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Introduction: Questioning, Challenging and Advocating: Advancing Knowledge in Composition and Rhetoric

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Introduction

Questioning, Challenging, and Advocating: Advancing Knowledge in Composition and Rhetoric

Julia Voss and Beverly Moss

In his 2012 *Kairos* webtext “Views from a Distance: A Nephological Model of the CCCC Chairs’ Addresses, 1977-2011” (featured in this collection), Derek N. Mueller uses word clouds as a way to make sense of composition and rhetoric as a field, to systematically notice trends, patterns, connections. Mueller suggests that “there is a value in *network sense*: an aptitude enriched by this tracing of linkages across an assortment of people, places, things, and moments.” In the introduction to this anthology, we attempt a sort of *network sense* on a smaller scale. That is, the articles collected here create a snapshot of one year’s trends, questions, themes, people, places, and moments in the field. Though the eleven articles in this collection vary in topic, questions, and methodology, there are ties—linkages—that bind them, painting a larger picture of current discussions in composition and rhetoric.

Although we offer a visual representation of these linkages through our own word cloud near the end of this chapter, our introduction focuses on the connections that emerge from the articles that follow. The pieces featured in this collection coalesce around key rhetorical moves that 1) question and challenge accepted practices and beliefs; 2) move from questioning and challenging to advocacy; and 3) illustrate and propose new methods and approaches for advancing the field. As we suggest below, most of the featured articles make at least two of these rhetorical moves. And while the scholars whose work is showcased here employ multiple methods (empirical, historical, discourse analy-

sis, philosophical) and concern themselves with a variety of locations (classrooms; writing centers; and community, digital, and discursive spaces) their work consistently pushes composition to re-examine its boundaries and its purpose.

The articles in *Part 1: Questioning and Challenging Accepted Practices and Beliefs* cause us to stop, reflect, and re-see the field. The scholars featured in this section challenge philosophical, pedagogical, and curricular practices that have dominated our field. Matthew Pavesich, in “Reflecting on the Liberal Reflex: Rhetoric and the Politics of Acknowledgment in Basic Writing,” challenges what he identifies as the prevailing liberal ideology found not only in colleges and universities, but especially in basic writing programs. He suggests that liberalism’s commitment to the “equal treatment of everyone” ignores historical and current inequities that make the equal treatment approach complicit in perpetuating inequities and injustice. Pavesich examines how Roosevelt University, an institution committed to social justice, interrogated the liberal ideology underpinning its basic writing curriculum and has begun taking steps to differentiate its writing curriculum in response to the varied needs of a diverse student population. This case study models one way to incorporate a rhetorical approach—long endorsed in composition and rhetoric—in the basic writing subfield.

Advocacy on behalf of basic writing students who enter with fewer resources than many of their peers is fundamental both to the questions Pavesich raises about the liberal ideologies in basic writing curricula and to the rhetorical solution he proposes. He calls for a pedagogy that repositions the students and the work they do. We see Kelly Bradbury doing similar interrogation and re-situation work in “Positioning the Textbook as Contestable Intellectual Space.” Bradbury challenges the messages conveyed to students by textbooks, a longtime staple in writing classrooms and a billion-dollar industry in the United States, pointing out how the ideological control textbooks exert over student learning runs counter to the “libratory and ‘student-centered’ pedagogies we employ in our classrooms.” In the classroom-based study she describes, Bradbury asked students to assume responsibility for and control of their own learning by creating the textbook for their composition course. Having students choose their own readings and write their own discussion questions makes the textbook a “contestable space” for Bradbury. Doing so repositions both students and textbooks: students are elevated to the role of intellectuals, and textbook

authors and contents are redefined. By questioning the role of the textbook, Bradbury calls us to see first-year writing students as intellectuals capable of “co-authoring classroom pedagogy.”

Like Pavesich and Bradbury, in “Writing Time: Composing in an Accelerated World” Jeanne Marie Rose challenges the way that English Studies, and composition in particular, understands, interprets, and uses time as a concept and tool in the writing classroom. She argues that while process pedagogy tends to view time as a limitless resource, the global capitalist world in which we live places considerable demands on writers’ time. As a result, Rose calls compositionists to “situate time in the context of our students and classes” and “examine the material realities of time.” Rose proposes that composition teachers rethink process pedagogy. She argues that the classic version of process assumes that students have more time than they actually do in today’s fast-paced global society. Therefore, Rose suggests that

students need to examine the materiality of time and weigh its consequences for their lives as writers, students, workers, and citizens. We as teachers, meanwhile, need to be open to learning about our students’ particular ways of experiencing time, and we need to bring this awareness to our course design and delivery.

Rose calls us to question typical classroom approaches to process pedagogy as well as to cultivate students’ awareness of time as a valuable resource that is sought after by multiple audiences (capitalist, media, educational, et cetera).

Rose’s questioning of how writing teachers and writing process pedagogy make use of time is, at its very core, a question about how we, students and teachers, are socialized to use time and efficiency. We also see this focus on socialization practices in the articles in *Part 2: From Questions and Challenges to Advocacy*. In “‘So what are we working on?’ Pronouns as a Way of Re-Examining Composing,” Kate Pantelides and Mariaelena Bartesaghi analyze the use of pronouns in writing center consultations to challenge how writing center scholarship has socialized its consultants to think about collaboration in the writing center session. Dissatisfied with the way that collaboration has been characterized in previous writing center scholarship, Pantelides and Bartesaghi argue that “rarely are [writing center consultants] presented as they are in practice—chameleons that change their colors

dependent on the moment-by-moment requirements of the consultation.” The authors assert, in other words, that collaboration in the writing center consultation is a dynamic process that cannot be dictated by rigid guidelines about how directive/non-directive a consultant should be. In their semester-long study of graduate student consultants and clients in the writing center, Pantelides and Bartesaghi examine how consultants and clients use pronouns—especially *we* and *I*—to indicate shifts in authority throughout the session. The authors propose that consultants’ use of *we* to refer at various times to themselves and the client, to the writing center as an organization, and to academic writing as a discipline is “multifunctional: signaling collaborative affiliation and disaffiliation by sharing and distancing oneself from a text.” The relationship Pantelides and Bartesaghi draw between collaboration and asymmetry in writing center sessions ultimately challenges the field to extend its ongoing thinking about collaboration (reflected, for example, in Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede’s twenty-year engagement with the concept) to the writing center.

While the articles we’ve introduced so far question and challenge accepted practices in traditional educational sites like composition classrooms and writing centers, the remaining essays in Part 2 move these challenges beyond the university classroom to alternative sites, namely community and corporate spaces. In doing so, these articles continue the field’s interest in community literacies and composing in the public sphere. In some instances, by virtue of linking literacy to particular community spaces, these scholars challenge traditional views of literacy. Melvette Melvin-Davis’s “Daughters Making Sense of African-American Literature in Out-of-School Zones” introduces readers to the group of 9th and 10th grade African American girls who participate in the Umoja Book Club, a community-based organization that meets outside of school space. Melvin-Davis argues that the out-of-school space and the reading activities that take place there offer these African American youth “homeplaces—spaces where diverse, relevant, and realistic African American experiences are shared and validated[.]” She demonstrates how culturally relevant pedagogy delivered in such homeplaces expands the girls’ literacy identities, “giv[ing] voice to the young, gifted, and Black girls of the Umoja Book club and demonstrat[ing] to community and academic circles the value in connecting and cultivating young people’s literacies in out-of-school spaces.” Thus, while implicitly challenging the ability of traditional school

spaces to meet the needs of certain marginalized populations, Melvin-Davis positions community spaces as valuable pedagogical sites, spaces where members of marginalized communities can use culturally relevant literacy artifacts—African American literature—to advocate for their own needs.

Similar to Melvin-Davis, in “Rhetorical Recipes: Women’s Literacies In and Out of the Kitchen” Jamie White-Farnham highlights the importance of another alternative literacy site. White-Farnham focuses on domestic space, examining the literate lives of members of the Rhode Island branch of the Red Hat Society, a social club for women over fifty. Society members surprised White-Farnham by questioning the value of their everyday literacies, instead placing a premium on the traditional literacies they practice(d) in school and workplace settings. White-Farnham suggests that aspirational identities—in this case, the professional identities the women aspired to rather than the domestic identities traditionally associated with their gender—act as a filter according to which individuals value different literacies. More to the point, White-Farnham argues that while these research participants, deeply influenced by second-wave feminism, see little value in everyday literacy practices, they value traditional academic literacies, especially writing, very highly. These findings remind researchers and teachers who place a premium on the everyday literacies that emerge from and dominate non-traditional spaces not to underestimate the investment people have in traditional literacies, especially those from groups who have historically occupied subordinate positions. To respect and accurately represent participants’ self-perception of their literate identities, researchers may, at times, need to reevaluate the non-traditional community practices they seek to study.

Where Melvin-Davis and White-Farnham interrogate the connections between literate identities and community literacy spaces, Heidi McKee introduces corporate spaces into the literacy conversation, focusing on the increasingly digital nature of contemporary literacy. The title of McKee’s article—“Policy Matters Now and in the Future: Net Neutrality, Corporate Data Mining, and Government Surveillance”—identifies three key national-level policy issues that already affect writing and the teaching of writing, the importance of which will only increase over time. We need only note the political and cultural uproar over Edward Snowden’s 2013 exposé of the U.S. government’s covert practice of recording metadata about Americans’ phone conversations

to demonstrate the significance of these issues. By linking net neutrality, corporate data mining, and government surveillance to concerns about freedom of speech/information, personal/financial security, and warrantless seizure, McKee argues the field must deal with them as research and teaching in composition and rhetoric increasingly takes place in networked digital environments ranging from the World Wide Web to corporate social media platforms like Twitter, Google Docs, and YouTube. Finally, McKee calls on members of the field to get involved in these issues outside the classroom by joining organizations that monitor and agitate against the loss of net neutrality, the rise of corporate data mining, and the covert practice of government surveillance.

While the pieces in Part 2 question existing values and practices in composition and rhetoric and call us to advocate for change at the level of personal, educational, and social policy and beliefs, the work featured in *Part 3: New Methods and Approaches for Advancing the Field* offers new methods and approaches to research, composing, and teaching that can help to realize this kind of change. These pieces, all of which, interestingly, were published in webtext format only, represent novel ways to view the subject matter(s) of the field, canonical figures and texts, and the field itself. In “The Meaning of the *Motivorum*’s Motto: ‘*Ad bellum purificandum*’ to ‘*Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore*” Richard H. Thames re-examines the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic and how the “nature of poetics (which weaves the two together) [is] discerned.” Thames analyzes the etymology of Latin words found in the epigraph and text of Burke’s *Motivorum* to redefine the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic. He reads the history of these terms against the body of work surrounding Burke’s unfinished *Motivorum* text, including letters, articles, and annotated versions of Burke’s manuscripts to uncover the theorist’s conception of language. Thames’ two-part approach helps him re-open the classic text to argue that in the *Motivorum*, language depends on the pursuit of beauty through dialectic (as in Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*) as well as on the pursuit of war (as rhetoric has traditionally been defined). This combination of etymological inquiry and close reading allows Thames to reread the *Motivorum*, providing a new perspective on one of the field’s major theorists.

Like Thames’ reappraisal of Burke, Rex Veeder’s “Re-reading Marshall McLuhan: Hectic Zen, Rhetoric, and Composition” examines

what another major figure, Marshall McLuhan, has to offer the field of composition and rhetoric as a whole. Although McLuhan's influence on the field has thus far focused on media and cultural change, Veeder argues that McLuhan's approach to textual production has much to offer the wider field. Specifically, his "artistic, complex, and holistic form of exploration, writing, and thinking" provides Veeder with a model for what he calls "Hectic-Zen" composing. Hectic-Zen reflects the "allatonce"ness of media-saturated contemporary life by drawing out and documenting the patterns that emerge from this ubiquitous din. Veeder offers mosaic as an example of how Hectic-Zen composition might work. Because mosaics are made up of bits and pieces from various sources, they contain multiple perspectives that represent patterns found in the chaos from which their disparate elements are drawn. Furthermore, Veeder argues that a mosaic's modular nature embodies Hectic-Zen methods because it lets composers "suspend judgment" as they work piece by piece without having to envision the whole, allowing composers to resist totalizing understanding and explanation in favor of playful exploration. Veeder's essay itself models the mosaic-style, Hectic-Zen mode he advocates by 1) interspersing references to McLuhan and the other scholars who populate Veeder's intellectual universe (such as Burke, Ann Berthoff, and Gloria Anzaldúa, whose work embodies the Hectic-Zen mode) and 2) breaking up his written text with playful doodles that abstractly illustrate his concepts.

The exploratory, experiential composing method Veeder derives from McLuhan reflects the kind of rhetorical environment Noah H. Roderick describes in "Analogize This! The Politics of Scale and the Problem of Substance in Complexity-Based Composition." He argues that the complex adaptive network or ecological world view found in recent composition scholarship that draws on complexity theory (seen in the work of Byron Hawk, Sidney I. Dobrin, and others) ushers in a new kind of writing subject, the eco-subject. The eco-subject is not a self-contained, autonomous being but the nexus of social, material, and biological factors that distribute activity across multiple components of the physical and virtual networks within which we are embedded. Roderick's rhetorical ecologies parallel the patterned, allatonce mediascapes from which Veeder's Hectic-Zen compositions emerge. Both describe complex adaptive systems in which "relationships between writing subjects, media audiences, institutions, and kairotic

moments” and the texts they produce “are constantly co-evolving.” Roderick argues that the co-evolution Veeder describes results from the connections that feedback loops create between seeming disparate material and cultural elements ranging from “information flows, [to] social networks, [to] animal metabolism.” For Roderick, these linkages between local and global conditions offset the neoliberal agenda some critics ascribe to network theory and complexity theory. Tying together micro and macro concerns allows for the “continuous invention of [eco-]subjectivity,” in which humans function as participants in complex networks that help shape other network components, even the large ones like institutions and ideologies, through mutually influential feedback loops. These feedback loops allow Roderick to argue for a postmodern ethical dimension of posthuman network culture, presenting a new philosophical and pedagogical point of departure for composition and rhetoric.

The patterns which Roderick and Veeder focus on bring us back to Mueller’s article, where this introduction began. Mueller analyzes the annual CCCC Chairs’ speeches from 1977 to 2011, using word clouds generated from the published versions of their speeches in order to examine when various terms appear, rise, and recede in these “views from the center,” which Mueller uses as barometers of the field’s intellectual climate. The word cloud methodology Mueller describes allows for a “distant reading” practice that focuses strictly on patterns of word use without examining their context. Word clouds’ “distance” from the meaning of the source texts distinguishes them from Ellen Barton’s and Duane Roen’s thematic analyses of the same texts, providing for a new, digital humanities approach to the field’s intellectual history. Mueller also compares word cloud-based distant reading to article abstracts, which seek to capture the essence of a piece, attempting the kind of explanation Veeder discourages. Because word clouds measure term frequency, Mueller argues that they can capture the “gestural build-ups, micro-turns, and anomalies to the larger patterns” that close thematic reading can miss, thereby harnessing the data-processing power McKee associates with corporate data mining for the benefit of the field. Such a distant reading method offers, therefore, one way to represent and investigate the complex rhetorical situations Roderick describes and even embodies the kind of exploratory (rather than explanatory) Hectic-Zen mode of composition that Veeder advocates. Finally, because Mueller uses customized software to create his

word clouds, he includes a detailed description of his methods, providing a model for how to introduce new research tools (whether digital or analog) into rhetoric and composition scholarship.

By way of bringing the eleven articles highlighted here into conversation with each other, we followed Mueller's lead and created our own word cloud based on the articles. Some of the major terms across these articles are expected: students, writing, work, rhetoric, Burke. Others, however, are surprising, for example "time," which may support Rose's claim that time is becoming an increasingly important consideration for the field. Some of the small-sized "trace"-words—such as Facebook, users, sciences, personal—that come up are illuminating as well in their seeming marginalization, indications of future concerns for the field. As you peruse the collection, consider, as Mueller suggests, what these different snapshot methods say about the current state of the field.

A NOTE ON SELECTION CRITERIA AND METHODS:

These eleven articles advance knowledge in composition and rhetoric because they question, challenge, innovate, and re-imagine the field. It is those qualities that reviewers used as criteria for ranking the nominated articles. The major criteria for ranking and selecting the articles are threefold:

1. Article must demonstrate a broad sense of the discipline, demonstrating the ability to explain how its specific intervention in a sub-disciplinary area intersects and addresses broad concerns of the field.
2. Article must make an original contribution to the sub-disciplinary field, expanding or rearticulating central premises of that area.
3. Article must be written in a style which, while disciplinary-based, attempts to engage with a wider audience.

The editor of each participating journal was invited to submit two articles for consideration. Both articles were reviewed by reading groups at several colleges and universities across the United States. These groups consisted of full-time and part-time faculty, lecturers, and graduate students who read the articles and, according to the criteria listed above, ranked the articles on a scale of 1 to 4 (4 being an article

that meets the highest criteria). The editors used these scores to select the final articles that appear here.

We owe a great debt to our reading groups, whose work made this project possible. We thank them for their careful reading and rankings of the articles. Specifically, we thank all of the associate editors who participated in the reading groups: Sarah Antinora, UC Riverside; Francesca Astiazaran, CSU San Bernadino; Paige V. Banaji, Ohio State University; Jessica Best, UC Riverside; Lindsey Banister, Syracuse University; Chase Bollig, Ohio State University; Matthew Bond, UC Riverside; Bridgette Callahan, CSU San Bernadino; Joanna Collins, University of Pittsburgh; Clare Connors, University of Pittsburgh; Katherine M. DeLuca, Ohio State University; Chloe de los Reyes, CSU San Bernadino; Jennie Friedrich, UC Riverside; Brenda Glascott, CSU San Bernadino; Rochelle Gold, UC Riverside; Ashley Hamilton, CSU San Bernadino; Joel Harris, CSU San Bernadino; Jennifer Herman, Ohio State University; Deborah Kuzawa, Ohio State University; Annie S. Mendenhall, Ohio State University; Peter Moe, University of Pittsburgh; Kristin Noone, UC Riverside; Tamara Isaak, Syracuse University; Emily Maloney, University of Pittsburgh; Lauren Obermark, Ohio State University; Jess Pauszek, Syracuse University; Anne Schnarr, UC Riverside; Karrieann Soto, Syracuse University; Frances Suderman, CSU San Bernadino; Noel Tague, University of Pittsburgh; Jaclyn Vasquez, CSU San Bernadino.