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Scholarship, Teaching, and Service Overview
Spring 2019

Scholarly and Creative Endeavor

As a scholar in rhetoric and composition with a focus on multilingual and digital literacies, my scholarship, my teaching, and my service are deeply interwoven. This situation is not unusual in my field, as called out in the “Scholarship in Rhetoric, Writing, and Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans, and Chairs” position statement published by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC):

The boundaries between scholarship, teaching, and service are quite porous for faculty members working in rhetoric, writing, and composition. This is because much of what we study is about pedagogy and practice: how writing is taught and learned in courses, programs, and extracurricular sites.

<http://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/scholarshipincolmp>

In my case, the four major strands of my scholarship and teaching all stem from abiding interest in multilingual literacies and the ways in which students with home or heritage languages and dialects other than “standard” English are welcomed or not welcomed (intentionally or unintentionally) into the academy and in college-level writing classrooms. This focus, combined with my early and enthusiastic adoption of digital composing tools and my affinity for international collaboration, has guided my sustained inquiry and scholarly projects related to:

- Multilingual literacies and the evolving conversation around translingual literacies in both theory and pedagogical practice;
- Knowledge-making in international, online writing classrooms, in particular for student writers identified by institutions as “at-risk” in some way;
- Affordances of digital technologies for writers in general and for multilingual writers in particular;
- Ethnographic research methods in college-level writing classrooms.

My scholarship in all of these areas has evolved over time from conference papers and presentations into published work. The most recent significant accomplishments are the two forthcoming (under contract, [WAC Clearinghouse](#) and [University Press of Colorado](#)) edited collections about “translingual” literacies, with one volume focusing on international, classroom-based research and one volume focusing on effective pedagogies for multilingual writers in US-based, college writing classrooms. Both volumes seek to fill a gap in current and evolving conversations in writing studies and applied linguistics around language use as social and situational practice. Chapter authors include established voices in the field as well as newer scholars. Highly respected scholars Ellen Cushman and Bruce Horner have each contributed a foreword or an afterword to one of the volumes. Both manuscripts have been externally reviewed, revised, and submitted to the publishers with expected publication in Spring 2019.

The publication of my chapter “Ludic is the New Phatic: Making Connections in Global, Internet-mediated Learning Environments” in *Thinking Locally, Composing Globally* edited by Rich Rice and Kirk St. Amant signals another major achievement in my post-tenure scholarly trajectory. The chapter presents a section of [my completed dissertation](#), in which I researched student discussion board activity for Sharing Cultures, a large-scale, online, international collaboration that connected students at Columbia College Chicago with students in Port Elizabeth and Stellenbosch, South Africa, and, in later years, Volgograd, Russia in a shared discussion board space every northern-hemisphere spring semester from 2003-2011. In addition to the book chapter, my presentations on this research have led to invitations to give two plenary talks, one at the Midwest Conference on Literature, Language, and Media at Northern Illinois University in 2014 and one at the International Changing Communication in a Changing World Linguistics and Intercultural Communication Conference hosted at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration in Volgograd, Russia in 2015. While my increased administrative responsibilities at Columbia certainly occupy a considerable amount of my time, I am looking forward to extending this work into my next scholarly project as a single-author monograph.

My teaching and scholarship have intersected in other important and impactful ways. While teaching Writing and Rhetoric I, I designed literacy narrative assignments using the [Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives \(DALN\)](#) as a platform for students to analyze and submit print and multimodal literacy narratives to the archive. As a result of that work, my assignment sequence is now shared on the [DALN Teaching Resources](#) site and several of my student’s multimodal literacy narratives are [featured as multilingual student samples \(Sky Wang, Viral Patel, Sofia Gomez, Keunho Shin\)](#). My work with the DALN and my research on my students composing processes deepened my interest in the interconnections between multilingual and multimodal writing and resulted in publication of “[Multilingual Literacy Landscapes](#)” co-authored with Alanna Frost and published in [Stories that Speak to Us](#), edited by Scott Lloyd Dewitt, Cindy Selfe, & H. Lewis Ulman.

Finally, early in my career and as Director of the English as an Additional Language (EAL) program, I was committed to creating a sequence of writing courses and learning experiences for international students that could effectively bridge typical “ESL” writing instruction outcomes and the very different expectations of the college writing classroom. I had success with several assignments using ethnographic research methods and was encouraged by my students’ enhanced understanding of research processes, their engagement with what they were writing, and the quality of their writing. I partnered with Ames Hawkins to co-author [Engaging Communities: Writing Ethnographic Research](#), an open-access textbook for college-level writing classrooms. To date, the web version of the text has had well over 43,000 unique users in 181 countries. In addition, it has been downloaded as an ePub (for free) over 1200 times. In addition to classroom use, the text has been cited in five scholarly articles focusing on writing pedagogy. Over the years we have received tens of emails from instructors telling us how wonderful and helpful the text is and how grateful they are that we’ve made the text fully accessible to them and their students.

Service to the Profession

I was elected to the executive committee of the [Modern Language Association \(MLA\) Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies \(RCWS\) Literacy Studies Forum](#) in 2015, and I have served as secretary for two years and then as chair leading up to the January 2018 convention. The executive committee is responsible for organizing all conference panels sponsored by the forum, both guaranteed and with competitive review, and managing nominations for annual elections for the forum leadership and for an MLA delegate. At the January 2018 convention, I was invited to chair the MLA plenary session "[The Matter of Writing](#)," which brought together highly influential scholars in writing studies "[to share key concepts, theories, movements, and agendas of the discipline.](#)"

Since 2010, I have also served as a member of the [executive committee and the travel grant committee of the Computers and Writing Graduate Research Network](#) (GRN). The GRN offers a full-day, pre-conference event at the annual Computers and Writing (C&W) conference, inviting participants to share in-process work (from conceptualization to publication) and receive feedback from experienced scholars in the field. From 2010-2016, I also served as coordinator of [Ride2CW](#), a fundraiser for the GRN Travel Grant Awards, which provides financial assistance for graduate students and non-tenure-track faculty who attend the GRN and C&W.

My additional service to the profession and a list of professional organization affiliations are included in my CV.

Teaching and Teaching-Related Activity

Teaching at [Columbia College Chicago](#) has always been invigorating for me and has continually pushed me to explore new ways of thinking, doing, and making as a means of creating quality learning experiences for our students. Over the years, I have primarily taught multiple versions of the following courses:

- Writing and Rhetoric I - enhanced (developmental) / international / standard
- Writing and Rhetoric II - enhanced (developmental) / international / standard
- First-year Seminar - honors / non-honors
- [Writing New Media](#)
- Writing, Language, and Culture (seminar) - Irreverent Rhetorics: Discourse in a Digital Age
- Composition Theory and Praxis (graduate seminar)

I purposefully chose an academic career at a teaching-focused institution and, as I explained earlier, at Columbia College Chicago my scholarship and my teaching are interconnected; my scholarship often influences innovation in my pedagogy and my students' work often drives my research questions. I believe that my teaching materials demonstrate the

intellectual rigor that undergirds my pedagogy as well as the intentionality with which I guide students through assignments to meet larger learning goals.

I have already discussed the scholarship that emerged from my work in Writing and Rhetoric I (literacy narratives / Sharing Cultures) and Writing and Rhetoric II (*Engaging Communities/ Sharing Cultures*), so in this section on teaching, I will highlight my First-year Seminar Honors course from Fall 2013 as a specific example of excellence in teaching, which resulted in student publication of work, with me as instructor/co-author, in the [Journal of Undergraduate Media Projects \(The Jump\)](#).

In 2004, I served as a “founding fellow” on the faculty committee that reinvented the previous iteration of our freshman seminar and created “New Millennium Studies: First-year Seminar.” By 2013, we had dropped the “New Millennium Studies” part of the course title, but I was also aware that the curriculum needed a deeper refresh. I opted to design assignments for my honors section of the course around [a large-scale, collaborative, digital, public research and writing project called “Curious Columbia”](#) (modeled after the “[Curious City](#)” segments on WBEZ in Chicago).

As I designed it, every student pitched a potential “juicy” line of inquiry, and the students voted on three research questions to explore in three teams. All three final projects were excellent, but team that explored food waste had created a mockumentary and researched web text called “[Maximus Waste](#)” that was the hit of the class. I encouraged the food waste group to submit their work to *The Jump*, and over the course of the next several months, I worked with them to develop the piece and meet the requirements for publication, which included additional reflections, rationales, and, importantly, descriptions of visual elements and video transcripts for accessibility. “Maximus Waste” was published in *The Jump* issue 6.1. Subsequently, the project was included as example work in *Joining the Conversation: A Guide and Handbook for Writers, 3e* by Mike Palmquist and Barbara Wallraff, published by Bedford/St. Martins.

It was incredibly rewarding to engage students in an experience that extended beyond the parameters of the classroom and the semester, and, further, to see publication of what was, for all of them, their first refereed/juried public work. It was also gratifying as a teacher to read [Christine Denecker’s response to the assignments](#) I had designed to prompt a project like “Maximus Waste” (all *The Jump* publications include two critical responses). Denecker closed her evaluation of the pedagogy that guided the student work by saying:

As Nilson points out, today’s students are “self-confident,” “technologically sophisticated, action bent, goal oriented, service or civic minded, and accustomed to functioning as part of a team” (11). The pedagogy undergirding “Maximus Waste” speaks to all these strengths and more. This no-waste approach to assignment design proves that the Ironclad Laws of Pedagogy need not lead to learning that falls short of expectations. Instead, an assignment designed with social and academic applications in

mind can lead to a pretty amazing learning experience—for students and for the audience of their work.

I work to bring that sense of social and academic design to all of my teaching.

Service to the Department, School, and College

I have an extensive record of service to Columbia College Chicago at the department, school, and college levels, the value of which is most evident in the administrative/academic leadership roles I have held since I was awarded tenure:

- Director of English as an Additional Language, Department of English June 1995 – August 2013
- Acting Chairperson, Department of English, Columbia College Chicago, August 2002 – August 2003
- Interim Writing Center Director, August 2006-August 2007
- Coordinator of Professional Writing, Department of English, August 2013 – July 2014
- Interim Dean, School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Columbia College Chicago, July 2014-July 2015
- Interim Senior Vice President and Provost, effective December 14, 2018 – June 2, 2019
- Senior Associate Provost, Columbia College Chicago, July 2015-Dec 31, 2018, June 3, 2019- present

Recent and key initiatives I participated in or led include: the development of and writing of [*Achieving Our Greatness: A Strategic Action Plan for Columbia College Chicago 2015-2020*](#); various projects to implement the strategic plan and revise curriculum in all majors; the development and approval of the Columbia Core, a new general education program; and the transformation of our former first-year seminar program into the “Big Chicago” first-semester experience course launched in Fall 2015.

One of the most significant instances of my service to the institution, however, is far less visible in the list of the administrative appointments, program coordination, and committee service in my CV. In 2011-2012, I was nominated, through a Faculty Senate process, to serve on the Academic Team for a college-wide “BluePrint Prioritization” initiative. I was subsequently elected by the 13-member Academic Team as team leader and project manager for a comprehensive review of all academic programs as dictated by Bob Dickeson’s now (in)famous *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources To Achieve Strategic Balance*. The work of the Academic Team culminated in the 2012 “ONE Columbia” document, which set the stage for the subsequent changes in leadership at the college and for the development of our current Strategic Action Plan. The process of prioritization as enacted by Columbia College Chicago was fraught in numerous ways, but for me as a team leader, organizer, community leader, project manager, colleague, and faculty member, it was fruitful training and proving ground for my ability to orchestrate and facilitate a complex, and

complicated, change process involving diverse constituencies from across the college community. I learned that a high-functioning team can accomplish a great deal and that to pull a diverse group together to form such a team requires constant communication, shared vision, openness to challenging each other's ideas in productive ways, and a clear process for decision making. Since that very complicated year, I have worked to bring those central tenets of effective teamwork to all of my leadership roles.

My additional service to the department, school, and college are listed in my CV.