

## From the Editors: A Three-Year Check-In

### Unexpected Lessons

This fall issue marks the end of our first three-year term as *Composition Studies* co-editors. What we did not know (or could not have predicted) was what happened between the fall and spring of our first year: a global pandemic began. This pandemic, coupled with much public, anti-racist social action, was deeply felt in our field—a field that tends to respond to such moments through our multiple roles: as educators, humanitarians, rhetoricians, and especially as writers.

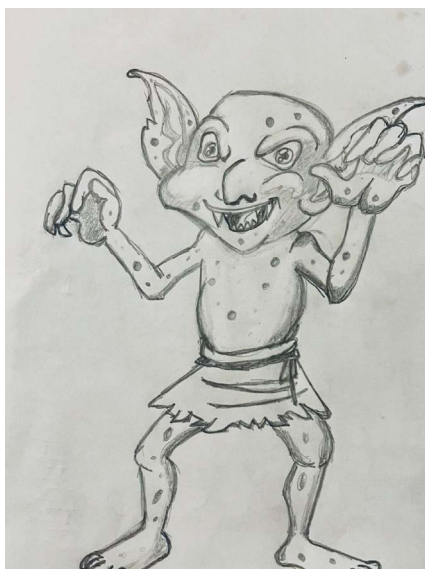
As brand new journal editors, we came to the pages of *Composition Studies* with ideas bubbling. Given the context of our first year, however, we saw an opportunity to reflect, to settle into the uncertainty, to attempt a patient pivot. We reassessed the goals that we set forth in our application letter, and we created a few new goals to align with the current moment. As difficult as it was to try and keep going, *Composition Studies* is an independent journal—one that depends almost solely on its readership—so we did our best to tread lightly by adjusting timelines, thinking through new editorial practices, and moving forward with care so that the journal would be ready for whatever might arise. But nothing is without lessons, and here are three we learned throughout that first term:

*Lesson 1: The special issues were even more special than we'd imagined.* For our first term, we committed to doing an open-access, guest-edited, special issue each summer. We believe the three issues that have come out—on corequisite writing courses; supporting BIPOC faculty and students; and student and faculty well-being—were necessary and well-received by the field (and, thankfully, downloads of the issues confirm this!). Our editorial team did an amazing job throughout the process—especially since many of them are graduate students or new assistant professors. However, the additional work was substantial—a 50% increase in yearly editing work—and the issues didn't result in the additional revenue and subscriptions for which we had hoped. So we have decided to discontinue the summer special issues; the summer 2022 issue will be the last of them.

*Lesson 2: Fighting off Goblin Mode is harder than we all thought.* We are not “back to normal.” As indicative of where many are: The 2022 Oxford word of the year was “goblin mode,” “a type of behavior which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations.” Though goblin mode hasn't (yet?) caught on as a phrase on this side of the Atlantic, it nonetheless denotes how many people are still experiencing the weight of the pandemic and the weight of its stress on their emotional and mental well-being.

At *Composition Studies*, we certainly wouldn't say we are unapologetically lazy or slovenly, but we would say that we understand the impulse to throw

off social expectations of efficiency and productivity and to attend more care-fully to our own needs. We feel somewhere between normal and goblin mode, a precarious spot where the work gets done, but often in sweatpants. It's a good moment, we find, to orient ourselves to sustaining relationships—to ourselves, to others, to our work, to the environment, and to our causes—and to figure out what works for us on a day-to-day basis. One outcome of this is that the journal has had a bit of delay in production (as is seen in this fall issue coming out in the winter months). We're planning for an on-time production schedule in 2023, but we've also learned to loosen our expectations of what on time might mean so that we might be able to publish the great work that we have.



*Lesson 3: One way to through difficult times is to create.* In our case, this meant creating robust, multi-faceted, and sustainable publication infrastructure for the journal. (We would call this Build Back Better, but apparently that has been taken.)

First and foremost, that meant nurturing the journal's human infrastructure. To keep the journal going, many folks on the Advisory Board generously stayed on as scholarly stewards past the time they had committed; the journal's editorial staff maintained rotations and even expanded to include a managing editor, blog editors, and a social media team. Second, the journal's technological infrastructure expanded to ensure continuity of access. The journal's web presences moved to WordPress; its social media presence expanded to Facebook and Instagram; and *FEN Blog* launched as a "space for writing teachers to bring their research and experience to bear on current issues" (*FEN Blog*). Third, and as importantly, we built on the award-winning work of previous *Composition Studies* editors to reinforce what we think of as our equity infrastructure. To us, this meant continuing anti-racist efforts by creating the "Guide for Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices at *Composition Studies*." Then it meant making good on the promise of that document: creating processes and spaces for the publication of work by scholars of color. This commitment complements our mission to publish emerging voices—such as early career scholars and graduate students—in the discipline.

## Accomplishments to Celebrate

We're very happy to say that some of these lessons have been put into practice. Our twin commitments to collaboration and publication infrastructure—and to the equity infrastructure in particular—have already shown up within the pages of the journal.

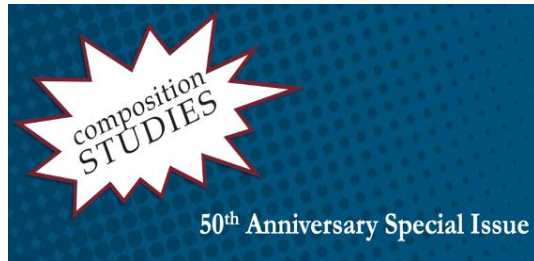
In these first three years of our co-editorship, and including the special issues, *Composition Studies* has published:

- 182 separate pieces (not including these editorial introductions)
- 43 peer-reviewed articles (of which 19 were collaboratively authored)
- 60 collaboratively authored pieces (not including these editorial introductions), and
- 316 authors.

This last number makes us especially proud. Talk about making room for new voices!

We were also very pleased to be able to continue the Where We Are section; to create a new section for each issue, At a Glance: Connections & Collaborations, centered on promoting collaborative research in the field through visual representation; and to usher *FEN Blog* into its second year.

Lastly, a big milestone for us—and, frankly, an honor—was celebrating *Composition Studies*' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We did so by building on the journal's rich history (and asking people from its past to contribute) while wanting to challenge the field and move forward in new directions (for which we also asked newer authors). We are really proud of that issue and grateful to the authors whose work laid out how the journal maintained its impact while also continuing to change and reach forward.



## Looking Ahead

We also feel this tension—between stasis and progress—as we reflect over the last couple years: What do we want to continue to do? What we might need to change to do better? As reflective practitioners, we value looking backward and inward to move forward and outward. To that end, we want to share some new goals that we have set for ourselves:

1. We want to deepen and strengthen our relationships with readers, authors, reviewers, the Advisory Board, the editorial staff, our publisher

(Dave Blakesley at Parlor Press), and the journal's distributors. These relationships are too often transactional; with effort, they can be meaningful, sustaining relationships.

2. We want to maintain and develop the long-term financial health of the journal. This will almost certainly mean adjustments to subscription fees, but it will also mean a commitment to bringing in new library subscriptions, new advertisements for the issues, and finding other creative ways to bring in revenue. Independent journals rely on funds to exist, so we will need to find new ways to create revenue.
3. We pledge our ongoing commitment to our equity infrastructure. This means:
  - a. continuing to implement our version of the antiracist heuristic and transparency around submission, review, and publication processes;
  - b. leading the way on publishing current scholarly and teaching approaches to antiracism; and
  - c. continuing to have diversity in terms of Advisory Board members, reviewers, editorial staff, and authors.
4. We want to continue to encourage internationalization of authors, reviewers, and readers, thus strengthening the impact of *Composition Studies* outside the United States.



We believe these goals can help push the journal into new directions.

### **This Issue**

This issue includes an At a Glance focused on undergraduate research; we hope this will hearken, for some, back to our spring 2020 Where We Are focused on that same topic. The issue also features four articles—three, interestingly, which focus on how we improve our work in different disciplinary contexts when things aren't as they should or could be. The two course designs in this issue also cluster: both address teaching writing with sensitivity to local contexts in the American South. This issue's Where We Are is on disciplinary crisis—as both rhetorical pitfall and productive frame—in six different contexts. There are also offer nine book reviews on offer: a few more

than normal to help highlight some publications readers may have missed in the last few years.

As dedicated readers will know, our previous covers have come from artists in and around the discipline. For this issue's cover results, however, we've collaborated—is that the right word?—with DALL-E 2, an image generator that relies on natural language prompts and deep learning models. We acknowledge that the ethics of this sort of image creation are still an open question, so we offer this cover as an provocation for scholarship that covers aspects of the ethics, utility, pedagogy, and research on image and text generation technologies.

For what it's worth, our prompt for the cover image DALL-E 2 generated was: “create a 3D image of a futuristic writing machine, in bright colors.”

### **At a Glance**

This issue's At a Glance, “Myth-Checking in Complandia” by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Derek Mueller, and Kate Pantelides, is with a visual guide to their undergraduate research textbook *Try This*. It outlines not only a series of figures that haunt Complandia (aka rhetoric and composition), but also the values with which *Try This* responds to those figures: trust, curiosity, patience, and relationship building. Additionally—and very helpfully, we think—it provides positionality heuristics for placing researcher preferences and dispositions on a visual spectrum that accounts for differences in approaches to data, play and discomfort, and messiness. We hope this At a Glance will be helpful for readers interested in teaching writing research (especially to undergraduates) and potentially serve as a teaching resource for adopters of *Try This*.

### **Articles**

“Interrogating the Four Ps: Positionality, Privilege, Power, and Professionalism in the Rhetoric and Composition Job Market” by Chen Chen, Dev K. Bose, Jennifer Sano-Franchini, Elizabeth Keller Kirycki, Ruth D. Osorio, and Elliot Tetreault is a much-needed corrective to disciplinary thinking about the job market. Using counterstories framed through positionality, privilege, power, and professionalism, these authors demonstrate how “centering perspectives that are often marginalized are conducive for imagining hiring practices that are more humane, equitable, and accessible.” Even more helpfully, the authors conclude with more than ten inclusive recommendations for hiring committees, department faculty, and faculty mentors.

Through carefully articulated and theorized experience, Louis M. Maraj's “Unlike Conventional Form(s) Of: Beyond Reparative Antiracism” argues that our conventional disciplinary approaches to antiracism tend to center whiteness and white guilt (and the explication and investigation of both) to the detriment of Black folk and their approaches liberation. As countervailing

forces to whiteness, Maraj offers three proactive Black and Black feminist approaches to antiracism and a pedagogical activity that focuses on power as “a multifaceted, obtuse construct [that] directs participants to unpack its varied lived formations in the world through fracturing that concept.”

We suspect that the findings of “Teaching During a Pandemic: A Study of Instructors’ Preparedness for Online Composition Delivery” by Pam Lieske, Ana Wetzl, and Mahli Xuan Mechenbier will provide data for experiences with which readers are already familiar. Through a series of surveys, Lieske, Wetzl, and Mechenbier investigate writing instructors’ preparedness for the immediate pivot to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings may not be surprising, but they resonate deeply: writing teachers were not prepared for such a transition; institutional support, though helpful, was not sufficient preparation for such a transition; and, though such changes were stressful (for faculty and students alike), there is a way forward—through our field’s work on online writing instruction (OWI). For writing administrators interested in working with their own faculty on such issues, Lieske, Wetzl, and Mechenbier have, helpfully, included their survey instrument.

Alisa Russell’s “Expanding Communicative Possibilities’ in the Public Writing Classroom” theorizes a case study of public writing based on the experiences of a graduate student union organizing for health insurance. Framing this public action through Rhetorical Genre Studies, Russell shows how that public action takes place through writing in both widely-dispersed and narrowly-dispersed genres, both of which facilitate (and inhibit) certain kinds of genre uptake. Russell then uses these insights to develop a model of teaching public writing that focuses mobilization, location, and genre ecologies. In this model, the question for public writing teachers becomes “Which genres (across blurry dispersions) can students reasonably locate, access, and compose to encourage public uptakes?”

## **Course Designs**

This issue offers two exciting course designs, both of which reflect on approaches to writing that are grounded in institutional mission and local community. First, Jannell McConnell Parsons, Kathryn Kohls, Shelby Roberts, Joshua McConnell Parsons, and Jim Ridolfo outline and reflect on a first year writing course focused on having students “index...and publish pre-existing but previously unpublished interviews” at the University of Kentucky. As important as the robustly theorized and carefully designed course is the authors’ reflection, which outlines how to teach a course flexibly enough to account for the difficulties—of infrastructure, personal struggle, public crisis—that arise over time.

Nathaniel Norment, Jr.'s "Incorporating Black Life, History, and Culture (BHLAC) in English Composition 101 at an HBCU" lays out an approach to first year composition at Morehouse College that not only draws on institutional mission and history but also fits with current institutional outcomes and quality-enhancement plans. This approach, is, well, in the title: by drawing on readings and creating writing assignments based in Black life, history, and culture, Norment creates a culturally-relevant pedagogical model for Morehouse students and sets up the first year writing program there to be "a center for conducting research on Black men's writing and writing pedagogy."

## **Where We Are**

For this *Where We Are*, we invited a number of scholars to think and write a bit about the rhetorical function of and discourses around disciplinary crisis. What first intrigued us relative to this topic is the field's continued use of a specific metaphor for expressing disciplinary newness: the turn.

Or: One way to better understand disciplinary change might be through the field's many (and there are many!) turns—cognitive, social, affective, public, material, translingual, multilingual, queer, linguistic, postmodern, ethical, global/transnational, spatial, archival, political, rhetorical, posthuman, and multimodal . . . just to name a bunch (and we are sure we've missed some). Which left us wondering: What are the purposes of this dizzying turning? Does it suggest something about our discipline?

In addition and apropos of the current moment, we wondered what these turns might signal about the rhetoric of disciplinary crisis. What do we do when we claim "crisis?" That is, what happens when the discourse of crisis is invoked—in this moment and in moments past?

Luckily, six brilliant colleagues were able to take us up on this invitation, and, as you will read, they took very different approaches to the question. First, Carmen Kynard explores the whiteness of disciplinary disrespect, especially relative to its adjunct and faculty of color, before turning to Black feminist scholars who urge rhetorical impatience and staying "righteously pissed off." Next, Will Banks ruminates on the peril and power of crisis discourse: on one hand, it can cause outrage fatigue, rendering us always angry and never in-action; on the other hand, "crisis can sometimes be the only way that some of us can render our lives and experiences meaningful enough that those in the (disciplinary) majority notice us at all." Banks suggest "queering crisis" as a way to use crisis to direct our attention carefully toward that which is missing in our discipline. Drawing inspiration from Pete Seeger, *Radical Stuff*, and Plato (and perhaps subconsciously the *Goo Goo Dolls*), Ryan Skinnell's contribution establishes a tension: crises are "a sign of possibility," even though the turns that accompanying them are, in

their dizzying variety, pretty destabilizing. The solution, however, is to go with it, because the “rhetoric of crisis is an encouraging sign of our disciplinary (and cultural) ferment and activity, disagreement and difference. It is a signal of health even if it is also a signal of potential danger.”

In his piece, Jim Ridolfo turns toward data on the job market—specifically his work at Rhetmap.org—which shows that “while the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s were a time of establishing new graduate programs and certificates in rhetoric and writing studies [. . .] the 2010s and 2020s are a period of peak and contraction.” Contextualized through scholarship on academic positions and graduate programs in the discipline, Ridolfo suggests that the discipline prepare for degrowth: “For the next decade, I expect to see continued contraction of existing programs in terms of new PhD cohorts, the formal closure of more programs, and perhaps the addition of one or two new programs that are in an institutional position to adequately support doctoral students.”

Cedric Burrows starts from the understanding that the “rhetoric of disciplinary crisis is one affected by the historical and cultural moment that is based on which groups are allowed to be included.” Thus, Burrows traces three moments of disciplinary crisis to show how the inclusion of new voices shaped disciplinary moments past and present. The newest of these moments gives cause for hope: the inclusion of Black voices—in the discipline and in the national spotlight—raises the possibility of inclusive disciplinary and national identities that might obviate the need for future crises.

Finally, Sandra Jamieson takes on a current disciplinary crisis—the rise and popularity of AI writing tools—that has, at least in the popular press and on social media, provided for much recent anxiety among writing teachers, scholars, and administrators. Reactions that demonstrate fear of new writing technologies are unfounded, according to Jamieson, because “rather than a new turn, then, AI and the complexity of the work of writing exposed by it calls for a re-turn to the pedagogies that shaped our discipline and the commitment to student writing that propels it.”

## **Book Reviews**

And, of course, we are very glad that this issue offers a full suite of book reviews, one each by Gavin P. Johnson and G. Edzordzi Agbozo, Suzanne Bordelon, Erick Raven, Tyler J. Martinez, Jainab Tabassum Banu, Andres Altamirano, Rae Haight, Kaustav Mukherjee, Shreelina Ghosh, and Kimberly A. Bain. Together, the pieces of this issue offer a number of valuable lessons, and we hope you’ll learn as much from them as we have.

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