Changes designed to improve “Thinking Like a Writer” MOOC

First held in summer 2013, MSU’s “Thinking Like a Writer” MOOC was revamped and redesigned for summer 2014 to provide a better user experience. Additional improvements and changes resulted from what Professor Jeff Grabill and his team learned by teaching the 2013 MOOC.

“For instance, we learned there is a tremendous interest throughout the world in learning writing; we had more than 2,000 people sign up last year,” says Grabill, Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures Chair. “And we listened to what they had to say. As a result, our team adapted this year’s experience to the wide range of reasons people have to learn writing.

“We also learned that it is possible to create high quality peer feedback at scale with large enrollments and to create quality peer learning experiences. That is at the top of our agenda. And, with Eli Review (www.elireview.com), we have the technology to craft peer learning in a very real way.”

Some key points learned from the 2013 MOOC’s participants:

1. Importantly, it does take a team to design and deliver MSU’s Writing MOOC, including Grabill, Professor Julie Lindquist, Professor Kate Fedewa, instructor Kristen Heine, and English PhD student Jennifer Royston.

2. “We designed our ‘Thinking Like a Writer’ MOOC to help attract an even wider range of participants this year,” Grabill says. “Of course, everyone is welcome, thus the term ‘open,’ but we especially invite incoming college students [to MSU and elsewhere], business people, community college students, English as a Second

Language students, and anyone for whom writing is a hindrance to advancement in school or their jobs, or for whom a college-level writing course may be a real impediment.”

3. There are now four pathways to the MOOC. A certificate option and two for-credit options were added for 2014. There is:
   • the FREE option where MSU facilitates some peer interactions
   • the “Certificate of Completion” option for a fee of about $50
   • a non-MSU student credit option, and
   • an MSU student credit option that meets MSU’s first-year writing requirement of all MSU students.

Grabill says that what he most wants to communicate to interested participants is: “If you want to become a better writer, our MOOC helps you think like a writer by learning to use the strategies of expert writers.”

Information on the “Thinking Like a Writer” MOOC is available on the MOOC website at http://writemooc.wide.msu.edu