Understanding Poetry Online: an Internet Application for Teaching

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This poster session offers participants a thorough overview of the genesis, process, development, and utilization of *Understanding Poetry Online*, an application for teaching formal and analytical approaches to verse. Developed at Vanderbilt University, this application offers instructors and students new and different ways of approaching fundamental issues in college-level instruction in poetry including the ability to create, share, and deliver, and take lessons online. Participants will learn how this application originated, how it has been supported and developed, and how it continues to be used, assessed, and refined. In this way, the session will offer both an introduction to a useful new technology, and a discussion of how such technologies can be developed.

The teaching of poetry to undergraduates has two components: training students to recognize basic poetic forms, techniques, meters, and rhymes, and helping students to develop and defend thematic observations about the poetry. The challenge to teachers at all levels is to integrate these two aspects of teaching, so that students can use their acquired knowledge of scansion, rhyme, imagery, and so forth to deepen and enrich their understanding of the themes and contexts of the poetry. We have designed the *Understanding Poetry Online* application to help train students in both aspects of poetic analysis and especially to integrate those aspects.

The *Understanding Poetry Online* project has elucidated students' learning processes and progress by providing a rich, interactive multimedia platform for the acquisition and application of both the technical and analytical reading of poetry at the university level. Our *Sonnet Scansion and Analysis* program is a web-based interface for designing and implementing curricula that facilitate assessment of students' learning of critical poetry reading skills in the following ways:

- providing an online, on-demand environment for reviewing and acquiring the skills of metrical scansion, rhyme scheme analysis, and analytical reasoning;
- making the processes of reading and analysis visible with on-screen, color-coded, computer-assisted poetic scansion tools;
- providing a facility for user-stored and instructor/user-retrievable in-depth analyses of poetic forms and content;
- creating links from the online environment to the classroom and student study groups with printable versions of all online activities and work;
- encouraging students to integrate their online work with essays they are writing for classes.

The application continues to evolve, and has grown from a basic web-page into a fully-automated instructional technology.