

Shakespeare-VR in the Composition Classroom

Kelly Williams, Meryem Yilmaz Soylu, Jeonghyun Lee, Manuni Dhruv, Alison Valk
Writing and Communication Program, C21U, Georgia Tech Library

ABSTRACT

Students in Composition II courses at Georgia Tech learn communication skills through a multimodal or WOVEN (Written, Oral, Visual, Electronic, and Nonverbal) approach. The goal of the Writing and Communication Program (WCP) is to turn students into “savvy, sophisticated communicators who can work with the broad array of media found in the modern workplace.” Today, virtual reality (VR) technologies are not simply a method of communication, but an essential component of the 21st technology toolkit. As such, expert researchers Meryem Yilmaz Soylu, Jeonghyun Lee, and Manuni Dhruv (C21U) collaborated with Emerging Technologies Librarian, Alison Valk, and WCP Britain Fellow, Kelly Williams, to investigate (1) the impact of VR on student engagement, and (2) how multisensory, immersive VR experiences impact students’ rhetorical awareness. To study these impacts, we administered pre- and post-surveys to approximately 50 students to gauge their comfort, experience, and level of engagement with VR in instructional settings.

OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

During the collaborative lesson, students participated in classroom activities on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* using Meta Quest 3 headsets and Carnegie Mellon’s Shakespeare-VR application. Students examined Hamlet’s famous “to be or not to be” speech in four different modes and media: written (original text), visual (film), oral (recorded live theatrical performance), and electronic (VR). Then, students assessed the extent to which these modes and media could effectively teach the concept of “psychological verisimilitude.” They assumed the rhetorical role of an instructional technology consultant tasked with advising a high school English teacher on which mode/media would be most engaging for a specific, intended audience of high school English students. The lesson was composed of (1) a pre-activity on psychological verisimilitude, (2) a film station, (3) a theater station, and (4) a virtual reality station.

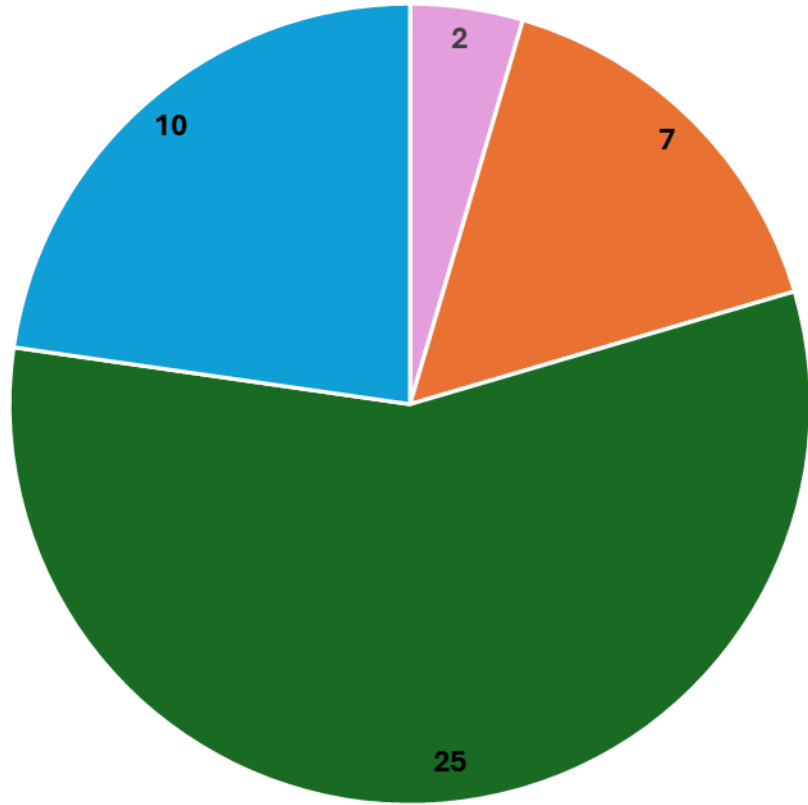
LESSON



Clockwise (Images 1-2): students experience scenes from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in 360 degrees. Image 3: Williams instructs on the “learning outcomes of VR.” Image 4: from left to right, Williams, Valk, and Yilmaz Soylu pose with Meta Quest headsets. Image 4: footage of Hamlet produced for virtual reality. Photos courtesy of Yelena M. Rivera Vale, Communications Program Manager, C21U.

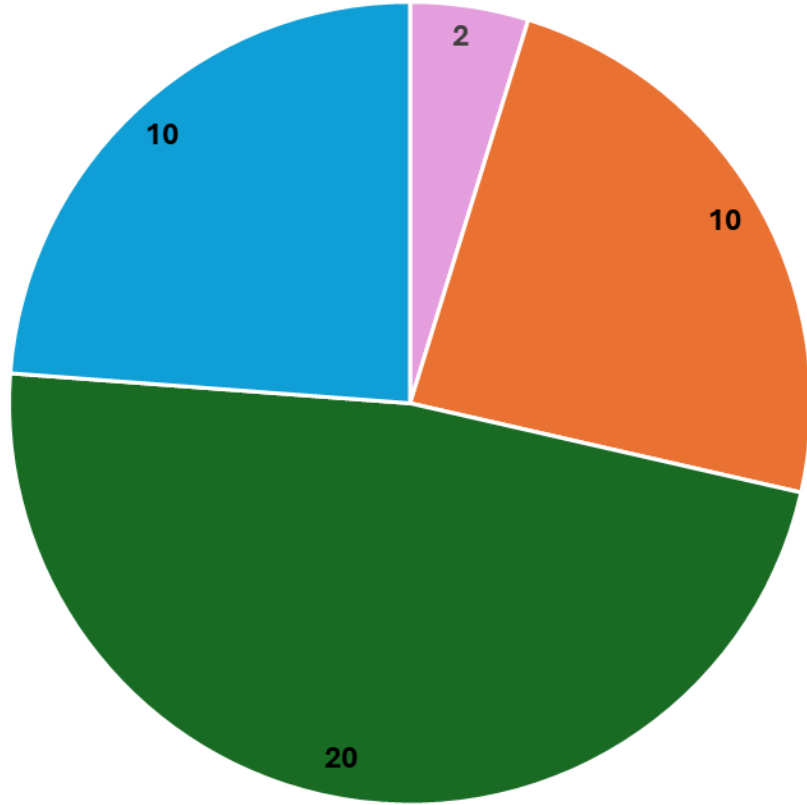
RESULTS

Students found the VR experience satisfying (79%)



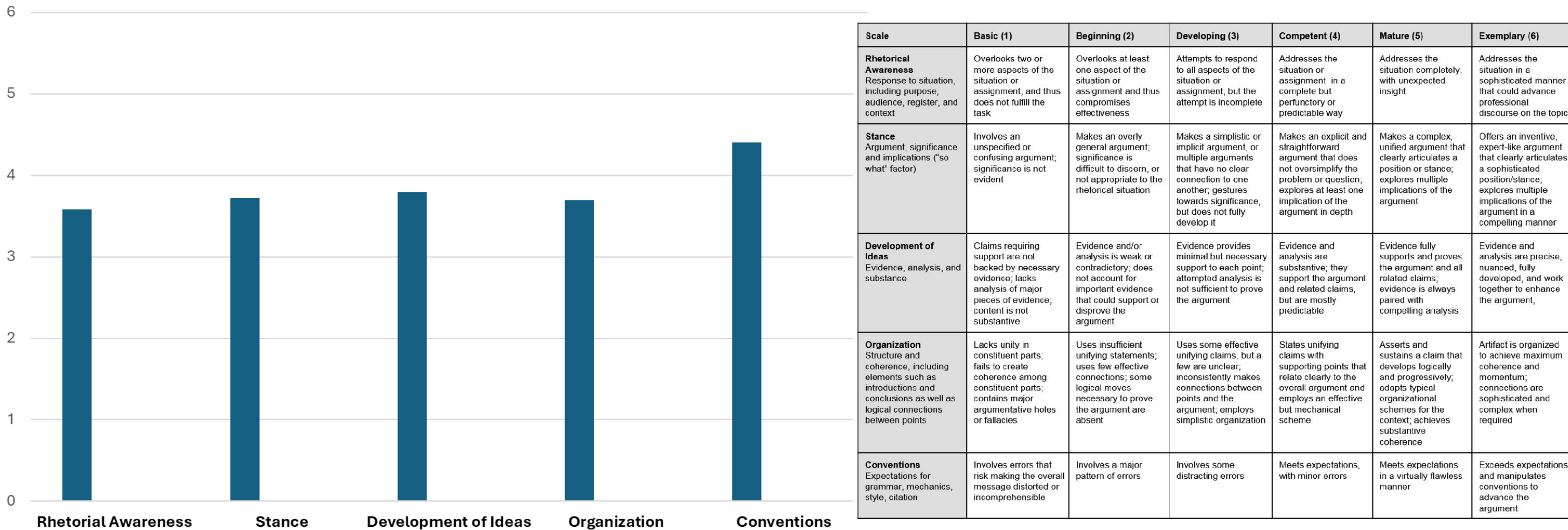
Somewhat disagree Neither agree or disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

Students found VR immersive and engaging in class (72%)



Somewhat disagree Neither agree or disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

Post-Activity Worksheet Results



CONCLUSIONS

Overwhelmingly, students had a positive response to the VR lesson. As shown above, 79% of students found the experience satisfying and 72% reported high levels of engagement. A majority of students (83%) did not experience any technical issues. Many students found the experience enjoyable and effective as is. No major complaints suggest that issues were not universal. In their post-survey, some students did offer helpful recommendations for future iterations, such as (1) more hands-on, interactive elements instead of primarily passive experiences like videos, (2) clearer onboarding instructions to avoid confusion, or a pre-session tutorial video that could help maximize hands-on time during class, (3) more time allotted for experimentation with the VR, perhaps several class periods dedicated to the activity, and (4) offer more opportunities for VR to be more collaborative, allowing them to engage with peers, rather than individually. In their post-activity write-up, the instructor utilized an abbreviated version of WCP’s common feedback rubric (pictured above) to assess students’ rhetorical awareness via the following prompt: *discuss the ways in which the meaning and overall effects of dramatic artworks relate to the physical conditions of performance (the type of theater, the lighting, proximity to the audience, etc.)... Your audience for this short piece of writing is a high school English teacher trying to decide which performance (VR, film, theatrical) would best teach their students the concept of psychological verisimilitude.* Students are approaching competency (level 4) in four criteria and maturity (level 5) in the last criteria.

REFERENCES

“Courses.” Writing and Communication Program. Accessed March 24, 2025. <https://wcprogram.lmc.gatech.edu/courses>.
Witteck, Stephen. “Shakespeare-VR: virtual reality in humanities education.” Carnegie Mellon Department of English, 2019. <https://shakespeare-vr.library.cmu.edu/>.

CONTACT

Kelly Williams, Marion L. Brittain Fellow, WCP (kduquette3@gatech.edu)
Meryem Yilmaz Soylu, Research Scientist, C21U (msoylu6@gatech.edu)
Manuni Dhruv, Graduate Research Assistant, C21U (mdhruv6@gatech.edu)
Jeonghyun (Jonna) Lee, Director of Research in Education Innovation, C21U (jonnalee@gatech.edu)
Alison Valk, Emerging Technologies Librarian (alison.valk@library.gatech.edu)