THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION

IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION:

A MOMENT IN THE 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR

by

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CAN'T I JUST WRITE AN ESSAY ABOUT THIS?

My stomach lurched when I read the first major assignment for Dr. Christine Tulley’s Introduction to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing class in my first semester as a student in the Master of Rhetoric and Writing program at The University of Findlay: “Create a 3-5 minute digital movie for one of the [rhetorical terms], indicating 1) what it means in the context of writing and 2) how it can be used to enhance writing.” A digital movie? I had no clue what that meant. Can’t I just write an essay about this?

My confusion was not surprising for a Baby Boomer who has had more than thirty years of teaching English under her belt. My education and practice had been firmly grounded in alphabetic text. Sure, I had watched typewriters disappear from office desks to be replaced by personal computers and then laptops, but I welcomed the new technology that offered my students effective revision and collaboration opportunities. As “personal computers” entered more family homes in the early 1990s, my high school students began to ask if it was permissible to use Internet sites as possible sources for their research papers, and during that same period, my high school was proud to install a “writing lab” with word processors for student use. However, all of these changes were quite seamless in my alphabetic text world because all they really did was make alphabetic text electronic. In response, I became proficient at refilling a computer printer and I deciphered MLA documentation for a Web site; all was good because my classroom still revolved around the print essay with its familiar black Times New Roman text on linear white 8 ½” X 11” paper.

Meanwhile, the digital world was closing in on me, coming to roost on my computer screen in Dr. Tulley’s class. Her digital movie assignment was my first exposure to multimodal composition in an academic setting. My feeble attempt at expressing my ideas using a blend of
movement, image, and text opened my eyes to the challenges—and advantages—inherent in this form of composing. In addition, it became clear that the Snapchat, YouTube and Facebook activities of my Millennial Generation students have more meaning than simple social fun: daily, Millennials are practicing rhetorical skills that are becoming the norm for negotiating, creating and navigating in their post-secondary classrooms, personal relationships, and future careers. However, students’ digital writing practice often lacks intentionality; as a whole they are not consciously applying rhetorical conventions in their digital expression. Instead, they are often composing in the random rhetorical patterns inherent in social media expression, which are as capricious and shifting as social media itself. According to rhetor Kenneth Burke, a writer “can’t possibly make a statement without its falling into some sort of pattern” (A Rhetoric 65). He explains that “conventional form is the expectation of a particular form prior to encountering a work” (Counter-Statement 126). Thus, by bringing multimodal digital composing practices from social media into the writing classroom, instructors can clarify for students the academic “expectations” of “particular form[s]” that are appropriate for digital composing in professional, as opposed to personal, contexts. Doing so bridges two elements that are familiar to students: academic writing conventions learned from composing alphabetic essays in school and digital modalities learned from daily navigations on social media platforms.

With these revelations about digital multimodal composing in mind, I reconsidered my syllabus for my first-year composition (FYC) students at The University of Findlay. I wanted to give my freshmen students the same opportunity to compose digitally about an academic subject that Dr. Tulley had given me. To that end, I made one of the four required essays, the “instructor’s choice essay,” multimodal, rather than alphabetic text. Using lesson and assessment ideas from Cynthia Selfe’s 2007 text Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers, I
launched the first scholarly multimodal composition prompt of my career in the fall of 2013. I was apprehensive because I knew that I was diving into unfamiliar waters, but dive I did because I felt responsible to show my students how to apply academic and professional conventions to multimodal compositions, so that my students would in turn construct multimodal projects confidently and appropriately in other contexts outside of my classroom. I was pleasantly surprised by my students’ responses to the multimodal prompt: They paddled into the assignment with confidence, even taking rhetorical risks in their compositions that I had never seen them take in their alphabetic essays. I knew then that multimodal composition had found a place in my first-year composition classroom.

I know that I am not alone as I consider the pedagogical potential of digital modalities in my classroom. Other instructors in my department at The University of Findlay are doing the same. Other writing programs in other schools are too. However, I wonder, in the wider scheme of things, just how many are? And if they are, how are multimodal writing projects incorporated into the syllabi of college first-year writing instructors? How much support do their institutions offer them as they make this bold move? These questions form the foundation for this study.
INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MODALITY SHIFTS

During the sixth century BCE in Athens, Greece, a quiet “revolution in communication” began that would influence Western expression for the next 2,500 years. In the ancient Greek Assembly, “declaim[ing] aloud to the group” (Bernstein 63) in oral argument was privileged and applauded. Significantly, this form of rhetoric was inherently multimodal because in the act of “declaiming aloud,” the orator would use the visual elements of gesture and expression as well as the aural elements of inflection and pitch. However, over a period of several hundred years, the primacy of the spoken word in Greece would be shaken by the rising influence of written alphabetic text. This modality was adopted by the ancient Greek theater because playwrights such as Thespis found it was effective to use “permanent written script” to capture and record nuances of character and tragic elements (Bernstein 62), and it was through this form of entertainment that the printed word entered Greek popular culture. Reading and writingalphabetic text gained further ground through Greek politics as ordinary citizens began to participate in the Assembly because they had learned to read the written laws. The time was right for the modality of the alphabetic text to enter scholarly discourse—and stick.

Likewise, in the 1400’s, Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press initiated the spread of ideas through the modality of alphabetic text throughout Medieval Europe. This solidified the authority of reading and writing as literacy. This literacy movement empowered people to express their ideas to a wider audience than ever before. For example, the printing press “gave wings to dissent, endowing it with an amplifying power that enabled ordinary people to successfully challenge the might of the greatest power on the continent—the Church” (Bernstein 139). As in ancient Greece, the influence of the written word in Europe was a grass-roots movement that gained momentum because of the voice it gave to the growing masses who
engaged in reading and writing alphabetic text. In addition, rhetoric became more and more mono-modal as text on a page gained influence in civic and religious discourse. Technology (the printing press) influenced the modality (printed text) that people preferred to express their ideas, and this moment in history opened the floodgates for the dispersion of new ideas during the Renaissance years that followed Gutenberg’s innovation. This was not the last time that popular use of communication technology would have a seismic impact on the literacy practices of a culture.

During the 20th century, print alphabetic text was the principle modality that people used to engage in scholarly and professional communities, so university First-Year Composition (FYC) courses required students to demonstrate proficiency in that mode. During the latter half of the century, however, digital technology broadened the modality choices for writers, and these modalities became more and more accessible with the technologies that continued improving into the 21st century. This widespread use of digital communication outside the academy has cracked the infrastructure of alphabetic-text communication within the academy; each day that iPhones and laptops enter university classrooms in the book bags of students and teachers, the cracks grow wider. Expression using the “available means” of image, sound, movement as well as text has gained ground in the academy because in the digital context, expression is sensory, accessible, and immediate. For today’s FYC students, digital fluency rivals traditional print fluency because of daily practice on social media sites.

Therefore, today more and more professional, civic and personal communications are expressed using 21st century digital modalities. Since FYC is responsible for “[preparing] students for writing in college courses, in their professions, and in their civic and personal lives” (Froehlich and Froehlich 290), it is conceivable that in the near future, many FYC programs will
be compelled to make Digital Multimodal Composition (DMC) mandatory because students need to apply academic writing conventions to digital as well as alphabetic expression. However, the process of such a move has many unknowns because the digital wave is happening now; today’s university writing programs are the pioneers in this movement—and the guinea pigs. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis study is to discover if, and how, university FYC writing programs are implementing DMC, and determine what strategies for DMC implementation are beneficial for students, professors, and writing programs. In addition, this study will identify the programs that have taken the leap to making DMC a requirement for FYC proficiency, and explore the methods that programs have taken to reach that stage and meet the standards set for digital composition by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA). Driving this study is this question: How can university FYC programs best prepare for a future DMC requirement?

The timing of this study is critical. As Kathleen Blake Yancey noted twelve years ago in her 2004 College Composition and Communication Conference address, “For compositionists, of this time and of this place, this moment—this moment right now—is like none other” (297). By seizing the moment and adding DMC to their FYC writing requirements, many university writing programs are grabbing their proverbial surfboards and riding the digital wave that is cresting now in 2016. Others, however, are standing on the shore, wondering what to do.
WHY DIGITAL MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION? A LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature about DMC and its relationship to FYC reveals the rationale for university writing programs to insert DMC into their curricula and consider DMC as a future requirement for proficiency. This review also shows the current state of the presence of DMC in particular university classrooms and programs; many articles situate DMC in differing stages of engagement such as prompting DMC for the very first time in FYC class (Froehlich and Froehlich 2013), tracking the benefits and pitfalls of DMC assignments over a period of time (Sanchez, Lane and Carter 2014), and speculating on theories about DMC assessment (Moran and Herrington 2013; Yancy 2014). In addition, many articles address the varying states of instructor readiness for teaching DMC and the challenges of dealing with administrative concerns (Zanzucchi and Throng 2014). Finally, DMC requires particular network infrastructures for process, assessment, and storage; as a result, institutions have to actively commit to DMC by providing for these. The study which drives this literature review will attempt to explain the variety of trends in this ongoing process of the DMC wave. What is working? What is not?

Predicting the Impact of the Digital Wave

A majority of the articles in this review have been written in the last ten years (2005-2015), documenting the most current movement of DMC in writing programs and the trends that reside there. Voices in this review, and later in this study, include well-known rhetors such as Cynthia Selfe, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Andrea Lunsford and Jody Shipka; however, there are also the lesser-known voices of those from the trenches of community colleges and graduate writing programs who are bravely making the leap into the digital for the first time in their FYC classrooms and sharing their experiences for others in the field. All of these voices are valuable
because of the perspectives that they provide, and many have entered the unknown before the rest of the field. There is the sense that so many writing programs are poised for action, but are unsure about how to begin to implement a DMC addition; therefore, many of the articles were written to offer ideas and support because there certainly is no tried-and-true template for DMC implementation in FYC.

The sense of urgency of the digital movement in the context of FYC has been gaining momentum for two decades, beginning with multimodal pioneer Cynthia Selfe, who issued a call to action to “teachers of English studies, language arts and composition” (xix) in her 1999 book *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-first Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*. Selfe challenges educators to consider that “Literacy alone is no longer our business. Literacy and technology are. Or so they must become” (3). In the 1990s, Selfe clearly saw the digital wave closing in on the academy as computers and email accounts demanded a larger and larger presence in private homes, schools and businesses. In response, Selfe asserts that it is teachers’ “ethical responsibility” (xix) to understand how technology and literacy affect their classrooms, school districts, and communities.

Five years after the publication of Selfe’s book, Kathleen Blake Yancey addressed the Conference on College Composition and Communication in her speech, “Made Not Only in Words: Composition in the New Key.” Yancey echoes Selfe’s call to action by identifying the “moment,”—the “tectonic change” in literacy that is happening in all facets of the culture, including the academy (297-298). Yancey’s tone is no less urgent than Selfe’s when she points out that the definition of *writing* is changing due to the influence of digital communication: “What is writing, really? It includes print: that seems obvious. But: Does it include writing for the screen? How visual is it? Is it the ability to move textual resources among spaces…? Is
composing… not only about the medium but also specifically about technology?” (298-299).

Yancey is urging “compositionists” and educators to consider these questions because the answers are entering more and more composition classrooms. Selfe and Yancey agree that educators who ignore the digital movement are “not only misguided but dangerously shortsighted” (Selfe 24). Even more recently, in 2013, Andrea Lunsford wrote in her Forward to Digital Writing: Assessment and Evaluation: “[writing teachers] are very much in need of understanding [digital] texts, thinking through their characteristics… and developing commensurately appropriate forms of assessment and evaluation” (par. 7). Lunsford’s use of the adverbial intensifier very reveals a sense of exigency in her tone, and she joins Selfe and Yancey in urging educators to take a serious look at integrating DMC into their syllabi. As a result, university FYC programs are feeling the heat of change in cultural literacy practices, and pressure to address the DMC issue is coming from within the academy in response to literacy practices that are happening outside of the academy.

**Why Digital Multimodal Composition?**

These literacy practices are occurring in the digital realm. That is why in the expression DMC, digital multimodal composition is the focus of this study, as opposed to other modality options that, according to Christine Denecker and Christine Tulley, writing teachers also use such as “collages of pictures made with scissors and glue, chalked graffiti on the sidewalk, or slam poetry recited aloud” (par. 10). First, due to their inherent informality, these modalities are not utilized for academic composition; many digital genres like Prezi or iMovie have features that are appropriate for professional expression. Second, digital expression is becoming more and more universal in scope as most people have access to at least one electronic device that has Web
capabilities. Therefore, even though there has been much discussion in the rhetoric field about multimodal composition, the digital modes receive the most attention.

A leader in the multimodal movement, University of Maryland associate professor of English Jody Shipka cautions in “Sound Engineering: Toward a Theory of Multimodal Soundness” (2006) that composition instructors should acknowledge that there are different ways to approach multimodal composition, and the digital modalities may be rhetorically limiting. Shipka encourages “communicative flexibility” by offering FYC students “a series of open-ended tasks that ask them to consider how a [...] familiar communicative objective might be accomplished in any number of ways and with any number of semiotic resources” (356). These resources are those that the student writer may find the most appropriate to convey his or her message, so to that end, Shipka says that a product may “take the form of a printed text, a handmade or repurposed object, a film, web page or a performance” (356). Although Shipka’s ideas about utilizing all “available means” do have relevance rhetorically, this study will focus on the digital modes (rather than the homemade objects or performances) because the digital is utilized in the professional and civic contexts that FYC students are poised to enter.

Furthermore, digital multimodal composition is utilized across a broad swath of societal contexts. If modes are understood as “ways of presenting information […] including] words, sounds, still and moving images, animation, and color” (Lauer 24), the digital provides many applications that are easily accessible for composing. Lauer explains the use of the term mode in the context of the academic classroom: “There is a greater emphasis on design and process in the classroom which makes the term multimodal more suitable in that context” (23) as opposed to the term multimedia, which has a “greater emphasis on production and distribution in non-academic or industry contexts” (23). The use of the term multimodal, therefore, undergirds the
process pedagogy of the 21st century FYC classroom. Also, the prefix multi- in multimodal reflects the many modality choices that the digital has to offer student writers, which they can readily access through a wide variety of applications on their laptops or cell phones; this notion of multimodalities opposes the monomodal concept of alphabetic text. In their textbook *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*, Kristin Arola, Jennifer Sheppard and Cheryl Ball define *multimodal* for their post-secondary student audience: “The word *multimodal* is a mash-up of *multiple* and *mode*. A *mode* is a way of communicating […] *Multimodal* describes how we combine multiple different ways of communicating everyday life” (1). Most people today are practicing their “everyday life” communication in the digital realm; thus, *digital multimodal* composition is a most appropriate expression to describe 21st century literacy in the FYC classroom.

The final word in the expression DMC is *composition*, as opposed to the traditional word *writing*. This word choice reflects the fluid nature of expression offered in digital environments; and according to “Disrupting the First-Year Composition Course” (2012), the accessibility through the digital is attractive to writers and rhetors because composing in digital environments enhances the “organic” nature of the process: “Organic [composing] develops in non-linear clusters, like the way organisms develop […] it’s a concept that permits a clearer view into the pulpy, fleshy process of giving linguistic, visual and electronic architecture to our ideas” (“Disrupting,” par. 5). The non-linear approach in the digital mode—in direct contrast to the linear track of the alphabetic print mode—is an acquired taste from prodigious self-sponsored use. Writers gain confidence from this “organic” flow of digital composing, and instructors can build on that proclivity to work in digital spaces by increasing students’ awareness and intentionality in their digital expression. This concept is what drives the instructors referenced in
“Disrupting” to encourage the adoption of DMC in FYC, even if it “disrupts” the time-honored linear approach to process in the FYC classroom. Finally, to *compose* means “to arrange,” which opens the door to a variety of modes, which can include alphabetic text, images, or movement; whereas *writing* has traditionally been associated with alphabetic text.

**FYC and the Digital Wave**

Both self-sponsored personal expression and professional/technical writing have, therefore, been dominated by digital modes in recent years. As a result, Yancey suggests that FYC is considered a “gateway” (as opposed to “gatekeeper”) course that “[prepares] students to become members of the writing public and to negotiate life” (306). Bronwyn T. Williams echoes Yancey in his 2010 article, “Seeking New Worlds: The Study of Writing beyond Our Classrooms.” According to Williams, “beyond campus” literacies have relevance in FYC classrooms because these literacies—and the audiences that follow them—directly reflect the kind of discourse students will use in their professional lives: “Understanding more about the literacy practices in which students engage outside of the classroom or before they reach college (or practices in which they engage after college) complicate and benefit our research and teaching” (133). Since most of the self-sponsored practice of DMC is personal and mostly confined to social media, it appears that there is little formal instruction about standard academic principles for digital discourse beyond trial and error.

More and more, FYC is compelled to provide the “gateway” for these practices by teaching students the appropriate academic conventions for DMC that will help students communicate effectively in their classroom and professional lives. To that end, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Outcomes were modified in 2014 to address standards unique to DMC, demonstrating that, on an administrative level, the rhetoric community is
positioning itself for the advent of the DMC wave through post-secondary institutions. These outcome additions are designed to help create continuity in the composing standards as more and more FYC teachers embrace and adopt DMC in their syllabi.

There is also a movement within the academy to prepare FYC instructors to teach DMC projects so that they can meet the WPA Outcome standards. For example, in the second edition of the text *Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing*, published in 2012, editor Irene L. Clark notes that “an emphasis on new media and information literacy and their impact on the teaching of writing”(i) has been added. In her preface, Clark reasserts her target audience for the text and the purpose of the text: “[The text’s] goal is to [enable] prospective teachers to become conscious of how they think about writing in the context of a first-year writing class and develop strategies that can help students improve as writers” (xvi). As a result, Lisa Gerrard’s “Writing in Multiple Media” chapter has equal space within Clark’s text with chapters that cover the more traditional concepts associated with teaching writing such as Process, Audience, Revision, Assessment, and Teaching Grammar.

This digital multimedia chapter in Clark’s text, however, reveals that there is limited understanding about the role of DMC in the field. Gerrard’s “Writing in Multiple Media” lacks the deep troves of pedagogical treasures of the other chapters in the text. For example, out of thirty-one pages of chapter text, five are devoted to the features of word processing and four describe and define the different social media networks that instructors can utilize such as Twitter: “Twitter is a ‘microblogging’ tool that allows users to send and receive messages from a computer or cell phone and view them on a web page” (418). The possible reason why there is much energy devoted to a digital primer is that Gerrard can assume nothing about the digital knowledge of her audience; defining Twitter is just one example of the ways that she makes
certain that Baby Boomers and other digital novices understand the digital terminology that they must teach. As a result, nearly one-third of the chapter is devoted to explaining and defining concepts that are common knowledge for most Millennial students, but are unfamiliar landscape for many instructors. This drives home a concern that is inherent in the current flow of the digital wave: there are many instructors and department administrators who are not knowledgeable about composing in the digital themselves; as a result, they are not comfortable teaching DMC. Therefore, one of the challenges of a DMC addition to a writing program is to teach digital “immigrant” instructors the discourse landscape of digital composition; this needs to happen before pedagogical training can occur.

In “Introduction: The Current Moment in Composition,” Christine Denecker and Christine Tulley discuss the support that composition instructors receive as they prepare for the advent of the digital wave in their classrooms. Denecker and Tulley show that many instructors who have been nurtured on alphabetic text “distinctly feel the pedagogical tension between what was and the possibilities of what can be in the composition classroom” (par. 3). There are not many opportunities for professional development to help instructors learn about how to use and assign the new digital modalities; in addition, “workshops that are available are often ‘tool-oriented,’ not pedagogy-oriented” (par. 7). This is a problem because the how-to is provided for a particular digital modality, but the more important rhetorical aspect, “the relevant, semiotic channel for composing” (par. 7), is often not offered.1

Therefore, another challenge for instructors who are unfamiliar with DMC pedagogy is a limited understanding of the rhetorical dynamics inherent in the digital composing process. With

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1 There are exceptions, however. For example, The Ohio State University offers the Digital Media and Composition Conference, and it is attended by secondary and post-secondary teachers. Also, graduate programs, like University of Findlay, offer “pedagogy-oriented” instruction for digital composing.
the advent of the digital wave, compositionists such as James Porter are considering the rhetorical canons in fresh ways. For example, in 2009 Porter “re-theorized the canon of delivery for digital writing” (Adsanatham, Garrett, and Matzke 316). Porter’s “framework” includes the following five topoi:

- **Body/Identity**—representations of body, gestures, voice, dress, image, identity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity in digital spaces
- **Distribution/Circulation**—technological publishing options for reproducing, distributing, and circulating digital information
- **Access/Accessibility**—audience’s ability and competence for accessing and using digital hardware and software
- **Interaction/Interactivity**—the range and types of engagement […] encouraged or allowed by digital designs
- **Economics**—copyright, ownership, control of information, fair use, authorship, and the politics of information policy. (qtd. in Adsanatham, Garrett, and Matzke 316)

This 21st century adaptation of delivery by Porter applies digital elements to an ancient canon, and for instructors unfamiliar with digital composing, this presents a challenge. As Denecker and Tulley note, instructors have two layers of understanding to achieve: the “tool-oriented” and the “pedagogy-oriented” (par. 7). In order to begin to grasp theoretical concepts like Porter’s, digital novices must understand the landscape of digital tools and platforms. For example, Porter’s topoi of “engagement” using the variety of digital “designs” requires a working
knowledge of what those design options are—and a familiarity with how to apply them in the composing process.

As a result, FYC instructors who are digital novices are challenged by the variety of tool choices (blogs, Web pages, podcasts, Prezis) that function as “available means” for expression. Often, instructors are hesitant to add a DMC because they do not know how to teach students how to utilize the modes that digital genres offer; the leap from the print to the digital can appear daunting. This is a concern for many writing programs because sometimes this is often the root of resistance to a DMC requirement. Anne Zanzucchi and Michael Throng offer a solution to this kind of instructor resistance in “Thinking Like a Program: How Electronic Portfolio Assessment Shapes Faculty Development Practices” (2013): “new media” certification for instructors. Zanzucchi and Throng describe how in 2012, the University of California at Merced (UCM) partnered with the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence to offer digital media instruction to all faculty on the UCM campus. The certification showed faculty how “to incorporate new media approaches in composition pedagogy, and, in particular, how to design, facilitate, and assess the quality of multimodal projects” (par. 8). A certificate such as this would give instructors the confidence to initiate a DMC assignment in their FYC sections, and it would also create continuity when facilitating and assessing DMC projects campus-wide. Plus, this program fulfills the missing pedagogical piece of DMC training that concerns Denecker and Tulley. However, not all institutions have the resources or the administrative support needed for a comprehensive certification like UCM had.

UCM offered a DMC certification for its entire faculty, but Barbara Schneider argues that “the placement of professional teaching outside of disciplinary departments” are often “problematic” because faculty-wide programs “too frequently assume that teaching strategies are
generalizable, applicable across disciplines” (qtd. in McGrath and Guglielmo, par. 7). This is especially “problematic” for English departments because instructors are concerned with teaching DMC in the context of rhetoric. Therefore, Laura McGrath and Letizia Guglielmo advocate a department-based faculty development approach to teach a “pedagogy-focused and discipline-specific” methodology “within classroom environments where participants teach” (par. 9). In their article “Supporting Faculty in Teaching the New Work of Composing: Colleague-Guided Faculty Development within an English Department,” McGrath and Guglielmo suggest that English faculty serve as “facilitators” for a DMC pedagogy workshop (par. 10). In this context, English faculty facilitators “drew from their own pedagogical approaches to [digital] technology and multimodality, using tools […] sharing assignments […] and discussing their approaches to the challenges of assessing multimodal assignments” (par. 18). McGrath and Guglielmo assert that participants in this type of department DMC workshop would feel more comfortable (par. 19) with familiar facilitators, and as a result be in a better place to receive what is being taught. In addition, faculty facilitators can easily anticipate participants’ needs (par. 17), and also initiate on-going working relationships that involve teaching DMC. As in the example of the institutional DMC certification offered by UCM, administrative and institutional support is vital in order to make faculty development happen. Therefore, in many institutions, change needs to occur on an administrative level in order to rally what McGrath and Guglielmo call a “culture of support” for DMC. Institutional changes occur not only in attitude and acceptance of the personnel, but also in the classroom and network infrastructures.

For instance, DMC changes the audience dynamic of the FYC classroom. In the traditional, non-digital classroom, the teacher is the primary audience. The teacher may prompt
an imaginary audience for students, but ultimately, students know that the teacher will be collecting the print text and determining the quality of the composition. However, when digital composing enters the FYC classroom, the audience becomes much wider in scope. In their 2009 article, “Among the Audience: On Audience in an Age of New Literacies,” Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford explain why the teacher is no longer the primary audience in the 21st century classroom: “[T]he teacher remains an audience for student texts, but by no means the only audience, especially when student writing is posted on the Web” (57). The digital realm includes what Anne Herrington, Kevin Hodgson, and Charles Moran call “production genres” such as podcasts or blogs (201) that invite other audiences into the classroom, and these audiences-beyond-teacher are more strongly considered than the created or “invoked” (Ede and Lunsford 54) audiences of the non-digital classroom.

Digital genres also change the dynamics of the FYC writing space by inviting collaborative writing: “In these classrooms, there is discussion among students; sharing of ideas, resources and knowledge; and in-class communication fostered by the teachers, with the technology as the medium” (Herrington, Hodgson and Moran 203). This activity is recursive because students have become accustomed to collaborative exchange in social media platforms; they then apply the same social composing behavior for FYC digital projects—sometimes even using social media as part of the design of a digital FYC project. Charlotte Thralls clarifies different “dimensions” in which this collaborative writing occurs: “[A]ctive readers function as collaborative partners; the writer’s sense of anticipated audience constitutes a form of collaboration; the community in which the act of writing takes place or toward which it is aimed contributes […] conventions such as word choice, tone, [and] organization” (qtd. in Howard 55). In the FYC classroom, the digital brings an “anticipated audience” that includes fellow
classmates, the teacher, and “a potentially global audience” (Herrington, Hogdson and Moran 203). Furthermore, in her essay “Collaborative Pedagogy,” Rebecca Moore Howard notes that collaboration “levels” the teacher-student relationship: “When teachers are no longer dispensing knowledge in lectures but are guiding students in the collaborative process of discovering and constructing knowledge, students are empowered” (57). This empowerment from collaboration, plus the empowerment of acting as “writer-designers” using familiar digital genres that are accessible within their smartphones, creates a more student-centered FYC classroom. Thus, DMC brings a fresh dynamic of the teacher-student relationship, collaboration and audience that FYC instructors must consider when prompting DMC assignments.

The relationship between computer use and collaborative writing is also highlighted in Gerrard’s textbook chapter about DMC. For example, Gerrard reassures her readers that “Although critics of computer-based composition often imagine a cold, mechanistic environment […] the opposite is true. Computers socialize the classroom” (412). (On one level, it is significant that Gerrard has to make this statement at all in the second decade of the 21st century, when one considers that the computer has nearly eclipsed the pencil, so it is rather moot to be talking about opposition to computer use). Gerrard continues to explain how this social, collaborative experience can actually happen in the FYC classroom: “The [computer] monitor displays text clearly enough for small groups of students (gathering around the computer) to see, so that groups of three students coauthoring a project… can work together, with one ‘scribe’ doing the typing” (412). This vision of a collaborative classroom dynamic, as described in this instructional text for FYC teachers, seems almost too obvious, yet it reinforces that compositionists like Gerrard are not assuming anything about their intended audience, some of
whom may not understand the working dynamics of 21st century literacies in the writing classroom.

The advent of DMC with its fresh concepts of audience and collaboration also changes the physical space of the traditional FYC classroom. For example, since audience is no longer limited to the teacher, but rather the wider audience of the digital world within the computer monitor, the monitor itself becomes a central focus in a classroom. In the 1990s, the Apple computer gathered dust in the back of my public school classroom; today, the computer is front and center, and much concern revolves around its electronic “health” because today’s composition instructors depend more and more on the digital for classroom lessons in the digital realm. Furthermore, the monitor is not the only place where students gather; collaboration, drafting, and research can also occur on iPhones or iPads. In order to accommodate this working dynamic, traditional rows of desks give way to pods of seats and desks. Breaking up the classroom space in this way is new to many instructors who have been in the field since the pre-digital era, and it steepens the learning curve associated with the pedagogy of digital composing.

There are other ways that the FYC classroom can change when a DMC project enters the curriculum. For example, “Disrupting the First-Year Composition Course” highlights the use, documentation, and reliability of the research sources, which are foundational skills in academic writing classes. Significantly, the writer of “Disrupting” asks, “What if I told my students that they had to use Wikipedia in their research? […] Can a blog be as reliable a source as an academic journal? […] Do we need to change the way we teach citations?” (par. 9). These questions that relate to “sacred cow” issues of academic writing arise from the fluid nature of digital media, but they also reflect the fluid nature of the formation of the “new” FYC classroom that is forming under the feet of post-secondary teachers and students right here, right now.
Many FYC instructors have and will continue to have a difficult time with some of the answers to the questions that “Disrupting” poses. In addition, Shipka acknowledges that a “potential difficulty” with adding DMC is that the “wide and alertly chosen materials”—in this case, the digital—“are often equated with playing, or with artist- or childlike expressions of feelings or emotions” (356). Therefore, DMC would be considered “opposed to the communication of scholarly, rigorous arguments or ideas, something that is associated with the production of linear, print-based texts” (356). For this reason, many instructors feel that DMC has less educational value than alphabetic text; therefore, class time should be spent teaching students the principles of academic (alphabetic) writing, not Prezi template organization or the rhetorical effects of image and movement in an iMovie.

**DMC and Academic Rigor**

Because DMC is often considered by some to have less academic rigor than an alphabetic text, FYC instructors are challenged to determine how to assess DMC projects, and thus establish that rigor. For example, the “instructor’s choice” DMC project in my University of Findlay FYC classroom is worth 15% of the total class average, as compared to 75% total average of the three alphabetic essays, which are the mandatory essays for the final portfolio assessment. A DMC, if individual instructors choose to assign it as the “instructor’s choice” piece, is considered part of the complete portfolio, but currently it is not a required deal-breaker for passing or failing the class; the three alphabetic essays are privileged for that purpose. In addition, individual instructors who opt to assign a DMC choose how they will score it. I use a version of a scoring rubric from *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers* by Selfe. Confident of my ability to score a print essay, I felt less so when confronted with a wide variety of DMCs, ranging from Prezis with voice-overs to Moviemaker compositions. There is the sense that DMC assessment is
currently evolving, and as Charles Moran and Anne Herrington note in their essay, “Seeking Guidance for Assessing Digital Compositions/Composing,” “[T]eachers are glad to describe student adventures in multimodal composing, but when it comes to laying out our assessment procedures or criteria, we are most often silent” (par. 2). This shows that many teachers are apprehensive about assessing 21st century literacies like DMC; as a result, teachers may not feel that they can replicate the academic rigor of traditional text assessment with DMC text assessment.

Because the presence of DMC in FYC is evolving (and that is what makes it the focus of this study), the question of its rigor in relation to alphabetic text is also evolving. For example, the presence of DMC as a supplemental instructor’s choice project in my FYC classroom reflects my own reticence about privileging DMC before I feel I am ready to most effectively prepare my students for it; I am still learning about the variety of tools for digital composing and the rhetorical theory associated with DMC. With this instructor learning curve in mind, Chanon Adsnantham, Bre Garrett, and Aurora Matzke address Porter’s theory about digital delivery in “Re-Inventing Digital Delivery for Multimodal Composition: A Theory and Heuristic for Composition Pedagogy” (2013), and they assert that there are significant rhetorical advantages to composing in the digital realm: “[T]he computer and its capacity for multimodal electronic production […] adds the affordances of a digitally connected, networked environment—textual spaces that enable combinations of sounds, images, motions, and words for varied means of web publication, such as blogs, email, wikis, and social networking sites” (317). Compared to the singular linear mode of alphabetic text, DMC’s wider variety of “available means” suggests a possibility of more academic rigor than the alphabetic essay. According to Adsanatham, Garrett, and Matzke, digital composing “involves a variety of considerations that are discrete from
essayist writing, which include […] representations of body/identity, copyright, interactivity, and rhetorical velocity” (325). As a result, teachers who are digital novices are experiencing a learning curve for assessing individual DMC class projects and DMC projects that are part of FYC portfolio reviews which determine whether students have met the composing requirement of FYC.

Portfolio assessment using electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) broaden assessment options for FYC writing programs. Depending on an institution’s network, electronic portfolios can store alphabetic essays and digital compositions, and instructors can share and access them easily. Yancey, in her essay “Writing Assessment in the Early Twenty-First Century: A Primer” (2012), refers to portfolio assessment as the “third wave” of the three “periods” of assessment practices that she identifies occurring from the 20th century to the turn of the 21st century (167-168). Yancey notes that portfolio assessment is “characterized by attention to multiple texts, the ways we read those texts, and the role of students in helping us understand their texts and processes they used to produce them” (169). Portfolio assessment opens the door to including DMC in the mix with traditional alphabetic essays, and the attention to process in portfolio evaluation is also DMC-friendly, especially because of what Yancey refers to as the “localized and differentiated” writing that “varies by rhetorical situation and genre”(170). By including a “range of writing genres,” the portfolio engages “a construct of writing that is differentiated by task and one that is much closer to the way we think of writing now” (170). Published in 2012, Yancey’s assessment “primer” includes digital composition as a genre in her idea of “now.”

One of the suggested ways to assess individual DMC projects apart from an end-of-term portfolio review is to apply existing alphabetic print essay assessment to student DMC work. A 2013 study conducted by Emily Wierszewski in “‘Something Old, Something New’: Evaluative
Criteria in Teacher Responses to Student Multimodal Texts,” found that instructors overall prefer to use modifications of print essay assessment criteria, rather than create entirely new assessment criteria, as proposed by Yancey (qtd. in Wierszewski, Discussion, par. 1). Wierszewski’s study shows that organization, formatting, purpose, and audience were elements that were highly common between digital and paper compositions (Discussion, par. 1); however, she adds that “print criteria borrowed from rhetorical theory” also reflect the notion that “rhetorical principles ought to be transferred to how we talk about and understand new texts” (Conclusion, par. 1). This study reveals that instructors are pulling from what they already know about assessing compositions, and naturally, these will include elements of rhetorical theory.

However, two of the modifications that Wierszewski found were characterized as multimodality, or the “relationship between modalities in a text” (Discussion, par. 8), and technical execution, or the “ability to use technology skillfully to create a finished product” (Discussion, par. 8). Both of these assessment elements are independent of print text, and emerge as means to address composing features of DMC. However, as Denecker and Tulley noted previously in their discussion of “tool-oriented” versus “pedagogy-oriented” teacher training, both of these elements are also heavy with layers of instructional issues. First, if each element is an assessment tool, then there is the responsibility to teach that element. For example, pedagogy that emphasizes the relationship between visual literacy and composing practices would be appropriate to address multimodality, or pedagogy that demonstrates how to master the construction of an iMovie or Webpage would address technical execution. Mastery of digital elements, however, highlights the second instructional issue: instructors are often conflicted about how much they need to know about digital equipment, and they also struggle with the
amount of class time that should be devoted to teaching these elements at the perceived expense of alphabetic writing, which still reigns supreme in most FYC programs.

However, a resolution to these instructional issues is inherent in the digital space of the electronic portfolio. In “Writing Assessment,” Yancey describes the student-centered nature of 21st century assessment by highlighting “consequential validity,” which she asserts is privileged in today’s post-secondary writing (170). This is defined as “the power of assessment to help the person tested to learn […] the assessment is valid to the degree that it helps a student learn” (170). Process pedagogy, a concept that has a smooth fit with digital composition, is a component of portfolio assessment: “[T]he ability to learn is designed into the assessment model” (170). Charles Moran and Anne Herrington note that process “woven into the fabric of [a] curriculum unit” (Conclusion, par. 1) encourages student learning through the use of formative assessment, “such as reflective writing and periodic survey check-ins” (par. 1). For example, in my FYC class, students upload their working theses for an argument research essay onto a Blackboard Discussion Board. In this digital platform, students can view each other’s thesis process and provide feedback. Therefore, as a part of the formative process, “Peer review […] takes place on a regular basis, and technology skills that are learned by one student are made visible and shared with others” (par. 1). A summative assessment of the argument essay is applied when students submit the final product, using a rubric “designed to guide the work from start to finish” (par. 1). This type of peer sharing and feedback in the digital is also another way that instructors can take what is a familiar part of social media (“liking” and responding to posts) and make it intentional in the academic writing process.
DMC and the Composing Process

In addition to formative assessment opportunities in the process of drafting, DMC is often introduced into a FYC program as an effective process tool, often in preparation for a required alphabetic text. For example, Elkie Burnside, assistant professor at the University of Findlay (UF), shared in a 2014 interview that DMC is useful “in the composing process whether the final deliverable is multimodal or not.” She continues by noting that FYC students can use DMC for “invention, brainstorming or the drafting process.” As an example, Burnside describes how DMC can be used to produce “circles of context” for the sources that students are synthesizing for a literature review essay. She suggests that the contextual touch points among sources can be identified by “creating a visual graphic organizer as a part of the drafting process” of this alphabetic literature review essay, which is a required essay in UF’s FYC program.

Like Burnside, University of Findlay professor of English Christine Denecker identifies the rhetorical potential of DMC as an heuristic in the composing process in “Digital Heuristics: By Chance and By Choice” (2010). Denecker notes that DMC and alphabetic text “can and should be viewed as complementary units” (par. 3), and she illustrates this assertion by describing how a digital MovieMaker assignment in her FYC course “[aided] considerably in preparing students to manage their thinking” (Smith, qtd. in Denecker, par. 7). Her students were prompted to create an argument, and the composition “could contain text; however, the bulk of the message had to be displayed through visuals and auditory elements” (par. 8). Denecker used formative assessment for this project: the compositions were “screened” and “discussed” in class, and students were assigned a “process grade” (par. 8), which took pressure off the results. Denecker noted that “with the goal of perfection removed, students seemed more at ease with producing and then commenting on their own work and that of others” (par. 8). Referring to this
classroom experience as “heuristic by chance” (par. 9), Denecker observed improvements in her students’ organizational skills, audience awareness, and unity of ideas in the alphabetic text argument assignment that followed the DMC MovieMaker project (par. 9).

This “heuristic by chance” has often occurred with the DMC “instructor’s choice” project in my FYC classroom at the University of Findlay. Students are prompted to discuss an issue concerning the Millennial Generation in a digital modality of their choice, including iMovie, Prezi, Power Point, or MovieMaker. Laney*, a freshmen student, chose a Prezi with her voiceover to argue that online education is beneficial for many high school students. In her presentation, she effectively refuted three opposing views to online education using images, sound, and text. Laney agreed to share with the class the counterargument piece of her Prezi project during the counterargument lesson in the class argument unit; it was an effective teaching tool. Furthermore, Laney argued the same claim in her alphabetic argument research essay, a course requirement. Her organization and integration of source support was fluid and logical—mainly because she had already fleshed out these ideas using image, text, and the spoken word in her DMC project. Similar to Denecker’s observation of her students’ successful transfer of skills from a DMC to an alphabetic text project, Laney demonstrated skills of “researching and storyboarding the arrangement of [her] digital [argument]” (par. 9), and Laney’s DMC functioned effectively as a heuristic for her alphabetic text argument.

Utilizing DMC as a heuristic tool in the writing process clearly has many advantages for FYC students. Denecker draws on the theoretical ideas of the New London Group to describe the particular literacy skills that students will engage when composing a digital project, whether it is intended as part of a process to create an alphabetic text final product—or if it is privileged
as a final product itself in the FYC classroom. Denecker suggests that instructors should “design pedagogies that challenge students” to do the following:

- construct, grow, or invent meaning as they compose;
- transition or code-switch between visual and alphabetic forms[…];
- and work in more than one medium to allow for multiple avenues to stimulate and support creativity. (par. 35)

If students are composing digital projects as heuristics for alphabetic projects, they are honing their code-switching skills as they shift from using image, sound and movement to the modality of linear text. As the FYC student Laney demonstrated above, code-switching between modalities encourages students to consider how to order their ideas, present their evidence, and express their critical thinking. It appears that Laney used the visual elements of Prezi (shape, image, movement) to make decisions about arrangement and order. These coincided with her spoken text to convey her message. She then transferred her arrangement of ideas to her argument essay. Her development in this essay was also strong because she had already articulated her ideas to a live audience and gauged how well the audience was persuaded by her logic; this gave her confidence to expand in her alphabetic text project.

For many of today’s Millennial students like Laney, the foundation of this kind of confidence is daily practice of audience awareness and delivery in social media platforms. Even though students may lack rhetorical intentionality, they choose among a variety of digital modalities that are the “available means” within their portable electronic devices. Besides simply being a “gateway” through which students pass as they enter scholarly and professional
discourse, FYC can also function as a “bridge” to intentional rhetorical practice with digital modalities. A DMC addition makes the FYC classroom relevant for the 21st century.

**The Influence of the Digital Wave on the Culture of FYC**

In the same way that oratory made way for alphabetic text in ancient Greece, alphabetic text is now making way for digital expression in the 21st century. These shifts in the ways that societies communicate affect more than just the rhetorical elements of discourse contexts—entire cultures shift as well. The culture of FYC is changing as each semester passes and as students enter composition classrooms with more and more electronic tools for communication. Furthermore, instructors become more and more aware of the presence of these tools—and begin to consider the educational and rhetorical potential of the digital. How do the cultures of post-secondary writing programs change when digital composition enters FYC syllabi? Is DMC integrated with the established FYC culture of alphabetic text, or does DMC enter a program independently of alphabetic text? As Kenneth Burke notes, when there is a “violation” of a conventional form, “a new convention of its own occurs” (196).

During the final two decades of the 20th century, the “multimodal prophets” of the rhetoric world—Selfe, Yancey, Shipka, and Lunsford—identified the movement of the digital wave and signposted many of the changes that are now occurring in the rhetoric and composition community. This revolution in communication converges in FYC, so that is why the FYC context is the focus of this study. Said another way, FYC, as the gatekeeper/gateway course of an institution, bundles together the interdependent educational and rhetorical elements that, in theory, produce student writers who meet the academic writing standards set by the institution. A DMC addition affects each element, including those addressed in this study: pedagogy, assessment, classroom dynamics, teacher readiness, student readiness, and institutional readiness.
In addition, the literature suggests a pattern or process of DMC integration into post-secondary FYC programs. First, there is the institutional or department acknowledgement of the presence of self-sponsored digital composing and the rising dominance of digital expression in today’s professional, personal, and civic worlds. Second, instructors appear to invite DMC into their syllabi on a low-stakes basis, utilizing DMC as a heuristic for an alphabetic essay or a tool for formative assessment. Often these (sometimes furtive) DMC additions are learning experiences for both instructors and students as instructors learn how to most effectively assign and assess digital compositions, and students learn how to apply academic conventions and choose the best available means to express their ideas. Finally, because of its potential for both rhetorical and academic rigor, is there a progression toward a future DMC requirement for FYC proficiency—and how will/can that occur?

Therefore, this study tracks this pattern of DMC progression and provides insight into how institutions of differing sizes and dynamics are approaching each step. Additionally, this study will explore what influences each institution to initiate a DMC addition to FYC. The comparison that follows provides an introductory look at two institutions and their patterns DMC integration.

**Implementing DMC in FYC: A Comparison of Two University Writing Programs**

A comparison of DMC implementation at two different institutions—a university with 39,000 students and a university branch with 1,000 students—reveals how widely disparate the process can be; there appears to be no continuity or organized progression of DMC entering FYC programs across the country. The large university, Purdue University, has an FYC program that is described in “Engaging Writing about Writing Theory and Multimodal Praxis: Remediating WaW for English 106: First Year Composition” (2014) by Fernando Sanchez, Liz Lane and Tyler Carter. Purdue’s 150 sections of FYC are divided into eight “syllabus approaches,” of
which Writing about Writing (WaW) is the most recent (119). All students are required to take the English 106, Purdue’s FYC course, and they have “no control” over the syllabus approach that their instructor has selected to use (119). However, all eight syllabus approaches share common WPA Outcomes: “rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and literacy for composing in electronic environments” (119, emphasis added). This implies that at Purdue, all students will be constructing a DMC in their FYC course, regardless of the syllabus that is used. The WaW syllabus approach that interests Sanchez, Lane and Carter is based on the theoretical background proposed by Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle. Downs and Wardle contend that “writing instructors prepare students to write across all disciplines not by teaching genres, but by teaching […] students to] develop a meta-awareness of contextual elements that shape writing so that they can become familiar […] with the type of writing specific communities value” (qtd. in Sanchez, Lane and Carter 120). This meta-awareness provides the theoretical foundation for the WaW syllabus, and it drives the DMC’s that are assigned. Since other Purdue syllabi with titles such as Digital Rhetorics and UR@ were in place before the addition of WaW, there is the impression that DMC had a place in the Purdue FYC program before 2011, when WaW was added.

The smaller university in this comparison of DMC implementation is a community branch institution: Pennsylvania State University at Hazelton. In their 2013 essay, “Implementing 21st Century Literacies in First-Year Composition,” PSU assistant professors Maggie Gordon Froehlich and Peter Alan Froehlich provide a case study of adding DMC to their FYC to “encourage colleagues to consider implementing twenty-first century literacies (21CL)

Note: The Sanchez, Lane and Carter article was published in 2014, and WPA revised its outcomes to better accommodate DMC projects in that same year.
into their own FYC courses, while also providing fair warning to the challenges involved” (289). Their first attempt at adding DMC in 2010 was to “[graft] digital media projects onto a well-established and successful syllabus” (291) because Froehlich and Froehlich knew that they were treading on unfamiliar turf; therefore, by “grafting” DMC into what was familiar, they felt that it would assuage concerns that their students—and colleagues and administrators—would have (291). Froehlich and Froehlich measured the success of this approach by the student evaluations of the course; most students welcomed the DMC addition, but a “small but vocal” minority of the students experienced “anxiety, confusion and resentment” (292). Froehlich and Froehlich considered the student reactions and re-constructed the FYC course to include pedagogy that included “highlighting the parallels between media production and traditional writing process” and breaking the multimodal assignments “into discrete steps” (293). Noting that their process of DMC implementation is “not over,” Froehlich and Froehlich note that they continue to re-evaluate their FYC course so that they can better serve the needs of their students.

Two Different Approaches to Applying DMC

Comparing PSU-Hazelton and Purdue reveals two approaches to introducing DMC into FYC. The process of introducing DMC at PSU-Hazelton is more foundational and raw; Froehlich and Froehlich are tracing their experience which moves from their initial “insufficient and overwhelming” attempt to a more mature and informed pedagogical methodology. On the other hand, the addition of the Purdue WaW syllabus approach reveals a writing program which has gone beyond that initial, awkward step and has considered digital composition in a variety of theoretical facets; the meta-awareness concept of WaW is only the most recent. This shows that there is clearly a disparity in the maturity and depth of DMC use in these institutions. One
possible explanation is that Purdue, a large institution with more staff and resources than PSU-Hazelton, was able to dive into the digital much sooner.

Therefore, Froehlich and Froehlich spend much more energy on the foundational logistics of a DMC addition at PSU-Hazelton that Sanchez, Lane and Carter seem to have the luxury to assume at Purdue. For example, Froehlich and Froehlich express their concerns about the “personal and institutional fit” of DMC into their program. They were concerned about their colleagues “who have invested years into perfecting traditional modes of teaching,” who might “find insufficient exigency or opportunity to…master the practical requirements of this approach to composition” (290). Those very same PSU colleagues who are hesitant to warm to a DMC adoption also might question the amount of class time spent on digital composing skills at the expense of the “basic research and writing skills that are so necessary to the success of our students” (290). Since PSU-Hazelton has a smaller and more intimate staff, those disparate voices would have more power; they might be lost in the shuffle of the large Purdue faculty that includes first-year TAs who follow the lead of their mentors. To that end, Froehlich and Froehlich suggest that instructors “must be empowered to innovate” and that full-time instructors at PSU-Hazelton may design their courses, select texts and assess student work “independently” as long as they are following the “common objectives” set by the writing program administrator on the main PSU campus (291).

At Purdue, instructors (and second-year TAs) are empowered to choose the syllabus approach that they prefer. This choice is in place because Purdue’s DMC inclusion has matured in their writing program; the eight syllabus choices reflect different pedagogical approaches, of which the WaW syllabus is designed to teach what “we, as composition scholars and researchers, understand and accept about writing itself” (120). In this sense, the WaW syllabus uses DMC as
a tool for students to learn the rhetorical conventions of academic writing and therefore to learn to meet the academic composing standards of Purdue and the WPA Outcomes. In this sense, the genesis of WaW is based on a rhetorical concept of a “meta-awareness” about writing. On the other hand, by “grafting” DMC into a “well-established” syllabus, PSU-Hazelton instructors are simply assigning DMC projects to replace alphabetic texts projects, for which the syllabus was originally designed. This less mature approach does not consider the rhetorical gains or intentionality that can occur from DMC; this may be why some of Froehlich and Froehlich’s students did not respond well to the DMC inclusion. For example, one student expressed “feeling that the turn from text to multimedia was gratuitous, that our assignments ‘indulge a fetish for technology’ at the expense of student preference and, ultimately, success” (qtd. in Froehlich and Froehlich 292). Referring to such criticisms such as this as “partially just,” Froehlich and Froehlich made changes in the way DMC is integrated into their syllabus. For example, they “highlighted the parallels between media production and traditional writing practices” (293), which resembles the thinking behind Purdue’s WaW syllabus.

Another difference between Purdue and PSU-Hazelton is the place of DMC in the composing process of the assignments. For example, Purdue’s WaW syllabus posits the use of DMC as an invention or revision tool, and they ground their pedagogy in insight from Jason Palmeri: “[I]f we limit students to only alphabetic means of invention and revision, we may unnecessarily constrain their ability to think intensively and complexly about their work” (qtd. in Sanchez, Lane, and Carter 120). WaW, then, reflects an organic approach to a DMC inclusion; Purdue instructors are considering where DMC would fall naturally into the composing process. This contrasts with the “grafting” of DMC by PSU-Hazelton instructors, which privileges the wording of the syllabus rather than the process of writing. Finally, since the DMC replaced an
alphabetic text assignment in the “well-established” FYC syllabus, the emphasis appeared to be more about DMC product, rather than process. Denecker refers to this type of digital assignment as a “stand-in” which means that the digital assignment “usurp[s] written text” (par. 3). This also may explain the stress that was expressed by Froehlich and Froehlich’s students the first time that DMC was assigned.

Another challenge faced by FYC instructors who include DMC in their syllabi is the disparity in student digital skills. Purdue’s WaW syllabus incorporates “hands-on invention exercises involving technology and social media platforms with which many students are already familiar; we hoped to cushion the learning curve for students” (Sanchez, Lane and Carter 120). As is the case in any FYC classroom, some students have a strong background in digital media knowledge; others are less skilled. However, WaW assumes that most students have had some experience with technology (i.e. a Smartphone) and some experience on some form of social media (i.e. Instagram). In an organic way, a “stream of assignments that complement our students’ growing literacies in technology and composition theory” (121) are used to “deploy metacognitive rhetorical skills relevant to FYC” (121). On the other hand, PSU-Hazelton, with its emphasis on DMC-as-final-product such as a “historical narrative in digital audio” (Froehlich and Froehlich 291), puts stress on their students, some of whom expressed “anxiety about adopting new technologies” (292) in addition to the basic research and writing skills necessary for success in a FYC course. PSU-Hazelton appears to be adding DMC mainly for the sake of keeping up with the 21st century literacy movement. Purdue may have experienced some of what PSU-Hazelton did early on, but the WaW article illustrates approaches to teaching DMC that are more rhetorically expedient.
What Is Significant about Comparing Purdue and PSU-Hazelton?

The differences between Purdue’s and PSU’s relationships with a DMC inclusion demonstrate many significant inconsistencies between the two institutions, such as teacher support and training, pedagogical practices, rhetorical use of DMC, and student empowerment. Will these same inconsistencies emerge in a study that includes a broader sample of writing programs, rather than just two? For example, concluding that Purdue entered the digital conversation because it is a larger institution than PSU-Hazelton is a narrow view; that assumption may not have validity when considering the large number of institutions in this country whose writing programs are also adding DMC—Purdue and PSU are not truly representative of all such institutions. Some small institutions may be quite progressive in their DMC involvement because they have a large number of digital-native faculty or the faculty happens to have a strong interest in digital expression, or a university may have a stronger literature department and a weaker rhetoric department. Therefore, one rationale for this study is that it will survey a minimum of ten post-secondary institutions to get a broader and more representative picture of post-secondary DMC practice than the articles from this literature review present. This comparison reveals that many articles focus on isolated studies, as is the case with Froehlich and Froehlich at PSU or Sanchez, Lane and Carter at Purdue. Furthermore, what do inconsistencies, as well as similarities, among writing programs mean for the future of the digital movement into FYC?

In addition, comparing PSU-Hazelton and Purdue reveals one institution in the throes of introducing DMC into the culture of the FYC writing program (PSU) and another institution that is experimenting with different philosophical uses of DMC (Purdue). What are the challenges of each developmental stage of adherence to DMC, and how are writing programs meeting these
challenges? There may be other programs that, like Purdue, are spear-heading innovative ways to teach students how to best harness the rhetorical potential inherent within the digital modes. Also, there may be other programs, like PSU-Hazelton, that can offer insights about initiating the dive into the digital.

The discoveries about the DMC best practices and programming, gleaned from a wide variety of institutions—large, small, public, private, East coast, West coast—will help articulate a clearer picture of the digital movement at this moment: the 2015-2016 academic year. DMC has barriers that can impact its movement into the standards of FYC pedagogy. These barriers include network and financial limitations, conflicting pedagogical philosophies, administrative apathy, and instructor opposition. By engaging in the moment, much can be learned about how to confront these barriers to DMC as they transpire. In addition, only in this moment can the trends associated with DMC implementation be captured in motion. Therefore, time is relevant for this study because at some point, the moment will pass, and with it, the opportunity to learn from it.
METHODOLOGY

Assumptions and Research Questions

In order to capture a snapshot of the movement of DMC into FYC classrooms during the 2015-2016 school year, English department writing directors from a variety of institutional settings were surveyed about the status of digital composition within the contexts of their FYC writing programs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover trends and patterns of DMC implementation in FYC programs.

One of the assumptions of this study is that many instructors have been transferring what they know (alphabetic writing pedagogy) to what they are newly implementing (DMC pedagogy); this parallels the learning transfer that their students experience as they shift from composing in the alphabetic to the digital contexts in an academic field. Related to this assumption is that most Millennial students arrive in FYC classrooms with a standard practice of digital composing in their self-sponsored writing; in order for students to shift from unintentional to intentional rhetorical choices in digital “available means” for FYC assignments, such self-sponsored composing experience must be inherent in students’ writing histories.

Another key assumption related to this study is that the spread of digital influence is wide and deep across post-secondary composition education; therefore, most FYC programs are affected in some way, whether they have adopted DMC as a mandatory course requirement or are simply considering the possibility of an elective DMC assignment in FYC course syllabi. Embedded in this notion are the suppositions concerning the potential barriers that impact the ways that DMC enters a FYC program, and these include the technological learning curves of both instructors and students, and the varying degrees of support from both institution and department infrastructures. This study tracked the ways that FYC programs address these barriers.
Therefore, the assumptions provided a foundation for the following research questions which drove this study:

1. Do institutional characteristics (size, student demographics, network support) affect DMC implementation?
2. In what pedagogical context does DMC enter an FYC program?
3. What are the potential challenges to a DMC implementation, and how are FYC programs addressing these challenges?
4. How does DMC align with current FYC program writing outcomes in each institution, and how are these outcomes addressed pedagogically?

The Survey and Interview

In order to track the current movement of DMC in FYC programs, this study has two parts: a survey that asks writing program directors to discuss about the presence—or lack thereof—of DMC in their FYC classrooms (see Appendix A) and discourse-based interviews with writing program directors that ask them to specify aspects of DMC implementation that are unique to their programs (see Appendix B). The interview questions are related to the survey questions because the interview questions invite participating directors to expand on the issues presented by the survey questions; the interview is a follow-up to the survey. Directors had the choice between responding to the interview questions in written form by email or orally via telephone or a face-to-face interview.

Both the survey and the interviews target the following areas: instructor experience with DMC, pedagogical approaches, assessment options for DMC, and institutional support for DMC. The participants in the study were chosen because they were clearly identified on each school’s
Web site as FYC program directors. It was assumed that these directors would have broad knowledge of their department FYC teaching personnel, their university’s writing outcomes, and their program’s pedagogical approaches. The method of inquiry was grounded theory because this study identified the main concerns that writing program directors have about the implementation of DMC in their FYC programs. A grounded theory study such as this one is descriptive and emerging because it reveals patterns of behavior in the implementation process and explores what these patterns mean.

In addition, the research setting for this study is FYC because this kind of composition course “functions as a bridge between high school and college experiences” (Reiff and Bawarshi 315), and upon completion of an FYC course, students often must demonstrate their readiness for composing in scholarly and professional contexts. FYC is considered a writing proficiency course in many universities, so large swaths of the student populations pass through FYC classrooms. Here, the digital wave has the potential to take hold in the academic composing practices of a significant number of Millennial Generation students because many institutions mandate that all students take a FYC course: “Positioned as it is at a transition point for students entering the university, the FYC course is uniquely suited to engage, develop, and intervene in students’ purposeful reflection on their learning and application of this learning to new contexts” (Reiff and Bawarshi 331). Therefore, the survey invited directors of FYC programs to reflect on the presence of DMC in their classroom practice and identify the rhetorical strategies that they and their writing instructors use to teach DMC.

The terminology used in the survey questions included concepts that are traditionally associated with alphabetic composition pedagogy such as prewriting/heuristic, reflection, holistic assessment, scoring rubric and formative feedback. These terms, familiar to post-
secondary writing instructors and writing program directors, are representative of the FYC discourse community. According to Porter, a discourse community is “a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is regulated” (39). The common interest that links the study survey to the participants is the concern for the success of FYC student writers, and that commonality is conveyed through the language of the survey. Applying traditional pedagogical terms to a discourse about digital composition helps study participants to situate the survey questions more easily into the context of their own programs, regardless of the relative presence of DMC. In addition, the use of these terms enhances the ethos of the study survey because a “discourse community shares assumptions about what objects are appropriate for examination and discussion” (39). By choosing to take the survey (and also responding to the interview questions), participants contributed to the shape of the discussion of the evolving DMC movement, which is evolving.

Therefore, the language of the survey was a vehicle to spread the conversation about digital expression among the FYC discourse communities whose program directors participated in the survey. Porter notes that change can be “effect[ed]” when people within a discourse community “encounter and learn new codes […] intertwine codes in new ways […] to expand semiotic potential” (41). For example, asking participants, “to what degree is [audience] taught in relation to DMC” in their FYC programs extends the idea that audience pedagogy is one of the rhetorical considerations that is applied to DMC pedagogy, and widens the conversation about the DMC movement among those in the FYC field.

Therefore, while the language and structure of the survey part of the study collected consistent and controlled responses about the DMC presence in a variety of schools, the discourse-based interview part of the study gathered insights about DMC pedagogy and
assessment that are more particular to institutions. Within the interview context, participating writing directors reflected upon the challenges and strategies of DMC implementation that affected their individual programs. Because the interview questions were designed to extend upon the survey questions, the directors’ answers provided increased clarity about the issues that the survey merely touches. Below are the interview questions regarding the use of digital multimodal composition in first-year composition (also see Appendix B):

1. Why have you added digital multimodal composition (DMC) to your first-year composition (FYC) program?

2. Describe the status of your university’s commitment to building or expanding network support for DMC.

3. Describe your university’s lab resources for FYC classroom use, storage/access for student projects, and students’ access to computers.

4. Describe a challenge that your program encountered with implementing DMC and how you addressed the challenge.

5. To what degree should the scoring criteria used for alphabetic essays be applied to digital multimodal composition?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

The final question, “Is there anything else you would like to add?” was particularly revealing because it allowed the respondents the opportunity to identify a DMC issue that is unique to his or her institutional context.
Limitations

The survey and the discourse-based interviews addressed the aforementioned questions; however, there were several limitations to both the interviews and the survey questions. First, in order to fulfill the Institutional Review Board (IRB) qualifications, the survey and interview questions had to be crafted very early in the process of this study. Research for the literature review revealed essential concepts associated with DMC pedagogy that had not been identified at the time that the survey and the interview had been designed. For example, if DMC is taught in FYC classrooms, to what degree do students transfer their knowledge of digital composition from their self-sponsored practice to their academic practice? How do/can instructors make that transfer intentional? As the literature suggests, these questions are valid because people learn effectively when they are able to hook a new concept to a “prior genre knowledge” (Reiff and Bawarshi 314). Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi cite Beaufort’s assertion that prior genre knowledge is “one of the mental schema that writers invoke as they analyze new writing tasks in new contexts” (314). This learning transfer from the alphabetic to the digital is a key element in 21st century FYC pedagogy when DMC is implemented into a writing program. However, even though the survey/interview participants are not questioned about transfer and intentionality directly, some of the participants’ answers do address these issues indirectly.

Another limitation for this study is that there are only eleven survey participants and two interview participants. An original goal of this study was to harvest a wide and broad response field of writing program administrators from as many different kinds of post-secondary institutions as possible and from as wide a geographical range as possible. To that end, forty-seven surveys were sent out to schools over the period of late-November 2015 to mid-January 2016. (Reminders were then sent to the schools three weeks following the initial query).
Fortunately, however, the eleven responses do represent each of the following institutional dynamics: small and large private as well as small and large public. In addition, there are schools from the East coast, the Midwest, and the West coast. Although a more comprehensive view of the digital wave would have been ideal, the responses do provide a balance of institutional culture and geography.

The survey itself, by the way the questions were designed, is also limiting because it requires directors to make sweeping generalizations about instructors and their classroom activities, and many of these generalizations are based on perception. For example, the choice selection the survey offers for describing the DMC experience of FYC instructors is quite narrow (See question #6 in Appendix A), and forces respondents to characterize an entire FYC faculty in one simple description. This does not allow for the variety of experiences and backgrounds that instructors bring to a program; in addition, it does not allow for the personal influences of particular instructors within a program who may or may not support DMC.

Finally, since this study was meant to track the digital movement in FYC programs, it would be beneficial to survey again the same eleven schools who responded as follow-up. This second survey could take place in a subsequent year in order to determine the progress of the trends that this study had articulated, and identify new trends. Using the same survey tool could reveal pedagogical, administrative, institutional network, and assessment trends. These trends might demonstrate the pace at which DMC moves into/through FYC programs and could be a potentially effective comparative study among institutions.
RESULTS

The Schools Represented in This Study

Out of forty-seven survey inquiries sent to universities all over the United States, ten writing program directors responded to the study survey; in addition, one writing director from a small private university sent an email that he did not take the survey because he was not familiar with the term digital multimodal composition. Therefore, of the eleven total schools signified by this response pool, most were large public schools (seven), with the remainder being two small private schools, one large private school, and one small public school.

Geographically, schools from a variety of states were represented in the study results, including California, Michigan, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and Maryland. The goal was to show results from as broad a spectrum of institutional size, educational philosophy, culture, and geography as possible based on the assumption that the spread of digital influence is democratic; it reaches everywhere in the culture.

Alternate names were assigned to schools whose programs were analyzed in detail in this study. These names were based on the information the directors gave about their schools in the study survey question #1, “Which best describes your institution?” In order to keep the study results anonymous, the schools were named according to the elements that distinguish them from each other. In addition, the names provide insight about the schools’ institutional dynamics and general geographical locations (see table 1):
Table 1: The names assigned to the six institutions analyzed in detail in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name for this study</th>
<th>Description of the school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Urban Public</td>
<td>large urban public university located on the West coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Private MW</td>
<td>small private university located in the Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Public MW</td>
<td>large public university located in the Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLarge Public MW</td>
<td>moderately large public university located in the Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Public MW</td>
<td>small public university located in the Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Public E</td>
<td>large public university located near the East coast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The schools renamed for Table 1 were schools that could be researched in more detail on their public Websites to gather information about their FYC programs. This information helped to provide insight into the answers that their writing directors provided, yet still preserve the anonymity of the schools.

Of the ten FYC program directors who completed the survey, two volunteered to participate in the study interview. FYC Director H from a large urban public university (Large Urban Public) on the West coast, responded to the five interview questions via email. Another director, Director D, from a small private Midwestern university (Small Private MW), agreed to
a face-to-face recorded interview. These two interviews are key to the analysis of results because each represents a different context for the movement of DMC in FYC programs, which was a goal of this study. A third director, Director P (Large Urban Private) indicated that he was unable to complete an interview for this study, but he invited me to read his blog to gather insights about his philosophy for writing pedagogy.

The survey results and interview responses were coded according to significant patterns or trends that provide insights about the way DMC is affecting FYC programs represented in the study. These patterns or trends come from the responses of the ten schools whose directors responded to the survey. The type of coding used is open coding, which means that labels were created for chunks of data, and these labels summarize what is happening in the survey and interviews. The coding is grounded in the research questions that initiated this study:

5. What institutional characteristics (size, student demographics, network support) affect DMC implementation?
6. In what pedagogical context does DMC enter an FYC program?
7. What are the potential challenges to a DMC implementation, and how are FYC programs addressing these challenges?
8. How does DMC align with current FYC program writing outcomes in each institution, and how are these outcomes addressed pedagogically?

These questions predetermined the coding process, and they influenced the approach taken to identify the trends that emerged from the survey and interview results. This chapter describes the elements of each of the following trends:

- Institutional support for DMC
• Instructor support for DMC
• Best practices for DMC pedagogy
• Common assessment strategies for alphabetic and DMC projects

Institutional Support for DMC

The survey revealed that of the ten schools, two were described by their writing program directors as “small” and eight schools were described as “large.” This was in response to the survey question, “Which best describes your institution?” (See Appendix A).

Of the two small schools, neither had a DMC mandate for its FYC program, and both had implemented DMC within the last five years. One small school, designated as a public institution, had “indifferent” institutional support for DMC, and the other small school, designated at a private institution, “strongly supports” a DMC implementation.

The survey results for the eight large schools were more varied. Table 2 (below) presents the results for the large schools:

Table 2: Institutional support responses for large schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>DMC Mandate</th>
<th>Institutional Support</th>
<th># of Years in FYC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Urban Private</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Strongly supports DMC</td>
<td>Skipped this question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Urban Public</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Hostile to DMC</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLarge Public</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Indifferent to DMC</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Public 1*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Indifferent to DMC</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Public MW</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Indifferent to DMC</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 suggests that 50% of large schools (4/8) have “indifferent” institutional support for DMC. The results for “indifferent” institutional support for small schools is also 50%. In addition, the percentage of a DMC mandate for FYC in both large and small schools is low: 37.5% for large schools and 0% for small schools. This may suggest that the relative size of an institution does not necessarily influence how an institution will support DMC or even consider DMC as a highly-valued, mandated element of an FYC program. Significantly, Large Public MW, a school with the longest DMC presence (more than a decade) and a DMC mandate for FYC, has “indifferent” institutional support. In addition, Large Urban Private, a school with no DMC mandate for FYC, has “strong” support for digital projects. This study shows then that institutional size and support do not appear to affect DMC implementation, and this trend is discussed in more detail in Chapter VI Discussion.

Another trend of institutional support involves funding for digital networks or infrastructures for both large and small schools. As indicated in Table 2, the writing director of Large Public 3 chose “other” for the survey question, “Which best describes the commitment of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>DMC Commitment</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large Public E</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Strongly Support DMC</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Public 2*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Indifferent to DMC</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Public 3*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Our university...fund the projects.”</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*I was unable to identify these schools.*
your institution to supporting DMC?” and he qualified what he meant by “other” by stating his institution “acknowledges the importance” of a DMC implementation, but his institution “won’t fund the projects” (italics mine). Director H from Large Urban Public echoes the director of Large Public 3: “[Institutional support] is tenuous at best, but that is a funding issue” (italics mine). However, in spite of the concern about funding, Large Public 3 does mandate DMC, and Director H from Large Urban Public says that “while DMC is not a formal part of FYC, a core group of faculty teach in computer-mediated environments.” Therefore, this trend in the study shows that funding—although a concern—does not seem to prevent a program from including DMC in some way.

**Instructor Support for DMC**

Seven writing directors responded to survey question #3, “Which best describes the presence of DMC in your FYC program?” The responses were as follows: “Few or no instructors assign DMC”: 28.57%; “About half of the instructors assign DMC”: 42.86%; “Most instructors assign DMC”: 28.57%. This means that of the seven responses to question #3, 71% of these schools have at least half of the instructors assigning DMC projects. This becomes even more significant when the three respondents who did not answer question #3 were from schools who mandate DMC; therefore, it can be assumed that 100% of their FYC instructors assign DMC projects. *As a result, the survey grand total of FYC programs that have at least half of the instructors assigning DMC is 80%.*

The role of FYC instructors in DMC implementation is also revealed by the survey results. Table 3 demonstrates the answers that had the highest number of responses to four survey questions. A pattern of instructor *action* emerges. (Note that Question #3 is also represented in this table):
Table 3: Instructor Action Relative to DMC Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Response with the Highest Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q3: “Which best describes the presence of DMC in your FYC program?”</td>
<td>“About half of the instructors assign DMC” ………………….42.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: “Which best describes the way DMC is presented in your [program’s] FYC classes?”</td>
<td>“Instructor’s choice assignment ……71.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6: “Which best describes the experience with DMC that the majority of your instructors have had?”</td>
<td>“Instructors who have attended workshops or conferences that emphasize DMC pedagogy” ………50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8: “Which best describes the assessment tool that your FYC program uses for DMC?”</td>
<td>“Scoring rubrics designed by individual instructors for their classes” ……………………………40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each case, instructors *initiate* DMC implementation, education, pedagogy, or assessment. (See Appendix C for the complete results for each survey question for comparison). Each response implies an action (verb) taken by instructors: *assign, choose, attend,* and *design.* One way to interpret this trend is that DMC moves into a FYC program via the instructors. The survey does not strongly indicate a relationship between this trend and the support of the institution or writing program for DMC.
The interviews also reinforce this trend of instructor pro-activity. For example, Director H from Large Urban Public said that a “core group of faculty teach in computer-related environments,” and he also noted on the survey that his institution’s attitude toward DMC is “hostile.” The FYC director for Small Private MW, Director D, expands on survey question #4 in the above table: “We have gotten DMC into [FYC] as an instructor’s choice, which makes it optional, but most instructors are making DMC in some way, shape, or form. We have gotten DMC into [FYC], which is successful.” The Large Urban Public example shows instructors crossing the divide of a hostile environment, and the Small Private MW example shows instructors choosing to assign DMC in an optional context.

**Best Practices for DMC Pedagogy**

The survey listed seven composing elements: audience, development, organization, source documentation, composing strategies (using image, sound, movement, and text), technological instruction, and grammar/usage. Of the seven, audience was chosen by 90% of the respondents as having “strong emphasis” for DMC pedagogy, and composing strategies using a variety of modes such as image, sound, movement as well as text, was chosen by 60% of respondents to have a “strong emphasis.” Both of these elements are more dynamically associated with digital, rather than alphabetic, composing. For example, audience is critical in DMC instruction because the notion of *audience* fluctuates and expands for digital projects that often include audiences outside of the traditional classroom dynamic of teacher and students; this corroborates with the discussion concerning pedagogies for digital audience in the literature review. Therefore, considering that the survey reports that 50% of FYC instructors have attended workshops that teach digital composing strategies, a significant trend is emerging about instructors’ approaches to teaching composing elements. Even if they are not fully confident
enough to make a DMC mandatory, instructors seem to recognize that the digital wave is affecting their students’ drafting practices, so instructors actively seek ways to learn about DMC-oriented composing elements like *audience*—and apply what they learn when designing their FYC syllabi. Table 4 below shows the survey results in response to the question, “To what degree is each composing element taught in relation to DMC in your FYC program?”

Table 4: Composing elements taught in relation to DMC in FYC curricula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composing Element</th>
<th>Not taught/ addressed</th>
<th>Moderate emphasis</th>
<th>Strong emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source documentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composing strategies using sound, movement, images, and text</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 also shows how the best practices pedagogy for DMC is reinforced by what is significantly not taught in most FYC classrooms. For example, teaching students how to use digital devices and programs is given “moderate emphasis” by 80% of the respondents, but notably, zero programs listed “tool-pedagogy” as “strong emphasis”—and that includes the three schools who mandate DMC in their FYC programs. In addition, “moderate emphasis” is given to grammar and usage instruction for DMC projects; this may show that instructors are concerned with students creating projects that are credible and polished; however, the 0% for “strong emphasis” may show that instructors are aware that mechanics is important, but it not critical to effectively expressing ideas. Just because a composition is mechanically correct does not automatically mean that the content of the composition is effective.

This trend of teaching best practices for DMC becomes more apparent when comparing schools that have mandated DMC with those schools that have not. For example, Large Public MW, which has mandated DMC for FYC, has a mature digital composing program that has been in place for more than ten years, according to the survey. Large Public MW has a graduate program for composition/rhetoric, so it can be assumed that its FYC program has a strong philosophical background for digital composing practice. In relation to this, the survey reports that the majority of its FYC instructors are TAs who are fluent with DMC. Therefore, Large
Public MW’s writing director pointed out on the survey that the following composing elements all have a “strong emphasis” in DMC pedagogy: audience, development, organization, source documentation, and composing strategies using a variety of modalities. It can be concluded that Large Public MW’s FYC program has teaching and institutional dynamics that are suitable for a thriving, progressive DMC environment, and the strategies that instructors use to teach it are rhetorically appropriate for digital composing. Nationwide, Large Public MW is considered cutting-edge in the directions its composition program is taking with DMC.

On the other hand, a small Midwestern public university (Small Public MW) also has progressive pedagogical approaches for teaching DMC in its FYC, even though the survey reports that DMC is not mandated, institutional support is “indifferent,” and only about half of the FYC instructors assign DMC projects. In addition, instructors who do assign DMC make it their “instructor’s choice.” Also, according to the survey, DMC has only been present in the composition program for less than five years. As a newer presence in Small Public MW’s program, DMC lacks the mature pedagogical approaches and deeply entrenched digital infrastructures of Purdue or Large Public MW; yet audience, organization, and composing strategies are listed as “strong emphasis” on the survey for Small Public MW. This awareness of elements that have components that are unique to digital composing may be the result of “instructors who have attended workshops […] that emphasize DMC pedagogy” noted on the survey as the “best” description of this institution’s “experience with DMC.” Instructors at Small Public MW are proactive in implementing DMC in the way that they seek out ways to teach it. Therefore, even though DMC at Small Public MW lacks the institutional and network support that larger schools in the study have, DMC has the potential for pedagogical growth at Small Public MW that could eventually rival Purdue and Large Public MW.
The pedagogical DMC practices of FYC instructors at Small Private MW are also progressive, even though the survey reveals that DMC has only been present in the FYC program for five years or less. Noting on the survey that the best description of the DMC experience among the FYC faculty is “teaching assistants who are fluent with DMC,” Director D says that “the challenges are on-going” with a DMC addition. Since TAs from the composition/rhetoric graduate program are the driving force behind the “fluency” of digital instruction and composing practices in FYC, there is the sense that rhetorical concepts and theories have driven DMC implementation. For example, audience and development in relation to DMC are both checked as “moderate” emphasis on the survey. The growth of the graduate rhetoric (MARW) program may influence this progression of DMC’s presence in Small Private MW’s FYC classroom instruction.

Assessment Tools: Alphabetic Text → DMC Text

The study showed that of each of the DMC assessment tools listed on the survey, “scoring rubrics designed by individual instructors for their classes” is the most common at 40%. As noted in the Instructor Support for DMC section of this chapter, one interpretation of this data is that it demonstrates that the movement of DMC into the FYC classroom is initiated and formatted pedagogically by instructors. This interpretation is further validated by the low response to the assessment tool “common scoring rubric set by the FYC writing program”: 10%. This is significant because three institutions in this study mandate DMC, yet only one of these, Large Public MW, uses a scoring rubric directed by the writing program, not the individual instructors for their individual classes. Table 5 reveals the writing directors’ responses to survey question #8: “Which best describes the assessment tool that your FYC program uses for DMC?”
Table 5: Assessment tools for DMC used by FYC programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Tool</th>
<th>Responses %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic assessment</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scoring rubrics designed by instructors for their classes</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common scoring rubric set by the FYC writing program</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass/fail assessment</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative feedback (no official grade or score)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combining the results from the survey in Table 5 plus the interviews reveals another trend in the study: instructors are applying what they know about assessing alphabetic text to assessing digital texts. For example, of the four FYC programs whose instructors design their own scoring rubrics for DMC, two programs are dominated by instructors who are long-term adjuncts with little DMC experience. Furthermore, in both of these programs, most of these programs, most instructors assign DMC. One way to interpret this finding is that these instructors are transferring their knowledge about assessing alphabetic text to assessing DMC projects.

The interviews with the two writing program directors also reinforce this concept of knowledge transfer and assessing digital compositions. For example, Director D talks about looking at how “texts do similar things” as well as “[building] on what [instructors] already know.” Director D also speaks of how instructors “align [DMC] with our understanding of alphabetic text.” In addition, Director H talks about how a digital composing element is “akin” to an alphabetic composing element. The terms—similar, build, and align—all denote consensus, growth, or transfer in the context of assessing DMC projects.
DISCUSSION

Institutional Support for DMC: The Influence of Composition/Rhetoric

Broadly, the results from the ten directors who completed the survey demonstrate that even if FYC programs have not mandated and/or included DMC in some way, there is at least an awareness of the implications of the digital movement in the field of composition pedagogy. The director who wrote to say he had not completed the survey because he did not know what DMC is represents an exception. This may be because his English program from a small private Midwestern university has a strong literature influence, as opposed to composition/rhetoric. For example, an undergraduate writing major at this university is required to complete seventeen hours of writing classes which include fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and technical writing. In addition, eighteen hours of literature is required for a writing major, including British and American literature (“English,” par 2). Only one required class, “Writing for the Media,” (par. 2) may address digital composition, but significantly this class is situated in the Communications Department (par. 2). Therefore, a plausible conclusion is that the curriculum is firmly grounded in alphabetic literacies, and digital composition, if it is indeed taught, may be designated as part of the curriculum for the Communications Department, not English.

The shifting historical divide between composition/rhetoric and literature in the English field influences whether a FYC program will seek or even accept a DMC addition. As Linda S. Bergman notes in her introduction to Composition and/or Literature: The End(s) of Education, “In spite of the established and growing body of disciplinary knowledge in the field of composition, the issue of its relation with literature is still faced department by department and course by course” (3). Like the small private university whose writing director did not complete the survey, there are many university programs that have a strong emphasis on literature over
composition/rhetoric, so this program director may be an exception in this study, but not necessarily an exception in the bigger picture of the DMC movement nationwide. In addition, many institutions privilege literature as the content focus of FYC classes, and Bergmann continues, “Because institutional practices and situations vary so greatly in the many kinds of institutions that teach (and usually require) first-year composition, questions about the place of literature in composition courses continue to be raised” (3). For example, since literature is the more traditional and familiar disciplinary emphasis, the change to a rhetoric-based emphasis can pose a threat to some faculty who are not as comfortable with new approaches.

This kind of resistance to change may be the root of the hostility toward digital composing that Director H describes in his FYC program at Large Urban Public: “I might argue that there is a certain stigma attached to teaching writing with computers. Some of our [composition] lecturers keep their technology use a secret because their peers have openly dismissed and ridiculed such practices.” In spite of this resistance, however, Large Urban Public instructors like Director H recognize the value of digital composing, and they appear to soldier on, giving their students what they can within their limited circumstances.

Among the ten directors who did complete the survey, the English departments they represent include a strong composition/rhetoric influence that nearly eclipses or pointedly rivals literature. For example, a large public Midwestern university (Large Public MW) features Rhetoric/Composition/Literacy Studies, a Digital Media Project, and a Writing Workshop on its English Web site (“English—Department of,” par.1). According to the survey this English program has made DMC a mandatory requirement, and it has made a firm commitment to digital expression, even providing a Digital Media Project which is intended to teach people in the field how to compose using digital technologies. Like the grounded presence of DMC in Purdue
University’s FYC program as described by Sanchez, Lane, and Carter, Large Public MW’s FYC program appears to have an established and mature DMC pedagogy; this may be because, as the survey reports, DMC has been a part of the Large Public MW’s composition program for more than ten years. This presence, coupled with an active composition/rhetoric program, secures the continued growth of DMC at Large Public MW.

On the other hand, the large urban public university where study interviewee Director H teaches includes thirty-five composition lecturers and professors out of sixty-two total English faculty members (“CSULA Department,” par. 1); this demonstrates a solid composition presence. DMC is not a mandatory requirement for FYC at Large Urban Public, but Director H, who holds a PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, feels that DMC should be included in FYC because “the environment and tools ought to be those which students will employ in future writing situations.” Director H recognizes the pedagogical value of a DMC addition, and he echoes Selfe when he says, “It is not ethical or responsible to teach writing in a traditional [alphabetic text] classroom.” However, he notes, “Our writing program has not adopted DMC because the university cannot support it.” Director H’s admission about the lack of institutional support for DMC is a challenge faced by other universities in this study; furthermore, as noted previously, there are some faculty who do not support a change to include digital practice. Nevertheless, the overall English department emphasis on composition in both of these large public institutions, located on opposite sides of the country, validates an acknowledgement of—if not an active commitment to—a DMC inclusion.

According to this study the size, public/private, or geographical location of an institution does not appear to influence a welcoming atmosphere for a DMC inclusion, as the diverse experiences of large public universities Large Public MW and Large Urban Public reveal. In fact,
the disciplinary emphasis of the department is key. For example, Small Private MW has added a DMC project to its FYC program within the last five years, according to the survey. Significantly, the university launched a Master in Rhetoric and Writing (MARW) program in the fall of 2013, and the DMC inclusion is a parallel occurrence. Director D credits Small Private MW’s previous writing director, Professor T, for adding DMC to the FYC program, noting that Professor T “now directs the MARW program.” Professor T’s background in composition and rhetoric informed her decision to create a storage space for FYC student digital compositions: the ePortfolio. Director D explains the reason for the DMC addition: “It was my understanding that this was in response to trends in theory, scholarship, and pedagogy […] This is how writing is evolving into the digital spaces, so we are just keeping with best practices and making it part of our program.” Like large public universities Large Public MW and Large Urban Public, Small Private MW has an English program that privileges composition and rhetoric as well as literature, and this disciplinary dynamic lays a foundation for Director D’s mindfulness of the digital movement and its inherent potential for student learning and practice.

As the history of rhetoric and its relationship with modalities reveals in the introduction to this study, there needs to be an opening within a discourse community in order for a new modality to enter. This occurred in ancient Greece when oral expression made way for written expression because the playwrights of the theater found that alphabetic text was effective to permanently record their work, and citizens of the Greek Assembly could read the laws made available by alphabetic text (See Chapter II, Introduction). These contexts created an opening for the alphabetic modality in Greek society. Similarly, digital composing has filled a need to communicate quickly and efficiently in fast-paced 21st century society, and it is democratic because nearly everyone in Western culture has some access to a mobile device. This common
need to express ideas in the digital realm is privileged by today’s universities that have pursued a composition/rhetoric emphasis; therefore they appear to be more open to a DMC addition to their FYC programs than the programs that have the more traditional literature foundation.

**Institutional Barriers That Challenge DMC Implementation**

Overall, this study reveals that the FYC field is responding to the digital wave theoretically and pragmatically. As noted previously, the study survey shows a wide variety of digital influence in writing programs. On one end of the spectrum of DMC presence in FYC is the mandated and mature DMC addition to Large Public MW’s writing program. At the other extreme of the spectrum is the small private university whose writing director could not take the survey because he was not familiar with DMC. The fact that this director felt compelled to explain his inability to respond may show that he is acutely aware of his lack of knowledge. The digital drives the self-sponsored composition skills sets of Millennial FYC students; therefore, the digital resides in the classrooms of this director’s FYC program whether or not he officially recognizes it. Regardless, these two extremes of DMC influence illustrate two polar opposites of response: Large Public MW heeded the prophetic calls of Selfe and Yancey and actively pursued DMC earlier than most other institutions; the small private institution appears to be frozen and unresponsive to the digital wave. The other institutions in this study represent response categories that fall between these two extremes.

For instance, even if a FYC program community recognizes the potential value of DMC, there are often challenges inherent within the system that can prevent or impair its inclusion in the FYC curriculum. One of these barriers involves the institution’s network infrastructure. For example, Director H explains why he feels that a DMC would be beneficial for his program at Large Urban Public: “It only makes sense that we teach writing in digital environments, as doing
so will enhance [students’] experiences both inside and outside the academy.” Director H has observed the prodigious self-sponsored activity of his students, and he is aware that they “undertake a lot of reading and writing in digital environments.” However, Director H “cannot promote DMC” because his university lacks the appropriate network infrastructure and classroom facilities in order to teach it: “In many cases six lecturers share one office with one old computer and one old printer […] many faculty teach in classrooms without screens or computers (A few do have pianos, though).” Director H’s humor about the pianos softens the blow of his stark description of the lack of accommodations for technologies in the teaching spaces of his school. As much as he wants to give his students the opportunity to practice using DMC in an academic setting, he knows he cannot openly encourage his FYC instructional staff to assign it, let alone mandate it. Significantly, Director H noted on the survey that his university is “hostile” toward implementing an infrastructure that welcomes DMC.

The survey also reveals that other FYC directors have some concerns about their institutions’ commitments to support an infrastructure that would benefit a DMC addition in their writing programs. Out of the ten survey respondents, five noted that they felt that their institutions were “indifferent to implementing an ePortfolio and network infrastructure for DMC.” This is not as severe as Director H’s admission that his environment is “hostile,” but the “indifference” rating reveals that some writing directors do not feel that their institutions back their discipline in particular, even though FYC programs traditionally prepare students for an institution’s academic writing standards required in disciplines campus-wide.

On the other hand, an institution that the survey reports as “strongly supports implementing an ePortfolio and network infrastructure for DMC” yet does not mandate DMC in its FYC program is a large private university located in a large Midwestern urban setting (Large
Urban Private). The survey reports that Large Urban Private’s FYC program has “few or no instructors” who assign DMC, yet Large Urban Private is ranked among the top 100 “global research universit[ies]” in the nation (“D***** at a Glance,” par. 1), and the university Web site notes that the university has a “history of academic technology firsts” (par. 2). Large Urban Private’s emphasis on technology shows why there are resources readily available for composing and storing digital projects, which contrasts deeply with the lack of institutional support for digital modalities at schools like Large Urban Public.

In spite of its strong institutional foundation and support for technology, Large Urban Private does not have a thriving DMC presence in its FYC curriculum. Large Urban Private’s writing program director Director P noted in a brief email interview that “[Large Urban Public does not] incorporate DMC with intention into our program,” and he offered his blog as a source to explain why. Director P’s blog reveals that his pedagogical concentration for FYC is student engagement, and he noted in his email that his “primary focus is on [student] attitude toward writing and writing as a life-long habit.” Unlike Director H and Director D who value remaining current with pedagogies associated with 21st century literacies, Director P expresses concern that “student/learning-centered pedagogy chronically remains in the back seat—if not in the trunk” (“The Displeasure,” par. 2) of FYC curriculums. His blog continues with strategies and surveys that instructors can use to encourage students to embrace writing as a habit for life and to track student attitudes about writing. It appears that in the same way that a theoretical approach based on composition/rhetoric can create a context that is welcoming to DMC, a theoretical approach that is geared toward a student-centered pedagogy can create a context that does not privilege
DMC. It would be rash to say that Director P’s pedagogical philosophy is a “barrier” to a DMC addition, but he does make it clear why he is not seeking out DMC “with intention” for his FYC curriculum.

Large Urban Private, therefore, is a school that has the institutional support and resources available for DMC, but the theoretical approach of the leadership in the FYC program impedes an active implementation of DMC. Other schools represented in the study may also have network systems that support classroom technologies but do not have the resources to invest in the technology needs for particular departments like FYC writing programs. For example, Professor D, who noted that her school “strongly supports” the ePortfolio and network infrastructures needed for a DMC implementation, qualifies, “I cannot say that our university is committed to DMC, but it is committed to supporting technology.” This shows that her school does not narrow its focus on FYC in particular, but she does express the hope that the digital needs of FYC “is on the radar of the people making these decisions.”

In spite of perceived institutional indifference, seven directors who noted that DMC was a non-mandatory presence in their FYC programs, indicated that DMC is assigned either as an “instructor’s choice” assignment (five schools) or as a “class presentation that is a supplement to an [alphabetic] essay” (two schools). This data represents the majority of responses on this survey (seven out of ten schools), so one conclusion is that these two DMC assignment approaches signify the most common means of inviting DMC into FYC writing programs. Significantly, neither assignment approach appears to be a deal-breaker for passing the FYC course; in addition, neither DMC assignment approach is as privileged as alphabetic text for

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3 Offering DMC options for expression can an effective way to engage students and help them become lifetime writers.
successful completion of FYC. Both assignment approaches also present a pedagogical comfort zone for instructors who may be unfamiliar with composing in computer technologies. For instance, a supplemental digital presentation for a mandatory alphabetic essay is familiar to experienced, long-term instructors who may have assigned presentations in the pre-digital era where students utilized posters, mobiles, or collages to express their ideas. This pedagogical transfer from the paper-poster to the digital has the potential to be seamless for both instructors and students. Therefore, it appears that even if there is not a climate of institutional support for DMC, there are pedagogical comfort zones for DMC to enter a program.

One university on the survey that serves as an example of addressing the institutional challenges of a DMC addition is a moderately large university in the Midwest (MLarge Public MW). This school’s writing director indicated on the survey that MLarge Public MW as an institution is “indifferent” in its support for a DMC addition, but DMC does have a presence in FYC as an “instructor’s choice” piece, which is a low-stakes assignment compared to high-stakes traditional alphabetic essays. MLarge Public MW’s “Writing Program” Web page says that “first-year writing emphasizes the rhetorical nature of writing and reading, argumentation, *multimodality*, inquiry, and primary and secondary research.” (par. 2, italics mine). Here the school’s FYC program recognizes the importance of writing in different modalities, which appears to include digital modalities because the survey notes that “most instructors assign DMC.” Therefore, DMC may not be mandatory for FYC at universities like MLarge Public MW, but the influence of DMC is growing in the program, regardless of the minimal institutional support. In addition, most FYC programs in the study appear to allow DMC to trickle into classrooms via instructor option.
Instructors are truly the key for a successful integration of DMC. At Small Private MW, the “instructor’s choice” essay, which is supplemental to the three mandatory alphabetic essays, allows instructors to experiment with prompting and assessing DMC projects in a low-stakes context. This prevents the stress on the students and the instructor that PSU-Hazelton instructors Froehlich and Froehlich describe in their experience replacing a mandatory alphabetic essay with a mandatory DMC. The survey states that of the FYC programs that did not mandate DMC, most (five out of seven schools) reported that “about half” or “most” instructors assign DMC. MLarge Public MW, for instance, with “most” instructors including DMC in their syllabi, has had digital assignments in its FYC program for six to ten years; however, the majority of those instructors are described as “long-term adjuncts with little DMC experience,” according to the survey. An “instructor’s choice” assignment permits “long-term adjunct” instructors, who may have entered the field in an all-alphabetic text era, to integrate DMC in their classrooms at their own pace.

Instructors themselves can pose a potential barrier to DMC, especially if they have had little experience composing in digital contexts themselves. However, as the MLarge NW example reveals, if instructors who know little about DMC are given the safe option for adding a DMC, it appears that they will most likely assign it eventually, especially if they learn of others in their programs assigning it. Even though Professor H notes that some faculty at Large Urban Public are firmly resistant to DMC, the survey of ten universities presents a more positive overall picture of instructor support for DMC. For example, zero directors indicated that there were instructors who “have little interest in implementing DMC.” On the other hand, the survey reports that five schools have FYC instructors “who have attended workshops or conferences that emphasize DMC pedagogy.” This disparity indicates that overall, instructors seem willing to
take an active role in learning how to teach DMC, so the few dismissive and ridiculing faculty members in Director H’s program appear to be an unfortunate exception, not the rule.

Another way that the survey presents a positive view of instructors potentially promoting DMC, rather than obstructing it, is the data that shows how “recent graduates from graduate programs” and “teaching assistants (TAs) who are fluent with DMC” combine to identify the second-largest group of FYC instructors represented by the schools in the survey (the largest is the group who attended DMC workshops). Traditionally, the majority of Master’s graduates and TAs are young people in their 20s and 30s: The Millennial Generation. An accepted view of Millennials is that they are digitally fluent, due to social media activity in their personal, civic, and even professional lives; therefore, Millennial FYC instructors would be more welcoming of a DMC addition than their Baby Boomer or even Generation X counterparts.

However, even if Millennial FYC students are comfortable with a DMC project, instructors generally cannot assume that FYC students will have easy access to the technology they require to complete a digital assignment; this is another potential barrier to a program’s DMC addition. Urban public institutions such as Large Urban Public have student populations that differ economically and culturally from student populations who attend private institutions. Director H explains, “Over 80% of our students come from a working class community and do not have access to computers and the internet at home, so it’s difficult to ask them to create transmodal projects that they cannot work on in a classroom, in a computer lab (the library lab often has long lines), or at home.” This is another reason that Director H gives for his reticence about promoting a DMC addition to the FYC program at Large Urban Public. In contrast, there are universities where freshmen students arrive with technological devices they can use in the classroom. Professor D says, “Increasingly it has been my experience that students bring a laptop
Noting that Small Private MW does not have a campus policy regarding laptops, Director D continues, “It has been my experience teaching FYC classes that if I say it is a work day, most students will have a computer, or they are using tablets or phones. Out of twenty students, I may only have one that does not have access.” The differences in student cultures between these two schools may be considered representative of the variety of community and cultural responses to the digital wave. Institutions have little control over the individual computer access students may have when they enter as freshmen, and this lack of control does influence the relative status of DMC in a FYC program.

Therefore, it appears that sometimes there is little an institution like Large Urban Public can do to provide for a majority of its students who do not have access to the technologies they need to complete digital assignments. This would be especially problematic in an era where students are struggling to pay for college tuition, let alone purchase a laptop, yet Director H and a few others in his Large Urban Public FYC faculty quietly do what they can to teach DMC because they believe in its value. However, there are institutions like Large Private Urban who actively provide the technological resources students require for digital composing, but the Large Private Urban FYC program does not actively pursue a DMC addition. Therefore, it appears that overall, the philosophical stance of a program has more influence than institutional support or network access.

DMC Pedagogy

As noted in the previous section of this chapter, a key element of pedagogical implementation and growth for DMC is the learning transfer for both FYC instructors and students. This involves taking what is familiar (academic composing conventions associated with alphabetic text) and applying it to what is unfamiliar (academic composing conventions
associated with digital text). When speaking of instructor learning transfer and its relationship to pedagogical growth for DMC at Small Private MW, Director D explains, “What we need to do, when we talk about professional development is so when we say emphasis, contrast, organization, alignment, proximity—how we understand those [concepts] in a DMC that […] aligns] with our understanding of an alphabetic text.” These concepts have meaning in relation to alphabetic composing, yet they have another meaning entirely in relation to digital composing that includes the modalities of image, movement, sound, and text. Director D continues that professional development must “build on what instructors already know and add what [they] don’t know and show how those work together” (emphasis mine). In FYC programs such as Small Private MW, this learning transfer may occur in the TAs’ MARW graduate classes where rhetorical theory is used to present the ways that alphabetic composing practice and digital composing practice work together and build understanding that helps DMC to “continue to move forward” in the FYC program.

At Large Urban Public, where professional development for DMC is not supported due to an environment that is “hostile” to digital composing in FYC, Director H shares his approach to easing the learning transfer for both his students and fellow faculty members. In his classroom, he says he invites his students “to broaden their conceptions of text by considering the persuasive elements of graphics and images.” In doing so, he is taking what his students have been taught in traditional writing classrooms (persuasion using alphabetic text) and apply digital elements that his students use in their daily self-sponsored practice (persuasion using graphics or images). Similar to Director D, Director H is focusing on how these familiar elements work together to create academic DMC texts. However, Director H also shares how he initiates learning transfer with his FYC colleagues: “When faculty raise issues during portfolio readings, I have similar
conversations [as in similar to his conversations with his students] with them. Clip Art dropped into the essay is akin to a drop-in quote.” Here Director H demonstrates the way he seeks to capture teachable moments with his colleagues in order to, A) achieve a learning transfer for faculty and, B) build his colleagues’ trust in the credibility of digital composing. One might say that the latter is a political move to circumvent the “hostile” attitude toward DMC at Large Urban Public.

Overall, the survey reveals that FYC programs emphasize the rhetorical elements of DMC pedagogy. In spite of the fact that many teachers—and students—often do not know how to execute platforms for digital composing such as Prezi, Google Docs, or iMovie, “technological instruction (how to use devices and programs)” consistently scored the lowest among the composing elements that are taught in FYC classrooms. For example, six directors checked “moderate emphasis” for technological instruction, and one director checked “not taught/addressed” for the same. There may be several reasons for this. At Small Private MW, for instance, DMC is considered instructor’s choice, which opens the option of collaboration. This dynamic allows for students to teach other students how to use digital programs, and this releases more class time for the instructor to emphasize the rhetorical elements of digital composing. Also, as noted previously, the inherent educational value of composing in digital modes is privileged in many programs with a strong composition/rhetoric presence; therefore, learning the mechanics of a digital program may be given over to an institution’s information technology support program or an information commons/library. This practice also frees pedagogical “space” within the FYC classroom for a focus on traditional composing elements. Finally, because many schools have FYC faculty who acknowledge their limited experience with DMC—five directors noted on the survey that their faculty have attended workshops about DMC
pedagogy—technological know-how among instructors may be rather spare. Therefore, in the same way that rhetorical theory drives the movement of DMC into a program, rhetorical theory also drives the movement of DMC pedagogy within a program. Lessons that teach how to use the devices and infrastructure are generally considered secondary.

An example of an institution where classroom technological instruction takes a back seat to composition pedagogy is a large public university located in the East (Large Public E). Even though DMC has been present in the FYC program for less than five years, the survey reports that “most instructors assign DMC.” In addition, the majority of these instructors are “recent grads from graduate programs that taught DMC.” Similar to Small Private MW where the growing MARW program produces TAs who are “fluent with DMC,” composition/rhetoric theory may be coursing through the lessons of Large Public E’s FYC instructors. Since the DMC implementation is relatively new, it is not mandatory, and it resides most often in “class presentation that is a supplement to a mandatory essay,” according the survey. As noted previously, DMC-as-a-supplemental-presentation is a familiar and traditional place in a writing classroom. Large Public E’s FYC program lacks the pedagogical maturity for DMC that Purdue and Large Public MW share. However, a pedagogical progression appears to be in place at Large Public E: The composing elements audience, development, source documentation, and composing strategies are all checked as “strong emphasis” for DMC pedagogy on the survey. Lessons that teach technological know-how are given “moderate emphasis” in the program. This may mean that teaching FYC students how to compose their ideas in digital spaces is considered the more important take-away from the course than the mechanics of technology. In addition, the strong emphasis on documenting sources in DMC texts demonstrates a concern for applying
academic conventions to digital compositions, making them rival alphabetic essays in scholarly credibility.

Even though the survey notes that as an institution, Large Public E is “indifferent” about supporting a DMC addition, technology support may be available outside the FYC classroom, which frees the instructor to focus on digital composing strategies within the classroom. Similar to Small Private MW, which has an ePortfolio to store student DMC projects, Large Public E might have the same, especially since most FYC instructors are assigning DMC. Accompanying network storage may be informational technology support; therefore, “technology instruction” may not be a necessity in the FYC classroom. Also like Small Private MW, Large Public E as an institution supports technology growth in the school as a whole, not necessarily the more narrow application of DMC in the FYC program in particular.

**DMC Assessment**

In the same way that learning transfer is factor in classroom pedagogy, learning transfer may also be a factor in determining assessment best practices for DMC in the FYC context. The assessment strategies which have been effective in the traditional alphabetic text classroom are often applied to digital composition. The survey lists five assessment tools which are familiar to writing program directors: holistic assessment, scoring rubrics, pass/fail assessment, and formative feedback. Of the ten respondents on the survey, four checked “scoring rubrics designed by individual instructors for their classes,” as the “best” description of the tool used by their FYC instructional staff to assess DMC. According to Swedish educators Anders Jonsson and Gunilla Svingby, scoring rubrics are “performance assessments […] designed to capture more elusive aspects of learning by letting students solve realistic or authentic problems” (131). Scoring rubrics which articulate composing elements for summative assessment of alphabetic
text are commonly associated with FYC programs; students are prompted to design an argument or an exposition as a “solution” to a rhetorical “problem.” Traditionally, this practice is considered “authentic” or “realistic” because many FYC programs replicate the composing situations that students will encounter in other university disciplines as well as their future careers. Therefore, it is a natural pedagogical transfer for FYC instructors to use traditional scoring rubrics to assess student compositions in digital platforms.

In regards to DMC assessment, the survey discerns between scoring rubrics designed by “individual instructors for their classes” and scoring rubrics which are “set by the FYC writing program.” Only one FYC program represents the latter type: Large Public MW. Significantly, this program, in which DMC has been present for more than ten years, mandates a DMC composition for FYC. If FYC is considered a “gatekeeper” course for the academic writing standards for Large Public MW, a scoring rubric set by the program is customary practice for summative assessment of DMC projects. However, the four programs that use a scoring rubric created by individual instructors represent a different dynamic than Large Public MW. One such program, Small Private MW, has not mandated DMC, and digital composition has been added to FYC within the last five years. In this program, the pedagogical applications for digital composing are still maturing, and only “about half” of the instructors assign DMC. A scoring rubric often is used for summative, rather than formative, grading, so this means that there is concern that students meet particular academic composing standards, but the Small Private MW writing program allows for those standards to be set by individual instructors for their own particular course sections. In this dynamic, instructors have the autonomy to experiment with best practices to teach DMC in a lower-stakes context; instructors themselves are not accountable for getting their students to meet the standards of the program as a whole.
Director D, the director for the Small Private MW writing program, advocates using the same kinds scoring rubrics for both digital and alphabetic texts: “[When] we talk about assessment […], we talk about how texts do similar things.” However, she qualifies that “professional development” would help FYC instructors “align [DMC] with our understanding of alphabetic text.” Director D continues that instructors can “build on what they already know [alphabetic text] and add on what they don’t know and show how those work together.” Therefore, as noted previously, the opportunity for Small Private MW instructors to create their own scoring rubrics for their individual classes creates a learning space for instructors to transfer their prior knowledge about scoring alphabetic text to the newer and less familiar digital modalities.

Adapting traditional scoring rubric terms to the context of digital composition can help smooth the transfer of instructor knowledge from alphabetic text assessment to DMC assessment. One way is to introduce fresh approaches to traditional terms in scoring rubrics. For example, the alphabetic text approach to organization involves the logical order of words, sentences, or paragraphs. Alphabetic text transitions are words, phrases, or clauses that help to show the organizational relationships among ideas. On the other hand, the digital approach to organization involves not only the order of text, but also the order of movement, image, or sound. In addition, digital transitions may include fading images, sliding images, or music. Director H explains how considering digital graphics enhance organization in DMC: “Images, I advise [students], must contribute to the argument and must be relevant to nearby text. In that sense, the images play a role within rubric categories for Argument and Organization.” The inherent meaning of each term is the same, but rhetorical breadth is achieved by considering modalities that preside in DMC. According to Director D, this kind of approach demonstrates
that rhetorical composing elements including organization or transitions can transfer seamlessly from alphabetic text essays to DMC, and she adds, “Audience is still relevant; purpose is still relevant; context is still relevant—that’s rhetorical analysis, no matter what the medium.”

Applying digital context to traditional composing elements is an effective pedagogical method for teaching FYC students how to be more intentional in their drafting process for DMC. Director H offers an example: “Since images should have captions, they relate to Conventions or Mechanics categories [of a scoring rubric]. In this sense, I am asking students to broaden their conceptions of text by considering the persuasive elements of graphics and images.” By using the scoring rubric as a teaching tool, Director H is prompting his Large Urban Public students to consider the rhetorical power associated with an image and how it works in relation to text. In addition, Director H provides an example of scholarly source integration in a multimodal project: “Clip Art dropped into the essay is akin to a drop-in quote.” This broadens students’ awareness of how they need to appropriately manage multimodal sources that they use in their DMC compositions; if a digital image is “akin to a drop-in quote,” then the image must be cited and documented using the standard style. In most cases, students are already familiar with documentation styles, such as MLA or APA, because they had learned them in the context of alphabetic writing.

Another way to acclimate a traditional scoring rubric to digital composition is to adopt rhetorical terms that more effectively reflect DMC. For example, Director D suggests, “We can change how we word things so that it is all-encompassing, like using the term composing instead of the term writing.” As noted in “Disrupting the First-Year Composition Course,” writing evokes a linear approach to expressing ideas, and that is why writing has been used to describe the process of alphabetic text. On the other hand, compose presents a non-linear, “organic”
process, which is more “fluid” and therefore open to arrangement options present in electronic modalities (par. 5). Digital modalities require elements that help frame the pedagogical conversation that occurs between instructor and student, and Director D proposes terms that relate to organizational elements that influence the visual effect of imagery for digital composing: “contrast, alignment, and proximity.” She adds that terms like these are included in the “guidelines” that teach how to apply academic composing conventions to DMC in texts such as *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* (Arola, Sheppard, and Ball). Since DMC is still a relatively new presence in Small Private MW, Director D notes that her FYC program “continue[s] to integrate [DMC conventions] and continue[s] to move forward.” At Small Private MW, the DMC movement has initiated an on-going learning process for both instructors and students to consider drafting ideas in new ways and contexts.

Additional assessment-tool results on the survey also reflect the emerging status of DMC in most FYC programs in the study. For example, twenty per cent of the survey respondents said that “formative feedback (no official grade or score)” was the best description of their DMC assessment strategies. Another twenty per cent advocated “holistic assessment.” Finally, ten per cent indicated that DMC is scored by using “pass/fail assessment.” All of these assessment strategies are non-analytic and non-summative. Formative feedback is utilized during the composing process, and its purpose is to help monitor student learning. This low-stakes assessment approach allows both instructor and student to learn about how the DMC drafting process works. On the other hand, holistic scoring, a summative approach, often lays out particular scoring criteria, but “readers do not assign a score for each criteria in holistic scoring. Rather, as they read, they balance strengths and weaknesses among the various criteria to arrive at an overall assessment of the success of a [project]” (“Holistic Scoring,” par. 1). Therefore,
holistic scoring considers the success of a DMC project as a whole; this assessment method does not commit instructors to have to break down the digital composing elements as scoring criteria, especially if instructors are not confident about doing so. For example, Large Public E, a FYC program that has recently implemented DMC (within the last five years), uses holistic scoring for “class presentations that supplement a mandatory [alphabetic text] essay.” In this program, DMC is emerging and supplementary; therefore, this shows that DMC is a presence in the program, but has less status than alphabetic text.

Like DMC pedagogy, DMC assessment is evolving as instructors explore the educational potential of DMC in their individual classrooms. They have the freedom to do so because in most of the programs in the study, DMC is not mandatory or high-stakes; therefore, the assessment tools are generally designed by individual instructors who appear to adapt the assessment tools to their pedagogical styles and classroom needs. In addition, instructors may also be applying their prior knowledge about alphabetic text assessment to DMC.
CONCLUSION

As I plan my syllabus for my fall 2016 FYC classes, I feel a stronger sense of community with the FYC instructors represented by this study; the results confirmed that I am not alone as I grapple with planning, prompting, and assessing DMC projects. The study also shows how the digital wave is an agent of change in the culture of the FYC classrooms, including mine. This change, driven by the trickles—or even the tides—of the digital movement into FYC classrooms indicates a shift in the educational culture of academia.

James Porter describes this change in his keynote address to the College English Association of Ohio at Kent State on April 23, 2016. Porter asserts that the new model for the academy privileges techne, which he defines as “the art of making something beautiful.” Techne is key when composing in the digital realm where FYC students are demonstrating what they can do, or create, as well as engaging what they know. One way to apply Porter’s assertion is that the techne-technology aspect of digital expression “bleeds into” the episteme world of linear alphabetic text, thus creating a cultural change within the FYC composition classroom. This blend of the two modes of expression broadens students’ composing choices for audience, purpose, and context. Therefore, by adapting DMC projects to the FYC classroom, instructors are better preparing their students for composing in academic, professional, and civic contexts; in this way, instructors are catching the wave of change in the composition field.

Therefore this study demonstrated that instructors are responding to the changes in academia by taking the initiative to add DMC into their FYC syllabi, often regardless of institutional or administrative barriers; this is a “bottom-up” rather than a “top-down” movement. In addition, instructors like me who have had little experience with digital composition are finding ways to make a DMC addition work for their students. Therefore, this study shows that
in order to teach DMC, instructors themselves do not necessarily have to be highly proficient at digital composing; many familiar rhetorical composing elements that they teach cross over seamlessly from alphabetic text to digital text. Pedagogy workshops that emphasize this concept—rather than the “tool-oriented” how-tos of technology applications—can ease instructor concerns about DMC implementation, and a majority of the programs in this study include instructors who seek these kinds of workshop opportunities. In addition, educational programs and workshops about digital pedagogy can entice reticent instructors into experimenting with digital composition as a supplemental assignment in their curricula.

Once instructors embrace with intention the rhetorical potential of multimodal expression in academic composition pedagogy, they can in turn teach their students to apply rhetorical elements of DMC with intention in academic contexts. Students can apply what they know from two composing dynamics: their self-sponsored digital composing in personal contexts, and their working knowledge of composing academic alphabetic essays. This learning transfer of intentionality for both instructors and students appears to secure the maturity of DMC presence in FYC programs.

To this end, more research is needed to identify, or even design, pedagogies that address the “multimodality” (relationship of modalities within a text) of DMC expression. As the digital wave continues its influence in FYC through the syllabi of individual instructors, concern for the academic rigor of digital projects will drive interest in fresh strategies to teach the rhetorical “available means” of DMC to FYC students.

In addition to classroom instructors, the wider composition field is responding to the growing interest in DMC pedagogy for academic contexts, even if individual institutions, like some of those in this study, are indifferent to DMC. As noted in the literature review of this
study, the WPA has widened its standards to include DMC. Resources like textbooks are becoming available, such as the *Writer/Designer* text suggested by Director D, which explain how to apply academic conventions to digital composition. Also, the Modern Language Association (MLA) will be releasing its latest edition of its *MLA Handbook* in the spring of 2016, and its main emphasis is a more “streamlined” approach to documenting digital sources (Flaherty, par. 3). All of these movements in academia and the rhetoric field are designed to help support students’ intentional use of academic conventions in their digital FYC projects. As a result of this field-wide “culture of support,” FYC instructors may feel more secure about integrating DMC in their curricula, and many FYC programs may progress closer to a DMC mandate.

As of this 2015-2016 school year, DMC is demonstrating its influence on the FYC community nationwide, as more and more writing programs include instructors who are prompting digital projects. The study hints at a recent trending movement of the digital wave into FYC programs with 50% of the survey respondents indicating that DMC has been present in their programs for less than five years. Since change happens quickly in the wider digital world of social media, it can be easily argued that this trend of DMC movement into FYC will continue at a rapid pace. Therefore, additional research to include a larger number and a wider variety of institutions is needed in order to capture a more current and comprehensive picture of the digital movement in academia.

Because of all of these changes in my field, I am thankful for that moment in Dr. Tulley’s Introduction to the Field of Rhetoric and Writing class—stomach lurch and all—because without her digital essay assignment, I would never have understood the direction that FYC is taking in institutions all across the country, including mine. Completing her digital movie assignment was
challenging, but very important. That moment in Dr. Tulley’s class led me to my study of this moment in time: The 2015-2016 school year and what it means in the movement of DMC into the FYC classroom.
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Which best describes your institution?
   a) Small private
   b) Large private
   c) Small public
   d) Large public

2. Is digital multi-modal composition (DMC) a mandatory requirement for your first-year composition (FYC) program?
   a) Yes (If you answered Yes, please skip items #3 and #4)
   b) No  (If you answered No, please respond to items #3 and #4)

3. If you answered No for #2, which best describes the presence of DMC in your FYC program?
   a) Few or no instructors assign DMC
   b) About half of the instructors assign DMC
   c) Most instructors assign DMC

4. If you answered No for #2, which best describes the way DMC is presented in your FYC classes?
   a) Prewriting or heuristic exercise
   b) “Instructor’s choice” assignment
   c) Class presentation that is a supplement to a mandatory essay
   d) Reflection activity
   e) DMC is not assigned in the program

5. Approximately how long has DMC been a presence in your FYC program?
   a) DMC is not presently assigned
   b) 1-5 years
   c) 6-10 years
   d) More than 10 years

6. Which best describes the experience the majority of your instructors have had with DMC?
   a) Recent grads from graduate programs that taught DMC
   b) Teaching assistants who are fluent with DMC
   c) Long-time adjuncts with little DMC experience
   d) None of these
7. Which best describes the commitment of your institution to supporting DMC?  
   a) Strongly supports implementing an ePortfolio and network infrastructure for DMC  
   b) Indifference to implementing an ePortfolio and network infrastructure for DMC  
   c) Hostile toward implementing an ePortfolio and network infrastructure for DMC

8. Which best describes the assessment tool that your program uses for DMC?  
   a) Holistic assessment  
   b) Scoring rubrics designed by individual instructors for their classes  
   c) Common scoring rubric set by the FYC writing program  
   d) Pass/fail assessment  
   e) Formative feedback (no official grade or score)

To what degree is each composing element taught in relation to DMC in your FYC program?

9. Audience  
   a) Not taught/addressed  
   b) Moderate emphasis  
   c) Strong emphasis

10. Developing a main idea/thesis  
    a) Not taught/addressed  
    b) Moderate emphasis  
    c) Strong emphasis

11. Organization  
    a) Not taught/addressed  
    b) Moderate emphasis  
    c) Strong emphasis

12. Source documentation  
    a) Not taught/addressed  
    b) Moderate emphasis  
    c) Strong emphasis

13. Composing strategies using image, sound, movement, as well as text  
    a) Not taught/addressed  
    b) Moderate emphasis  
    c) Strong emphasis

14. Technological instruction (how to use digital devices and programs)  
    a) Not taught/addressed  
    b) Moderate emphasis  
    c) Strong emphasis

15. Grammar and usage  
    a) Not taught/addressed  
    b) Moderate emphasis  
    c) Strong emphasis
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Why have you added digital multi-modal composition (DMC) to your first-year composition (FYC) program?

2) Describe the status of your university’s commitment to building or expanding network support for DMC

3) Describe your university’s lab resources for FYC classroom use, storage/access for student projects, and students’ access to computers.

4) Describe a challenge that your program encountered with implementing DMC and how you addressed the challenge.

5) To what degree should the scoring criteria used for alphabetic essays be applied to digital multimodal composition?

6) Is there anything else you would like to add?
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