

a publication of the coalition of women scholars in the history of rhetoric and composition

## In this issue:

- Editor's Letter
- When the Field was Young...and I Was Too by Erika Lindemann
- An Academic Career Built on Hybrid Feminist Rhetorics: From China to the U.S. by Hui Wu
- For Colored Girls who Considered the Academy when Suicide wasn't Enough: Unceasing Variations in an Early Afrafeminist Academic Career by Rhea Estelle Lathan
- Beginning with the End in Mind: Why I Chose a Career at an HBCU by Michelle T. Johnson
- Mentoring Table Reports

## Editor's Letter

Dear readers,

In this issue of *Peitho*, we continue a tradition we began last year. The Spring/Summer of *Peitho* is devoted to the Coalition's Wednesday night meeting at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. This year, the Coalition was lucky enough to have Erika Lindemann, Hui Wu, Rhea Lantham, and Michelle T. Johnson discussed the exigencies that drove their career choices and paths. Their talks are reproduced in this issue of *Peitho*.

As usual, the latter half of the Coalition's meeting was devoted to mentoring tables; many of the discussions were written up and have been reproduced here. If you have interest in the topics, but were unable to attend the meeting, we encourage you to contact the table leaders via email. (Email me at [@](mailto:bleplatt))

(Continued on page 3)

## When the Field Was Young...and I Was Too

*Erika Lindemann*

I joined CCCC in 1974, when the 25th annual convention met at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim. The program consisted of 111 sessions and came to 52 pages. Contrast that with the 2011 program book of 371 pages, over 500 sessions, and more to do, see, and hear than any one person can manage.

The fact that this is my 38th consecutive conference tells you that I value these meetings. Large or small, the convention has always held the same appeal. It's my school. I come here to learn and to touch base with my classmates, an extended family of colleagues and former students. The terms "extended family," "community," "professional home"—these metaphors seem to help us locate ourselves in our life's work.

(Continued on page 2)



Peitho fleeing the seduction of Leda appearing on an Apulian red figure vase, ca. 350-340 B.C.E.

J. Paul Getty Museum  
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(Continued from page 1)

When the profession was young—and I was too—most people teaching composition had degrees in British or American literature; I was a medievalist with a helpful background in linguistics. At those early CCCC meetings, I found a group of colleagues—Joe Comprone, Rick Coe, Susan Miller, Dave Bartholomae, Gary Tate—who became my teachers. “Have you read Macrorie’s new book?” someone would ask, probably over a beer in the hotel bar; “Oh yes, isn’t it extraordinary?” I would reply, then let them carry on about what a contribution it was to the field. I hadn’t read Macrorie’s new book at all, but I wrote down such references throughout the convention and made them my summer reading list. I wasn’t yet ready to enter the professional conversation, but over time, in the company of friends who were energized by their work, contributing a sentence or two became less daunting. Four or five years later, I wrote *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, my attempt to organize what my informal graduate program of CCCC meetings had helped me to understand about teaching writing. That book became a piece of furniture in my professional home, a dresser, let’s say, with drawers full of “stuff” that others might borrow for their own work with students.

In those early days I also snagged some dittoed or mimeographed bibliographies that were handed out in many convention sessions. Those lists made up part of my summer reading too. It was possible then to read the year’s work in our profession over the summer, but as the profession grew and new books and journals proliferated, keeping up became difficult. What this professional home needs, people began saying, is a comprehensive, annual bibliography. So we compiled one, I and UNC’s graduate students and a few hundred professional friends, many of them graduate students too. For eleven years, from 1984 to 1995, *The Longman*, then *CCCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric*, gave teachers and scholars a resource for finding the research that helped them broaden and deepen the profession. These bibliographies also asserted that we were a profession. They helped outline what was already then a highly interdisciplinary field and served as a kind of blueprint for our professional home. That blueprint has seen many revisions since

then, as people knocked down walls, opened doors, repurposed the original spaces, and built paths and walkways to other disciplines.

Lately, I have been drawn to history, prompted initially by complaints that “these kids today just don’t write as well as they did in the good old days.” Finding a significant cache of writings by UNC’s antebellum students, I began the happy task of preparing their work for the Web. *Verses and Fragments: The James L. Dusenbery Journal (1841-1842)* (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/dusenbery>) and *True and Candid Compositions* (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/true>) present digital editions of over 100 antebellum students’ texts, together with supporting images, audio, and scholarly essays that help users understand the broader educational and rhetorical contexts for students’ writing in the good, very old days. These projects also have held the hope that someday our profession will appreciate more than it currently does the truly collaborative scholarship that digital publishing represents. For now, though, I enjoy combing through the attic of my professional home for long-forgotten bits that other students and teachers left behind.

Who knew that our professional home had an attic? Who built this house in the first place? Why was it built? Asking questions such as these led to an invitation to edit a collection of essays celebrating NCTE’s centennial, which led, in turn, to contributing a symposium piece on the founding of NCTE and CCCC in the February issue of *CCC*. That piece holds some lessons for the future that I won’t summarize here, but on the whole I would say that I am optimistic about that future. Those who built our professional home did so for themselves and their students but also for us and our students. We who come later have a responsibility—and the pleasure—of maintaining the place. Our professional home is much larger now; there are many more of us to help put the rooms we occupy in better shape than when we found them. You might choose to add some furniture, or take some out, or build new rooms (and a larger attic), or simply paint the same old walls a different color. Each of you has a contribution to make, and an obligation to make it. As my story reveals, you can begin simply by suggesting to some newcomer a good book to read over the summer.

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*(Continued from page 2)***Works Cited**

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Erika Lindemann is Professor of English in the Department of English and Comparative Literature and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Curricula at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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ualr.edu if you can not locate the table leaders' addresses.)

The next big event for the Coalition is the 2011 Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference held at Minnesota State University, Mankato on October 12-15th. The program is very exciting and we hope to see you there! Included on the program are two outings to the greater Mankato area. Mankato is a beautiful town, the county seat of Blue Earth County, which is one of the richest agricultural areas in the nation. We know that you will enjoy fall in Minnesota (no mosquitoes and no snow! The perfect time to visit). The website is <http://femrhet.cwshrc.org>.

If you are attending Fem/Rhet, consider signing up for one of two CWS-sponsored workshops: a manuscript review workshop and a workshop on professional transformations. The manuscript review workshop functions like a small group workshop. Participants will submit a manuscript for distribution to a group (composed of other workshop participants), who will read and review it before the conference. At the conference, each group, led by a successful published author, will provide feedback and publishing advice on participants' manuscripts. A call for manuscripts will go out in late August; for more information on this workshop, contact Barb L'Eplattenier ([bleplatt \[at\] ualr.edu](mailto:bleplatt@ualr.edu)).

At the professional transformations workshop, short talks on transforming classrooms, dissertations, and careers will introduce mentoring sessions on each topic. Conference goers who would like to participate in this workshop are encouraged (but not required) to bring 3-5 copies of a syllabus or course assignment, dissertation abstract, or CV for distribution during the mentoring sessions. For more information on this workshop, contact Jenn Fishmann ([jennfishman.phd \[at\] gmail.com](mailto:jennfishman.phd@gmail.com)) or Liz Tasker ([taskerea \[at\] sfasu.edu](mailto:taskerea@sfasu.edu)).

The Coalition has been discussing the future of *Peitho*, which we will announce at Feminisms and Rhetorics. We have exciting plans and we look forward to sharing them with you.

Sincerely,



## An Academic Career Built on Hybrid Feminist Rhetorics: From China to the U.S.

Hui Wu

As a female academic from a non-white, non-middle-class American culture, I hope my personal story can help other women who come from marginalized cultures realize that, in battling an institution largely disagreeable to our home cultures, we need not only to study feminist rhetoric as scholars but to practice it in our academic life. Grounding my talk on feminist studies of rhetorical listening in relation to the Chinese rhetoric of listening engagement, I will reflect on my professional growth and share two key rhetorical components of mentorship that male-dominated rhetorical and academic traditions do not have in stock. It is by practicing the rhetoric of listening that I have survived as a minority female academic leader in a field where few ESL speakers pursue and establish their careers.

I arrived at the DFW International Airport on August 11, 1993 to pursue a PhD in English at the Texas Christian University. I was met and picked up by Nancy Myers, who later took me to look for an apartment and became a long-time friend. By that point, Lynée Gaillet had already become a legend in TCU's Rhetoric/Composition program. The first semester, I received a B for a mid-term literature paper because I did not know and use the MLA style. Yet, I was fortunate to study under leading figures of Rhetoric and Composition—Win Horner, Gary Tate, Jim Corder, and Jan Swearingen. Observing Horner's approaches to teaching, students, and rhetorical history in her class in History of English Studies, I found my passion and my niche. It was because of her that I determined to change my specialty from literature to rhetoric/composition. However, until the moment I was preparing this speech, I did not realize that I had been practicing the rhetoric of listening keenly as a Chinese-American feminist, getting mentored by all people around me at all moments; I did not realize that rhetorical listening has become essential instrumental for my leadership as a departmental chair. After having zigged, zagged and zoomed in academia as a woman originally from China, I feel that my stories about mentorship grounded on rhetorical listening must be heard.

Krista Ratcliffe (2005) defines rhetorical listening as “a trope for interpretive invention and as a code of cross-cultural conduct,” and as such, “rhetorical listening signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” (1). Her definition corresponds well to the Chinese rhetorical perspective on listening engagement. To a Chinese, listening is a first step to become a learned person to build human relations and survive in any environment. Confucius says, “In a group of three, there must be someone who can teach me,” meaning that whenever a person is with others, he/she can always learn from them. China's first treatise on rhetoric, *Guiguzi (Master of Ghost Valley)*, my current subject of study, emphasizes listening. According to its instruction, persuaders must listen closely before opening their mouths. Listening is primary; speaking is secondary, and mainly as a response. Speech comes only after careful listening and critical inquiry of information.

Unfortunately, listening has been largely viewed in the U.S. “as a passive, simple act that we just do” (Wolvin 1). All too frequently, we reduce listening to the non-active, receptor, part of communication, when we say “just listen” (Wolvin 1). This pejorative view has much to do with a lack of theory on listening in the male-dominated rhetorical tradition. As Ratcliffe points out, “Aristotle's theory never delves into *how* to listen” (20 emphasis original).

By understanding what we *cannot* learn from male-dominated Western academic and rhetorical traditions, we women academics can create our own tradition in which we practice rhetorical listening to better ourselves and battle the dominant tradition. I am suggesting two approaches for academic mentorship.

### **Approach One: Any Moment Can Be a Mentoring Moment**

*Case 1:* It was the year I was writing my dissertation. I told Dr. Horner that I was not ready to graduate because I had not finished the books I needed to read. She turned to me and said, “Hui, you

*(Continued on page 5)*

(Continued from page 4)

can never finish reading. You write, so you have to read.” These remarks have been keeping me moving forward for years. Horner’s tip distinguishes two kinds of readers—“knowledge creators” who read in order to write to create knowledge and “knowledge consumers” who read to be entertained or to access knowledge created by others. This distinction also enables me to read far more books than my scholarship requires, because I know I can never finish reading all the books “out there,” but I can live with peace of mind that I am catching up with the readings I am interested in. It also feels great to be a knowledge creator.

### **Approach Two: Any Person Can Be a Mentor As Long As This Person Is Candid and Sincere**

*Case 2:* Again, the year I was writing my dissertation. While my proposal to CCCO was accepted, I hesitated to attend the conference due to the cost of the trip. I was ineligible for any assistantships available at TCU, which, until after my class of 1993, offered assistantships only up to three years. When Dr. Horner asked me about the conference, I told her about my hesitation. She looked at me in the eye and said, “But you have your reputation to keep.” It was hard to accept this honest straightforward criticism. However, because of her response and because I listened, I delivered my paper at the conference, where I was also invited to a campus interview and landed a job in a writing program. Now her reminder—“you have your reputation to keep”—has become a crucial component of my work ethics. In fact, Dr. Horner’s words represent a truth in academia. After all, it is all about reputation and building one’s reputation.

*Case 3:* Dr. Horner first introduced me to Professor Cheryl Glenn at the 1995 RSA conference in Tucson. When Glenn learned that I wished to work in the U.S., instead of returning to China immediately after graduation, she responded, “Welcome. So, you want to start all over again.” I listened and heard her. I turned her response into advice. I realized that I was no longer a departmental chair and an associate professor, as I had been in China. I was a graduate student on the job market. All my achievements and experiences in China might not count much in the U.S. I had to work extremely hard to speed up my

professional growth. Upon our first encounter, Dr. Glenn naturally became my mentor.

Years later, I am still practicing rhetorical listening. For example, I practice it in the governance of the department that I chair. Before making decisions, I listen to my colleagues. Before publicizing any policy, I listen to my colleagues’ critiques. I have eliminated voting and involve all faculty members in collaboration, deliberation, and negotiation to reach a consensus. Through rhetorical listening, I put my feminist scholarship and disciplines in practice with conviction. Having listened to a nationally renowned female academic leader, I realized that voting is deeply rooted in the male-dominated rhetorical and academic tradition. It is a male creation. By practicing rhetorical listening, I easily let go of my ego, which is, after all, associated with the male and male sense of power anyway. I have come to peace with myself and my position. Consequently, I enjoy my job as a department chair, a job most academics believe to be lousy and stressful. The rhetoric of listening liberates me.

In short, rhetorical listening is the key to mentorship. All the cases described above share something in common: there is a moment when a candid, sincere person offers something out of her seasoned experience, an experience that embodies her philosophy for success. This is indeed a moment of mentorship, when the protégé listens rhetorically and benefits. By practicing rhetorical listening, we can build mentorship with anybody anywhere. By realizing what the dominant male tradition lacks, we invent our own to meet our own needs.

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Hui Wu is Professor of English and Chair of the Department of Literature and Languages at the University of Texas at Tyler.

## For Colored Girls who Considered the Academy when Suicide wasn't Enough: Unceasing Variations in an Early Afrafeminist Academic Career

Rhea Lathan

I begin with apologies to Ntozake Shange for taking privilege over her language. However, the recent revival of her text reminds me that there are consequences in my choice to be academic. My remarks today are situated within the nexus of my identities, which are encapsulated best by Zora Neal Hurston who states:

Like the dead seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say. So you will have to know something about the time and place where I came from in order that you may interpret the incidents and directions of my life. (1)

Many incidents guided me in the direction of a career in Rhetoric and Composition Studies. Unfortunately, time constraints don't permit me to give full details of how I came into the profession. I wish I could say that my initial interest in the discipline is the result of intense theoretical rigor and intellectual seductiveness. But sadly, that's not my story. Let me be clear that I did not choose to be an academic over suicide—no matter how interchangeable the two could be. Being raised in a middle-class African American family has taught me that no “job” is worth taking a life over. Most importantly, and to my advantage, my intellectual “other mothers” have already done the meticulous work that allows me the space to claim my own individual nexus between my life as both an African American Woman and African American Woman scholar and activist.

The directions of my journey to rhet/comp studies looks something like this: Michelle S. Johnson directed me to Nellie McKay, who directed me to Jacqueline Jones-Royster and Deborah Brandt, who directed me to Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Smitherman who directed me to Shirley Wilson Logan, Elaine Richardson, Gwen Pough, Beverly Moss, Joyce Middleton; each in their own way, have told me it's okay to resist/reject push back notions of myself as an “objective” researcher when what I research is so intricately linked to the life I have lived

and continue to live.

My PhD journey looked something like this: Nellie McKay, my MA Thesis advisor, was convinced that I had what she called “the intellectual strength and indomitable will and determination to succeed” (I think she was calling me stubborn). Therefore, she literally *delivered* me into the custody of both Deborah Brandt and Jacqueline Jones-Royster. While researching the Freedom Schools, I discovered that there were women who participated in the intellectual development of the curriculum. These women were still invisible within composition scholarship. So I went on a mission to disrupt the master narrative of *the man on the mountain and the tired old lady who happened to spur people into civil action*. In addition my life as the granddaughter of a Freedom School Steward taught me that participating in the literacy crusade was not solely about civic inclusion. I was taught from an early age that critical thinking and intellectual freedom are primary principles in my community.

It's important to stress that early in this process, my intellectual sponsors stressed to me that “if [I was] going to do intellectual work, I [needed to] know my intellectual ancestry.” But where was the intellectual history of African American Women? Where were the working class African American women from my community who initiated and sustained empowering community based literacy activism? And why hadn't I encountered them in my rigorous undergraduate Africology and English majors, or my meticulous and prestigious Afro-American Masters Degree program? Surely my painstaking doctoral preliminary exam studies would reveal this history. But alas. No. Not yet anyway.

My motivation to consider the academy stems from the power of a strong sense of social and cultural identity, which is heightened through an awareness of ones' ancestry: the contributions made by ALL African Americans, not just the gendered privileged or educated elite. This desire is fueled by first-hand incidents in my own academic life.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

Recently, I was in my campus office working late. I decided I needed to take a walk to our Rhetoric and Composition Suite where Kathy Yancey keeps the Hershey's chocolate bowl full of mini sweets. I had been diligently working on part of my text exploring what I call an "Embodied Intellectual Ancestry of African American women". This concept is part of my larger book project I call *Freedom Writing*, where I recover the intellectual activities of community-based African American women in an effort to dismantle essentialist assumptions that place highly visible men on the *mountain top* of the struggle against oppressive ideologies during the Civil Rights Movement.

I had just determined how to articulate a term I'm calling "intellectual incarceration". And at that moment I was feeling VERY confident in my own intellectual prowess. So I determined *that* deserved a chocolate treat. Getting to the candy requires me to walk out of my office, past the Writing Center, and through a set of double doors before I enter into our Rhetoric and Composition Suite. By the way, I've convinced myself that I'm walking off chocolate calories.

As I turned the corner, past the stairwell, a young woman stopped me to ask, without hesitation, if I would let her into a professor's office so she could put a paper on "HIS" desk. Shocked by her request, I replied that I could not do that. She then stated that she thought that since I was cleaning the offices, she didn't think it would be a problem. Intellectual Prowess deflated.

This is an example of just one incident that fuels my goal to exonerate intellectually incarcerated notions of African American women. I do my work so that Carter G. Woodson becomes a footnote to Halley Quinn Brown, Nellie McKay ceases to be remembered as the research assistant to Henry Louis Gates, and Michelle Obama is recognized not only as the White House Gardner and fashion diva but also as a graduate of both Princeton and Harvard, an Assistant Dean of Student Services and, lest we forget, the presidential debate coach to the first African American President of the United States of America—a critical intellectual thinker and activist!

Before I was regulated to the solitary confinement

of the tenure process, my work outside the university included writing instruction at an inner-city library and a correctional facility. I've created literacy programs for underserved populations, designed to encourage participants to transition into the university. Just as important, for the past 19 years, through my association with various community-based organizations, I have had the privilege of mentoring African American women in danger of incarceration or negative associations with public service agencies. These formal and informal endeavours dovetails into *Freedom Writing* and my interest in exploring community-based African American women's intellectual ancestry.

I have found it meaningful to connect the struggle of community-based intellectual activism to contemporary issues of oppression. My basic premise is simple: if I can link grassroots literacy activities to contemporary literacy issues, then many troubled participants in community literacy programs, especially African American women who are otherwise at-risk for harmful activities, might identify with these ordinary community-based heroines and focus their energies toward a creative and intellectual direction.

In closing, I draw from Pearl Cleage to explain why I choose to be an academic: I choose to be an academic because I'm mandated to explore and *expose* the point where racism, sexism and homophobia meet. I'm an academic because I must help others understand the full effects of racism, sexism and homophobia. I'm an academic, researching, writing, and teaching to try and communicate that information to my sisters first, and then to any brothers of good will and honest intent who will take the time to listen...I am a colored girl who considered the academy because suicide wasn't (just won't do).

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Rhea Lathan is Assistant Professor in the English Department at Florida State University.

## Beginning with the End in Mind: Why I Chose a Career at an HBCU

Michelle T. Johnson

My name is Michelle Johnson, and I share with you today on the topic of “Beginning with the End in Mind: Why I Chose a Career at an HBCU.” I am a newbie in the world of academia. I graduated with my doctorate in English from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2009. While in graduate school, I did everything I was supposed to do in order to be successful. I made good grades; I attended and presented at conferences; I designed and taught new courses for the university; I engaged in service and held administrative responsibilities; I even managed to place a chapter from my dissertation for publication. I was on the right track to being an academic.

I was also suffering silently.

As an African American woman at a predominantly white institution (PWI), I dealt with many of the issues other graduate students of color experience at PWIs—issues stemming from insensitivity and ignorance, to white privilege and gendered racism. By the time I graduated, I had had enough. I decided not to play that particular game: the game of writing about race and racism, only to have a select group of people read my work; the game of watering down my message so I do not offend anyone; the game of being one of only a few faculty members of color within a large university setting. My white female professors told me, “You can go anywhere.” And for a while, I believed them. I almost lost myself trying to live up to their expectations of what a smart black woman was.

I will never forget the time my gendered communications professor, a white woman and self-identified feminist, described me as “always angry” in front of the entire class. That hurt. Deeply. Fortunately, I had a professor-mentor I could confide in, which helped me feel better, but it did not help my grade. After I addressed the issue with the professor, she told me what she meant was that I was the “resident critical theorist.” My final grade dropped from an “A” to a “B.”

That incident opened my eyes to the reality of theory, practice and academic culture. I learned it is not that different from the culture outside of the ivory tower. We can all theorize about dismantling racism,

but when it comes to actually doing it, we fall short. Yes, even academics. So, I decided I could not play the game and pretend to be okay with pretending. I could not research and write about “those students” while teaching another group of students. I refused to turn the very students I loved, and the very community in which I came from, into a lab experiment. I did not want to turn into someone I could not recognize when I looked in the mirror. My on-campus interview at Livingstone College confirmed my decision.

Livingstone College is a private, four-year historically Black institution located in the small town of Salisbury, North Carolina. The emphasis is on teaching and service, although the teaching load is far from ideal. Nevertheless, I decided to give it a try because of my commitment to teaching students I research and write about, and because of my family legacy with HBCUs. After numerous interviews and touring the campus, I presented a 20-minute teaching demonstration in a composition course. I had an awesome time interacting with the students, and I really felt like I could contribute to the department. But, I still was not convinced that I would make that permanent move and pursue tenure there. That was, of course, until a black male student came up to me after class and inquired about my office location: “Excuse me. Um, where is your office? I want to get some extra help.”

“Oh, I don’t teach here. I am just interviewing for a job,” I told him.

The expression on his face turned from relief to disbelief in seconds. Even though we parted ways, this student never left me. “Where is your office?” I kept playing in my mind for weeks, and I found myself trying to answer it outside of the student’s presence.

“Is it across town in the new multi-million dollar building or is it a few steps from his dorm room?”

Where is my office? Right now, it resides on the campus of Livingstone College. My door is open to students who were not admitted to larger universities due to abysmal grades and test scores. I teach students who either come to class or go back to the

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*(Continued from page 8)*

streets. I read papers that have a lot of soul, but poor grammar. I impress upon whole classrooms that they are entitled to an education, to use their voices and to think critically about the world. They do not come to my classroom or to my office feeling entitled to anything. I have chosen a career at an HBCU because I care more about the lives I affect than about the status of my career in academia.

I chose an HBCU because I wanted to have an answer to the question, "Where is your office?" and still be able to sleep at night.

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Michelle T. Johnson is Assistant Professor of English and the 2010-11 Chair of the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina.

## Mentoring Tables

### Publishing Options and Opportunities

*Table Leaders: Arabella Lyon and Kate Adams*

Mentors Arabelle Lyon and Kate Adams and the Publishing Options and Opportunities group discussed both writing, particularly time management, and publication. In discussing time management, we focused on the need to be schedule time or “punch clock” throughout the year. Whether one writes between 5 and 7 a.m. or p.m., many agreed it was important to find specific times when writing is the priority. Several of us had participated in productive writing or accountability groups which had helped both to motivate and polish pieces.

We also discussed how to approach various types of presses publishing in our field, both university and trade, and how to craft a book proposal that would get their attention. For graduate students and assistant professors who were not working on a book, we emphasized the need to send pieces out for review and not to wait and polish overly long. Conversation continued with contracts for books, co-authoring, and ranking presses. We also considered how to publish parts of the manuscript as articles in advance of the book.

In the interest of sharing information, we are including the following, unranked list of presses who have published in our fields:

U of Pittsburgh P  
 Penn State UP  
 U of Illinois P  
 Rutgers UP  
 Harvard UP  
 Utah State UP  
 U of Southern Illinois P  
 U of Wisconsin P  
 U of Chicago P  
 U of Alabama P  
 Michigan State UP  
 U of Tennessee P  
 Vanderbilt UP  
 U of Arkansas P  
 Oxford UP  
 U of California P  
 Sage  
 Duke UP

U of Illinois P  
 Cornell UP  
 UP of Kentucky  
 Louisiana State UP  
 Temple UP  
 Wayne State UP  
 UP of Mississippi  
 U of Minnesota P  
 U of South Carolina P  
 Indiana UP  
 Stanford UP  
 Howard UP  
 Blackwell Publishing

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## Mentoring Tables

### Designing Proposals for Fellowships and Grants

*Table Leaders: Jane Donawerth and Kathleen Welch*

Mentors Jane Donawerth and Kathleen Welch and a dozen scholars and graduate students gathered at the Designing Proposals for Fellowships and Grants table to share frustrations and advice about the complicated process of applying for fellowships and grants. Participants identified two problems as most urgent: (1) how to research grants that fit Rhetoric and Composition research, and (2) how to select recommenders who will write compelling letters and get them in on time.

Discussing applications, participants agreed, above all, to do *exactly* what the directions called for (and especially never to write longer summaries than asked for). For dissertation fellowships, students generally must be ABD, have a chapter sample completed and in good shape, and to be competitive for national fellowships, an article accepted for publication; it helps to have one recommender not a former teacher and from another institution, so Rhetoric Society of America Institutes help a great deal. For faculty travel grants (ACLS and short-term grants to libraries such as Folger, CLark, Huntington, Newberry, Philadelphia Library Company, religious archives), research can be in early stages as long as well formulated; for all other faculty fellowships, applicants should be able to finish the book or edition during the fellowship. It is helpful to have an article from the research already accepted for publication, to show it is worthwhile, and it is helpful to have a broad range of referees (say, from both English and Communication, from East or West Coast and heartland) and the more eminent the better, as long as they can write detailed, knowledgeable references.

For NEH, expect to try for 2 to 5 times before achieving it, and be sure to talk to a Program Officer after the first failure in order to get your grades, samples of successful applications, and explanations. In proposals, be sure to include what research has been accomplished and where, a chapter summary so that the plan of the work is clear, and a month-by-month calendar about what will be done on fellowship. In all applications, write for a general audience, avoid jargon or abstruse theoretical terms, request recommendations 6 weeks ahead with

accompanying criteria and vita and proposal, and have others read your proposal and critique before sending. For grant applications, research at the beginning of the process and discussion with grant program officers is key: the research initiative or development must be formulated to fit the requirements of the grant.

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## Mentoring Tables

### Transforming the Dissertation

*Table Leaders: Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Liz Tasker Davis*

Mentors Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Liz Tasker Davis led a discussion about the challenges, maneuvers, decisions, and work involved in transforming a dissertation into publication(s). Participants were at various points in the transformation; some shared publication success stories while others had just completed their dissertations and are now interested in researching publication venues, formulating proposals, and making necessary revisions.

Our discussion addressed many questions about the potential afterlife of a dissertation, as well as the multiple “next steps” that the new Ph.D. might take to get her work in print. The discussion included the following Q & A topics:

#### **Article or book?**

What form should your publications take? It depends upon your dissertation subject matter and your target audience. Begin deciding by identifying potential journals and book series for your topic. Check submission requirements carefully; those guidelines might help you decide whether a series of articles or a full-length project is best for your project. Are you trying to introduce a completely new topic to a scholarly community? If so, publishing several articles could be beneficial. Does your topic fill a gap in an existing line of scholarly publication? If yes, consider writing a book.

#### **Publish immediately or wait?**

It depends. If you have a ready venue and need to make only small changes, go for it soon! Publishing soon after the PhD gives you public exposure, helps fulfill tenure requirements, and takes some pressure off of you as you begin your new career. But, waiting also has advantages. Over time, you will gain more perspective in your field, which can enrich the argument of your dissertation and add nuance to your work—especially if you had to rush to finish your dissertation. However, too much vacillation and worry about expanding your work can delay getting into print.

#### **Who is your audience?**

If your topic is interdisciplinary, which discipline

comprises the primary readership of your target publication(s)? Research possible publication venues thoroughly. The expectations of editors and publishers are often difficult to identify. Consider how your new audience differs from your dissertation committee in their areas of expertise, their expectations, and needs as readers. Establish credibility by contextualizing your topic for a specific audience of readers, clearly focusing your argument, and maintaining the focus throughout your piece.

#### **Are modifications necessary?**

Yes, always. Your audience, purpose, and scope will necessarily change once you begin revising your work for publication. New pieces (abstracts, articles, book proposals, and grant proposals) must all be carved out of the larger work.

Some dissertations can become entire books in themselves with minimal modifications, such as the re-purposing of an extensive literature review into a big-picture contextualization of your topic’s relevance within a scholarly community and its benefit to readers. Other dissertations may break easily into multiple articles; each perhaps offering a different focus on a topic or looking at different case studies or examples. Still other dissertations will work best condensed to form one or several chapters in a new project of wider scope.

#### **Do you need a master plan?**

It certainly doesn’t hurt. The time between landing your first tenure-track job and coming up for tenure is usually 5-6 years. Each position/institution has different requirements (publication, teaching load, service), and publications cycles can be long, so be realistic and prepared. Use conferences, grants, and other types of proposals as means to network, reposition, and test the waters for your research. Stay active and create multiple options.

#### **Conclusions**

Although the nature and look of publishing is shifting, we recognize that the admonishment to “publish or perish” is still relevant; publications still equal cultural currency in academia and provide the

*(Continued on page 13)*

*(Continued from page 12)*

means for purchasing advancement. Our round table functioned as a support group for this intimidating task—one that is most often tackled in seclusion. As in other mentoring initiatives sponsored by the coalition, our group was happy to find an opportunity to share experiences and concerns, and to discover among colleagues webs of support that are sustainable and that foster intellectual exchange.

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## Mentoring Tables

### Methodology in Historical Research in Rhetoric and Composition

Table Leaders: Nan Johnson, Wendy Sharer, and Tarez Samra Graban

Mentors Nan Johnson, Wendy Sharer, and Tarez Samra Graban led a discussion on the various principles, practices, and outcomes driving historical research into rhetoric and composition. Participants at our table reflected all stages of their careers and their historical projects, and the crux of our discussion was the participants' own work, allowing us to address theoretical and pragmatic concerns about *doing history* of rhetoric and composition in multiple spaces—archival, digital, pedagogical, and public. Each of these spaces raised productive dilemmas that reflect the particular kinds of epistemological movement we see being made in feminist historiography, where our actual needs are challenging what we know as traditional research methods for historical work. Productive dilemmas included the following:

#### **How to collect (non-traditional) archives?**

This is perhaps the most salient and overarching dilemma that each of us shared—whether our archives consisted of virtual or material texts, metadata, performances, memories, or oral histories—and it poses three questions in one. The first is how to gather the archive and get enough that is representative of its genres, the second is how to define what we gather, and the third is how to help our audiences value what we gather and define as archival material. Our overwhelmingly common response to this question was to network with other researchers and to document our processes of gathering with as much nuance as possible. That documentation early on may provide the answers later on as we step back and take stock of our findings. For those of us researching little-known topics or figures, or relying on hidden, partially processed, or obscure collections, it can be beneficial to look at related materials in non-obvious places such as the reference files of institutional archives or the faculty records of small colleges or regional schools.

#### **What kinds of historical evidence count?**

A number of participants had written or were in the process of writing extensive projects based on

their archival work and found that their projects often demanded alternative ways of understanding historical evidence. For example, how do we research tableaux as rhetorical performances? How do we capture, define, classify, and typify non-traditional texts, digital surrogates of original texts, or performances that are not text—not just for the sake of analysis, but also for the sake of historicization? How can we innovate feminist/rhetorical methodologies of triangulation or “rivaling,” i.e., of taking into account all aspects of the history of what counts as proof in our discipline? Alternatives likely combine a willingness to define both *performing* and *reading* more broadly, with the development of methods for naming and tracing multiple aspects of a single performance so that it can be studied several ways.

#### **How to measure the drawbacks or benefits of case studies and representative cases versus in-depth general cases?**

Several participants recognized that they do historical work alongside or for the sake of discourse analysis, rather than historical work for its own sake. Other participants expressed that the line between what is ethnographic versus what is purely archival has sometimes been blurred. When this is the case, it seems essential to let the corpus we want to study influence our questions, rather than defining our corpus with only our questions in mind. This is because our preconceived notions about what counts as historical evidence may cause us to miss out on discovering a new research methodology for working with several cases across historical periods, or on gleaning valuable information from a single representative case. We agreed that, as feminist historical researchers, we often rely on both paradigms: arriving at “truths” about our rhetorical histories based on broad looks across many figures, traditions or texts; and discerning “truths” about our rhetorical performances based on an in-depth examination of fewer (even single) representative texts. We also discussed how both paradigms

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

together contribute to the kind of contemporary re/landscaping or re/locating that we call for in feminist historical studies, and perhaps researchers should be prepared to justify their chosen methodology in terms of the other.

### **How to build true collaborations with student historians?**

In an institutional climate that still favors the singly authored publication—and yet, in an intellectual and cultural milieu that increasingly invites collaborative research—the question of how best to enable each other’s historical work seems paramount to how the Coalition can help feminist studies in rhetoric and composition move forward. In the world of archives, this dilemma is more pronounced given that our archival finds have historically relied on the serendipity of arriving at “lost” or unprocessed documents before anyone else. Several participant projects stood to benefit from putting senior and junior scholars into contact with one another and with student historians, whether for the sake of sharing archival materials or modeling archival methodologies. While the collaboration is a worthwhile goal on its own, we discussed the possibilities that more collaboration might allow more archival materials to be uncovered, circulated, and used more quickly, hence expanding our canons in useful ways.

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## **Mentoring Tables Working in Digital Spaces**

*Table Leaders: Jenn Fishman and Lee Nickoson*

Mentors Jenn Fishman and Lee Nickoson facilitated a lively discussion of the various ways Coalition members use digital resources for pedagogical and scholarly projects. Noting that both the production and assessment of digital academic work are still new activities for many students and faculty, roundtable participants identified a range of questions for the Coalition to consider:

- How can we, as feminist scholars, historians, and historiographers, contribute to our discipline's vibrant digital community? And how can we engage (or develop) feminist strategies to help connect increasingly siloed digital communities?
  - How, as many of us turn our focus to digital teaching and research, can we remain sensitive to the embodied and affective dimensions of working with and in new media? What pedagogical resources might help us teach more humanely in differently mediated environments? What new research might improve our understanding of the embodied and emotional aspects of multiliteracies?
  - How do we articulate the impact digital academic work is having on our ideas about teaching and scholarship, and how do we apply our understanding when we evaluate different kinds of scholarly work? For tenure and promotion, for example, should we modify existing evaluative practices, invent new criteria and procedures, or borrow existing protocols from colleagues in other fields (e.g., fine arts, information science)? For publication, how do we combine mentoring and peer review to foster rigorous experimental work? How do we ensure new work will be accessible to different audiences over time and through different means of citation (e.g., references in print scholarship, remixing)?
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## Mentoring Table: Balancing the Personal and Professional Life

Table Leaders: Risa Applegarth and Hui Wu

Mentors Hui Wu and Risa Applegarth led a discussion in which graduate students, junior faculty, and senior faculty shared strategies for addressing the challenges of integrating our professional work with our personal commitments. Recognizing that individual situations and local institutions vary, the participants at this roundtable shared specific stories, challenges, strategies, and advice to find points of connection between our varied experiences. Some of these strategies are summarized below.

### Finding Community as Writers

Discussion at our table centered around finding and creating networks of support for the intellectual work we each want to undertake. When moving from one institution to another, it is particularly crucial to find—or to create—the communities that sustain us in our personal and professional lives. Creating writing groups with varied structures and goals can help to generate this support.

For instance, a *writing check-in group* might meet weekly or bi-weekly, for only an hour, with no more than 4 participants, all of whom are actively pursuing writing projects. The participants in this kind of writing group generally do not read each others' drafts; instead, at each meeting participants set concrete writing goals for the following meeting and report on progress made toward the writing goals set at the previous meeting. Participants in a writing check-in group help each other manage their writing schedules alongside other demands on their time; help each other set realistic writing goals; hold each other accountable for meeting those goals and sticking to a writing schedule; and share advice about writing issues, like minimizing perfectionist tendencies or deciding when to approach an editor about a book project. Writers in a writing check-in group need not be in the same department or involved in similar research; this kind of group is especially useful for writers who feel too busy for a traditional writing group, who struggle to stick to a writing schedule, or who desire accountability and motivation more than feedback from their writing group peers.

In addition, a *face-to-face writing group* organized with other writers at your university who

are at similar stages in their careers—dissertation writing, pre-tenure, post-tenure, etc.—can meet another set of needs. In this traditional writing group format, one writer circulates a draft of work-in-progress several days before the group meets face-to-face, when the other participants offer verbal or written feedback. Such a format not only generates useful feedback and intermediate writing deadlines, especially on the longer pieces of writing (such as articles and chapters) that writers are often reluctant to ask their colleagues to read, but also can help to establish the kind of supportive intellectual community that makes scholars more productive, less stressed, and less isolated. The peers in a face-to-face writing group need not come from your home department; in fact, especially for junior faculty, organizing a writing group that includes faculty from nearby departments such as history, religious studies, women's studies, and other humanities disciplines can broaden one's on-campus support network, can provide a safe environment for discussing concerns you might be reluctant to discuss with others in your own department, and may provide a broader perspective on publication norms and expectations across the university. This kind of writing group typically meets monthly to provide participants with ample time to respond to longer pieces of writing; meetings might take place on campus, over lunch, or in the evenings at participants' homes.

An option that's especially valuable for people who have few or no local colleagues pursuing similar research is the *Skype writing group*, which is organized around the research interests of the participants without regard for their physical proximity. This kind of writing group can grow out of a conference panel, a pre-conference workshop, or any other activity that helps a writer identify one to three other writers who are pursuing similar research or working in a similar subfield. Participants in this kind of writing group schedule a video chat at a certain time each week. During the meeting, the group might sometimes function as a writing check-in group—discussing progress on projects, setting goals, seeking advice—and at other times function

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more as a traditional writing group, by circulating drafts of work in progress via email, reading and making notes on the draft before the meeting, and then discussing feedback during the Skype session.

### **Combining Social Activities and Care Work**

Our discussion also included advice about ways to integrate intellectual work, social activities, and personal commitments whenever possible in order to strengthen our support networks and relieve stress. For instance, colleagues with children can organize childcare swaps, in which one parent looks after a colleague's children one evening a week while the colleague writes; the following week, they swap, allowing the first colleague to get the extra evening of writing time. Other stress-relieving activities—walking, running, movie-watching, gardening, etc.—can also be organized with colleagues, either with or without children, to strengthen personal and/or professional networks and to mitigate isolation.

### **Negotiating Personal and Professional Pressures**

Participants at our mentoring table spoke frankly about the personal commitments that sometimes conflict with professional imperatives. Taking seriously our roles as partners, parents, and caretakers of family members, we shared strategies for managing these moments of conflict, for searching out professional opportunities that allow us to continue fulfilling other roles that matter to us, for accepting certain responsibilities within our professional and personal worlds, for gracefully declining others, and for creating communities to sustain us both personally and professionally.

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# Feminisms & RHETORICS

*Feminist Challenges or Feminist Rhetorics?: Locations, Scholarship and Discourse*

Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN  
October 12-15, 2011

The 2011 Feminisms and Rhetorics conference, sponsored by the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, will be hosted by Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The conference committee is strongly interdisciplinary and therefore our theme seeks to recognize the spaces between disciplines and communities. The conference theme is meant to acknowledge the academic and socio-discursive spaces that feminisms, and rhetorics on or about feminisms, inhabit. Major political, religious and social leaders have recently discussed feminism, including the Dalai Lama, but the discussion seems to revolve around cultural or essentialized discourses of feminism.

We seek proposals that speak to the challenges and diversities of feminist rhetoric and discourse, in public and private life, in the academy, and in the media. We welcome proposals on topics that significantly engage disciplines other than Rhetoric and Composition, and that have consequences for communities located outside of the academy.

*“She didn’t write it.*

(But if it’s clear she did the deed. . .)

*She wrote it, but she shouldn’t have.*

(It’s political, sexual, masculine, feminist.)

*She wrote it, but look what she wrote about.*

(The bedroom, the kitchen, her family. Other women!)

*She wrote it, but she wrote only one of it.*

(“Jane Eyre. Poor dear, that’s all she ever. . .”)

*She wrote it, but she isn’t really an artist, and it isn’t really art.*

(It’s a thriller, a romance, a children’s book. It’s sci fi!)

*She wrote it, but she had help.*

(Robert Browning. Branwell Bronte.

Her own “masculine side.”)

*She wrote it, but she’s an anomaly.*

(Woolf. With Leonard’s help....)

*She wrote it BUT. . .”*

Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*

For more information, contact **Kirsti Cole** at [kirsti.cole](mailto:kirsti.cole) [at] [mnsu.edu](http://mnsu.edu) or [femrhet.cwshrc.org](http://femrhet.cwshrc.org)