

Understanding the Journals that Write Us: A 30th Birthday Reflection

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Abstract

2013 marked the 30th anniversary, or birthday, of the *Computers and Composition* journal. In order to provide a reflective picture of where the computers and composition subdiscipline has been, what identities it has cultivated, and where it stands in relation to the larger field of composition, this study examines the articles published in *College Composition and Communication* (CCC) and *Computers and Composition* (C&C) from 1983–2011. This research identifies six major findings. The first five speak to the relationship dynamics between CCC and C&C: 1) the journals' overall publication relationship; 2) both journals' participation in a sticky theory-practice dance; 3) the ways each journal relates (or fails to relate) other subdisciplines to computers and composition; 4) the major topics displayed significantly in one journal and minimally in the other; and 5) both journals' overall trend of programmatic stasis and (slow) professional increase. This study's sixth finding presents an emerging trend in C&C: the slow and nuanced appearance of a sophisticated development from single to multiple points of entry in the journal's articles. Finally, these findings are put in dialogue with current assertions about the relationship between CCC and C&C to explore how they both align with and challenge previous assumptions.

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“Thirty was so strange for me. I’ve really had to come to terms with the fact that I am now a walking and talking adult.”

—C. S. Lewis

1. Birthday reflections

In the field of composition, we like to talk of anniversaries or birthdays as opportunities to pause and reflect. We deem them “moments,” as Kathleen Blake Yancey (2004b) has reminded us. When the field’s flagship journal—*College Composition and Communication*—turned fifty, we published not one, but two editions reflecting who we were and where we were going. Fifty is indeed an important age; however, as any young adult will tell you, there is also something pivotal about a thirtieth birthday. As Lewis articulated above, at 30 you are typically considered an “adult” in the eyes of the world at large; you are expected to leave behind your wild, experimental 20s and settle down. So what does

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this mean for the subdiscipline of computers and composition? Furthermore, what is to become of the subdiscipline as retirement announcements of founding scholars, like Gail Hawisher's in 2012, become more of an emerging pattern than an isolated incident? How can we better understand the legacy our mentors and leaders are leaving behind for us to tend to and mold—for as Joseph Harris (1999) reminded us, “our identities and allegiances as a field have not simply been handed down but constructed, even fought over, thus may yet once again be remade” (p. 561). How are we to stand on our own two adult feet, as any 30 year old must, without the ever presence of our founding mentors? As we celebrate our birthday and move into a new period of our collective publication life, it appears it might behoove us to seize our “moment” and reflect on the young life we have had, where we have been, who we have been, what we have valued, and how we have prepared ourselves for our impending journal-adulthood. However, understanding oneself and one's relationships to others is a complicated, arduous task, and turning inward to understand ourselves as an academic subdiscipline requires more than the latest self-help book. It requires an almost Viktor Shklovsky or Mary Shelley-like “defamiliarization”—an estrangement of the familiar, an uncanny investigation that explores the most familiar in more distanced terms. One such method of defamiliarization is to explore the content in the very journals at the heart of our field and subdiscipline: *College Composition and Communication* (CCC) and *Computers and Composition* (C&C). That is what this article will do.

This article explores the complicated and nuanced history of the computers and composition subdiscipline, its constructed and evolving identity, as well as its relationship to the field of composition as a whole by means of a research project that examines the journal articles published in the last 28 years of the field's and subdiscipline's flagship journals: CCC and C&C. This exploration will focus on a number of interconnected questions of identity: What historical trends in the technology/computers and composition movement are revealed in the articles published in the two journals from 1983–2011? What types of work has the main journal in the subdiscipline, C&C, valued and thus published since 1983 (the date of the journal's first publication)? Similarly, how many and what types of computers and composition articles has the main journal in the composition field as a whole, CCC, published and thus valued? Do the published articles in C&C and CCC display similar and/or differing trends? What do those trends say about the computers and composition subdiscipline, its past, present, and potential future, and its relationship to and/or influence on the field at large? Answering such questions can help us better understand who we have been, what identities we have cultivated for ourselves within the field of composition as a whole, and in what directions we would like to move in the future.

2. Our historical traditions

Historical explorations such as this are certainly not a new idea in our field or subdiscipline; as Sibylle Gruber (2004) stated, “it is certainly not a novel idea to trace the history of writing studies in general and computers and composition specifically” (p. 15).¹ Many scholars in our field have explored the history of the composition and rhetoric field in general and its historical progression through the movements of product-based thinking, process-based emphases, and social and cultural influences (Bloom, Daiker, & White, 1996; Bloom, Daiker, & White, 2003; Connors, 1997; Smagorinsky, 2006). There have also been pieces that have echoed this article's desire to highlight and explicate the importance of journals and professionalization in the field of composition (Goggin, 2000; Journet & Boehm, 1999). And we certainly would not be who we are without the anthologies that have highlighted the major topics of importance in the field and foreshadowed the role that technology and computer-related topics have played when placed within the larger context of composition (Lindemann & Tate, 1991; Miller, 2009; Villanueva, 1997). Finally, there have been shorter articles that helped provide snapshots of how the field was viewed and valued at different moments, whether it be a look at the field's goals in general, its trend of axiomatic division, or its genesis and development (Phillips et al., 1993; Corbett, 1987; Fulkerson, 1990, 2005). The same rich historical research exists in the subdiscipline of computers and composition; as Hawisher et al. (1996) noted:

computers and composition, although it is a relatively young field, is, nonetheless, already informed by a lengthy and complex history; already located in rich and influential patterns of historical developments in education,

¹ Further proof of this historical abundance can be found by turning to Rebecca Moore Howard's (2015) bibliographic work. In her section “Histories and Overviews of the Composition field” there are just over 400 entries.

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