

# FY2008 Learning Technologies Grants Proposal

(COVER PAGE)

## Project Information

<emma> and Vista (LMS)

Project Title

Prof. Nelson Hilton

Project Director

Writing Board (/CTL)

Requesting Department

\$10,000.00

Amount Requested Year 1

\$10,000.00

Amount Requested Year 2

/ Nelson Hilton /

Project Director's Signature

## Proposal Endorsement Signatures

/ Nelson Hilton /

Department Head

/ Jere Morehead /

Dean-Vice President for Instruction

Proposal Abstract (100-word maximum)

Taking advantage of the new Blackboard application protocol interface (API) — called Powerlinks — to integrate <emma>, the locally-developed writing and ePortfolio tool, with Vista 4.0 in time for the January 2009 campus rollout of the new LMS would create the opportunity to use ePortfolios within the new LMS to help faculty and students to address an essential pedagogical challenge for the institution, writing. It would be relatively easy, if need be, to port this work to another Java-based LMS such as Sakai.

## **Section I. Project Description**

### Nature of the Innovation

The newest version of Blackboard's "learning management system" (LMS), Vista, is considered by many the leading contender to become the University's replacement next year for our current LMS, Blackboard's WebCT 4.1. The Center for Teaching and Learning and the Task Force on Writing propose taking advantage of the new Blackboard application protocol interface (API) — called Powerlinks — to integrate <emma>, our locally-developed writing and ePortfolio tool, with Vista in time for the January 2009 campus rollout of the new LMS. In order to accomplish this integration, the <emma> developers would work with a programmer to construct an integration module between these applications using the Powerlinks kit. The Powerlink would allow faculty and teaching assistants to insert <emma> as a tool inside their Vista courses and would facilitate links with other Vista tools, such as discussions and grade books. Similar integration of the Wimba Live Classroom and Voice Tools has decreased the number of technical barriers for faculty and students who use these tools and increased the number of users. It should be noted that once complete, it would be relatively easy to port this work to our other Java-based LMS contender, Sakai.

### Rationale

A confluence of new technology adoption and institutional need prompts this proposal for a Learning Technology Grant.

As UGA prepares for the next generation LMS, we have the opportunity not only to provide faculty with the latest LMS tools available, but also to introduce innovative pedagogies deployable through the new system. Bundling <emma> with Vista's suite of tools would facilitate the presentation of new possibilities for assignment construction and course design to all TAs and faculty teaching LMS-supported courses.

More important than synchronizing the integration of <emma> with the rollout of a new campus-wide LMS, however, is the opportunity to use ePortfolios within the new LMS to help faculty address an essential pedagogical challenge for the institution, namely writing. In its description of the core curriculum for the entire University System of Georgia (USG), the Board of Regents (BOR) has identified eleven oral and written communication learning outcomes for collegiate general education. While these USG and consequently, UGA goals set high expectations for student writing, multiple studies and reports — including two National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reports and the 2005 Report of the Task Force on General Education and Student Learning — indicate that UGA students are not writing as much as their counterparts at peer institutions, and in many cases students do not have to do any substantial writing after completing their first-year composition requirements through the ENGL 1101 and ENGL 1102 sequence.

A 1996-97 UGA study by the Academic Literacy Committee found that while faculty believe that writing assignments foster high-level thinking and learning, only 54% of the 440 respondents reported using writing as a form of evaluation of those skills. Of faculty who did assign writing, 53% rated students' writing quality as "acceptable," while 26% rated it as "weak," 14% as "good," 4% as "poor," and 2% as "excellent." In a world that increasingly relies on effective thinking and writing, such evaluations of student writing abilities do not bode well for UGA graduates moving into the world of work. The accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, for example, identifies poor oral and written communication abilities as one of the four gaps it finds in most new hires' skill sets. In order to ensure that UGA students are fully capable of making contributions to their community as citizens and as professionals after graduation, the University must expand opportunities for students to develop their written communication skills. The Task Force on General Education and Student Learning recommended the incorporation of "significant writing assignments into more courses across the University so that students are exposed to rigorous writing experiences throughout their undergraduate career" and recommended the expansion of "the current system that designates selected classes as 'writing intensive' or containing a 'writing component' across the University." Integrating <emma> with Vista is a step that, along with others recommended by the Task Force on Writing ([wwwctl.uga.edu/Writing\\_Task\\_Force\\_Report.pdf](http://wwwctl.uga.edu/Writing_Task_Force_Report.pdf)), will help the University provide faculty with the tools and opportunities to improve student writing.

As part of its response to these reports on general education at UGA, the Task Force on Writing has recommended a number of initiatives and program expansions to increase the amount of and the quality of writing instruction throughout the University. One recommendation focuses on the use of ePortfolios, which could be implemented in courses throughout the curriculum and throughout departments. There is scholarly consensus that student portfolios focusing on the writing process — including multiple drafts, feedback, and revision — and including student choice of assignments and student reflection on their learning improve overall writing skill and metacognition; students not only improve their writing but also 'learn how to learn,' thus preparing them to be lifelong learners. Well-designed portfolios require complex thinking and expression skills and help students understand their own learning; they provide a richer picture of student work that documents growth overtime.

Electronic portfolios have been required of all students in our first-year composition program since Fall 2005; by the time that Vista is implemented, virtually every undergraduate will already be familiar with <emma> and ePortfolios from their participation in those classes. Having <emma> available in Vista will provide students with convenient access to what will be, by January 2009, a familiar software application.

Finally, integrating <emma> with Vista would streamline the management and administration of writing assignments. Advantages would include single sign-on access via the UGA MyID to the LMS and ePortfolio and system integration that would allow for the ePortfolios to be linked to different Vista tools such as discussion boards, rubrics, and grade books.

## Relevance of the Project to University Priorities

As stated above, the Board of Regents' and University's general education learning outcomes identify the primacy of effective written communication, yet undergraduates at UGA do not write as much or as well as their counterparts at our peer and aspirant institutions. Given this disconnect, having ePortfolios readily available in the campus-wide LMS would make it easier for both students and professors to manage the writing process that includes invention, planning, drafting, feedback, revision, editing, and proofreading of written work.

In particular, the five written communication goals that are part of UGA's General Education Abilities are the ability to:

- Assimilate, analyze, and present in written forms, a body of information
- Adapt writing to circumstances and audience
- Interpret content of written materials on related topics from various disciplines
- Compose effective written materials for various academic and professional contexts
- Produce writing that is stylistically appropriate and mature

Board of Regents learning outcomes related to writing would be enhanced by the integration of these tools, but these five abilities in particular are addressed by the emphases on process, feedback, and revision inherent in the <emma> model of the ePortfolio. For example, one of the most difficult lessons about academic and professional writing for students to internalize is the idea that one's writing must adapt to disciplinary contexts, purposes, and audiences. At present, all of the formal writing instruction that undergraduates receive (except in Writing Intensive classes) is within the general context of argumentative writing in English 1101 and writing about literature in English 1102. Consequently, when undergraduates are asked to write in the social sciences or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, they are unaware of rhetorical, stylistic, and disciplinary or professional standards their professors are expecting. Access to <emma> in Vista, along with expansion of the Writing Intensive Program, will provide professors and students with a powerful writing tool to help train disciplinary and professional writers.

As a result of the Task Force Report on Undergraduate Education, writing has become a much higher priority. As the University prepares for its next Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) review, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a key component of the accreditation process, may well focus on enhancing writing opportunities for undergraduates. As the focus of the institution's QEP, expanding writing opportunities for undergraduates would entail the commitment of significant institutional resources for the next three to five years. At the end of that period, SACS will require documentation that assesses the QEP's effectiveness, and the newest version of <emma> is already equipped to produce that data, as described below.

Specific Courses or Student Groups Benefiting from the Project

Immediately, the courses benefiting from this project would be all of the Writing Intensive Courses across campus that not only require significant writing but also focus on process, feedback, and revision. English composition students will also benefit from having <emma> integrated with the other Vista tools, such as discussion and gradebook. The proposed initiation of the writing certificate program in Fall 2008 will gain from having <emma> as an ePortfolio tool through Vista as well. As other recommendations from the Task Force on Writing are implemented, all LMS-supported classes stand to benefit from having an ePortfolio tool available within Vista.

Number of Students Served Including Undergraduate, Graduate/Professional or Both

All UGA students may potentially benefit from the integration of <emma> with Vista.

**Section II. Budget**

Budget for 2007-2008

<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Requested from LTG</i>	<i>Provided by Other Sources</i>
Java Development	100 hours @ 50	\$5000.00	\$5000.00	
<emma>/LMS Development	2 units @ \$3640.00	\$7280.00	\$5000.00	\$2,280.00 (CTL)

The best integration of the <emma> application into Vista will require a clear and deep understanding of Vista's PowerLinks API as well as the core <emma> technologies. A Java developer will be hired to craft the integration from the Vista side of the equation. <emma> will also be modified to integrate its functionality fully in the Vista environment. As the technology links are crafted, the <emma> team will test functionality and usability; it would also develop materials, tutorials, and guides.

Project Timeline

<i>Date</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Person Responsible</i>
July 1, 2008	Complete initial coding of Powerlinks and <emma> modifications	Nelson Hilton, Ron Balthazor
August 1, 2008	Complete testing	Nelson Hilton, Ron Balthazor

Budget for 2008-2009

<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Requested from LTG</i>	<i>Provided by Other Sources</i>
Server for <emma> Vista	1	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	
Training, development of support tools, and support for pilot classes	1 unit @ \$3,640.00	\$3,640.00		\$3,640.00 (CTL)

As <emma> will function as a tool within the University's LMS, an appropriate support model will need to be implemented in preparation for piloting the use of the <emma> in Vista.

Project Timeline

<i>Date</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Person Responsible</i>
August 1, 2008	To create a support mechanism in preparation for piloting	Nelson Hilton, Sherry Clouser
Fall term 2008	Pilot of <emma> in Vista	Nelson Hilton, Paul Quick

**Section III. Learning Outcomes**

Learning Outcomes and How Resources Will Be Used to Achieve these Outcomes

The learning goals for this project are described above in the Rationale section. It bears reiterating that the writing goals established by BOR and UGA and the recommendations of the Task Force on Writing can be specifically addressed by having <emma> and ePortfolios available within Vista. <emma> is powerful because it uses the technology of humanities computing to emphasize the fundamental importance of the writing process. The <emma> ePortfolio increases the learning potential because it gathers student work over time to show growth and development in a student's thinking and expression. Such a collection combined with an authentic reflection by a student on what the portfolio represents helps broaden the student's understanding of his or her writing and improvement. Student writing is also improved by widening the audience for student writing to include the whole class. These features are what help <emma> meet the learning outcomes described above.

The resources supplied by the Learning Technology Grant would be used to hire a software developer to work with the <emma> team to integrate <emma> with the UGA version of Vista using the Blackboard Powerlinks.

#### Methods for Evaluating the Project and Learning Outcomes

The First-Year Writing Program and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness are currently developing a tool within <emma> that will assess the improvement of student writing through the use of ePortfolios. In addition to the holistic grading offered now, students and instructors will evaluate the ePortfolios with a rubric based on Board of Regents Core Curriculum Learning Outcomes, the University of Georgia's General Education Learning Outcomes, and the First-Year Writing Program's current portfolio assessment rubric. The tool will generate concrete and direct assessment of student writing that can be included in feedback for students or collated for course, program, or institutional assessment evaluation.

A version of this assessment tool will be integrated into the <emma> component of the campus version of Vista, proposed by this grant. Allan Aycock, the Director of Program Review and Assessment, supports this grant proposal as it facilitates the extension of direct writing assessment across the University.

#### **IV. Support Plan**

Once in place as a regular part of the curriculum, the ongoing support required for continuing this project would be supplied by the Writing Board and CTL as part of their maintenance of the Writing Certificate.