Bill Hart-Davidson, Jeff Grabill and Mike McLeod know that peer review is a great tool for improving student writing. In fact, they created the instruction platform to prove it.

Eli Review instruction software allows instructors to create peer-review opportunities that help students learn how to become better writers. Students use Eli Review to do three important tasks: writing, reviewing, and revising. Writing tasks can be completed by composing in Eli or by uploading a file. Reviews are done in Eli, guided by criteria provided by teachers. Students use the feedback they receive to make revision plans, and then revise and resubmit their drafts. The result? Better writing and, more importantly, better writers.

The true magic of Eli Review, though, according to Hart-Davidson, is the real-time data it produces about the writing process. Instructors can get real-time feedback on how reviewers are doing—as it happens—and watch as students submit their reviews and respond to each other’s comments.

“Eli Review works from the idea, supported by research on writing development and learning theory, that students become better writers as they learn productive strategies for revision,” said Julie Lindquist, professor of Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures, and director of the First-Year Writing Program. “It emphasizes moments of review and revision, and allows for more effective interventions into students’ writing processes.”
Hart-Davidson, Grabill and McLeod invented Eli Review as researchers in MSU’s Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) Research Center. All three were also faculty in the MSU Department of Writing, Rhetoric, & American Cultures. Eli Review is currently being developed by Drawbridge, an educational technology company for which McLeod now works and is part owner.

Founded in East Lansing, Michigan, the firm seeks to make ideas into great technologies that enhance teaching and facilitate learning.

Hart-Davidson is currently associate dean of graduate studies in the College of Arts & Letters, while Grabill chairs the college’s Department of Writing, Rhetoric & American Cultures.

LICENSED TO MSU

Michigan State University obtained a license for faculty and instructors to use the Eli Review online peer review platform at no cost to them or students beginning with a fall 2013 semester pilot, and running through the next two academic years.

“Effective communication is one of MSU’s five institutional learning goals, and development of excellent writing skills is key to achieving these goals,” says Doug Estry, associate provost for undergraduate education and dean of undergraduate studies. “Eli Review, WRAC, and the digital writing initiative articulate and facilitate creative goals for students’ writing and foster faculty innovation that will enhance students’ knowledge and ability through peer mentoring.”

Estry adds that Eli is a powerful and effective tool for developing student writing abilities through peer learning and peer assessment.

“Feedback is terribly important to effective learning environments, and Eli is specifically constructed to try and facilitate better feedback from peers to each other,” Grabill said. “With regard to writing instruction, in particular, Eli facilitates the review and revision moments that are the spine of good writing process pedagogy.”

“We don’t just want a single better draft,” said Hart-Davidson. “We want students to be making good progress as learners. And that’s what that feedback does.”

SUPPORT FOR ELI PILOT

MSU IT Services supports the Eli Review pilot technically and through faculty development, training, and consultative support in partnership with the Undergraduate University Division, the College of Arts and Letters, and the First-Year Writing Program. IT Services will also work with the College of Arts and Letters to conduct an assessment of the pilot and its impacts on the educational outcomes of First-Year Writing students.

“Eli Review might provide a positive cost benefit ratio by allowing more assignments and feedback than would be practical without technology,” says Brendan Guenther, director of teaching and learning for IT Services. “We will test that premise to assess innovations with instructional technology, and show evidence of impact.”

Interested MSU faculty and instructors can request access to Eli Review by filling out its online form. For questions, call the MSU Distance Learning Services Help Desk at (517) 355-2345 or (800) 500-1554.

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