were not implemented and by writing papers on primary sources students used their traditional printed versions. To guarantee the objectivity of such comparison the previous years' papers will be mixed up with the current year students' papers and then "blindly" evaluated by using the developed rubrics. The same technique of "mixing" previous and current students' writings will be also applied to on-line discussion entries. It is also possible to have another faculty member or an advanced philosophy major to assist with the assessment. However, someone's participation in the assessment process depends on funding and its amount. The PI thinks that the assessment itself requires funding that should be provided in addition to the initial project funding and should become available after the proposed project is completed. However, even if funds for assessment should not become available, the PI will do the assessment on her own in the form as it is described above.

(2). The PI will keep track of the amount of time and effort that will be put in developing a hypertext of the proposed course module. She will be recording the encountered differences in in-class and on-line discussions when students were to read the module with hypertext and compare them to previous years' discussions when a hypertext was not available. These observations will be formulated in terms of the PI's objectives and teacher outcomes.

(3). In addition, the PI will conduct a survey that will be given to students after they complete the course module on hypertext. Students will be asked to reflect on their experience with hypertext, evaluate it, and report on how this experience is different from one when they are required to read a regular

printed version of a primary source. They will be also asked to share their feelings about such a use of technology in philosophy as well as about the level of their satisfaction with a new kind of the student-teacher interaction that is mediated by hypertext. The survey will serve as a tool to measure the effectiveness of the hypertext module(s) of the course for student learning. It will also provide an objective evaluation of the project and measure its success.

(4). The PI will use the data collected by the tracking system built in the WebCT Vista to exactly evaluate how technology (the presence of a hypertext) impacts students' learning. The PI will be able to compare how much and to what extent each student actually used the technology and how this affected his/her learning outcome (mastering of argument, correctness of interpretation, and quality of a course paper). These data will be then compared to the results from the evaluation based on rubrics, providing reliable information about the effectiveness of the use of a hypertext by learning.

12. Staffing and Support:

This project is an individual project that will be performed by the PI along. The PI will be responsible for completing of all the tasks, including the content of the text, the information to be put "beyond" the text, and also the technical execution of the proposed project. The PI will also prepare and conduct the project assessment.

13. Financial Support Requested:

EPA salary total: \$ 10,000

SPA salary total:

Other salary:

Equipment:

Cost associated with assessment:

Other financial support requested:

Total Funds requested: \$ 10,000

Additional Explanation of how funds will be used:

Funds requested for the PI summer support consist of 0.71 month of her summer salary per year (\$ 4,065) and 23% fringe benefit charge (\$ 935) per year for two consecutive years.

14. Funding Breakdown:

Total funding requested for fiscal year 2005-2006: \$ 5,000

Total funding requested for fiscal year 2006-2007: \$ 5,000

15. Staff Support and/or Technical Support Requested:

10 hours to provide help with the tracking system in WebCT Vista

16. Timetable for Implementation:

2005-2006 fiscal year – work on Kant's text:

- January 2006: uploading the primary text in digital format to the PI's website. Discussing and solving copyright issues as well as edition and format issues. Creating a class discussion board for on-line discussions and linking it to the text; starting working on a tracking system
- February 2006: creating terminological, definition, and reference links; work on rubrics to use for evaluating students' papers; working on a tracking system
- March – April 2006: creating expansions and interpretative links; finalizing rubrics to use for judging students' papers; completing work on a tracking system and its initial testing
- May – June 2006: designing discussion topics and formulating open (“why”) questions
- Fall 2006: teaching PHI 375 (or PHI 302) with implemented hypertext (the primary source is overlapping in both courses)
- November-December 2006: assessment of students' learning and teacher outcomes
- December 2006: final assessment and release of the assessment results

2006-2007 fiscal year – work on Nietzsche's texts:

- September - October 2006: uploading the primary text in digital format to the PI's website. Discussing and solving copyright issues as well as edition and format issues. Creating a class discussion board for on-line discussions and linking it to the text.
- November – December 2006: creating terminological, definition, and reference links; work on rubrics to use for evaluating students' papers; working on a tracking system; creating expansions and interpretative links; finalizing rubrics to use for judging students' papers; completing work on a tracking system and its initial testing
- Spring 2007: teaching PHI 310 (or PHI 302) with implemented hypertext (the primary source is overlapping in both courses)
- April - May 2007: assessment of students' learning and teacher outcomes
- May - June 2007: final assessment and release of the assessment results; the final report

17. Human Subjects Protection:

If your proposal project involves research using human subjects, you will need approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) prior to final approval. IRB information is available at <http://www.ncsu.edu/sparcs/irb>



18. Proposal Release:

By submitting this proposal the applicant grants the LITRE Advisory Board permission to make this proposal available as an example for future grant applicants. All personal information will be removed if this proposal is used as an example.

