

ODU Writes a Book

Technology and the Humanities will come together for a project they believe is the first of its kind. Over a 24-hour period, starting at 12:30 p.m. on Feb. 11, anyone on campus, or with an ODU email address, can join in the process of writing the book: “You are (w)here: how knowledge is related to virtual and physical space.”



Contributions to the joint-authorship “multimodal, digital text” as the website describes it, can take any form – scholarly research-based writing, personal reflections, photo essays or audio recordings.

A “flash mob” of co-authors will be physically located in the Learning Commons, but others will be able to contribute virtually to the project – anyone with an odu.edu email address.

Project co-leader George Fowler, associate university librarian for information resources and technology, got the idea for the book after attending a workshop on digital humanities. It inspired him to come up with a way to get the ODU Libraries involved in the digital humanities.

“It is an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, and administrators to create an academic product as equals,” said Fowler. “It is a historic event, never attempted at another higher-education institution in the U.S. It showcases the resources available to students and faculty at ODU. It can be a culmination of the mission of higher education – the addition of knowledge to interest and motivation to create synthesized knowledge as part of a larger system.”

“This experiment will have unexpected results, though I am hoping for a hive of activity in the Learning Commons as well as pockets of activity elsewhere throughout ODU and individual participation from everywhere,” Fowler said.

D.E. Wittkower, Ph.D., philosophy and religious studies faculty member explains the importance of this event, “Our educational environment today is excessively assessment-driven—most notably, in the testing culture exemplified by No Child Left Behind. We have reduced the scope of what counts as “learning” to what is empirically verifiable through standardized assessment and the meaning and value of education has been greatly impoverished thereby.”

Adding, “This is an important project for our University, and for our educational culture as a nation, because it represents a conscious and conscientious break with this pattern, and the version of “learning” that it implies. We intend to come together as a community, and to write and edit as a community, and in so doing, to recapture the idea that writing and scholarship are about an interchange of ideas and a concretization of experience into knowledge—not about memorization, hierarchical authority, cramming and recall, or performing rigid tasks to pre-set standards. This is an important project because it aims to create a pop-up community of knowledge creators that keeps faith with the fundamental goals of education as discovery: discovery of ourselves, of each other, and of the world, conducted among partners in knowing.”

Both Fowler and Wittkower recommend that students and faculty visit <http://oduwritesabook.digitalodu.com> to propose and discuss topics, and begin forming working groups. That process can also take place during the event itself, but if you have a topic in mind, you can get others to sign on with you ahead of time, and even start outlining the piece. A Facebook page has also been set up at <https://www.facebook.com/ODUwritesabook>.

When completed, an electronic version of the book will be available for public consumption, with all participants listed as co-creators, and a Creative Commons license to share ownership of the final product.

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