Digital tool enhances writing instruction

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Jeffrey Grabill, co-director of Michigan State University's Writing in Digital Environments Research Center, works with his writing students. Grabill is a co-developer of a software platform to enhance writing instruction. Credit: G.L. Kohuth, Michigan State University

Effective writing has never been more important to learning and career opportunities in this 21st century-knowledge economy. But teaching it well challenges schools and universities.

Drawing on its educational research expertise, Michigan State University is partnering with software company Red Cedar Solutions Group of Okemos, to commercialize a writing instruction platform known as Eli. With two patents securing the technology, Eli is offered through a joint venture called Drawbridge, LLC.

Eli was developed by Jeff Grabill, Bill Hart-Davidson and Michael McLeod, all faculty in MSU's Department of Writing, Rhetoric and

American Cultures department and researchers in MSU's Writing in Digital Environments Research Center.

"We know that Eli can move the needle in terms of writing proficiency," Grabill said. "Eli promises to help America's students become better writers and our nation's teachers to become better writing instructors."

Eli is a web service that improves writing by helping teachers and students quickly conduct reviews, see and assess feedback, and learn from the revision process. Eli is designed for use in K-12 schools, colleges and in professional or continuing adult education.

"Like any good company, Drawbridge is built on a societal need, such as the need to improve writing skills," said MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon. "Writing is identified in most every employment circumstance as one of the biggest challenges, particularly as students are becoming more oriented toward the language of hand-held devices."

Simon initiated the project in 2003 when she sought financial support from the MSU Foundation to establish the WIDE Center.

"Too often we identify entrepreneurship opportunities as associated with science and engineering, and not necessarily Arts and Letters or Communication Arts and Sciences," Simon added. "In this day and age, the faculty in those colleges also represent rich sources of great scholarship and ideas that can be commercialized."

The MSU Foundation was instrumental in financing ELI's early development and MSU Foundation board member Gregory E. Bradbury is chairperson of Drawbridge.

"With Eli and its commercialization through Drawbridge, MSU is showing a real commitment to growing Michigan's economy," said

Andrew Henry, CEO of Red Cedar Solutions and of Drawbridge. "We have started selling the software and are getting excellent reviews from instructors and students."

Provided by Michigan State University

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