# Cover Letter

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To: The awards committee, Premier Awards.

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Please find enclosed our submission for The Teaching Machine and WebWriter++. As the authors of this software, we are entitled to submit it for competition.

WebWriter++ is copyright of Michael Bruce-Lockhart. The Teaching Machine is copyright of Michael Bruce-Lockhart and Theodore S. Norvell, except the editor component of the Teaching Machine, which is copyright of Hao Sun (a former student). Derek Reilly authored much of the C++ compiler and much of the compiler framework. The example websites were authored by (and are copyright of) Michael Bruce-Lockhart and Theodore S. Norvell. All authors have been contacted about our submission. Hao is currently a software engineer in Calgary and Derek is a post-doc at Georgia Tech.

We hereby permit Engineering Pathways/NEEDS to distribute the Teaching Machine, WebWriter++ and all accompanying materials submitted to the Premier awards.

Here follows a brief description of the Teaching Machine and WebWriter++:

The Teaching Machine is a program animation system. It reveals to the student exactly what happens inside a computer when a computer program executes; that is it animates the relationship between the static text of a computer program and its dynamic computations.

WebWriter++ is a JavaScript library to aid instructors in creating interactive websites for courses, especially courses on programming. WebWriter++ makes it easy to embed code examples on web pages —handling the conversion from programming language to HTML, including extraction and colourization; such examples may be sent to the Teaching Machine by a click of a button.

Sincerely,

Michael Bruce-Lockhart and Theodore S. Norvell

# Body

## Description of the Teaching Machine

The Teaching Machine is a program animation system. It reads in programs written in either C++ or Java, compiles them to an intermediate form and then executes the programs step by step, on a virtual machine, under user control. As execution proceeds, the state of the virtual machine is displayed back to the user in visual form in a number of views. These views include

* Code. The original text of the program is presented with syntax high-lighting. The currently executing line is high-lighted with a yellow back-ground. The code window-auto scrolls as the current line changes.
* Stack, Static and Heap. These views present the state of the memory in a tabular form. Locations are identified by variable name (if any) as well as address. Values are shown symbolically by default (e.g. in decimal for numbers), but can be shown in binary, if the user wishes.
* Linked View. An alternative view of memory. Objects and arrays are represented by boxes within boxes. Pointers are represented by arrows between boxes.
* Symbol-table. Shows the type and address of each variable currently in scope.
* Expression Engine. Shows the current state of evaluation of an expression. As the expression is evaluated, its representation in the Expression Engine is reduced to a single value.

The selection and positioning of the views may be controlled by the user or by a configuration file.

The Teaching Machine can run either as a stand-alone application, as an Eclipse plug-in, or as a web applet. Being written in Java it runs on Windows, Unix, Linux, and Mac operating systems.

## Description of WebWriter++

WebWriter++ is a JavaScript library that facilitates the production of interactive course websites, especially for programming courses. The main point of WebWriter++ is to allow instructors to create effective interactive websites with a moderate investment of time.

Some of its many features include.

* Automated table of contents generation.
* Automated navigation button generation.
* Multiple view modes: Lecture and self-study.
* Hidden notes. These are useful for providing extra information that will be skipped during the lecture.
* Glossary. Keywords may be defined in a glossary and uses of these words are shown in a special colour. Hovering the mouse over such a use causes the glossary entry to appear in a popup window.
* Popups. Besides glossary entries, other popup windows can be included.
* Code excerpts. Excerpts from program files can be included on the web page. The portion of the file to include is tagged by special comments. The excerpt is converted to HTML and is presented with syntax high-lighting.
* Pop-ups in code. By means of special comments in the code, pop-ups can be included in code excerpts.
* Interface to videos. Each code excerpt may be optionally associated with a video. WebWriter++ adds a button to the excerpt’s header to launch the video.
* Interface to the Teaching Machine. Each code excerpt may optionally be sent to the Teaching Machine. WebWriter++ adds a button to the excerpt’s header that allows the user to send the excerpt to the Teaching Machine. In fact the whole file is sent but the designer has the option of having the Teaching Machine display only the excerpt. The Teaching Machine appears in its own window and that window is brought to the fore.

This last point is what most connects the Teaching Machine and WebWriter++ and is the reason that while each is powerful on its own, the combination is particularly effective.

## Response to the Premier Award Evaluation Criteria

### Learning Objectives: Learning objectives and goals are clearly stated and supported by the software and learning experience.

The Teaching Machine and WebWriter++ are tools that instructors can use to create learning experiences. WebWriter++ allows excerpting of code examples in order to focus the student’s attention only on the most relevant section of code. The Teaching Machine allows configuration of its views so that the student can focus only on the most relevant aspects of behaviour.

### Interactivity: The learner is actively involved in the learning process—the interaction enhances learning.

WebWriter++ sites may be used by the instructor in the classroom or by the student on their own. In the latter mode, the student is free to interact with the web-site. For each example, the student can also chose to watch a prepared video of the instructor using the Teaching Machine or they can choose to use the Teaching Machine themselves. The student can even alter the code of the examples before they are sent to the Teaching Machine. The Teaching Machine allows the student to control not only the pace of execution, but also its granularity, with the possibility of backing up to an earlier point in the computation and re-executing it, possibly at a different granularity.

### Cognition/Conceptual Change: Learning appears to be significant and long lasting—strong and useful cognitive models can be built.

The main motivation is to help students build effective mental models for understanding computations and programs. It does this by illustrating the state of computations using an intuitive visual vocabulary. That is, it helps to build conceptual mental models of computations and their relationship to the program text. These mental models then form a structure on which to build new knowledge. The learner can connect the actions shown in the “expression engine” view with the data in and the changes to the “store” and “heap” views.

To monitor their learning, students can anticipate the actions of the teaching machine and where those actions differ from expectations, they can go back and see exactly why.

### Content: The content is well chosen and structured.

WebWrtiter++ and the Teaching Machine are tools for developing and presenting content, they are not content themselves. These tools encourage content producers to *show* the student material rather than simply *talk about* material.

### Multimedia use: Multimedia is used effectively and promotes the learning objectives and goals.

The Teaching Machine is in a sense a new medium. WebWriter++ enhances an existing medium —websites. The same code example can be shown on the web page, surrounded by written explanation; in a video demonstration using the Teaching Machine together with verbal explanation; and in the Teaching Machine, so that the student can interact directly with the example. These various views are consistent because they all start with the same C++ or Java file.

### Instructional Use/Adaptability: The software can be used in a variety of settings.

WebWriter++ sites are styled via cascading style sheets (CSS) and can be switched between classroom style (large fonts) and self-study mode (small fonts). A third set of CSS is used for printing. Because all scripting is client-side, WebWriter++ sites, if downloaded, can be used without any connection to the Internet. The Teaching Machine can be used as a stand-alone application, as an applet embedded in a webpage, or as an applet running in a dedicated window —as it is when used by WebWriter++. The Teaching Machine can also be invoked from inside the Eclipse IDE.

The Teaching Machine presents the state of the computer at various levels of abstraction. In early courses in programming, we use a simple model of memory in which the contents of the stack are presented as a stack of named boxes with a string value representing the value of each variable. For more advanced courses, such as courses in Data Structures or object-oriented programming, objects are depicted as boxes containing fields with arrows between them indicating pointers. Both views can be presented together to show that pointers are simply numerical addresses. The instructor can create configurations of the Teaching Machine that present only certain view and can control their size and position.

The Teaching Machine is designed as system of plug-ins and the ambitious instructor can create their own visualizations by creating a new plug-in. We have done this to support the presentation of arrays as images.

Both the Teaching Machine and WebWriter++ improve the way the instructor spends their time. The Teaching Machine allows instructors to spend classroom time more effectively. Rather than the instructor spending time creating pictures representing machine state on the board or spending time before class preparing such images, the Teaching Machine not only creates the needed images, but does so incrementally. WebWriter++ allows the instructor to create instructional websites in a fraction of the time that it would take otherwise.

### Engagement: The software holds the interest of a diversity of learners

Student engagement is one of the prime motivations for the Teaching Machine. Seeing is more engaging than reading about. In self-study, the student controls the actions of the Teaching Machine. They can use it to provide various inputs to programs and they can explore the computation at various temporal granularities and using the views of their choice. The ability to back computations up allows the student to review tricky parts multiple times, if they wish.

### Learner Interface and Navigation: The software is easy to use.

The interface to the Teaching Machine is fairly simple. Computations can be driven forward by one operation, one statement, or one subroutine call. The various view windows can be easily moved, stretched, minimized, and restored by obvious gestures.

WebWriter++ sites have table of contents and navigation arrows automatically generated.

### Technical Reliability: The software is free from technical problems.

We have tried to make the software reliable and resilient. The Teaching Machine uses the model/view pattern consistently so that all views are updated according to the current state of the model at the end of each user interaction.

### Engineering Content: Accuracy

The Teaching Machine supports large subsets of C++ and Java. Within those subsets we have tried to be faithful to the respective language standards. This allows the student to see a faithful depiction of the execution of programs written in these languages.

## Description of the impact of this courseware.

Websites generated with the aid of WebWriter++, and using the Teaching Machine, have been used at Memorial University in a sequence of three undergraduate courses: *Introduction to Programming*, *Advanced Programming*, and *Data Structures* This sequence of courses use C++. In these courses, depending on the instructor, WebWriter++/Teaching Machine sites are used either as the primary lecture notes for classroom lectures, or as an adjunct to non-interactive (e.g. Powerpoint) lecture notes. The sites are also intended to be used by the students for self-study and review. Although these courses are not now offered by distance, the predecessor to *Introduction to programming* was offered as a distance course with a WebWriter++/Teaching Machine site as the primary learning resource. Between 200 to 300 first year Engineering students take *Introduction to Programming* each year and WebWriter++ and Teaching Machine have been used in that course since 2004 so about 1500 students, at both campuses of Memorial University, have been taught at least one course using the software.

In addition, WebWriter++/Teaching Machine sites have been used in a module introducing the Java programming.

The Teaching Machine has also been used in courses at the University of Athens and the University of Florence.

## Description of how the courseware is used by a learner.

The learner uses the Teaching Machine to step through example programs and to see the effect of executing the program on given input. As the program is stepped the state of the computer is shown to evolve under the control of the program. The primary pedagogical goal supported by the Teaching Machine is the building of effective mental models of program execution. The Teaching Machine can also be quite effective in explaining the subtleties of programming languages. (E.g., what is the difference between i/2 and i/2.0, or what is the difference, in Java, between p==q and p.equals(q), or what is the difference, in C++, between an array and a pointer.)

The Teaching Machine can be used on examples created by the learner. (Our Eclipse plug-in is particularly helpful for this.) Or it can be used on examples prepared by the course instructor or another course-ware developer. In this case the best thing to do is to create a WebWriter++ site that presents the examples in context. Together with screen capture programs (such as Adobe’s Captivate), the Teaching Machine can also be used to create videos that illustrate various aspects of the course material. Such website can be used out of class (or in a distance education setting), directly by the learner, or in the classroom (or virtual classroom), by the instructor.

## Description of the evaluation and assessment

To date we have not done controlled experiments to test the effectiveness of the Teaching Machine. We have done a number of questionnaires for students taking courses using the Teaching Machine and have found that students are quite positive about the software. Over the years a number of instructors have taught the *Introduction to Programming*  course and all have stuck with using the Teaching Machine and the WebWriter+ site for the course.

## Similar Programs

The Teaching Machine is a program animation system and there are a number of other program animation systems in use. Probably the most prominent is Jelliot 3. jGRASP also has some similarity. In addition debuggers can be used to achieve a similar effect. However the following features are unique to the Teaching Machine as far as we know:

* Multiple views of memory. We present both tabular and graphical (linked) views of memory. This makes the Teaching Machine suitable across a wide variety of courses.
* Back-up. Any number of computation steps can be undone.
* Fine-grained execution and Expression Engine. The computation can be stepped one operation at a time. An operation might be a memory fetch, a store, a type conversion, or an arithmetic operation. The Expression Engine shows the effect of the execution of each operation by reducing the expression in the Expression Engine and by changes to the memory.
* Multiple source languages. The Teaching Machine handles both C++ and Java. Plug-ins for other languages are certainly possible.
* Plug-in architecture. One can create specialized views through the use of plug-ins.
* Scripting. The program under execution can control the Teaching Machine and its plug-ins via special subroutine calls. These calls can be hidden from the student.

While there are many JavaScript libraries that allow source code to be included on Webpages, WebWriter++ does far more than that and it provided a conduit to the Teaching Machine.