WELCOME TO ELRL 617!

Greetings! I am eager to lead this class and share this new adventure in learning with you! Before we begin, be sure to print out this letter and keep it handy! Now, let me share some "nuts and bolts" regarding this learning trip in cyberspace. I provide this information in the form of frequently asked questions:

Does my computer need to be able to do anything special?

In addition to the technical recommendations given to you by the WPUNJ IT services, you need to be sure you:

- o **Have an up-to-date antivirus program running at all times throughout the course;**
- o **Submit all documents using Microsoft Word. Other formats are unacceptable. Any questions? Contact the BB helpdesk;**
- o **Download the Adobe Acrobat Reader (information for this free download is available on the BB homepage);**
- o **Download the Powerpoint Viewer (available on the BB homepage for free) if you do not have powerpoint on your computer;**
- o **Consider using a high-speed internet access line rather than a telephone connection (I recommend this but it is not required).**

What do I do if I have a technical problem?

Contact Blackboard immediately for any/all technical problems you have. You can reach them on the BB homepage and/or through this link:
https://liberty.wpunj.edu/bb/support-center/default.cfm
A copy of your completed form is sent to me so that I know you have registered your problem in the proper location (the Blackboard tech support people will respond within 24 hours, often just as quickly on weekends). If you do not register your problem officially with the BB homepage, I can not give you credit for missed/late work.

You can reach BB via the link above even if you can't log onto the WPUNJ homepage or the Blackboard homepage. You must be sure to give course number and what's happening or not. A copy of your problem is also forwarded to me so we are all in "the loop."

If you have your own computer problems you need to find a working computer. Work from your school computer, your public library computer and/or come to

the WPUNJ campus and use one of the numerous student computers available to you.

Note: If you have family vacation plans I will still expect you to "attend" class. In previous semesters students have gone to Mexico, Hawaii, Jamaica, and the Netherlands and still participated online.

[For anything having to do with class that is <u>NOT</u> technical, please feel free to contact me at: <u>maluk@wpunj.edu</u>! Please remember that I am a reading teacher—not a technical support person!]

Email Addresses
WPUNJ holds you responsible for all WPUNJ student email account communication---and I will too! As well, I expect you to email me from that account—if you use a different account I will not be responsible for ensuring that I will read and respond to your messages. A final reminder … be sure to check your account regularly and delete any unnecessary information as it may overload the account.

Will We Ever Meet On Campus?
YES!

ONE REQUIRED FACE-TO-FACE MEETING:
You are required to attend **1 class** "in person" on the William Paterson University campus. Please mark the date below on your calendars and inform me immediately through a private email if you have any conflicts:

- **Monday, February 14th, from 7:30-10:00** in the WPUNJ library, computer lab in the basement

Optional face-to-face help: If you are not comfortable using Blackboard please contact them (see BB homepage, "What Students Need to Know") and make an appointment for help with the Blackboard system. If you wish further help, please send me a private email expressing your needs and I will schedule an appointment with you during my office hours or at a mutually convenient time.

All other sessions will be held on-line.

Counting the Weeks:
We will count our weeks beginning on Tuesdays. So, for example, our first week of class will be the week of Tuesday, January 18th (through Monday, January 24th).

What About Our Required Readings?
To order the "required readings" please do the following:

In this class the "required readings" actually mean that you join a professional organization and read their periodical mailings sent to your home. Below is a list from which you are to choose your membership. Please note that you should be sure to get the student membership, if available. If you already belong to one of these then you must join a different one. This will be the only expense you will have for "textbooks." Your membership is the "required reading" so do not rely on your school library's membership or a friend's membership.

Each membership gives you different options for journals. Be sure to choose something that will help you with your professional work—whichever of the journals and/or newsletters from any of these organizations you choose will be fine for this class.

1. The International Reading Association at: http://www.reading.org/ Recommended if you are in the reading program and interested in becoming a reading specialist—purchase any one, two or more of their journals.
2. The National Council of Teachers of English at http://www.ncte.org/ Recommended if you are in the language arts concentration—purchase any one, two or more of their journals.
3. The International Society for Technology in Education at http://www.iste.org/ Recommended if you are in learning technologies or media—purchase any one, two or more of their journals.
4. Fairtest at http://www.fairtest.org Recommended for any program or concentration you are enrolled in and if you are concerned about standards, testing and literacy—purchase their quarterly newsletter and any other materials you may wish.
5. Rethinking Schools at http://rethinkingschools.org Recommended for any program or concentration you are enrolled in and if you are interested in new and thought-provoking teaching activities—purchase their quarterly magazine and any other materials you may wish. (Out of all the organizations above, I believe this one gives you the most for your money!)

Please note that there will be additional required professional readings and Internet websites to read throughout the semester and I will provide you with these.

When Does Class Begin?
On January 18th (or at the latest January 20st) please go into Blackboard and log into class, ELRL 617 and look for the course buttons marked:

1) Course Information for an on-line copy of this welcome letter, the course syllabus and weekly schedule

2) Assignments to find guidelines for the written assignments you will need to complete. We will work with the course information in a variety of different ways, including large and small group discussions, private message exchanges, chat room conversations, Internet quests, assigned readings, and interview activities

3) Discussion Forum to begin our class discussions … read through the four discussion topics and begin to participate.

What Can I Do While I'm Waiting For Class To Begin?

There are two **very important** things that you MUST do:

1) Go to the Blackboard website (bb.wpunj.edu) and familiarize yourself with all of the information there. Explore all of the student tutorials. Get to know the language and terms that are used: Discussion Forums, Communication, Group Pages, etc. The more familiar you are with Blackboard the easier this course will be……honestly, once you begin working "in class" it won't take long to become familiar with the format but you must put in the time and effort—you need to be "pro-active"!

2) Order the "required readings" as explained above. You do not need to wait until January 22nd to do this.

How Often Must I Participate/Log On?

Please note that a significant part of your grade (40%) is based on your attendance and participation. Unlike a traditional class where you are physically present and you can use your body to indicate involvement and interest by raising your hand, calling out/or speaking to a neighbor, your presence on-line can only be "felt" when you log-on and send a message. So, please be sure to log-on at least **THREE TIMES per week, including one log-on between Tuesdays and Fridays and a second between Saturdays and Mondays. The third time is a day of your choice**. I will evaluate your participation by the quantity and quality of your contributions to questions and/or comments your classmates and I offer as well as your own postings of questions and reflections. Your comments and questions should be engaging, academic, thoughtful, and designed to support and encourage our learning. The purpose in logging on frequently throughout the week is so that we can maintain an on-going conversation as well as participation level that meets the needs of all the students. Finally, you must be sure to post your comments in the appropriate discussion topic area. Do not post "chit chatty" comments under Course Content forums. These should be posted under the "Passing Notes" section … this will be clear once we "begin class."

One note of caution: In previous semesters some students interpreted my words above to mean that the more posts they made the higher their grade would be. Three thoughtful comments and/or replies to other posts during a week will receive a higher grade than 5-10-15 posts per week. This is a three credit graduate level course and not a 24-hour per day IM-ing experience! Also, posts made after the due date for a discussion forum will not be given credit. There is no way to "make up" missed work by posting after the calendar date on a discussion forum. If you follow these simple directions, you and your classmates and I will have an enjoyable experience.

One more word about participation and contributions ... I do not consider a posting like, "I agree" or "What do you think?", or any personal comments (such as: "Do you know 'so-and-so'?", "Did I meet you in last year's class?", "I think I worked with your husband at ... ", etc.) as thoughtful, academic, and learning-supportive comments.

You also need to know that as the teacher responsible for this course, I _**automatically receive information regarding the number of times and minutes each one of you spend on-line**_. These statistics are available to me throughout the semester and _**I check them periodically and as the need arises.**_

What Must I Do When I Can't Log Onto Blackboard and/ or I Experience Other Technical Difficulties?

Please note that I am **NOT** a technology specialist. I am a reading teacher. I **CAN NOT HELP** with computer problems, including logging onto blackboard, losing e-mail messages, deciphering errors. **BUT**, there are marvelous, helpful, efficient, technology specialists who **CAN** help you.

There is information located on the Blackboard webpage https://liberty.wpunj.edu/bb/support-center/default.cfm and a form to e-mail for help if you have trouble. Any technical problems will be responded to within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends (often within 24 hours even on weekends). If you experience technical difficulties you must do the following:

1) Complete and submit the BB Support Center form on the Blackboard page at https://liberty.wpunj.edu/bb/support-center/default.cfm *The tech people forward a copy to me as well so we ALL know you are having a problem);*
2) *If you do not receive a reply within the designated time, contact the technical support again;*
3) *If you cannot complete an assignment because of technical problems, I expect to be able to find your complaint logged in with technical support services.*

Please **DO** contact me during the semester about questions, issues, and concerns regarding the academic content of our work together this semester.

Kathleen Malu at maluk@wpunj.edu. My on-campus office hours are Wednesdays, 4:00-6:00 and 8:40-9:40, p.m. and by appointment.

"Help, Teacher! I've never taken a course in cyberspace before!"

Don't worry! And, guess what? I have never taken one either! And, most of your classmates haven't either! The chances are greater this semester than when I began teaching online in 1998 that a few people have taken a cyberspace course before. However, I began my teaching online when not a single person had ever taken (or taught) an online class at WPUNJ so I have lots of experience **(and patience!)** working with individuals who are new to online work!

So…….. Relax! If you are new to cyberlearning … The more time you spend becoming familiar with Blackboard, the easier it will be. Don't be afraid. Try everything—you can't "break" the computer or erase/ruin the class!

Reach out for help! Most of my students with families have found this course becomes a marvelous way to extend family relationships, especially for teens who can help their parents navigate technology! The possibilities are enormous here. My students tell me that I am an open, patient, adventuresome teacher, willing to take risks on this cyberspace adventure! So, I hope you'll "catch my spirit!"

I have learned that the biggest problem students have is reaching out for help. In cyberspace, I can't see "puzzled" faces—so you need to let me know whenever you have problems so that we can solve them together! I can not help you succeed if you do not tell me what I can do to help! Please … ask me for help! I will be delighted to support you and help you become successful! By asking for help, you give me valuable feedback and an opportunity to learn from and with you—something I find most exciting! Also, don't wait until the last minute to tell me you are having difficulty….you should let me know within 24 hours of your problem …. But also remember that I am not a technology teacher—I am a reading teacher—BB offers the tech support necessary to help you.

Finally, I believe we are here to help each other learn and make this cyberspace way of learning meaningful and helpful. I welcome you to this pioneering adventure of exploration and discovery. I encourage you to take risks, be creative, flexible, and patient! If you keep the metaphor of astronauts, spaceships and exploration in

mind throughout the course—it will help you get through your fears (if you have any) and problems……

Good luck and see you soon in cyberspace!

And now we're ………………

b l a s t i n g   o f f !