

**Title of Grant:** Using Macros in MS Word to Accelerate Instructor Feedback on Student Essays

**S2008 – 184P –FF**

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**Abstract:**

The proposed summer project involved developing macros (small executable programs) within MS Word that, with one click of the mouse on a customized button at the top of one's computer screen, shall "automatically" produce pre-defined texts of instructor feedback in a series of response to problems and errors within a given student's essay. With the use of macros, instructors who are reading and commenting on batches of student papers on the same subject can save time and key strokes with just one click of a mouse in much the same way that a user of MS Word would "insert a table" or "bold a font" in the command line at the top of the user's screen in MS Word.

**Actual Outcomes:**

The project that I completed during summer 2008 involved the creation of MS Word "macros" or grading shortcuts that are designed to provide feedback within three major categories of errors related to the development of student essays: conceptual, formatting, and sentence level. Conceptual errors in student essays are those that deal with the "big picture" of students' critical thinking about topics that they intend to address in their essays. Formatting errors are those that deal with the proper look and feel of a student's essay, with respect to a prescribed set of style guidelines, such as those articulated through The Modern Language Association (MLA). Sentence-level errors are those that pertain to spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

With the implementation of macros in MS Word, the time involved in evaluating a student essay can be halved, and with this macro method more substantial feedback is produced for each student—with just a few clicks of a mouse.

Whether students provide hard copies or file versions of their essays, instructors who use the macros in MS Word can produce a customized report (or make comments directly on student essays) that identifies and suggests corrections for problems and errors.

**Other Colleges:**

During fall 2008, the entire Piedmont Virginia Community College community was invited to a presentation I delivered at the Center for Excellence in Instruction on the PVCC campus.

In spring 2009, I hope to present my findings at the VCCS New Horizons Conference in Roanoke. This of course is dependent upon the acceptance of my presentation proposal.

### **Discussion and Critique:**

Faculty across the disciplines may find the macros to be helpful, especially as writing across the curriculum becomes a more visible component in courses college-wide.

The benefits of the development of the macros are most profoundly to speed up the review and evaluation processes of reading and commenting on student essays. With the macros, each student can receive customized feedback in the form of inter-textual instructor comments directly on the student's essay OR a customized report of errors and expectations for revision. Clearly, students are the first members of the academic community to benefit from the streamlined and even semi-automated approach to essay evaluations.

The teacher of record in the course will also benefit through the increased efficiency in a macro-based essay response system. Perhaps the instructional playing field can be leveled to a greater extent than before between the disciplines. The truth is that teaching is a challenging profession for every instructor, but I believe that English professors may have the most difficult and time-consuming position with respect to evaluating student written work. Alleviating the monotonous and redundant tasks of making the same comments on multiple sets of student essays shall allow the instructor to focus time effort on other important elements of teaching and learning in the classroom.

I believe that the entire College community may also come to benefit from the use of the macro-based resources in MS Word. Clearly, MS Office is a packaged software program that provides untapped macro-based resources to the entire College community. Perhaps the use of one type of macro in MS Word (one software program within a larger suite) may lead other instructors within the College to explore additional macros to improve efficiency and feedback within a larger teaching-and-learning environment.

After closing out a summer of developing the three categories of macros, I now intend to present my findings through the Center for Excellence in Instruction. I hope that the presentation, which is scheduled for October 22, 2008, will result in PVCC faculty and staff feedback geared toward refinements of the macros. Perhaps the campus critique will lead to a presentation at the spring 2009 New Horizons Conference in Roanoke, Virginia.

Apart from showcasing macros at conferences, the most significant means of determining the success of the project is to have other faculty members take the macros for "a test drive," once a system for distribution can be determined. My goal for the more extended future is to produce a CD on which the macro files can be uploaded seamlessly to each faculty member's computer, using "Install Shield" software with the assistance of a specialist in the area of software development and distribution.

**Evaluation:**

Since late summer 2008 I have been using the macros that I created to evaluate my own student essays. The macros dramatically speed the process of developing instructor feedback for students.

I also developed a survey through "surveymonkey.com" that I will administer to students in my fall 2008 writing courses. That survey will be a tool for measuring student expectations and experiences, as they encounter the feedback generated through the macros.

**Dissemination:**

Dissemination of my findings is a work in process. I will deliver a presentation to the entire PVCC community on October 22, 2008. Later, I hope to present at the 2009 New Horizons Conference.

In phase II of the project, to be completed during summer 2009, I plan to migrate the macros technology to a CD ROM that can be plugged into other faculty computers, with the oversight of the PVCC IT support.