

The New Work of Composing: Editing an Online (Digital) Multimedia Book in English Studies

1. Goals and Objectives

The major goal of my new research and creative project is to **co-edit and publish the first new media book in the humanities**, a book which is already being considered by the humanities' first digital-only, academic press: Computers and Composition Digital Press (CCDP). The edited collection, called *The New Work of Composing*, is based on the eponymous theme of the bi-annual Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, which my co-editors are hosting this October 16–18 at the University of Louisville. As with the conference presentations themselves, the digital, new media scholarship that we expect authors to submit for *The New Work of Composing* will include multimedia elements that are crucial to the text's argument. Editing new media requires not only the print-based editorial knowledge standard for any journal or book editor but also requires knowing how to evaluate, edit, and manipulate digital multimedia elements in the technologies that the authors have used. Thus, digital media scholarship—or, *new media scholarship*—is both a scholarly/research and an aesthetic/creative endeavor because authors and editors have to understand how both linear, written arguments function rhetorically as well as how non-linear, creative elements (such as the use of sound, graphics, animation, etc.) function aesthetically to make meaning in a single text.

My role in this project—based on my experience as editor of the most longstanding, peer-reviewed journal that publishes new media scholarship (see *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net>, online since 1996)—is to lead my co-editors and our authors through the process of composing and editing digital scholarship. I have five specific outcomes related to the timeframe of this course reassignment grant, which I will detail in a later section, and **I have two major goals:**

- 1) to study how digital-media books and articles—as artifacts of our 21st century research practices—are composed/designed, peer-reviewed (by editors and tenure stakeholders), and revised for publication; and
- 2) to relate this research experience to my teaching and the needs of the English department's undergraduate and graduate curricula by proposing a class in digital scholarship.

Because of my experience editing digital scholarship, I have specific tasks for the co-edited book project that include (1) mentoring prospective authors through their composition, submission, and revision stages, and (2) leading the editorial team through the review, copy-editing, and other production stages of this digital, multimedia manuscript. Being the lead editor on these stages of the project will help me achieve the above goals.

2. Background and Significance

For nearly a decade—as funding for university presses and library acquisitions has decreased—the humanities have been experiencing what has collectively been called a 'crisis in publishing.' Where **publishing books is considered the “gold standard” for tenure in the humanities** (MLA Task Force, 2006), this crisis affects the careers of scholars at every rank in academia, but especially junior scholars who often do not have prior book-publication records. In attempts to

mitigate this crisis, governing bodies such as the Modern Language Association (MLA) have suggested that scholars consider turning away from the gold-standard print book and publishing scholarly articles in peer-reviewed digital journals. Although the humanities have been slow to adapt to digital scholarship, the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing (2004) reported that “online journals are already being used by many scholars in our fields, and this use is likely to increase” (p. 180). Indeed, in the last few years, a small list of the efforts to promote digital humanities scholarship have included

- formations of groups, non-profits, and other collaborations to support digital scholarship, such as the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC), the Institute for the Future of the Book, and the Software Environment for the Advancement of Scholarly Research (SEASR, through the National Center for Supercomputing Applications), among others;
- granting agencies affirming the need for research in digital humanities scholarship—of note being the MacArthur and Mellon Foundations’ sponsorship of several large projects in this area as well as the numerous NEH’s Digital Humanities grants offered;
- a set of best-practices guidelines for electronic journal editors, authors, and tenure administrators written by the Council of Editors of Learned Journals, a body of (mostly) print-journal editors who recognize the need for and benefits of electronic publishing;
- the launching of the Open Humanities Press, which is a publishing collective for independent, open-access, digital scholarship in critical and cultural theory (with renown humanities scholars on its board); and
- the transition of several university presses to include digital-only content, either by publishing it themselves (e.g., Rice University Press and SUNY Press) or in affiliation with new online presses (e.g., Utah State University Press with Computers and Composition Digital Press).

In addition to these consorted efforts, individual scholars’ efforts have made an impact on digital scholarship, including the often-cited humanities blogger, danah boyd, whose boycott against journals that are *not* open-access has raised awareness of the increasing influence of digital scholarship in the humanities. While publishing in online journals and presses is likely to increase, the MLA Report on Evaluating Scholarship (2006) said a problem remains: “Overall, **52.1% of respondents** [department chairs of English and languages programs] **report having no experience with evaluating [print-based] monographs in digital form**” (p. 45), and “although digital forms of scholarship increasingly pervade academic life, work in this area has not yet received proper recognition when candidates are evaluated for promotion and tenure” (p. 46).

Moreover, there is an increasing amount of digital humanities scholarship that is not simply a word-processed book-turned-digital—that is, a good portion of digital scholarship cannot be printed because it incorporates multiple media and interactivity to form its argument. **There are currently no examples of digital, multimedia scholarship in book-length form for humanities’ department chairs, such as those surveyed above, to evaluate.** The significance of this project, then, is to begin the journey that the MLA proposed: to better understand digital humanities scholarship, especially digital books. That understanding will continue to elude humanities scholars (and tenure and promotion committees) until examples of book-length, digital humanities projects are made available. **This project would fill that gap.**

In order to attract submissions for this digital book—what proposes to be the first digital media book published by the first open-access, academic press in the humanities—presenters from the Watson Conference will be encouraged to submit digital chapters using appropriate media and technologies to make their arguments. (See the Call for Texts for more about the topics and formats encouraged: <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.1/loggingon/watson-cfp.htm>). Computers and Composition Digital Press (<http://ccdigitalpress.org>) has asked us to submit the collection, and they have an impressive editorial board including international scholars in digital humanities computing (Katherine Hayles), media studies (Lev Manovich), visual rhetoric (WJT Mitchell), and electronic textual studies (Matthew Kirschenbaum), among other areas of specialization. *The New Work of Composing* will be open-access and accessible to readers with as few technological obstacles as possible.

3. Work Plan

The work on this digital book is ongoing, having started this past June 2008 and tentatively concluding April of 2011, when my co-editors and I plan to submit the final, accepted ‘manuscript’ to the press for publication. (My co-editors include Dr. Debra Journet, University of Louisville, who is the Watson Conference host and has edited several collections based on past Watson conferences, and one of her doctoral students, Ryan Trauman, who has expertise working in digital media.) The CCDP asks collection editors to complete most copy-editing and production work themselves. Because of my experience with editing *Kairos* (see above), I will be responsible for the copy- and design-editing and any production work involved in preparing the manuscript for publication. In addition, **the course release will allow me time to collaborate on designing the collection’s interface, sample chapters, and introduction as well as to draft the course proposal.** (See the Outcomes section for more details.) The project timeline, with the course release timeframe in bold, is below. The abbreviations T, C, and D indicate which co-editor is the lead during that stage (I am C).

Excerpted Timeline

November 15, 2008	Submission proposals due
December 1, 2008	Decisions made
January–April 1, 2009	Complete interface prototype (T/C), sample chapters (C), & introduction (D/C/T)
April 1, 2009	Send prospectus with 2 chapters, intro, and interface prototype
April 2009	Draft 300-level digital scholarship course proposal [C]
June–August 2009	Draft afterword (C) & interface (T/C)
September 1, 2009	Submissions due
Feb–March	Finish afterword (C) and interface (T/C)
May 1, 2010	Full manuscript sent to CCDP for review
April 1, 2011	Submission of complete manuscript to CCDP

4. Professional Development Outcomes

Regarding the time frame of this course reassignment grant, I propose to complete the following outcomes during Spring 2009:

- 1) co-design a web-ready (i.e., available on the Web) prototype of the interface that will thematically frame the ‘chapters’ accepted for the collection.

- 2) co-author the written introduction and prospectus.
- 3) collaborate with selected authors to complete a prospectus-ready draft of their chapter(s). [We need 2–3 chapters to submit with the prospectus.]
- 4) revise/complete the conference-theme overview chapter. This chapter is an outcome of student work from my Fall 2008 Multimodal Composition course (English 239: See <http://www.ceball.com/classes/239> for the syllabus). The students in that class will have attended the Watson conference and researched, scripted, filmed, and edited a final draft of this digital, multimedia overview chapter, which is their major project for the class. Because the students are new to reading and composing digital scholarship, I plan to shore up the piece with any necessary revisions so that it can be submitted with the prospectus and be ready for editorial-board review in late spring.
- 5) draft a 300-level course proposal for the English department undergraduate, Masters, and PhD programs on the topic of writing and editing digital scholarship. This class is needed to enhance the print-only options we currently offer in the Literary and Non-Profit Publishing sequence at the undergraduate and Masters level as well as the English education offerings and Writing for Publication graduate-level courses.

Although not necessarily within the course-release time frame, below are several related outcomes to this project to show that I have a concentrated and forward-moving research agenda in the area of digital scholarship:

- I plan to complete an “Afterword” for the edited collection, the theme of which will be the process of editing the field’s first digital book (and how that process differs from composing and editing print scholarship, which I have also done). I have submitted a preliminary proposal to the Research and Sponsored Programs office for an NEH Summer Stipend to cover the summer of 2009 during which I will complete a draft of the digital, multimedia “Afterword.”
- This project expands my 2008–09 New Faculty Initiative Grant, for which I am studying how authors compose new media scholarship. That grant covers travel and equipment expenses for this study, but this course release would offer me additional time to complete that related research by interviewing authors composing chapters for this book. Both projects fit my research agenda of studying how tenure stakeholders address digital scholarship in the humanities. (I received a 2008 FEIC Summer Professional Development Grant to build a prototype of a digital tenure binder to study this issue locally.)
- I have been asked to write a short article for *The Journal of Scholarly Publishing* on the intellectual work of editing multimedia, a topic that several members of the journal’s editorial board have said is of much need to their mostly print-centric readers.

5. Dissemination Strategies

As discussed earlier, we are planning to publish the book with Computers and Composition Digital Press, which is affiliated with Utah State University Press, an academic press well-regarded for publishing innovative and award-winning books in composition and new media studies. The purpose of the Computers and Composition Digital Press is to distribute free, open-access scholarship that needs to be disseminated in digital forms—as is the case with any interactive, multimedia scholarship such as this book. Because the press is new and *The New Work of Composing* will potentially present it with technological and other editorial issues that

digital scholarship brings to the forefront, we have already been in close contact with the editors so that we can work out issues as they arise.

Locally, I expect to showcase some of the ongoing work of this project through on-campus **seminars, brown-bags, and in-class discussions**. Nationally (and possibly internationally), I will be presenting my research on this book project at forthcoming **conferences** including MLA, CCCC, Computers & Writing, and also plan on attending EDUCAUSE to present there. I have also been in collaboration with the Humanistic Algorithms project at University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign’s NCSA site, where they are working to build metadata engines for multimedia, digital scholarship in the humanities, and they have an upcoming conference. In addition, once the book is published (around mid- to late-2011) **the press will offer free, open-access distribution to the collection**.

The audience for the digital book is primarily English studies scholars, as the focus of the multidisciplinary Watson conference—and thus the chapters that arise from the conference—is rhetoric and composition studies. We also expect humanities scholars (in media, cinema studies, technology studies, communications, art, design, etc.), social science scholars (in library science, sociology, psychology, informatics, etc.), and organizations (such as academic presses, MLA, and NEH) to be interested in the digital book, not only for its content but also for its form and potential reception in relation to issues of Fair Use, digital copyright, permissions, and tenure—all unresolved issues for those working in and with digital scholarship.