

Faculty Fellowship Project

“Low-Barrier Interventions for Research Literacy in Structured Online Writing Courses”

My research focuses on improving research literacy and academic inquiry in online first-year writing courses, particularly within highly structured digital learning environments. Situated at the intersection of composition studies and information literacy, my work explores how students develop the skills needed to locate, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information in academic contexts.

A central area of inquiry examines how students navigate contemporary research ecosystems. While many first-year writers rely heavily on familiar tools such as Google Scholar, they often struggle to understand how different information systems shape access to knowledge and academic conversations. My research investigates ways to help students become more critical, strategic, and confident researchers by framing research as a rhetorical and inquiry-driven practice rather than a purely technical process.

To address these challenges, I collaborate with colleagues in Library and Information Science to design and assess instructional interventions that integrate information literacy into writing instruction. This interdisciplinary work combines expertise in composition pedagogy with information literacy frameworks to support students' development as ethical and effective knowledge creators and consumers.

My current project explores how low-barrier, scalable instructional interventions—such as instructor announcements, targeted course messages, and supplemental learning resources—can enhance research literacy within predesigned online writing courses. This work is particularly relevant for structured online learning models, such as SmartPath courses, where opportunities for modifying core content are limited. By leveraging instructor communication spaces as pedagogical sites, I investigate how instructor presence and strategic messaging can influence student engagement, research behaviors, and confidence.

More broadly, my research contributes to conversations about online learning, faculty collaboration, student success, and course quality enhancement in higher education. Through evidence-based and scalable approaches, I seek to develop models that strengthen research practices in first-year writing while supporting innovative partnerships between disciplinary faculty and information literacy specialists.

About Jennifer Betts:

Jennifer Betts is a Lecturer of English at Valdosta State University with more than 20 years of experience in education. She holds a Master of Arts in English Literature and a Master of Library and Information Science and has earned both a TEFL certification and an ESOL Endorsement. Jennifer is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in TESOL and World Language Education at the University of Georgia.

Throughout her career, Jennifer has taught a wide range of courses, including Ancient and Medieval World Literature and First-Year Rhetoric and Composition, serving students from diverse linguistic, cultural, and

educational backgrounds. Her research and professional interests center on supporting international, immigrant, and migrant students as they develop academic confidence, language proficiency, and lifelong learning skills.

A strong advocate for global learning, Jennifer is passionate about study abroad programs and the transformative educational experiences they provide. She is committed to fostering an inclusive, engaging, and dynamic learning environment where students are empowered to grow as scholars, communicators, and global citizens.

About Dr. Ren:

Xiaoai Ren is a professor of MLIS at Valdosta State University. She received her Ph.D. in Information Science from the State University of New York at Albany. She also holds a master's degree in information science and a bachelor's degree in library science. She teaches information sources and services, online searching, and electronic resources in libraries. Her main research interest focuses on the role of libraries in addressing important societal and community issues and enhancing information literacy.