ABSTRACT

(RE)MAPPING SPACES THROUGH MULTIMODALITY: A STUDY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS REFIGURING MULTIPLE ROLES AND LITERACIES

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This thesis is a discussion of the author’s qualitative descriptive research project, wherein the author interviewed nine graduate students in a mid-sized Midwestern university to investigate their uses of multimodality. Using the New London Group’s (2000) definition of modes and designs for meaning-making, this thesis discusses the discursive and material limitations experienced by participants in the study. The study reveals the participants’ pedagogical uses of multimodality, focusing on the affordances and constraints of working in traditional and computer classrooms. Following Porter, Sullivan, Grabill, and Miles’ (2000) institutional critique, this thesis looks at the discursive and material spaces as they relate to the authority constructs through which graduate students navigate. It indicates a need to further explore the graduate seminar as a site for multimodal learning, as participants reveal concerns about the limitations on modality both within the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition and within their own program of study.
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A STUDY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS REFIGURING MULTIPLE ROLES AND
LITERACIES

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Chapter 1: Graduate Students and Multimodality: Taking a Closer Look

On my first day of teacher training, I was introduced to the concept of Universal Design—defined by the Center for Universal design as “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” As I prepared my first syllabus, I was asked to consider the various needs of students and to develop a lesson plan that anticipated these different needs. In other words, I was asked to anticipate multiliteracies within the classroom. Dolmage (2008) reminds us that “composition is not always an accessible space,” and in approaching the classroom, I find it infinitely important to examine the spaces—physical and discursive—in which I ask students to learn and produce. This examination prompts me to pay close attention to the limits and constraints, freedoms and choices I offer students as they study.

I quickly noticed a tension, however, in how I understood multiliteracies and how the field was using the term. Closely linked with multimodal, which I have come to understand as an integration of a variety of meaning-making approaches, multiliteracies appeared to be a concept most readily linked with the digital realm. Indeed, scholars throughout the field of Rhetoric and Composition have most recently been writing about multimodality and multiliteracies as they relate to the turn towards the new media age (to echo Kress, 2003). The new technologies being integrated into the computer classroom require multiliteracies (see Selber 2004) of students as well as teachers, and the shift from the page to the screen allows for and prompts an integration of multiple modes.

But as a teacher and student, the motives behind the digital discussions of multimodality and multiliteracies do not altogether satisfy what I believe constitutes a need for multimodal approaches to the composition classroom. It seems to me that there ought to be more overlap, more integration of the language of inclusion and access in the recent discussions of multimodality, and more attention to nondigital modes because, simply, sometimes digital modes will not address the needs or access the literacies of our students. I developed this project in part because of the tension I experience in trying to link concepts of Universal Design and inclusion with the more pervasive motivations behind digital discussions of multimodality.

As a teacher moving into a digital space, I continue to question how various modes, or designs for meaning-making, to borrow from Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (1999), might allow us to access (multi)literacies in a new way. In following scholars like Patricia Dunn (2001), who
locates multiple literacies in opposition to the primacy of language, I want to continue integrating kinesthetic and visual modes into the classroom as meaning-making activities. But whereas her multimodal moves are limited to activities which lead to linguistic production (namely, the formal academic essay), I look at how composing in a digital space allows students to *produce* in various modes, capturing visual, aural/oral, and kinesthetic compositions. Accessing digital modes and genres allows students to use their own literacies in classroom activities as well as their graded compositions, which affords a further expansion and validation of multiliteracies through multimodal composition. Much of the scholarship produced on and about multimodality, however, relegates multiple modes to a digital space, a division that disallows multimodal work to be both digital and nondigital, regardless of the environment.

Part of the impetus for this project is a desire to explore the intersection of multiliteracies as an evolving theory that stems from new technology and a pedagogical approach that stems from UD. How do discursively and physically diverse spaces expand and/or limit the process and product of students as they compose? This question requires an interrogation of institutional and authoritative constructs, an examination of the spaces in which students work. To this end, my empirical project extends the work of scholars already involved in theorizing the way multimodality is being used and multiliteracies are being accessed within the composition classroom (Dunn, 2000; Gee, 2003; New London Group, 2000; Selber, 2003; Wysocki, Sirc, Johnson-Eilola and Selke, 2004; Yancey, 2003). My project differs from current efforts to investigate these concepts, however, in that I have focused my study on a particular population: the graduate student.

Although discussions of multiliteracy and multimodality abound as they relate to first-year composition and other post-secondary students, the field has yet to examine how these concepts are being integrated into graduate programs or how these issues affect graduate students’ teaching and scholarship. In new media, scholars like Selber (2003) and Gee (2003), among many others, are asking questions about the new and evolving literacies of students while scholars throughout Composition studies continue to theorize about the composition classroom space. Perhaps because graduate students are in some ways considered part of the profession or perhaps because graduate seminars are not considered “composition classrooms,” the graduate learner has not been addressed in many of these discussions. Nonetheless, graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition are often involved in these discussions as scholars and graduate
instructors. Although the classrooms in which graduate students learn are not a focus of this new media and multimodal theorizing, graduate students are investigating multimodality and multiliteracies in various ways as they attempt to expand their own literacies in order to meet the needs of their students, and to transition as professionals into the field. The complex position of graduate students and the multiple roles they play within the institution make this a rich population in which to research the changing scope of composition.

The graduate identity is one of constant flux; graduate students are both teachers and learners, professionals and novices, colleagues to professors and mentees under them. They exist in a borderland, one foot in the profession, one foot out; one foot in the classroom as authority; one foot in the classroom as student. In discussing the graduate role, Marcy Taylor and Jennifer Holber (1999) even go so far as to call the graduate student “virtually invisible,” in that they are undeniably an academic “Other.” While as a graduate student, I do not consider myself institutionally or departmentally invisible (nor, I think, do the participants in this study), I find the graduate student role both important and interesting because it does involve, as Taylor and Holber discuss, the “defining [of] an identity in relation to the already written” (p. 610, original emphasis). They wrote,

In the case of the field of composition studies, the ways in which Students are named helps to define their position in relation to the institutions in which they work, the students whom they teach, and the “colleagues” (other faculty and administrators) who are often responsible for determining the shape of their work, identity, and status (p. 610).

Taylor and Holber illumine the unique positionality of graduate student as controlled by institutional expectation and definition, and my project further investigates the ways the identity and roles of the graduate student are changed and defined by the access they have to discursive and physical spaces--the access they have to multimodal process and products in their roles as teachers and students.

This research results in what I hope is a rich narrative of how, in this moment of technological flux, the literacies of graduate students in the field of Rhetoric and Composition are taking shape. In planning this research, I pursue several research questions, focusing on one overarching question:
• How are current initiatives to revise and reform literacy and modality translating and transferring to graduate programs?

I then break down this larger question by asking,

o What modes/literacies do graduate students use regularly in their various roles as teachers/students/professionals?

o What modes are graduate students expected to acquire and use as scholars, teachers, and students, and how do efforts in professionalization help graduate students acquire these multimodalities and multiliteracies?

o How do the various modes of communication and meaning-making shape and form the identity of graduate students as scholars? Are certain modes of communication seen as more valuable or legitimate than others and if so, how does that affect the scholarship and identity of graduate students?

Project Design

In order to investigate these questions, I interviewed graduate students in composition and rhetoric as a means of understanding how multimodality and multiliteracy enter into their lives as students and teachers. I hoped to collect information not only about how they understood multimodality and multiliteracies as teachers but also as students. In addition to entering into conversations with graduate participants, I also collected examples of multimodal work they produced as scholarship, which allowed me to see the various modes they used as scholars. Many of the participants also offered their syllabi as illustrations of their enactment of multimodal approaches to the classroom. Because part of my investigation involved the graduate student as learner and the graduate seminar as a location of learning, I also collected syllabi from each of the Composition and Rhetoric professors in order to see what kinds of prompts the professors give for multimodal production and process within the classroom.

Although multimodality within the composition classroom has been heavily theorized, very little empirical (quantitative or qualitative) research has been conducted in investigating how multimodality is being used. However, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) recently sponsored a study by Cheryl Ball, Daniel Anderson, Anthony Atkins, Krista Homicz Millar, Cynthia Selfe, and Richard Selfe (2007) that interrogates the way multimodality and new media are being integrated into curricula across the United States.
Although different from my work in a number of ways, their research serves as a strong base from which to conduct my study.

They distributed an extensive survey of 141 questions among 73 universities in an attempt to offer “a clear snapshot of who was teaching multimodal composing at what collegiate institutions in the US” (4). Where they offer a “snapshot,” I take a closer, more in-depth look at a graduate program as a site for compositions. In using interviews rather than surveys, I sought to create a narrative of experience rather than a brief look at the uses and definitions Ball et al. (2007) expose in their work. My study differs from theirs also in that their participants were chosen because of their integration of multimodality into the classroom; my call for participants did not include any indication as to their current uses and incorporation of multimodality. I wanted a more holistic view of multimodality at one specific site of graduate study as opposed to an examination of multimedia projects.

My project also differs from theirs in that I investigate multimodality as both digital and nondigital. Although Ball et al (2007) did not define “multimodal” for their participants, the selection of participants based upon the integration of multimodal assignments indicated multimodality as a digital concept. In other words, the participants were chosen because they were working on multimodal composition, which as best I can tell, they defined as composition with new media. In the opening of their discussion, they identify multimodal compositions as “compositions that take advantage of a range of rhetorical resources—words, still and moving images, sounds, music, animation—to create meaning” (2). While this definition does not imply an exclusively technological stance on multimodal, their initial inquiry began with questions about technology training within programs, and the bulk of their discussions revolve around digital multimodal projects, excluding any nondigital forms. My hope is to illumine some of the ways multimodality is occurring not merely as a digital concept, and as I constructed my project, I sought to design questions that left the discussion of multimodality open in regard to technology.

Despite this difference, Ball’s study is important because it reveals the need for further investigation about multimodality and multiliteracies. Theirs is the first published study within the field of Rhetoric and Composition that empirically investigates these concepts. It informs my work as it seeks to recognize the affordances of composing in the composition classroom and as it investigates how graduate students are trained to teach and work in digital spaces. Their
survey also finds that the validity of multimodal compositions is still questionable in terms of tenure and promotion.

The dichotomy between support for teaching multimodal composition and researching (i.e. producing) multimodal composition as scholarship needs to be examined so that schools recognize this disparity between what instructors are able to teach versus what they are able to research (p. 34).

My project further investigates and perhaps complicates this tension as it applies to graduate students.

Graduate students in composition are becoming professionals in a moment of change in terms of how we define composition, how we teach composition, and how we produce compositions. As Gunther Kress (2003) argued, we are at a moment in the long history of writing when four momentous changes are taking place simultaneously: social, economic, communicational, and technological change. The combined effects of these are so profound that it is justifiable to speak of revolution in the landscape of communication…Communicational change is altering the relations of the means by which we represent our meanings, bringing image into the centre of communication more insistently than it has been for several hundred years…Technological change is altering the role and significance of the major media of dissemination. The screen is beginning to take the place of the book, and is thus unmaking the hitherto ‘natural’ relation between the mode of writing and the medium of the book and the page. (p. 9)

As other scholars are working to investigate, validate, and interrogate the use of multiple modes in this time of change, it is imperative to consider how the discipline is also changing. As both students and teachers, graduate students are at the heart of the discipline and are therefore a strong source of discovering how texts are being changed by technology and how these new texts are being integrated into the field.

In response to these societal changes, we, as a culture and discipline are attempting to define and redefine terms. Although the terms mode/literacy and their “multis” have been used in a number of ways (a point to which I return and discuss more thoroughly in chapter 2), I draw most heavily from the New London Group (2000) and closely follow their notions of both terms because I think their definitions allow for discussions of both multimodality and multiliteracies
in both the digital and the nondigital realm. They conceptualize multiliteracy as a term that “engages with the multiplicity of communications channels and media…and with the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” (p. 5). They expand literacy beyond what they call “mere literacy,” a literacy that “remains centred on language only, and usually on a singular, national form of language at that, being conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence” (p. 5). As a pedagogy, multiliteracies “focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone… in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (p5).

Within a pedagogy of multiliteracies, modes are considered “designs” of meaning-making, grammars through which to communicate. Multimodality is seen as the ultimate design of making meaning, “as it represents the patterns of interconnection among other modes” (25). The New London Group describes modes as spaces in which “functional grammars, the metalanguages that describe and explain patterns of meaning, are required” (25), and besides multimodal, they identify linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial as available modes through which to make meaning.

In essence, my project explores how and if a pedagogy of multiliteracies is and can be integrated into graduate programs. It explores how graduate students engage with various modes and literacies and questions institutional constraints in terms of modality, digital work, and the anticipation of multiliteracies within graduate student populations.

Participant Population

The participants for this study were chosen from a pool of 22 graduate students currently enrolled in the composition and rhetoric program at a mid-sized, public university in the Midwest. The solicitation of participants was done via department listserv and was open to all graduate students in composition and rhetoric who were currently teaching or who had taught as a graduate student at some point. I eventually chose 9 of the 11 respondents based upon availability as well as their positions in the program. I wanted to get as representative a group of participants as possible, and the nine participants include, three Master’s students, two in their first year (Chad and Luke), one in his second year (Mark); and six Doctoral students, two in their first year (Iris and Patricia), one in her second year (Jennifer), one in her third year (Barbara),
and two in their fifth year (Lynn and Daniel). The participants range in age from 22 to 50+, and come to the graduate program with varied backgrounds and interests.

The differences in the participants’ ages and backgrounds offer a rich combination of narratives and experiences through which to explore the graduate program. I acknowledge, however, some potential discrepancies in responses for several reasons. First, four of my participants (Patricia, Iris, Luke and Chad) are first-year students. Many of their responses, therefore, only represent the one semester of classes they were enrolled in at the time, particularly the Master’s students (Chad and Luke), who did not have another program to reference. Second, those participants who were not currently taking classes (Lynn, Richard, and Barbara), struggled, I think, to remember specifics of classes because they were so far removed from their classroom experiences. Third, one participant (Barbara), although she had held a teaching assistantship in the past and planned to return to teaching the next year, was not currently teaching, and therefore did not speak as readily to teaching experiences and the application of multimodality into the classroom.

I conducted and recorded each of the interviews at locations of the participants’ choice. Some of the interviews were conducted at an off-campus coffee shop, others were at offices in the department, and still others were at the homes of the participants. After the interviews, I asked the participants to submit examples of some of the multimodal work they produced as graduate students, especially those who had discussed their work within the interviews. That said, the data collection for this project has been continual, as my participants help me fill in the blanks in the interviews, offer me additional information, and clarify the concepts we’d discussed in the interviews.

My relationships with the participants, who are also my friends and colleagues, provide me with continual interaction with them and has allowed for the research to be collaborative; as a close friend of many of the participants, two of whom are sitting at the next table as I write this, I have looked over the top of my computer to confirm dates, ages and projects, or expanded my understandings of their projects in phone conversations. While this is not traditionally considered “talking back” as discussed by Caroline Bertell’s (1996), it does mimic the interactivity that such a methodology supports. In establishing a dialogue with my participants about the research and their responses, the project becomes a shared endeavor, as much theirs as it is mine. Because I hope this work will be in some ways change-inducing, this dialogic
relationship allows for the participants to be active in changing their own positions within the institution, which, according to Patti Lather (1991), is one way to achieve reciprocity in emancipatory research.

In many ways, my participants have been integral in revising the ways I see the data I have collected and the ways I am presenting it. In this way, my research follows Lather’s (1991) call to increase reciprocity in empirical research through “interactive, dialogic” interviews that include self-disclosure on the part of the researcher and lead to “a collaborative, dialogic seeking for greater mutual understanding” (60-61). In addition, I have worked to maintain an astute awareness of my own position as a researcher, a critical stance that follows Lather’s description of praxis-oriented research, wherein the relationship between researcher and researched is examined and considered throughout. As I have interviewed my participants, I have continued to be self-reflexive, considering the way our shared position as graduate students affects their responses as well as my analysis of the data.

But the nature of my friendships with the participants also makes me nervous—am I casting their stories through rose-colored lenses? Am I coercing them into further discussions about my project? In other words, while I have enjoyed working and thinking with my friends and colleagues, they have also presented me with a crisis of representation, as I consider myself accountable to them on a number of levels: as friend, colleague, researcher and fellow graduate student. Despite these nerves, my relationships with each of the participants infuse my work with a respect and carefulness called upon by feminist methodologists, who encourage us to consider research participants as people rather than subjects. Although my project is not an ethnography, I align myself with Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (1996), as she notes the importance of self-reflexivity in ethnographic studies (p. 119), and want to make evident the negotiations I have been working through as I consider my various positions not only in the lives of the participants but also in the institution in which I conducted the research.

Among my participants, I work to achieve reciprocity in a variety of ways, hoping to meet individual needs. Admittedly, the inconsistency in approaches to reciprocity resulted in an unbalanced level of reciprocity among the participants; likewise the varied nature of my relationships with each of the participants created a fluctuating sense of and need for reciprocity. First and foremost, I think my participants recognized their involvement in this study as a unique chance to speak back to the program and department about their needs and experiences.
Although the graduate student is not, in my experiences at this university, a silenced population, I do think this project gives voice to graduate students where they would not otherwise have had it. Many of the interviews led my participants, so they said, to a greater understanding of what they were doing here: one participant found out, through our interview, that she had the opportunity to enroll in a technical communications class—a class she subsequently took and found helpful in terms of a multimodal approach to the classroom and in terms of developing her own scholarly interests; one participant and I began an ongoing (and still continuing) discussion of methods and methodology, which has helped her in developing her dissertation. The reciprocity I tried to achieve with my participants occurred primarily in the academic realm, and although it manifested itself in implicit rather than explicit ways, I see this study as an extension of academic collaboration, a vision which reflects notions of reciprocity as presented by Lather.

The Institution

The institution in which each of the participants is enrolled is a mid-sized Composition and Rhetoric program that traditionally funds each of its graduate students at both the Master’s and Doctoral level through a teaching assistantship. As an introduction to teaching first-year composition, all graduate teaching assistants enroll in a Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing seminar, which serves as a three-week training program. In addition, their first year of teaching is supplemented by a two-semester practicum that allows for continual pedagogical development. At the time of my study, the Director of Composition had held that position for five years, and as the director was responsible for teaching the training seminar as well as the practica. All of the participants were trained under the same Director of Composition, who is a scholar in Disability Studies and whose pedagogical teachings emphasize concepts of Universal Design, inclusion, and multiple literacies. The coherence of the training ensures that each of my participants were (perhaps directly) instructed to engage with multiple literacies in their classrooms; it also meant that as I interviewed my participants, they were already readily informed of concepts of inclusion and multiple literacies and used that language without hesitation.

During the year I conducted the interviews, the institution began a digital writing program, the Digital Writing Collaborative (DWC), which supports the teaching of composition in digital, networked spaces. Because of the DWC and its various initiatives, graduate students
have the opportunity to teach in completely wireless and/or digital classrooms, and three of my participants (Jennifer, Lynn, and Mark) and I teach in a computer classroom. Several other participants (Iris, Patricia, Luke and Chad) mentioned the DWC as a resource for training or as a future endeavor for their teaching. The inception of the DWC is important because it positions the institution as a location just beginning to feel the effects of technological change in the composition classroom. It is also important to note that the DWC is almost entirely comprised of graduate students. With one tenure-track professor serving as coordinator and one part-time instructor, the DWC functions with a graduate assistant director and 10 other graduate instructors. I mention this to illumine the centrality of graduate students in the first-year writing composition program’s transition to computer classrooms.

Graduate students in the Rhetoric and Composition program (as well as the literature and creative writing programs) are being trained to adopt pedagogies that embrace multiliteracies and, through the DWC, are learning to integrate multiple modes into their teaching as well. Although the Composition and Rhetoric students are not required to be involved with the DWC, all of last year’s incoming Composition and Rhetoric students are currently involved in the program, and five of this year’s six first-year graduate students a plan to participate in the program as teachers next year. Likewise, although the program does not require a class in Computers and Composition, a seminar focused on Computers and Composition is offered every year. Thus, although, as some of my participants pointed out, this particular university might be considered behind in the transition to integrating new technology in the composition classroom the DWC is expediting the transition.

In short, the graduate participants involved in my study are enrolled in a program that values multiple literacies as a pedagogical imperative and that works to adapt to the cultural and technological changes occurring.

Data Analysis: Theorizing Multiple Spaces, Identities and Experiences

In this project, I am concerned both with space and identity—the discursive and physical spaces in which graduate students process and produce scholarship and through which they form their identities as teachers, students, and members of the profession. My attention to space follows Jim Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Jeff Grabill, Stuart Blythe, and Libby Miles’ (2000) institutional critique, in which they “focus…on institutions as rhetorical systems of decision making that exercise power through the design of space (both material and discursive)” (p. 621).
Although I began my research concerned primarily with the way multimodality functioned within graduate programs, as I conducted my research and analyzed the data, I realized my data called for an examination of the larger institution of the university, the English department, as well as graduate students’ position within these institutions. Porter et al. propose institutional critique as a methodology for change: “We aim to change the practices of institutional representatives and to improve the conditions of those affected by and served by institutions; especially, within our own field, writers, students, part-time composition teachers, workers, local communities, and those not traditionally served by the university” (p. 611). Graduate students, too, might be added to this list of those whom institutional critique might serve. Although my research does not focus entirely on critiquing or working toward change in the university and department, in listening to my participants and reflecting on my own experiences, I am prompted to look more closely at the ways the constructed discursive and material spaces in which graduate students work and learn. Porter et al. “contend that institutional change requires attention to the material and spatial conditions of disciplinary practices inside a particular institution,” and they “argue that institutions are situated physically, that theories of change must account for that situatedness, and that attention to spatiality helps one fashion institutional change” (p. 620). To this end, I approached my data analysis by locating both the physical and discursive spaces about which the participants spoke.

Analyzing the interview responses, I found that participants located themselves in material spaces, and I discuss these material spaces as either the graduate seminar or the first-year writing classroom, and further identify them as either digital and networked/wired or as traditional and nondigital. I further sifted through the interview responses by examining the discursive spaces about which graduate participants spoke. I locate access to various modes and genres within this space, and I analyzed the data by looking at participants’ discussions of discursive constraints they encountered.

In looking at the data in relation to space, I am able to locate my interrogation of multimodal practices in specific material spaces—the graduate seminar and the first-year writing classroom, and I am also able to see multimodality as a concept that works against an institutionalized primacy of language (see Dunn, 2000). According to Porter et al., discursive acts are “institutionally based, materially constrained, experientially grounded manifestations of social and power relations” (Harvey qtd in Porter et al. p. 622), and by looking at the social and
power relations of the graduate seminar (as seen through the eyes of the graduate students I interviewed), I work in this piece to reveal a need for a localized institutional critique.

As I use spatial concerns to analyze and discuss my research, the complexities of the graduate student identity intermingle, making it obvious the way each identity (teacher, student, professional) is affected by the spaces and processes/products that grow out of each of these spaces. The material spaces in which graduate students learn and teach limit and alter the process and products through which graduate students construct their identities; likewise the discursive spaces in which graduate students create and make meaning are shaped by the types of processes and products they learn as teachers and scholars. Throughout, I follow Porter et. al. in their differentiation between material and discursive spaces, where material is the physical and where discursive refers to domains in which semiotic systems function. For my purposes, the discursive includes genres and modes, spaces where symbols “can be read and can produce meaning” (p. 622).

Graduate students continually navigate the authority constructs of the institution, as they become teacher in one class and student in the next, and these authority constructs define and redefine notions of “acceptable.” The voices of graduate students are important in speaking back to the field about the messages it sends, the values it professes, the actions that reflect these messages and values. In the chapters that follow, I examine the graduate participants’ responses as a means of locating spaces for change that might serve the graduate student.

In Chapter Two, I offer an overview of the ways graduate student experiences have been documented, researched, and written about in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. I also explain the various definitions, uses, and research involving literacy, modes, multiliteracy and multimodality. Chapter Three focuses on the role of participants as teachers and their engagement in multimodal works therein. I focus on the material spaces of the first-year classrooms in which participants teach and examine the participants’ experiences as teachers in both digital and traditional classrooms. As teachers, the discursive space they make available to their students includes various modes and genres, and this chapter reveals a disparity between the way participants discuss multimodality as a digital and nondigital concept.

Chapter Four uncovers issues of multimodality as it pertains to graduate students as learners. The participants share their stories of learning to learn in the graduate environment and
evidence some of the risks and restrictions embedded in that space. My participants substantiate
a need for more attention to the graduate student as individual learner within the class, and in this
chapter, I discuss the way the authority constructs affect potentials for multimodality as a
meaning-making tool.

In conclusion, Chapter Five returns to Universal Design as a pedagogy that might enact
institutional change at this localized site. Drawing upon my participants’ discussions, I look at
the affordances of UD as they might apply to the less universal space of graduate seminars. In
this examination, I locate multimodal practices as both necessary within the graduate realm as
well as composition classrooms in general.
Chapter 2: Looking Back: Graduate Studies, Literacy, and Discursive Spaces

In this chapter, I look at the theories surrounding the discursive spaces in which we write (both modal and generic) as well as the research done on literacy in its multiple forms. Considering the current moment, where technological advances are pervading the classes in which we teach, I work to uncover the ways these changes are affecting our view(s) of pedagogy, literacy, and learning. Very few of these discussions, however, overlap with an examination of graduate student identity, and I turn first to examine the broader discussion of graduate students within Rhetoric and Composition programs.

Graduate Student Identity

Within English departments, especially within Rhetoric and Composition programs, graduate students often take on multiple roles, and in entering a graduate program situate themselves (or are situated) within a labyrinth of authority constructs, institutional expectations and disciplinary traditions. The assimilation or acculturation of the graduate student happens on several levels: within the specific department, within the larger field (professionalization), and often within new cities, homesteads, and social realms. The graduate student position within the academy has not, as I discussed in Chapter One, been widely written about or researched within the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Only a few scholars have devoted their research to the graduate student population, and those who include graduate students as subjects of their work have often done so without addressing the complexities of the graduate student role.

For example, one of the first empirical studies published that focused on a graduate student was Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin’s 1988 discussion of “Nate,” a student whose texts they studied throughout a year of his graduate study. Although they do interrogate the discursive spaces in which graduate students work as writers, they do not focus on Nate’s position as a graduate student within the department as uniquely constructed in the institution; rather, they focus on how “one writer began to learn the conventions and conversations for literate communication within a specific disciplinary framework” (p. 40). Through an analysis of writing produced over a year of graduate study, Berkenkotter and Huckin conclude that over time Nate makes “substantial progress” in assimilating to academic writing but that he navigates the linguistic domain more readily than he uses “rhetorical conventions” (pp. 36-37). My project answers their call for “studies of graduate student writers entering disciplinary communities,” as
I ask questions about the generic and discursive constraints the participants work through and within. In part, this study also echoes Bartholomae’s (1986) discussion of the ways in which students are required to learn and reinvent genres and spaces in order to function within the university.

My study departs from Berkenkotter and Huckin’s discourse-based approach: it centers on the graduate student as an identity constructed not only through generic and discursive spaces but also through physical spaces, institutional pressures, and social and technological changes. The method of interview validates the graduate student voice and experience, and offers an assessment of not merely assimilation but acculturation, wherein the student seeks not to leave the former self behind but seeks to develop and bring with her/him the literacies and knowledge already established. I hope to produce a sketch not only of how the graduate student identity is professionalized and changed by the graduate program/classroom/discourses, but I also hope to offer a view of the ways in which graduate students change the programs/classrooms/discourses in which they work.

Since Berkenkotter and Huckin, other scholars have focused more closely on graduate student experiences, but many of these studies discuss the graduate realm as it involves professionalization or anxiety about post-graduate study. In 1997, for example, Miller, Brueggemann, Blue and Shepherd conducted a nationwide survey of graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition programs, revealing an overall satisfaction with the graduate programs but “far less satisfaction with and far less understanding about the broader realm of Rhetoric and Composition” (p. 397). Their research revealed graduate students’ desire to better understand the larger field into which they were entering as well as a need to gain skills that would help them transition into the field as professionals. The results of the survey, then, led to a larger discussion of how to better professionalize students and offer a more concrete understanding of the field, a discussion that was expanded in later years by other studies and articles concerning the professionalization of graduate students (Estrem and Lucas 2003; Graff 2000; McNabb 2002; Peirce and Enos 2006). Professionalization, or indoctrination into the larger field, has continued to be an issue for graduate students, and the dialogue the field has engaged in signals the nebulous territory in which graduate students work. Professionalization has become one of the goals of many graduate programs; through efforts in professionalization, graduate student learn to become active members of the field as they become involved in
professional organizations, publish in journals, and focus their work on various subdisciplines (new media studies, feminist rhetorics, empirical research methods).

In 2002, Robert Gross, then editor of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, offered an editor’s column devoted to giving professional advice to graduate students, which included bullet pointed blurbs like, “From your first year onward, think of yourself as a fully invested member of the professional field,” and “Be aware of your position in the departmental hierarchy, but do not be afraid to speak your mind as long as you can justify your opinions on intellectual ground” (p. 495). His article echoes many of the suggestions made by Andrew Hoberek (2002). As a graduate student, I find articles like these helpful, and they signal an acknowledgement of the graduate student within the department. Like Berkenkotter and Huckin, however, these articles remove the personhood of the student from the discussion, and construct the graduate student role as perhaps more stable than I offer it. Both Gross (2002) and Hoberek (2002) discuss the needs of graduate students without identifying needs that exist within classrooms and other preparatory spaces; the professionalized graduate student is conceived of through activities and programmatic attempts to acculturate the to-be professional. The move to professionalize graduate students posits the graduate student as a singular identity, perhaps leaving out, as my participants discuss, their identities as students.

Taylor and Holberg (1999) take up the graduate student identity as a multidimensional, dynamic position, existing on a borderland, and it is this version of the graduate student that I hope to present through my study. Although I do not necessarily maintain the idea that the graduate student is “academic Other,” I think the participants involved locate themselves in the “borderlands,” as Taylor and Holberg describe, in that they are unsure of their roles as they navigate in and out of authority positions and classrooms. Taylor and Holberg identify the graduate student as existing both in the profession and out, both as teacher and as student; that is, they forefront the complexities of the graduate student role. The complexities of the authority constructs that Taylor and Holber discuss are reiterated and supported by my interviews with graduate students. In some ways, these sentiments about authorities and expectations echo David Bartholomae’s (1986) discussion of the basic writer. He says, “The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily or comfortably one with their audience, as though they were members of the
academy” (p. 5). As with basic writers, graduate students have to enter into a discursive space as both novice and expert—straddling, as Taylor and Holberg point out, the border of the academy.

As Bartholomae (1986) and Berkencotter and Huckin (1988) discuss, the discursive expectations of the academy are difficult to meet, and graduate students, especially are met with a variety of discursive expectations as they negotiate their various roles. Powell, Mach, O’Neill, and Huot (2002) engage in a discussion of the multiplicity of the graduate role as they look at the “competing roles and conflicting discourses” graduate administrators face. In this dialogue, Powell et. al (2002) suggest that graduate students enter and use literacies in uniquely different ways depending on their own subjectivities and experiences. By writing in a nontraditional format, the authors give voice to the graduate experience as reported from journals and discussion group transcripts. The graduate students are considered not only as a group but also as individuals, and they present the graduate role as one that requires multiple literacies and multiple modes and a navigation through “the complex negotiations of graduate student authority” (p. 91).

In my study, I work to represent the various literacies required not just of graduate administrators but any graduate student who maintains both student and authority positions (either administrative, teacher, or tutor). My study also offers literacy as a valid concern for graduate students performing multiple roles, as they bring varying literacies with them and are likewise expected to execute various literacies in their work. I follow Powell’s (2002) study as I relate the privileging of academic literacy over other nontraditional literacies to the graduate student realm, and I, too, question the literacies and modes we value in graduate students.

At the graduate level, the literacy of students often goes unquestioned. Because graduate students in English studies are often the most capable of traditional readers and writers, interrogating their literacy practices might seem unnecessary. However, as literacy studies revise and revamp their definitions of what it means to be literate, and as texts become multifarious, multimodal, and transferred from print, the traditional skills graduate students bring to their classrooms can no longer be accepted as the basic skills necessary for survival. The concept of multiliteracies, which has long been proposed in disability studies and which has been further perpetuated by the technological changes occurring in larger society, has become increasingly important for undergraduate studies, and, I will argue, for graduate studies as well.
**Genre, Mode, or Text**

This project works to recognize the multiplicities of literacy that graduate students learn through, engage with, and execute throughout their graduate careers. The execution of these literacies is not separate from their production of specific discursive genres and modes or their use of modes as a means of immediate communication within physical spaces. Although this project is not explicitly concerned with notions of genre, I turn first to genre in order to situate my understanding of modalities and literacies.

Much has been written about genre, both in literature and Rhetoric and Composition. In its earliest literature origins, genre might be understood as form, convention, or the “rules” of certain types of writing. Aristotle’s earliest definitive genres, epic, lyric, and drama, continue to fuel an understanding of genre as a tool through which readers, writers and scholars might categorize and label various types of written, performed, and visual works. Other literary scholars follow Aristotle in seeing genres as definitive, classificatory labels. For example, Propp’s (1968) discussion of the fairy tale divides the genre into 20 specific generic attributes. Barthes (1977) also followed a structural view of the narrative as he systematically breaks down genres via various functions, like catalysers or cardinal functions. The discussion of mode, however, complicates notions of genre.

In his discussion of “The Architext,” Gerard Genette (1992) offers a perhaps decisive place to locate the genre/mode split. He criticizes the conflation of (Plato and) Aristotle’s views of genre, a conflation out of which he sees the ‘all-too-seductive triad’ developing. For Genette, a genre indicates a literary category which indicates thematic, formal, and historic qualities whereas a mode specifies the “means of enunciation” (Duff 2000, p. 210). The triad to which we turn for generic distinction originally began with Goethe as a modal distinction. As they became historic types with thematic distinctions, however, the “natural forms” (modes) were “redefined in generic terms.” “Therein lies the essential difference of status between genres and modes; genres are properly literary categories that belong to linguistics, or (more exactly to what we now call *pragmatics*” (p. 213). Genette’s own conclusion about the genre/mode distinction prompted him to rename the triad as archigenres, a move that has not since proliferated. However, Genette reminds us, in his renaming of the genre, that in literary theory, genres and modes are often conflated, and he suggests that Northrop Frye might be the “nearly the only modern literary theorist who maintains the distinction between modes and genres” (p. 213). Frye’s most notable
contribution to genre theory is in his categorization of for major literary forms: comedy, tragedy, romance, and irony/satire. Frye pairs each form with the four seasons (Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer) and coins them his four mythoi, or modes, a move which again separates genre from mode. Where Frye ties genre to the triad plus his added “fiction,” modes are “pre-generic” and “cease to be the discrete entit[ies] [they] ha[d] functioned as historically” (Duff 2000, p. 98).

The general distinction between genre and mode in literary terms remains much the same as Genette describes it: mode as a means of enunciation (narrative); genre as a form or category of literature (novel). Definitions of genre, however, are continually contested, revised, and in some cases thrown out. In “The Law of Genre,” Jacques Derrida (1990) resists the idea that genres even exist in any stable form, as each text folds genre upon itself and at the moment of its writing, changes and revises whatever genre it might have originally been intended for.

A text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging...Making genre its mark, a text demarcates itself. If remarks of belonging belong without belonging, participate without belonging, then genre-designations cannot be simply part of the corpus. (p. 54 original emphasis)

In his playful and mocking approach to discussion genre, Derrida offers that in naming a text through type, form, genre or mode, the text redefines whatever type, form, genre or mode system to which it has been appropriated.

While the literary definitions of genre in some ways overlap with new rhetorical theories of genre and the discussions surrounding genre within the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition, the field has largely departed from this static notion of genre. Within Rhetoric and Composition, the term has been redefined and perhaps reclaimed several times over, although the moves have generally been in the same direction: towards an open rather than closed version of genre1. Where genres within literary theory might traditionally be thought of as containers that hold thoughts, new rhetorical theorists work to develop an open system of genres, wherein authors maintain autonomy, creating and constructing compositions within and against the constraints of genres. Carolyn Miller (1984) defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based

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in rhetorical situations,” rejecting the idea of a genre as a taxonomic system or an a priori principle. Miller suggests that compositions might be best categorized based upon the “social action” they perform rather than their form. For her, and other genre scholars in composition, genres are conventional responses to rhetorical situations that have the potential to help communities and individuals redefine themselves. More important than form is what the piece of writing is trying to do and the rhetorical situation to which the writing responds.

Other scholars in the field have taken up the genre question, elaborating upon and drawing from Miller’s definition. Amy Devitt (2004) identifies genre as the nexus of three separate contexts: the context of genres, the context of situations, the context of culture—not a response to recurring situations (like Miller) so much as a “nexus between an individual’s actions and a socially defined context…a reciprocal dynamic within which individuals’ actions construct and are constructed by recurring context of situation, context of culture and context of genre” (p. 31). Devitt allows for genre to be dynamic and unstable, but because she has situated the instability within the situational and cultural contexts, she offers a means of understanding the changes that occur within genres. As a composition scholar, Devitt writes on genre from a pedagogical view and infuses it with a participatory element, and follows Miller in proposing that those who use genres have the power to change them as well.

Anis Bawarshi (2003) situates genre within the composition classroom as well, and in discussing the “genre function,” offers that genres are “both functional and epistemological—they help us function within particular situations at the same time as they help shape the ways we come to know and organize these situations.” He concludes that by making genred spaces available to students, we can enable them to participate in these spaces more meaningfully. In other words, the rhetorically situated genre allows for writers and readers to redefine the discursive spaces they navigate, a concept integral to an emancipatory, student-centered pedagogy.

In focusing the notion of genre on the classroom and in situating it rhetorically, genre theorists have paved the way for theorists of new media, who are revising compositions not only generically but modally as well. The notion of mode within Rhetoric and Composition seems a historically less debated topic than genre. Between the 1895 and 1930 and through the 1950s, composition relied heavily on the four modes of discourse (Narration, Description, Exposition and Argument) as a teaching tool (Connors). The four modes were superceded by other means of
teaching composition, and the definition of mode was dismissed until the integration of computers and online/new media texts, when modes were suddenly revived as central to theorizing not only classroom practices but also larger semiotic questions.

Kress, one of the most prominent and influential theorists on mode and multimodality, brings mode into the discussion of genre, as he situates every text as important in terms of genre, discourse, and mode. For Kress (2003), genre is defined as

That shaping of a text which reflects and is brought into existence as a result of the social relations of the participants in the making (writing/reading) and in the use (reading/hearing/interpretation) of a text. (p. 48)

His definition of genre is helpful because he offers a larger category, that of the “text,” in order to give an overarching name to a composition that works to communicate some concept. Kress further complicated the idea of genre, however, by suggesting that genre is not a purely linguistic phenomenon. “The problem which arises,” he claimed, “is that the theoretical categories developed to understand and describe genre are linguistic categories, developed by linguistics for linguistically realized objects” (p. 106). The text, for Kress, is tightly bound to genre, but is also inextricably linked to its mode as well. A mode can be defined as “the name for a culturally and socially fashioned resource for representation and communication” (p. 45). Each mode has its own logic, its own grammar, which can communicate the same concept in a different way, with a different logic.

The New London Group (2000) defines mode in much the same way, emphasizing the concept of design in meaning-making systems. They delineate the five major modes available in meaning-making Design: verbal, linguistic, audio, spatial, and gestural. As they define them, however, the modes are always working at once together to make a multimodal design of meaning. The multimodal design offers a way to understand the ways new texts relate the linguistic mode, previously identified as the most prevalent, to other modes.

The designs of meaning as the New London Group propose them open up a space to revise our understanding of literacy as well as modes and genre because viewing linguistic as only one of many modes prompts us as teachers and scholars to interrogate the modes in which we have literacy. Their discussion of mode is merely a step to defining a pedagogy that embraces various literacies. Along with the terms “genre” and “mode,” the term literacy is a highly debated and socially loaded word. While I do not attempt here to offer a comprehensive
view of the way literacy has been used and changed throughout history, I work here to situate the concept of multiliteracies, a concept central to my project, within the larger discussion. Throughout, I follow the New London Group in seeing genre as subsumed under mode—where modes encompass genre and can be made up of a number of genres.

**Literacy, Multiliteracy, and Movement Towards Multimodal Pedagogies**

Understood generally as the ability to read and write, composition scholars for many years have been invested in the idea of literacy. Although the standard definition of literacy as a set of skills necessary to read and write continue stably within the wider social and political realm, scholars like Brian Street (1993) and Elspeth Stuckey (1990) question the ubiquitously understood goodness in the term. It has historically been seen as central to civilization and advancement as evidenced by Walter Ong’s (1982) claim:

> Literacy is absolutely necessary for the development of not only history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature, of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language (including oral speech) itself (p. 15).

The ability to read and write print-based texts continues to be researched and scholars like Deborah Brandt (2001) continue to discover the layers of traditional literacies. Brandt’s (2001) work situates literacy within rhetorical situations and is especially important for my discussion of literacy because of its presentation. Where other discussions of literacy, like Ong’s, position literacy as a set of skills about which to theorize, Brandt “makes no attempt to measure people’s literacy skills against any kind of standard” (9). Rather, her interview-based work tells the stories of literacy acquisition. She represents the (alphabetic) literacy of participants through life-story methods and although my work is not life-story or autobiographical, her work serves as a model for representing my participants.

Brandt acknowledges the limitations of her definition of literacy as alphabetic, and other scholars have taken up literacy in a vast array of other senses. The term literacy is becoming the tag of many other skills, understood more as the ability to function within a specific domain. Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola (1999) critique this trend, pointing out that literacy comes in as many as 278 forms: socioliteracy, visual literacy, digital literacy, cultural literacy, to name a few. Literacy, then, becomes the ability to navigate within a specific rhetorical situation, whether that be reading *Moby Dick* for a literature course or understanding the ins and outs of street life.
These broader definitions of literacy offer women like Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) a space in which to discuss literate experiences that are not encapsulated by more traditional forms of literacy. Because traditional understandings of literacy are couched in oppressive and patriarchal values, we see in new definitions of literacy an opening for oral traditions, matriarchal ideals, and “a sense of human variety in the use of literacy” (p. 6). Although she focuses on the essay as an established genre, her work paved the way for other less traditional literacy sites and practices. Michael Newman (2005) focuses on the genre of hip-hop ciphers to extrapolate an ideologically-focused theory of literacy. In doing so he offers a broader meaning of literacy that “refers to competence at systems of information, extraction, and manipulation within specified domains or modalities” (p. 401).

Newman’s definition grows out of an understanding of multiliteracies, as posited by the New London group’s (2000) multiliteracies project and Gunther Kress’ (with Van Leeuwen 2001; 2003) influential work on multimodality, which defines literacy as all “socially made forms of representing and communicating” (p. 3). The most current turn in literacy definitions and in an understanding of literacies as multiple has grown out of the technological changes affecting our classrooms and our writing. As many scholars in new media studies have established, the text has transformed from a print-based, alphabetic text, to a multimedia, multimodal (in some cases interactive) amalgamation of various types of texts (Gee 2003, Selber 2003; Selfe and Hawisher 2004; Wysocki et. al 2005).

For new media scholars, the adoption of the term multiliteracies signals an understanding in semiotic theory, English studies, and communication of the various domains inherent in new, although some would argue all, forms of composing. Importantly, the adoption of multiliteracies for disability studies and education signals an understanding of difference and the need for autonomous agency within the writer. Both positions are helpful, I think, in constructing a complete view of how multiliteracies change and develop our field and our pedagogies.

In “Blinded by the Letter,” Anne Wysocki and Johndon Johnson-Eilola note the varieties of literacy being accumulated over time and discuss how new technologies are changing “literacy.”

‘Literacy’—if we describe it as some set of skills that allow us to work with the information structures of our time—then becomes the ability to move in the new-
technology spaces of information, the ability to make instantaneous connections between informational objects that allow us to see them all at once. (p. 298)

As the term “text,” begins to refer also to hypertext, visual texts, multimedia texts and audio texts, the ability to read and write said texts becomes complicated. Some scholars continue to add literacy to words like visual, technology, and media. Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe (2004), for example, situate literacy in an increasingly technological age, noting that “the ability to read, compose and communicate in computer environments…has acquired immense importance not only as a basic job skill, but also, every bit as significant, as an essential component of literate activity” (p. 1-2). They continue to use the word literacy, but argue for the importance of “properly situat[ing] [their] studies within the context of a particular historical period, a particular cultural milieu, and a specific cluster of material conditions” (p. 5). Kress (2003), on the other hand, asserts that literacy should be linked only to “messages using letters as the means for recording that message” (p. 23). Hawisher and Selfe and Kress’ differing definitions of literacy are at the heart of what seems to be a disciplinary conflict—is literacy a concept inherently linked to language, or is it a concept that extends to other proficiencies as well?

Despite the conflicting definitions of literacy, most scholars agree that our students and therefore we as teachers ought to attain a digital literacy and that any mode of composing, even if it’s an essay, requires some form of digital literacy. Selber (2003) offers several types of literacy that ought to be taught in the move towards attaining digital literacy. For him, to define literacy as merely a set of skills amounts to only one step of literacy, called functional literacy. He argues for integrating two other forms of literacy, critical and rhetorical, in order to fully understand and use digital media. In other words, it is not sufficient to teach students how to use a word processor; rather, we must teach students to think about how engaging with that medium changes their writing and constructs their identities.

James Gee (2003) revises the term literacy as well, as he proposes the video games offer a set of literate practices. He writes

Even though reading and writing seem so central to what literacy means traditionally, reading and writing are not such general and obvious matters as they might seem. After all, we never just read or write; rather, we always read or write something in some way. (p. 14)
He continues to revise literacy as he places texts within semiotic domains in order to offer a deviation from considering literacy as merely reading or writing.

If we think first in terms of semiotic domains and not in terms of reading and writing as traditionally conceived, we can say that people are (or are not) literate (partially or fully) in a domain if they can recognize (the equivalent of “reading”) and/or produce (the equivalent of “writing”) meanings in the domain. (p. 23)

Regardless of what we might call it, literacy has clearly evolved into a set of multiple skills, an ability to situate oneself within the flood of texts within which we interact. Even with the most nonacademic texts, like video games, scholars are finding the skills sets through which we understand the worlds and rhetorically situate ourselves make up a set of literate practices.

Through these scholars, we begin to understand how texts are being revised and therefore how acts of reading texts are changing. The National Council for the Teaching of English currently supports what they call multimodal literacies as they are connected to new media technology. They define multimodal literacies as “metacognitive strategies for developing literacy practices that can be carried across multiple sites/texts/media, rather than a set of practices tied to specific sites.” Their endorsement of a multimodal approach to teaching literacy indicates a discipline-wide acceptance of the integration of new technologies (and therefore new literacies) into the undergraduate classroom. Likewise, the publication of pedagogical texts and handbooks, like Hawisher and Selfe’s (1999) *Passions, Pedagogies, and the 21st Century* or Wysocki, Sirc, Johnson-Eilola, and Selfe’s (2004) *Writing New Media* offer a convincing argument that the technological changes Kress anticipates in his work are pervasive. In other words, the production of texts focused on adapting to the technological changes that the field is experiencing seems to indicate that these changes are, indeed, upon us.

I struggle, however, to see multiliteracies or multimodality as inherent to new media scholars and draw on Wysocki’s (2004) understanding of new media texts, which offers a space for nondigital texts in new media studies. By defining new media texts in terms of material (p. 15), she complicates our understanding of new media as technologically infused, but she also asks us to consider that “technologies are not responsible for texts, we are” (p. 19). She reminds us that multiliteracies happen because different learners, readers, and texts require different types of approaches. Some of the earlier work on multiliteracies done by scholars in disability studies indicate that these concepts are integral to democratic, feminist pedagogies. My study follows
Wysocki’s (2004) assertion that multimodality is not merely an attribute of technology, and it links multimodality to pedagogies of both digital and nondigital spaces.

In disability studies, scholars work to redefine literacy to include learners who have disabilities and nontraditional literacies. Brenda Jo Brueggemann (2001), for example, asserts that “Literacy as a communicative product means the individual is either a ‘have’ or a ‘have-not’” (p. 121, emphasis mine), and argues for a view of literacy that involves process, wherein literacy is an ability to communicate, regardless of the language. The remapping of literacy embraces learners, writers, speakers, and communicators of all kind, and the multiliteracies of students are identified as both valid and valuable. These notions work against what Patricia Dunn (1999) calls the “primacy of language,” that preferences the linguistic mode over others. She offers a practical guide to accessing the various literacies of students and theorizes how these practices might open up the classroom space for nontraditional learners.

I want to disrupt the myths about literacy: that ‘smart’ people write well; that ‘dumb’ people don’t; that writing is itself the best heuristic for carrying out the intellectual work involved in writing; that oral, visual or kinesthetic approaches to generating, organizing, or revising texts are acceptable for ‘basic’ writers but not ‘serious’ intellectual pathways for ‘real’ writers. (p. 9)

Dunn’s work serves as a basis for my work in a number of ways. As you will see, the graduate participants I interviewed find themselves working against the primacy of language, not only as teachers but also as students. As students, the oral, visual, and kinesthetic approaches Dunn defends as acceptable for ‘real’ writers seem to be rejected.

Accessing multiliteracies and using multimodality are central to inclusion in the classroom and a pedagogy of Universal Design, which focuses on the learner. I propose looking at multiliteracies not just as means of producing and reading multimodal texts, but also as a multimodal approach to learning. I hope that by looking at multimodality through a technological lens, we might turn the concept on end, and perhaps find a way to think about the graduate realm as designed not solely for the formally literate. That is, if we want to follow Dunn in her quest to debunk the literacy myth, the graduate classroom must necessarily be opened up for multiliterate practices and multimodal production.

Although graduate students in the field of Rhetoric and Composition are required to have a linguistic adeptness in order to be experts in the field, limiting the learning process to the
linguistic mode potentially limits the identity-formation and scholarship of the graduate student. Just as undergraduate students learn well and sometimes most effectively through nontraditional modes of meaning-making, so too do graduate students.

The production of multimodal texts within writing classrooms as well as within the profession increases as access to new technologies increases, and likewise the number of texts that address and theorize the way multimodality is changing the classroom increases. Teachers claim it offers students who struggle with verbal modes an “additional level of agency” (Tardy 2005, p. 334) and a means of “harnessing the resources that students bring with them” (Archer 2005, p. 449). Hull and Nelson argue as well, that “multimodality can afford, not just a new way of making meaning, but a different kind of meaning” (p. 225).

These affordances offered by multimodality are perhaps indisputable. The recent CCCC research project conducted by Ball and other cohorts in the field indicates a number of advantages to learning in digital, multimodal spaces. According to their survey of teachers within Rhetoric and Composition/Technical Communication, the affordances of multimodal approaches to the classroom are numerous. The participants in their study said that the integration of multimodal assignments and approaches allowed students to “gain a new understanding of communicating effectively,” encouraged students to be “actively and thoughtfully involved throughout each stage of the assignment/process,” and helped students understand how to use “technology medium/s for communicating.” In addition, the rhetorical capabilities of students were improved through the integration of various modes.

As I have discussed earlier, Ball’s (2007) study was highly influential in the development of my own not only because it investigates multimodality empirically, but because it clarifies (through teachers’ experiences) how the use of multimodality might improve compositions within the classroom. The affordances offered by the multimodal practices in the classroom and the multiple literacies accessed through these practices prompted me to ask whether as graduate students, my participants had access to these modes and benefited from these affordances. In her 2004 keynote address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Kathleen Blake Yancey acknowledged a need for new kind of pedagogy, given the new technological age. I wonder if this new pedagogy applies to the graduate classroom, and if so, how that pedagogy might be enacted.
I work here not to present a comprehensive overview of the ways genre, mode, literacy and their multiples have been discussed historically. Rather, my aim is to show that the current issues of multimodality and multiliteracy are pervasive and elaborately theorized but that the discussion remains generally within the confines of theory and the pedagogy generally within the confines of the undergraduate classroom. Throughout my work, I argue that these discussions are moving into the graduate realm because graduate students are teaching and enacting these pedagogies. And I question the movement of these ideas into the graduate seminar room, where the modalities remain verbal/linguistic, in either an oral or written form.

In the chapters that follow, I explore the ways graduate teachers have experienced and used multimodality with students in their classrooms, reiterating the affordances that Ball’s study present. I also explore multimodality within graduate students’ own learning experiences, revealing some accompanying tensions and risks. Within the discussion, the discursive and physical constraints participants navigate at times seem to hinder the discursive possibilities, particularly where classroom experiences are concerned. Their adherence to authority—either within the classroom or within the larger department—seems to be central to defining and delimiting their moves to explore various modes both as students and teachers.
Chapter 3 : Graduate Teachers: Situating Multimodality as Instructors

We need to challenge theories of knowing that privilege only one way of conceiving of ideas. Then we need to develop challenging pedagogies that use and develop alternate literacies, that expect the most from us and our students—Patricia Dunn

In the above quote, Patricia Dunn (2000) suggests that the pedagogies we use in the composition classroom ought to challenge monomodal ways of knowing and develop multiple literacies; she implicitly states that in doing so, we improve our students’ education and broaden their ways of considering the world. After theorizing the need for multiple literacies, she provides something of a handbook for teachers, in which she encourages us, through practical application, to integrate “alternate conception[s] of knowing” into the classroom. Although she deviates from the terminology, her alternate conceptions of knowing can be understood as modes—alternate “modes” of “meaning-making,” as the New London Group suggests. She writes, “The metacognitive distance all writers need can come through visual, aural, spatial, emotional, kinesthetic, or social ways of knowing, or unique combinations of them” (1).

Following her theorization of multiple literacies (and alternate ways of knowing), Dunn offers her reader four chapters of practical application of a multimodal approach to the classroom, insisting that activities like “Oral Peer Responses” (p. 89), “Sketching and Crossing out Sections of Typical Drafts” (p. 114), and “Multimodal Rounds” (p. 139) expand and broaden students’ understanding of content and composition.

In much the same spirit, Anne Wysocki, Johndon Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc (2004) suggest, “There is [neither] one ‘theory of written composition’ [nor]…one correct way into new media” (p. vii), and continue on, like Dunn, to expand ideas of reading and writing beyond the page. They provide practical activities for integrating new media, new technologies, and evolving literacies into the classroom. Cynthia Selfe writes, “Teachers of composition should not only be interested in new media texts, but should be using them systematically to teach about new literacies” (p. 44). Their text is devoted to a revision of pedagogy that integrates multiple literacies and multimodality.

Dunn (2000) and Wysocki et.al. (2004) enter into the discussion of multiple literacies from two different standpoints. Dunn (2000) is motivated by a recognition of the “primacy of language,” a “double edged sword” which links “language use with intelligence” (p. 21). Her primary concern is that omitting nonlinguistic modes and literacies disregards certain
populations of students and perpetuates the myth that language proficiency equates with intelligence. Wysocki et.al. (2004) approach the topic of multiple literacies as it relates to new media and technological advances. “Literacies,” Selfe writes, “accumulate rapidly when a culture is undergoing a particularly dramatic or radical transition” (p. 50). This cultural transition motivates their text and their view of multiple literacies relates to the proliferation of computer-based literacies both in and out of the composition classroom.

In acknowledging the different motivations for discussing multiple literacies, I also want to propose that the two approaches, one as a means of utilizing new media—one as a means of opening up the classroom to nontraditional, nonlinguistic learners, are not altogether disparate—that converging the two approaches offers a more complete theorization of the need for multiple literacies.

In the next two chapters, I offer my participants’ approaches to and experiences in the classrooms as a model and basis for this convergence, and finally in chapter five, I explore the implications for a multimodal/multiliterate approach to the graduate classroom. In this chapter, I will focus on the graduate teachers’ approaches to the classroom, and I suggest that the participants’ different classroom spaces, either digital or traditional, prompt them to discuss multimodality in significantly different veins. There exists an exigency for those in digital writing classrooms to utilize digital literacies and digital modes—I suggest that this might limit our understanding and use of multiple modes and literacies. Similarly, the traditional classroom makes an acknowledgement of digital literacies difficult in some ways. I close by suggesting that, despite the training some graduate teachers receive through the DWC, all participants feel a need to continue being trained in nontraditional literacies—particularly digital literacies.

In my presentation, I do not mean to set up a dichotomy between digital and nondigital forms of multimodality; rather I suggest that the exigency of the technological age prompts a focus on digital modes and literacies (as seen in the discussion of exclusively digital literacies in Wysocki’s text), and I propose that a pedagogy of multiliteracies ought to include nondigital activities and assignments aimed at broadening students’ understanding of writing and reading.

In offering this view, I set up a place from which to move in Chapter Four, where I discuss the need for a multimodal/multiliterate approach to the graduate classroom and graduate learners.

My interviews help me to understand the way various modes worked in the overall graduate experience. In coding my data, I found a natural division between how graduate
teachers used and viewed multimodality and how graduate learners used and viewed multimodality. The next two chapters reflect this division. I want to acknowledge, however, the danger of trying to separate the roles of the participants. By and large, participants spoke fluidly of their various roles and revealed a dialectical relationship between their practices and experiences as teachers and learners. This fluidity is, I think, the source of some of the tensions experienced within the experiences of participants, so while I do make an organizational move to divide the spaces and identities of the participants, I want to the reiterate the importance of seeing the graduate identity holistically.

I work in this chapter to reveal the participants’ experiences with teaching multimodal approaches in both digital and nondigital spaces. Among my participants three teach in digital spaces, where each student has his or her own computer (either a laptop or a desktop) in class. As members of the DWC (a requirement if graduate students teach in the digital classrooms), they have been exposed to pedagogies that integrate new media, and thus multimodality, into the assignments and activities. I begin this chapter by focusing on the ways these graduate teachers, Lynn, Jennifer and Mark, have been enacting a multimodal pedagogy within the classroom. I follow with a discussion of the way Iris and Patricia, two graduate teachers who teach in traditional classrooms, integrate multimodality into their traditional classrooms.

My discussions with graduate student teachers (from here, graduate teachers) complicate some of the current discussions of integrating multimodality into composition classroom, regardless of the whether the space is digital. They highlight the need for a multimodal approach to the classroom because of the students’ affinity to new media and new technologies and confirm the affordances of using multiple modes in the classroom (both digital and nondigital). But they also discussed the struggles with integrating multimodal approaches into the classroom and the need for additional training in multimodal, digital literacies.

A New Age, New Students and New Practices

As many other scholars in the field have discussed (Kress 2003; Wysocki and Johnson-Eilola 1999, with Selfe and Sirc 2004; Yancey 2003), the “new media age” requires that, as composition teachers, we revise the way we view writing. In supporting the New London Group’s pedagogy of multiliteracies, Selfe (2004) writes, “If educators hope to prepare citizens who can ‘participate fully’ in new forms of ‘public, community, and economic life,’—in other
words—we must teach them to design communications using ‘modes of representation much broader than language alone” (quoting New London Group p. 55). And as my participants each noted, the integration of new technologies is requiring a revision of the notion of text, literacy, and even speaking.

New Medium, New Language

According to my participants, composing in a digital space, whether on Blackboard, in a Word text, or on a Blog/Wiki, allows for a student’s new languages to be validated. Just as new media scholars suggest we must integrate these new literacies in to the classroom, Lynn explained, “To omit what our students already know from the composition classroom is irresponsible.” And so Lynn allows her students to use informal chatspeak in freewrites and in peer responses: you becomes “u;” btw (by the way) makes regular appearances in the margins of both the teacher and student responses. In Lynn, Jennifer, and Mark’s classes, the presence of the screen allows for all writing to be done on screen, conflating the space of formal writing and their online languages. This requires a special rhetorical attention to the appropriateness of these informal languages: that where replacing “you” with “u” is appropriate for an online discussion or a blackboard post, that choice does not work effectively in a research paper. For Lynn and other teachers in digital classrooms, like me, the new languages of the web offer an opportunity to enrich the discussion of rhetorical purposes and various audiences. Allowing students to use those languages in some spaces but not others requires discussions of who reads and responds to certain language styles—discussions that, for my students, have made real the sometimes generic situations that are produced in a writing classroom. For example, in discussing the appropriate language for an email to a professor versus an email to a classmate, my students are able to consider and assess rhetorical strategies and subsequently execute rhetorical decisions.

The change of medium—from the paper to the screen—permits the linguistic mode to be appropriated by the student. That is, as our students are becoming more and more inundated with online writing practices (such as Facebook, Myspace), the transfer of the linguistic mode from the paper to the screen allows a crossover of writing practices and writing media.

Screens and Visual Presentation
As teachers in digital spaces, Lynn, Jennifer, and Mark teach in rooms with no less than 23 screens in them. Each room has a large overhead screen and each student has his or her own screen as well. The presentation of ideas (even if in an alphabetic mode) is done almost exclusively onscreen, and each participant acknowledged this inseparability from the visual mode. Although the rooms do have a white board, which I use regularly in class, Mark and Jennifer take notes on a Word document rather than on the board. Mark and Lynn both run paperless classrooms, and even though Jennifer isn’t completely paperless, she commits to uploading all documents online, even if it’s merely replicating the paper document on the screen. As a result, all documents are online, accessible in class—there’s no chance that a student will forget a handout or lose a syllabus. In some ways, the student’s class is organized for them. Lynn’s students don’t ever hand her papers, and all freewriting is done on a private discussion board. Mark, Lynn, and Jennifer grade papers online using comment features, highlighters, and track changes—all of which they said allow for teacher responses that are longer and more in-depth. And the grading goes much more quickly.

In some ways, the visual mode, what Selfe (2004) describes as “a focus on visual elements and materials of communication,” pervades these classes. As Mark pointed out in our interview, “The screens are everywhere.” The laptop classes have plasma screens that students hook their laptops into for collaborative work and the screen at the front, though retractable, is a prominent feature. And for Mark, there seems to be a pressure to use the screens that are there. If, as Kress (2003) suggests, we are experiencing a “move from the dominance of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen” (p. 1), then the digital classroom offers a means of replicating this move, of allowing students to realize the dominance of the screen both in their personal lives and the classroom, which can sometimes become a place divorced from their own cultures.

The presence of the screen, while sometimes overwhelming, also allows for a redefinition of text that’s embedded in the classroom space. Lynn regularly uses YouTube as a text within the classroom, as she realizes that her students enjoy and are already familiar with the videos on the site. Her move to incorporate video echoes other participants’ moves to bring in film and video into the classroom, as Chad regularly does. The integration of the visual, even in these more simple ways, is a recognition of a changing student population, a changing society. As Daniel, a fifth-year Doctoral student discussed,
We’re dealing with a generation of students who’s grown up looking at video and playing video games and having fun interactions with texts…If [the texts we use] are just words and they’re used to seeing visuals and animations and music, how are [they] supposed to switch gears, just read these black and white words on a page?

While Daniel’s assessment might raise questions about the purpose of integrating the visual, his response does reflect the fact that my participants recognize that students react positively to visual stimulation. It also nods to (without addressing) the larger observation made by a number of scholars (Selfe 2004; New London Group 2000; Hawisher 1999): that students in the 21st century need to gain a visual literacy, to learn to think critically about visual texts. Daniel’s response seems to take visual components as a means to maintain students’ interest in texts, but Jennifer, Lynn, and Mark, all spoke of the visual mode as a means through which to help students engage in a visual literacy.

In a unit on rhetorical analysis, Lynn used a combination of video and text to expand students’ ideas of which texts are valuable in the classroom and to push their understandings of visual texts to analytical. Pairing a live performance of Fergie’s “Fergilicious” with the textual lyrics of the song, Lynn asked her students to identify the rhetorical purpose of each text. Students connected the visual message Fergie was sending with her outfit, her dancing, her gestures, the lighting choices with the textual message of the lyrics. “[They] had comments like, ‘Oh—I didn’t realize that’s what she was trying to say!’ The visual display clarified the text and the text helped make sense of the video’s message.” I find Lynn’s example particularly helpful in clarifying how the screen can become more than a form entertainment, as Iris and Daniel fear—it can be a tool to enhance visual literacy.

In our discussion about the Fergie analysis, Lynn acknowledged this as an engagement of the visual mode, but I want to also point out that the gestural mode was also being engaged. In the video, Fergie communicates meaning through dance; as a form of cultural meaning-making, dance can easily be overlooked because it is accessed through the visual mode. In order to process the visual, you typically see the dance, but understanding the meaning behind dances requires a different set of literacy skills, skills that are “situated, constructed, and valued” differently than others (Wysocki et al 2004).

*Visual Mode: a Rebuttal (of sorts)*
Despite our students’ affinity for the visual mode, and despite Lynn, Mark, and Jennifer’s decided success with integrating visual literacies into the classroom, my participants who are not yet in the digital classroom seemed to question the screen’s presence in the classroom, and they revealed a hesitance in the way the visual mode might take over the other modes in the classroom. In her argument for a poetics of teaching, Kristie Fleckenstein (2003) raises similar concerns over the need to “push beyond visual literacy” (p. 21). Because we live in a “visually saturated age in which display is the dominant mode of validation,” imagery is often “isolated from other modalities and serves as a sole focus of imagistic imagery” (p. 21). Here, Fleckenstein highlights the need for addressing all modes; where Dunn (2000) is concerned primarily with the exclusive attention to the linguistic mode, Fleckenstein discusses the way the new turn to the screen favors the visual mode. Iris and Patricia’s discussions of the classroom lead me to wonder if the same threat lies in discussions of multimodality in a digital classroom.

The onslaught of screens that Mark discusses above allows for the screen to dominate, and except with audio essays, the audio mode is often discussed in conjunction with and as a secondary complement to the visual mode (i.e. Chad uses video clips; Lynn uses YouTube, etc.) Fleckenstein suggests,

While visual imagery is important, such a reductive mapping of imagery is based on two errors: it replicates an ocularcentric view that removes the constructive influence of the seer, and it denigrates or ignores other aspects of imagery.

The second error Fleckenstein addresses is especially important to teachers of composition as we move the “visually saturated” world into the classroom. Although the screen does offer an engagement of visual literacies and visual modes, it might also threaten the integration of other modes of meaning-making: spatial, gestural, kinesthetic, oral. And it is this concern that Iris and Patricia, both of whom teach in traditional classrooms spoke about when I asked them about the possibility of teaching in a digital space.

Patricia, who is excited about working in a digital classroom next year, voiced a fear that while a digital space might expand possibilities for teaching multimodally, it might also limit them.

I’m thinking physically of what the classroom is like. Every student has to sit in front of a computer—and does that sort of limit space some way? I don’t know. I feel like…Will I
feel pressured to constantly be tied to that computer and do fewer kinesthetic activities, which I think is something a lot of students really respond to?

Patricia’s concerns are legitimate and reflect Mark’s comment that there is a pressure to utilize the visual mode. In a laptop classroom, where computers can be put away, and especially in the classroom in which I taught, where the desks are on wheels and are easily movable, the concern Patricia has might be abated. I can ask my students to close their computer lids, to put desks together, to push the desks to the side. But in classrooms with desktop computers, the teacher becomes, in some ways, a slave to the institutional set up of the tables. That is not to say that engaging in kinesthetic activities is impossible. I observed a colleague who teaches in a computer classroom as she asked her students to physically cut and paste papers. Despite a bit of constricted movement due to the set up of the furniture, the project seemed to be successful—and worked to engage students in a kinesthetic mode of meaning making. Nonetheless, when considering the ideal classroom space, Patricia’s concerns are valid: the presence of machinery changes the way our students learn.

Iris, Patricia, and Chad, all of whom teach in a traditional classroom, provide models of a multimodal approach separate from a digital space. Patricia, for example, described a “stations” activity she uses in class. Emphasizing the kinesthetic mode, Patricia discussed the importance of movement in the classroom. “I think there’s something to be said for physically getting up versus just sitting there, saying, ‘Now do this, now do that.’” Within the context of this activity, Patricia also invites students to use their own digital and nontraditional literacies. In casting a poem into a new genre like an instant messaging conversation, students are able to use their chatspeak while also engaging in a kinesthetic, collaborative activity.

Iris also discussed a concern for the movement within the class, bringing the body into her discussion and revealing a desire to integrate more performance into the classroom.

People want to be contained, to sit still. I think it’s learned. There’s an uncomfortable feeling when you think about the body. You have to get up and move around. Then you think that some people are going to look at you more and there’s more room for you to have some kind of error to be judged. It puts you in the spotlight.

Iris’s discussion of her own classroom echoes some Jennifer’s sentiments about being a student in the classroom. Jennifer discussed the risk of entering the spotlight, of moving your body in the classroom as a student, but didn’t discuss the body at all in terms of the classroom in which
she teaches. In fact Jennifer, Lynn, and Mark, who teach in the digital classroom, did not discuss the idea of mode as separate from their digital space. While their lack of discussion of the body is not necessarily linked to the presence of the screen in the classroom, as a teacher in a digital classroom, I can attest to the ease of forgetting that behind a screen is a body. The prominence of the screen in a classroom can easily distract from the person, which makes it likely that embodied modes like gestural, spatial, and kinesthetic might easily be forgotten.

**Multimodal Assignments**

During our interviews Mark and Lynn discussed in the most detail the types of multimodal compositions their students produce. Their texts moved beyond the traditional essay and into a variety of modes—in some ways this was because of the presence of and access to computers. Mark, who’s been teaching in a computer classroom since before he began his Master’s here, commented on the ease with which students can compose multimodally in digital spaces, as opposed to nondigital spaces: “It’s harder to [ask my students to produce multimodal texts] when you’re not in a digital classroom. Regardless, I always encourage my students to do things they can perform or create.” Mark’s move to encourage even nondigital multimodal projects is similar to Chad, Daniel and Iris’ moves in traditional classrooms. They do offer their students the option of doing something creative, but most don’t require it. They especially don’t require new media texts because without the presence of computers in the classroom, teaching software is a tedious process. My participants indicate a number of motives behind their choice to integrate various modes. First, they include multimodal, creative opportunities reflect their concern that their classes reach a variety of learners. As Chad discussed, he feels a need to offer his students “as many means of making meaning as possible.” Second, the integration of multimodal production expands the way students understand texts, an important move for students who are growing up in a digital age. In addition, understanding the world as text-filled impresses upon students the constructedness of the world around them and asks them to consider how everything they come in contact with potentially sends culturally and ideologically loaded messages.

**Websites and Audio Essays**
In the digital classroom, Mark, Jennifer, and Lynn all require some kind of multimodal assignment, which works well in part because they can teach the software in class. In the classrooms where students have computers in front of them, graduate teachers simply walk students through the software, answering questions and troubleshooting. As Jennifer pointed out, even with digital work, she continues to scaffold assignments. For example, when she assigned an audio essay, she had a smaller assignment in class so that students could familiarize themselves and play with Audacity, the music download software she used. Both Lynn and Mark required websites in lieu of one of the major papers. Like Jennifer, Lynn scaffolded this assignment by making it an extension of a research paper her students had already written. In producing the website, she asked her students to make rhetorical choices about visuals, music, as well as what information would be presented. Lynn discussed the website assignment as a break from the “rules” of formal writing, but still infused with rigorous critical analysis. The website began with a formal research paper, where she asked her students to “research a topic of public debate and write an argument of persuasion for an audience in opposition. “ This paper was to include reliable sources, an audience analysis, as well as an attempt at writing persuasively. Lynn’s follow-up assignment asks her students to transfer this written work onto the screen:

For this sequence, you will collaboratively build a website based on a common theme which threads various (assigned) topics together. Part of the pages for this website will be composed of much of the writing that you have already done in your Sequence III assignment. For this sequence, however, you will be moving your argument into a new platform, that of the World Wide Web. This might change your argument and will certainly change your audience—we will be accessing your allotted Miami server space and actually posting your website to the Internet.

The purpose of this sequence is to move outside of our familiar traditional text-based forms of communication. We have been working with visual elements all semester in class from audio clips to videos and images onscreen, moving much of these images through a rhetorical analysis of the visual text, discussing how various “writers” have applied the rhetorical appeals. Using what we have learned through this process, you will create your own visual text for analysis, applying images and various other forms of web-based media to create a new format for presenting your Sequence III Public Debate issue to new audiences.
Embedded within this assignment are Lynn’s attempts to push her students beyond the page as a means of understanding various rhetorical situations and help them understand the ways nonlinguistic modes make meaning for their “readers.” In some ways this a way for her students to be creative, and she told her students, “You had to learn the rules. You know them now. Let’s play with it and be explorative.”

In Mark’s class, his students learn a variety of different software, and he requires a number of multimodal compositions. My discussions with him evidence what the field hopes is a truth: that multimodal approaches to learning offer nontraditional learners a space to find success and express their own literacies. Mark asks his students to compose an audio essay in which they discuss their own cultures autoethnographically. One of his students produced traditional essays with little cohesion and choppy paragraphs, but once she was offered the oral/aural mode as a means of expressing her thoughts, she excelled. As an aspiring recording artist, she was able to take her ability to make sense of things aurally and use it not only for processing ideas but to produce a final composition2. The audio essay project allowed for Mark’s students to bring in their own cultures, which were particularly relevant to the genre, autoethnography. Mark reflected on the assignment,

[With the audio essay], the culture of the student gets incorporated, and you let them bring in the things they hear. [Multimodality] adds a layer of sophistication you can’t get with text.

Because students are bringing their own aural experiences to the table, they’re offered an autonomy within the text, a break from the academic discourse they are often scared to engage in or in which they engage with halfheartedly.

In my classes, while I don’t require an audio essay, I offer sessions outside of class to teach the software, and I found that with some students, the audio essay allows them to construct stronger arguments and see the intertextuality of their work. One student, Thomas, struggled to stay focused throughout his essays. When we got to the rhetorical analysis section, I worked through a written draft with him in conference. Although in conversation he could thoroughly explain the rhetorical moves in the speech he was analyzing from Braveheart, his written work

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2 Mark and I didn’t talk in detail about the audio essay, and because of limitations with the IRB, I’m unable to use the student’s work in this project.
lacked focus and clarity. During our conference, I suggested he move chronologically through the piece and construct an intertextual audio essay, where he integrated clips from the movie. The final product was focused, well-organized, and allowed for Thomas to use his skills as a public speaker to create his rhetorical analysis.

While I do not argue that an audio essay provides the same skills as composing a written argument, students like Thomas, who engage in this type of composing, learn many of the essential skills of, in this case, a rhetorical analysis. Specifically, using the audio essay as a modal choice maintains the importance of critical thought and analysis, considering rhetorical choices—not only the speech-writer’s but also the student’s own rhetorical moves. I find the construction of an audio essay closest to that of a written argument in that it does require a linguistic adeptness; if necessary, the student could have transcribed his audio essay and created a written text. In this particular case, the audio essay provided Thomas with a means to access his own oral literacy, and his success extended into a discussion of utilizing the oral mode (an audio essay) as a prewriting step to composing essays that must be produced on the page. Part of the challenge is to begin revising the way we think of writing and composing—and graduate participants in this study seem to maintain that the ability to read and write in a purely academic, essayistic manner is insufficient, therefore offering a variety of options for their students.

Avoiding the Fluff; Maintaining the Rigor

As Mark discussed the multimodal compositions his students produced, he also spoke about the dangers of multimodal compositions being “fluff,” or not rigorous enough—a concern voiced throughout the field as the turn towards new media composition continues to grow. As a means of minimizing the risk, Mark requires a written component with any nontraditional essay. I asked him if he uses a rubric, and he said,

If I give [my students] an opportunity to go outside the box or go off the paper, I always tell them to write an explanation of what they’ve done. If it doesn’t fit into my own concept of what the assignment was supposed to do, then I grade based upon what they were trying to do, how it was working.

Mark’s practice of requiring a written component allows him to see when his students lack a rhetorical purpose for their multimodal creations, for seeing through some of the less critical pieces, like a photo collage he received from a student, where “the photos were just haphazardly strewn, it was like they just tossed them onto a poster board.” Similarly, I require a written
analysis of the medium and mode when my students submit nontraditional essays. Asking them to interrogate their purpose for creating the multimodal piece helps them clarify their purposes for themselves, and also ensures that they are learning to express themselves linguistically on paper. Jennifer and Lynn’s in-class moves to scaffold assignments also allowed them to ensure their students were engaging in critical thinking rather than creating texts devoid of critical thought.

*Leveling the Playing Field: Learning Together*

The affordances of composing are varied and many, as I have shown in Chapter Two, and the participants from my study decidedly agree with the affordances presented by research like Ball’s (2007) study of multimodality. Mark and Lynn’s discussions add another affordance to the list, suggesting that this moment of new and emerging technologies allows for a more democratic authority construct for the classroom and a truly collaborative meaning-making process.

In arguing for a systematic integration for new media, Selfe (2004) addresses the issue of struggling to master technologies before entering the classroom. She “presents some activities for teachers…who may currently lack…the skills or the background training to address a full range of new media texts” (45). As a member of the Digital Writing Collaborative, I attest to the fear Selfe describes: how do I teach what I don’t know? And this is the sentiment Lynn had when she entered the classroom to teach her students to use Dreamweaver and create websites. Although she did have a basic knowledge of how to use Dreamweaver, she was nervous at the thought of not being an “expert.” Her experience, however, was that when she presented the basic information to students, their literacies developed within class, and soon her students were teaching her how to create designs. Because the literacy levels varied among her students, those who were more familiar with web design became leaders, not overshadowed by Lynn’s authority, because in terms of web design, she had less expertise than many of her students.

Lynn’s classroom became a space where the teacher was stripped of her authority—where students were experts, where the teacher was learning, where meaning was being made through discussion, through play, and through a truly collaborative effort. Selber (2003) describes digital literacy as a three step process, where an understanding of how to use the technology is not enough. Functional literacy (the knowledge of how the technology works) must
be accompanied by an ability to interrogate how the technology changes the message and possibilities of the text. Despite her lack of expert knowledge of Dreamweaver (*functional literacy*), Lynn continued to provide students with prompts to think critically and rhetorically about the texts they created (*rhetorical and critical literacies*). And her lack of expertise leveled the playing field, where Lynn could be upfront and honest with her students, saying, “I’m learning this too.”

Mark’s experience likewise suggests a potential for revising the classroom spaces, where the materiality of the technology—the breakability of it—allowed them to see their compositions as “in-need-of-work,” without the negative associations.

I think one of the things that happens [in the digital classroom] is [students] are more comfortable with this idea that something’s going to break, some of it’s not going to work. And that’s okay! That’s harder to do in a traditional classroom at any university, but particularly here…

Because the university we teach at is especially selective, the students who enter the classroom have expectations that their work ought to be perfect, unaltering, praise-worthy. Mark noted the difficulty in convincing his students that all versions of alphabetic texts are “okay” because they’re trained to see the mistakes, the fragments, the “mess.” The “brilliant” writer is clearly demarcated based upon past experiences, and Mark commented on the difficulty of reassuring other students that all work is valuable. And then he contrasts against his experience with teaching with new technology. “When you’re doing something new, all of you are going to learn something, you’ll teach each other things, and you’ll probably teach me something too!”

In some ways, this period of change, where teachers are learning along with students might offer us a way of to revise the way authority of the teacher is established in the classroom. In the same way that incorporating students’ own literacies might offer them power, offering students the idea, as Lynn does, that the teacher’s understanding is in some way incomplete creates a new relationship between the teacher and learner, and perhaps, is a place to begin all democratic approaches to the classroom.

*Transitioning from the Traditional: Hesitations in Going Multimodal*

An Experienced Teacher Tells All
Within our composition department and within many departments around the nation, the transition from the traditional classroom to the digital classroom is a daunting one. This feeling is the same for Jennifer, who, although not opposed to new technology, is admittedly resistant. “I don’t even have a cellphone!” She laughingly told me during our conversation. “Part of [my resistance] is I don’t want to be tied to a machine—to wear a flashdrive around my neck. I’m outdoorsy; I don’t want to be tied to a machine or a cellular device. It’s just—I don’t know—I want a more natural resistance.”

That said, Jennifer enters cautiously into the digital terrain. As a student, she took a class on Computers and Writing and when the Digital Writing Collaborative was being formed, she knew she had to jump at the chance. “I knew if I wanted to do it, I had to do it now because I had the theory and the support system.” Throughout our discussion, Jennifer continually discussed the way she’s revised her teaching and even her preparation.

With the screen dominating the classroom, she knew she could use a website for rhetorical analysis. Although her general mode of preparation is an oral “rehearsal” of her main points for class, the entrance of the screen necessitates a new mode. “I found myself pointing at my computer screen, talking through things I would point out. ‘Look at the link, colors, rehearsing on my small screen what I’d be saying to my students.” Her preparation has become a kinesthetic practice, not simply an oral one.

In talking about the visual mode within her classroom, she stopped for a second and said, “Well, it’s hard to talk about because of my transition to the digital classroom.” Where the chalkboard was once a tool on which she was dependent for mapping and brainstorming as she fulfilled her role as “scribe,” the visual representation she hopes to create for her students now involves a new set of functional literacies: knowing how to use the starboard or the document camera.

The transition Jennifer made the semester we spoke was a scary one, but one she felt she needed to make. The key to making it work? A supportive, but not pushy environment. The Digital Writing Collaborative offers optional workshops that graduate students are encouraged to take. “I went to Audacity,” Jennifer said, “But I knew Dreamweaver was too far. I need to take baby steps, and so I’m realistic, but often frustrated with how little I know…The tiniest thing happens and I feel paralyzed…[but our DWC mentor] is always there to help with things, so I know this is the right time.”
Jennifer’s reflection on her transition indicates that the type of training the graduate participants are receiving in their program is encouraging them to engage with new technologies and supporting them through the duration of the process. Through workshops and practica, the members of the DWC learn various technologies as well as the pedagogical and theoretical bases for integrating these technologies. That said, many of the participants discussed a need for more training, more information, more formally integrated programs for learning new technology—a call to which I will return later in this chapter. I want to turn now to Chad, a first-year Master’s student, who complicates the notions of multimodality in a new way, asking us to look at new teachers as a population that may or may not be ready to take on the various literacies a multimodal approach to the classroom needs.

A First-Year Graduate Teacher Tells All

As a first year Master’s student and a new teacher, Chad’s experiences with multimodality produced a ripe discussion about institutional expectation, as he repeatedly mentioned his struggle to incorporate multimodal activities along with the other concepts he is required to teach. “Our training is amazing,” he says, “in terms of the way it teaches us to bring in Universal Design, but sometimes I find it’s difficult as a first year teacher to get everything in order, to get everything aligned. Sometimes it’s difficult to keep on my toes, to make sure everything’s in place.” While the teaching program is fairly liberal in terms of planning the first-year composition course, the sequence of papers and the timeline is already laid out for first year teachers.

While I’m trying to be sure my class is open—a good community for my students, I’m trying to get through the sequences, know what my goals are for each sequence, from day to day. And sometimes it’s difficult to work [multimodality] in. After a moment’s reflection, Chad adds, “But I think I do do a good job—I try my best to let my students express themselves and negotiate texts in a lot of different ways.”

Chad’s struggle brings an important idea to the table in terms of considering how multimodality gets integrated into graduate teacher’s classrooms. As a first year student, who’s just learning to teach, to adapt to the graduate student way of life, the expectations of them are already high—learning new technologies and integrating multimodality into this curriculum presents a potential overload for first year teachers.
We’re expected to implement Universal Design into our curriculum according to our director of composition, and I completely agree with that. On the other hand, there’s bureaucratic end, having guidelines of getting our students to a certain point by a certain time and date at the end of the semester. There’s a tension—those are unavoidable tensions.

Part of Chad’s discussion reflects the “primacy of language” that Patricia Dunn discusses. Although Chad recognizes a need in his students to use nonlinguistic modes, there’s always a time factor, a pressure to get them to produce an alphabetic text. When he does incorporate a multimodal activity, he wonders if his students make the connections, if it actually helps them write their papers.

This tension between doing practical, written work and engaging multiliteracies increase as Chad looks forward to working in a digital classroom next year. There’s technology to integrate, to teach, and time will inevitably be eaten up by technical difficulties. For Chad, having to make those leaps this year, might have been too much.

I don’t think that for the first experience [I would have wanted to teach in a digital classroom.] I needed a year in a traditional classroom because of the very uneasy nature of the first year.

As we begin to discuss digital spaces and multimodality and as programs like the Digital Writing Collaborative burgeon, Chad prompts us to consider the first-year graduate teacher’s experience. His responses suggests to me, also a new teacher, that the difficulties of new technology and multiple modes must be considered in relation to the entire graduate experience—the assimilation and acculturation of graduate students into a new space and into new roles of authority.

**Digital Training: a Need for Change?**

As Jennifer’s experiences indicate, the integration of technology into the classroom, especially when coming from a traditional classroom can be rife with anxiety and stress—even when, as in Jennifer’s case, it is ultimately rewarding for both teacher and student. As Mark noted, “There’s an expectation for everyone to be at a certain digital proficiency.” The pressure Jennifer, Mark and other participants feel to learn more new technologies and to integrate them into the classroom is not unfounded. Cynthia Selfe (2004) suggests,
To make it possible for students to practice, value and understand a full range of literacies—emerging, competing, and fading—English teachers have got to be willing to expand their own understanding of composing beyond the conventional bounds of the alphabetic. And we have to do so quickly or risk having composition studies become increasingly irrelevant (p. 54).

Anne Wysocki (2004) notes that the changes needed to make composition studies fully integrated with new media will be slow, but through their collaborative text, Selfe, Sirc, Johnson-Eilola and Wysocki (2004) emphasize the urgency of adapting the classroom for the larger societal changes that Kress (2003) discusses in *Literacy in a New Media Age*. The Digital Writing Collaborative at this university was created in response to this urgency, I think, and it jumpstarted the first-year writing program’s move towards digital composing, new media studies, and classrooms that inhere a focus on multimodality.

In many of my conversations with participants, Jennifer and Chad’s for example, the quality of training they’ve received as teachers is highlighted, praised even. Nevertheless, I asked participants to discuss the idea of training in multimodal composition and digital literacies, and the overwhelming response was that, yes, the participants felt they needed more training. Even those who are in the Digital Writing Collaborative, who are learning some things about new technologies, discussed a desire to learn more. These desires echo Anthony Atkins’ (2006) survey of composition teachers, including graduate instructors, wherein he investigates the type and quality of technology training composition teachers receive. He suggests that in order to accommodate, “the growing presence of digital technologies [and] our students’ changing literacies,” we need to begin assessing the technology training that teachers of composition receive. His study found that graduate students were dissatisfied with the training they received, perhaps as a result of his finding that faculty members expect graduate students to take the initiative to learn new technologies on their own.

Given Atkins’ (2006) findings, the dissonance between the responses of students who are further along in the program and not involved in the DWC, like Daniel and Barbara is of note. Daniel spent some time discussing a need to learn software like Dreamweaver, and commented, “You know, we don’t have training in [things like powerpoint], we just pick it up as we go.” And Barbara, a third-year doctoral student, said, “I do think this ‘how-to-function-in-a-digital-space’ should be part of my scholarship, an [integrated] part of my graduate education.” As the
participants discussed a need for training in multimodality, I want to be clear that most of the discussions revolved around training in digital technologies and were directly linked to their teaching—a need to be able to teach students who are digitally literate. But the anxiety, the urgency, was also directly linked to concerns about getting a job, professionalizing, and going on the job market. Iris shared,

So many job calls now have stressed the importance of new media or technology classrooms. I think we should have training and maybe even more—somewhere where you have to produce a webpage, use the technology.

The other participants could be an echoing chorus. For some, like Barbara, who hasn’t been involved in the digital writing collaborative because she works in another administrative position, the pressure leads to a certain amount of anxiety.

I know I’ll have to know some things [for the job market] and I certainly feel that I’ll be responsible about starting to have to know these things, but it will be a weakness—I won’t have practical knowledge in what the kids know.

Even Luke, who is a first-year Master’s student, is aware that, even though he has no desire to integrate new media into his own work, he needs to know more to be successful on the job market.

There seemed to be two motivating factors for desiring more training as teachers in the composition classroom: an ability to connect with students and students’ new literacies and increasing marketability as they move out of the graduate student realm and try to get jobs.

Regardless, the data I collected presents a dissonance: those who volunteered to be part of the Digital Writing Collaborative feel they are receiving a good deal of training through their practica and workshops—though they might still desire more or an institutionally implemented training program. Lynn attests to the DWC as being integral in her understanding of new technology, and said,

The only reason I decided to stay here [to finish my dissertation] was because of the DWC…But if [the director of the DWC hadn’t come here and if the DWC hadn’t been started, I don’t think I’d be [integrating websites into my classroom].”

Those who are not part of the DWC feel overwhelmingly concerned with learning new technologies, but Chad, Iris, and Patricia see the DWC as part of their future education and are looking forward to the opportunities and training they will have because of the program. At such
a moment of change, the dissonance of responses from my participant is not surprising, and I think it makes a nod to this institution’s quickly changing scope of composition, the writing classroom, and the program as a whole.

**Multimodality and (non)Digital Practices**

Cynthia Selfe (2004) offers three potential reasons for composition teachers taking an interest in new media texts. First, because of the prevalence of new media texts in our personal, professional and daily lives; Second, because of the increased “access to the means of both viewing/ reading/interacting with such texts and composing/designing/authoring them” (p. 44); And third, because, as my participants emphasized, the literacies our students use regularly revolve around new media texts. My research here seconds these impetuses. But I worry that the emphasis on new media might erase the cause of expanding literacies, that the move to access multiliteracies and broaden the classroom space for students might be overshadowed by the move to gain functional literacies involved with learning new technologies. As Mark, Jennifer, and Lynn show, the inclusion of new technologies can open up the classroom space to new discursive spaces and a revision of traditional power constructs. However, their conversations with me also reflect the potential of limiting multimodality to new technologies. Discussions of multimodal practices involved audio essays, videos, and websites, but, save for Mark’s brief nod to a quilt he received from a student, omitted references to nondigital multimodal practices.

Patricia Dunn’s (2000) discussion of multimodality, however, exists completely outside the digital realm, which also seems incomplete. In their comprehensive look at multiliteracies and multimodality, The New London Group (2000) discusses technology as only a part of the multimodal pedagogical design. Part of their pedagogy includes Carmen Luke’s discussion of “the multiliteracies of digital electronic ‘texts,’” where she proposes,

Meaning-making from the multiple linguistic, audio and symbolic visual graphics of hypertext means that the cyber space navigators must draw on a range of knowledges about traditional and newly blended genres or representational conventions, cultural and symbolic codes, as well as linguistically coded and software-driven meanings (p. 73). But alongside Luke’s address of the digital end of a multiliterate pedagogy, is Martin Nakata’s (2000) chapter about a small indigenous population of students in Australia. As he writes on the
process of integrating a formal English program into the curriculum in Torres Strait, Nakata notes the use of various modes.

The most recent response of the school has been to teach the English Language Across the curriculum…Many teachers innovate and adapt, preferring to capitalize on the oral and aural modes which students find easier and are seen to prefer (p. 114).

Nakata reminds us that a globalized world and its changing literacy practices do not need to focus exclusively on new media.

Cope and Kalantzis (2000) argue that “knowledge is initially developed as part and parcel of collaborative interactions with others of diverse skills, backgrounds and perspectives” (p. 31). If this is true, and I think it is, then we must acknowledge that the “collaborative interactions” through which our students develop knowledge include nondigital modes. As Mark noted, though, it is easier to integrate multimodality within a digital classroom. But I think Mark refers here to multimodality as a product, not as a process. The ease with which student produce multimodal compositions increases with the integration of computers, screens, and speakers, but other forms of multimodality, as Dunn (2000) and the New London Group (2000) prove, do exist and are easily accessed in the traditional classroom.

Based upon my personal interactions with the participants as well as my own observations of their teaching, I know they each incorporate nondigital forms of multimodality. Nonetheless, Mark, Jennifer, and Lynn exclusively discussed their classrooms in terms of a digital multimodality. Mark and Jennifer offered in depth descriptions of the audio essay as aural/oral modes, but neither mentioned the oral presentations they require of their students. Lynn discussed the necessity of allowing her students to bring in their own literacies and languages, but her discussion was limited to “Chatspeak” and YouTube, omitting any acknowledgement of the slang students use in informal classroom settings or gestures that can often become modes of communication. The omission of the nondigital modes from their discussion suggests that in a digital space, the nondigital gets overlooked, or perhaps underemphasized.

The participants’ discussions of multimodal approaches in their teaching reveal several key ideas. The first is that, regardless of the physical space in which they work, the graduate participants work with a multimodal approach to teaching. Recognizing the importance of an attention to multiliteracies, they attempt to give their students “as many routes of expression as
possible,” as Chad says. Second, Jennifer’s discussion of and Patricia’s anxiety about transitioning from a traditional to a digital space reveal that the process the composition field is currently undergoing—of integrating new media into the composition classroom, of revising our concept of text—is rife with tensions and uncertainties. As Iris mentioned, using technology eats up time as technical difficulties cause the class to stop entirely. But along with these problems, the graduate discussions reveal affordances to the newness of these technologies, that making the transition with the students allows for a collaborative, democratic mode of meaning making. Third, the disparity between the digital teachers’ discussions of mode and the traditional teachers’ prompts us to look closely at the way new media is changing our classrooms and our pedagogies. A strictly digital approach to multimodality potentially removes the body from the classroom, refocusing attention on the screen. In turn, we run the risk of favoring the visual mode over other modes, and moving students whose literacies lie in nonlinguistic/nonvisual modes to the periphery.

In looking at the participants’ experiences as teachers, I have noted not only their moves to integrate multimodality within the classroom, but also the struggles they face. The differences between those students in the digital classroom and those in traditional classrooms is significant, indicating that the material spaces in which graduate teachers teach impact the way a multimodal approach to teaching is considered. The differences also illumine the way the discursive opportunities for students and teachers alike are affected by the material spaces. Those whose classrooms are digital seem to rely on (or discuss their classroom in terms of) digitally-enhanced modes, which might constrict or limit opportunities for nondigital modes. As I will discuss in the next chapter, issues of space are equally important as we consider the graduate seminar space. The next chapter considers the discursive and material spaces of the graduate learner, revealing the participants’ experiences as students within various seminar classes. In addition, the two chapters create a contrast in experience as teachers and students; where as graduate teachers, participants strive to validate alternative notions of “texts” and “composition,” my study reveals that some of their seminar work relies heavily on linguistic modes, making participants feel unable to engage in other modes of making meaning.
Chapter 4: Graduate Learners: Negotiating Authority, Exploring Modes

As a graduate student, I don’t think there are as many modes available, so I have to do a lot of that on my own. I’m a visual person, so I’ll draw little sketches of what I’m reading or create a graph or a timeline. But I have to do that stuff on my own. ~Iris

I feel like visual learning just doesn’t jive in the classroom. For the first time it was really hindering me. [In our classes,] there’s never any kind of visual...I feel like that is privileging one type of learning over another. ~Patricia

In 1963, James Bent wrote of the graduate student,

This is a career which starts when a student embarks upon a Ph.D. program continues as he collaborates with a professor in his research, and finally leads to a position as a professor in a university or investigator in industry. There is no sharp line between training and practice. A graduate student in a seminar will frequently, either literally or figuratively, take over the rostrum from the professor and develop the subject while the professor in turn becomes the student. The transition from graduate student to professor in advanced courses at a college or university is almost imperceptible. (p. 64)

Although writing some forty years before I conducted my research, I think his discussion still pertains to the graduate seminar—especially as my participants discussed it. In this chapter, I turn to the role of the graduate learner—the graduate student within the classroom—a decidedly more complex role than graduate teacher because, as Bent describes, the authority within this space shifts constantly. While I hesitate to separate the experiences and identities of the graduate student, the experiences of my participants as learners were decidedly different than their experiences as teachers. As students within the English department, the participants are astutely aware of the boundaries and constraints in which they work—sometimes frustratingly so. In this chapter, I forefront the graduate student as learner to illuminate the individual needs that graduate students have and to discuss the graduate seminar as a pedagogical, political, and professionalized space. The conversations I had with participants suggest a need for extending the multimodal approach into the graduate classroom, especially where in-class activities are
concerned, but they also complicate the suggestion by highlighting their feelings that the graduate seminar is full of expectation and steeped in traditions that cling to linguistic modes. For some of my participants, the pressures to professionalize, produce, and prove oneself within the classroom seemed to be a form of modal constraint, regardless of the professors’ pedagogy. Because the seminar serves not only as a site of learning, but also as a site of professionalization, the participants in this study worked within one physical space to negotiate several different identities. As scholars many of them felt pressured to articulate thoughts in the “accepted” (or what they perceived as accepted) mode of inquiry—namely linguistic/oral—even though as learners they felt most comfortable making meaning in other modes.

In this chapter, I locate the primacy of language within the larger field and discuss the way that overarching bent towards linguistic mode might create discursive constraints for graduate learners who are visual or kinesthetic learners. After highlighting the various modes through which the participants feel they learn best, I look at my participants’ discussions of the graduate seminar as a specific site of learning and explore how that space constructs a risky environment for multimodal meaning-making.

First, I want to forefront some of the problematic methods of my design and my own position within this portion of the study. In this chapter, I look closely at the participants’ thoughts and ideas about the graduate seminar and present a tension they discuss—that in their graduate seminars they do not experience the same kinds of multimodal freedom they offer in their classrooms. I want to be clear in acknowledging that my methods of data collection omit the professors’ discussions of their classrooms, and that this omission has the potential for biasing the results and implications. This does not invalidate the observations and experiences of the participants, but it does slant the results of the study towards the graduate experience. Further affecting this slant is my own position as a graduate student who shares many of the same experiences and sentiments that my participants discussed. I choose to reiterate my position because I do follow Lather (1991) and Porter and Sullivan (1997) in seeing the researcher/research relationship as important to critical research practices. But I also highlight it here because I am concerned with the relationship between my study, my participants, and the institution they/we attend. In making obvious my subjectivity, I hope to make clear that while I position my research within the vein of Porter’s institutional critique, I hope to open up a space for the graduate experience to be known. And so here I adopt a method of presentation that leans
towards life story (see Brandt 2000; Selfe and Hawisher 2004), taking a more narrative approach to the data and relying heavily on participant voices.

**Working Within and Against the Primacy of Language**

Because graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition apply to programs via linguistic sample, it is a logical assumption, I think, that each admitted student is adept at communicating in the linguistic mode. It might even be offered that, in general, a graduate student in Rhetoric and Composition communicates *best* through the linguistic mode. But my discussion with participants and my own experience disprove this conclusion, or at least complicate it. Although graduate students pursuing advanced degrees in Rhetoric and Composition necessarily (because of the focus of the degree) gain expertise in the linguistic mode, my participants’ responses suggest that despite the focus on the linguistic mode, the education of graduate learners should not be *limited* to that mode. Their responses also raise concern that the primacy of language within the field might threaten the multimodal possibilities for graduate students.

Patricia Dunn (2000), in presenting activities for multimodal activities in the composition classroom, questions the primacy of language while at the same time locating it squarely within composition studies.

Although we [compositionists] may not acknowledge our dependence on words *as words*, on their place in our worldview and rhetorical strategies, it is clear that in Composition, our way of knowing privileges written words, interpretation of words, word play and clever word combinations. There is nothing wrong with this. But this playing in the sandbox with colorful words is not what everyone likes to do…We can at least admit we have this worship of the written word and notion of writing as the most accurate indicator of learning. Examining our own investedness in the writing-as-the-great-heuristic ideology might help us realize what harm a reverence for written language might have on students who do not share our love of words and allow us to recognize alternatives to alphabetic ways of knowing (p. 29).

Her discussion continues on to prompt us as a field to consider outside forms of meaning-making within our classrooms and asks us to recover some of the threads of composition studies that do embrace multiliteracies. I quote Dunn (2000) at length because I think her suggestion is
worthwhile. I also quote her because I hope to locate within her discussion the problem a graduate student with alternative learning needs in Rhetoric and Composition might have in locating him/herself within the discipline as Dunn presents it. In addition to prompting the field to embrace multiple literacies, she also creates an us/them dichotomy—where compositions are those who love words, who value and use the linguistic mode and where students are the “them” who might need and use modes other than linguistic.

As graduate students, my participants are working to become a part of the “us”—composition scholars. The graduate program is a space that asks graduate students to be active learners as a means, perhaps, of leading them closer to the role of professional in the field. As Mark and Chad, both discussed, the idea that we’re becoming scholars, even at the Master’s level, is clear upon arrival. “The very first day of [our teaching practicum], [my colleagues and professors] wanted to know what my area was and what scholars I wanted to study,” Chad said. And Mark had a similar experience:

I don’t know if I felt pressured or if it just happened to me. I got here and I started working in a computer classroom and I’m a computer nerd…and then suddenly I’m a new media scholar…You get here and there’s a semester where you’re supposed to learn how to be a grad student, but you have to determine what you want to do with your scholarly life.

Although Mark and Chad both expressed a certain amount of anxiety about this professionalization, I do not think either of them felt it was wrong or unfair. Rather, I offer their reflections as a means of situating the graduate student both in and out of the field—but desperately wanting to enter it.

Regardless of whether or not a graduate student aligns her/himself within the discipline, my participants were asked to do so early, asked to make his/her mark and stamp him/herself as a member of the community. If, as a graduate student, I am working to align myself with compositionists (and I am), then I also position myself as one who loves words, who understands writing as the dominant mode of evidencing intelligence, one who sees writing as “the great heuristic.” On the other end of Dunn’s spectrum—outside the profession of Composition Studies—are students who might need us to “recognize a alternatives to alphabetic-based ways of knowing.” My research suggests that the us/them divide Dunn presents might be perpetuated by some graduate students and professors, but that it is not adopted by all (or even the majority).
It is important, I think, to remember that four of the participants with whom I spoke were first-year graduate students, still working to understand their roles as graduate learners and teachers within this specific university. Their experiences illumine the tensions felt by graduate students early in their careers, prompting us to consider the challenges graduate students face as they try to assimilate to the field. As research in the field suggests (Berkencotter, Huckin and Acker, 1989; Huot et.al. 2002; Miller et.al. 1997), the professionalization and acculturation of a graduate student into the discipline is a complicated process that seems to start almost immediately. In the graduate seminar, the bias towards a linguistic mode is clear and perhaps appropriate, but for the participants of my study, moving outside of that mode was something they desired as learners. What, then, does a graduate student who aligns him/herself both as a compositionist who loves words, but also as a “student” who needs us “to recognize alternatives to alphabetic-based ways of knowing?” Many of my participants belong in both categories, and while they are not mutually exclusive, the tenuous position of the graduate student trying to assimilate into the program seemed to make the overlap of linguistic and other modes hard to see.

**Locating Themselves on the Map: Multimodal Needs**

The graduate seminar, for my participants and me, is the first place where we begin to form our identities as scholars in the field, and there is an enormous pressure to present oneself as a serious student. The first day of class often includes, as Chad mentioned, definitions of self as scholar and is followed by meetings where learners read texts and articulate their thoughts about the weekly readings. At this university, the seminar class often includes students who are at different places in their scholastic careers, and the classroom can be limited by the expectation that the seminar is a place for “serious discussions about texts”—not multimodal endeavors.

I asked my participants about how meaning is made in graduate seminars, and overwhelming, they offered a portrait of the discussion-based seminar. Although they are learning to become experts in Rhetoric and Composition, some of my participants indicated a need for nonlinguistic modes of learning—and discussed a lack of engagement in nonlinguistic modes within the seminar. “In some ways,” Patricia said, “The seminar privileges one mode of learning over others.” Patricia, along with Chad and Iris, identifies herself as a visual learner, and all three participants feel they learn most effectively when they have a visual component, “a
drawing, a map, a visual text.” In the discursive (and physical) space of the graduate seminar, though, they find it difficult to incorporate visual elements into the classroom. The Rhetoric and Composition seminars they have been involved with as graduate students are primarily discussion-based, as Patricia points out, and when they enter the classroom, they are expected to communicate in alphabet-based (oral/linguistic) modes.

This expectation may indeed come from the professor and other students’ assumptions that the linguistic mode is sufficient for the students in the classroom. For Jennifer and Luke, the discussion-based format of the class works well. They learn easily through conversation, and when I asked Jennifer about alternative modes in the seminar class, she said discussion was the best way for her to learn—that mapping and drawing didn’t help her process the text or the information presented. Similarly, Luke didn’t discuss the need for other modes. Although he knew the graduate seminars he was enrolled in weren’t necessarily inclusive of all types of learners, he thought the class worked well for both his classmates and him.

Anyone in the [seminar] has the ability to learn by the way it’s taught [through discussion], but it wouldn’t be inclusive for everyone. I mean, it’s inclusive for the student who are in the classroom…I think everyone has a fair chance at learning in that class.

As we discussed multimodality, Luke talked about it in contrast with the classes he teaches, and in some ways, maintained the us/them dichotomy that Dunn (2000) sets up in her text. Where his students might need alternative modes, he assumed his colleagues readily learned through the linguistic mode. Luke’s discussion of the seminar, however, refers to a seminar in which Patricia, Chad, and Iris were also enrolled, a seminar that each of these participants spoke about as examples of modally constrained spaces.

In our discussions, Patricia made it clear that she felt like there was a favoring of certain modes, which caused some tensions for her. “I feel like I’m almost at a disadvantage,” she says, “because I want [a visual element] to help me process the texts we read…I’m someone who needs to look at something—and it’s not better or worse than someone who can sit there and listen.” Although I doubt any professor or graduate student in the classroom would support the idea that one mode is better or worse—or that Patricia is any less intelligent because she desires a visual, it is important to recognize that graduate students do feel this tension. Chad, who was enrolled in the same classes as Patricia at the time of our interviews, had a similar feeling.
My colleagues have different ways of negotiating, filtering texts—different meaning-making practices. But most are able to talk about things without visual representation. This inhibits me because I do [need that visual element]...In seminars there’s a lean towards the idea that discussion is the primary mode of processing ideas, a sense that discussion is at the heart of the seminar. But [for me] a visual text, a map of some sort, is important and crucial.

As a fellow graduate student, I can relate to Patricia and Chad’s thoughts about the seminar as well as their need for a visual mode of processing ideas. And although they were both in the same classes, which might limit the validity of their claims, Daniel also reflected on his coursework and his seminars in a similar way.

As a fifth year Doctoral student, Daniel took classes with different professors and in different areas than the first- and second- year students I interviewed. His secondary area was in Technical Communications, and as he discussed multimodality, he referred to those classes as inherently multimodal “because they had to be.” But in discussing his seminars that were not in Technical Communication, he said, hesitantly,

I guess there was a space to [use multiple modes] if I wanted to. [But] when you step out like [one of my colleagues did regularly], you have to achieve a level of comfort with the other students, and I don’t think we had that. [Trying to do something nonlinguistic] was a bit of risk. You risk being ostracized—public humiliation.

The risk Daniel speaks about and that Chad and Patricia implicitly feel makes me, as a student and teacher, alarmed. In a classroom, the risk of being ostracized or publicly humiliated is a

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3 In his interview, Daniel separated the Technical communications classes from his Rhetoric and Composition coursework. At this university, although the technical communications classes can count towards a PhD or MA in Rhetoric and Composition, the Master’s in Technical and Scientific Communication program seems to exist separately from the Rhetoric and Composition department, despite the overlap in classes and professors. I think Daniel’s discrete division of the two types of courses indicates 1) that this division is fairly pervasive and 2) that perhaps one of the solutions to graduate students’ desires for more multimodal activities might be to enroll in these classes. In order to make that happen, though, I want to suggest that the institution look closely at the language used to discuss the MTSC classes in an attempt to create more cohesive unity between the Rhetoric and Composition and Technical and Scientific Communication classes. For example, in my own meetings with advisors, these classes were often referred to as MTSC classes—not identified as possibilities or suggested as good options for graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition. Furthermore, a quick look at the course offerings for 2007-2008, shows a clear divide in the two curricula. Under the heading “Graduate Seminars,” all the courses for Literature and Rhetoric and Composition are listed, then under a large, two-barred separation, the courses for “Semester 1 Seminars in Technical Writing and Communication.” This division is one Sullivan and Porter (1997) discuss as they try to locate the overlap of computers and writing, Rhetoric and Composition, and technical writing.
frightening one to take. I do not think all graduate students feel this way—I certainly have never felt that kind of dire risk.

The risk of evidences through the participants’ reflections seems like it ought not come with consequences too grave—it’s a risk of interrupting the discursive space seminars usually embrace and remapping that space through images. But my participants do evidence a certain amount of chance-taking when attempting to remap the modes used in the classroom, which leads me to question why these tensions and constraints are felt and how we might adjust to make the classroom less risky for nontraditional learners.

The why of these risks and tensions lie, I think, in the way the graduate seminars are constructed—with students of different levels, professors who consider graduate students colleagues, and with a whole variety of authority constructs and expectations intersecting at the same time. Take, for example, the tension my participants discussed in terms of desiring the visual mode. In these discussions, I sometimes stopped and asked, “Well, what about the chalkboard?” In my seminars, professors occasionally used the board to create visuals or organize difficult thoughts and ideas, so I thought perhaps that might have occurred for my participants as well. But Patricia said, “The two professors I have right now do not ever use the board so whenever their leading discussions, there’s never any kind of visual.” Jennifer and Iris confirmed Patricia’s account. In my interview with Jennifer I asked her if any of the students might go to the board and use it, as Daniel said one of his colleagues had. Even though Jennifer, a second year Doctoral student, has her own classroom, uses the board regularly as a teacher, and is decidedly articulate and confident in presenting her ideas the seminar class, she still maintains the position of “student” within the classroom, in some ways adopting the traditional student/teacher authority construct. Although graduate students seem to have more agency in the seminar, Jennifer and others indicated that the teacher/student hierarchy is still very much in place. For example, Jennifer reflects on why the board by saying,

Students aren’t supposed to just walk up to the board and start talking as they write. You know—traditionally, the teacher says, ‘Go up to the board and do a math problem’ and the student obeys—does it silently and sits down.

Therefore, even though Iris commented that her teachers were “okay” with multimodal approaches, unless the professor initiated that type of activity, participants felt it was not in their position to control the mode through which the class was making meaning.
Jennifer, Iris, Chad, and Patricia both referenced days when class leaders were in control of the class, charged with the task of presenting the required texts for the day. For Chad and Iris, these were opportunities to bring the visual mode into the classroom, but when it isn’t his day to lead, Chad felt perhaps more tension than days when there was no class leader.

The nature of these seminars: there’s a leader. So [trying to map out ideas] would be out of turn. It’d be impolite if that, if that weren’t someone else’s way of doing it. In addition to being cognizant, then, of the traditional teacher/student construct, the graduate participants also talked about negotiating these other authorities as well. Although I would assume as a student in Rhetoric and Composition that other students in the field would be accommodating to other students’ needs, the discord and tension Iris and Patricia felt in trying to integrate kinesthetic and visual modes in the graduate seminar, might debunk this assumption.

When it was Patricia’s turn to lead class, she tried to incorporate kinesthetic activities that included small group work, but many of her colleagues resisted. One even went so far as to openly say, “I hate group work, and I won’t do it.” Patricia noticed,

It’s interesting because in one class there’s a few people who sort of just poo-poo on group work if we do it in that context. Doing it in [the first-year classroom] is fine—but in grad classes? There are some people who turn their noses up like it’s not a valid way of learning or something.

Patricia’s experience with group work is interesting when compared with an experience I had in a seminar at this same university. In this case, the professor, not a graduate student leader, suggested we break into pairs or small groups in order to flesh out a particularly difficult text. Although some of the people in the class may not have learned most effectively through the small group activity, as I remember it, the professor was met with little to no resistance. This also paved the way for subsequent student presentations that involved small group work, drawing, and other multimodal activities. While in some ways a small group activity may not constitute “multimodal” learning, it is an alternative to the large-group discussion the graduate seminar usually facilitates. It also reorganizes the space, the bodies, and requires movement of some sort—an engagement in the kinesthetic mode in one way or another.

In Iris’ case she chose to use a visual argument as the centerpiece of her class discussion, but as she discussed it, she seemed to be met with resistance from her colleagues.
I got lots of resistance with my presentation…I brought in two traditional handouts that had textual references and thematic sorting—and I brought in two visuals. One was a visual of Burke’s pentad, the barnyard, and chaos and one was Burke’s rhetoric. I feel like people weren’t engaged…I was using the board. It was weird because the alternative to that—where we were just doing the close reading—there was criticism of that too. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are examples of the handouts Iris brought into class with her. As she discusses above, she felt her visuals weren’t taken seriously, weren’t acknowledged as valid modes of making meaning of the linguistic text they’d read for class.

In figure 4.1, Iris illustrates the human barnyard as it might be located within Burke’s pentad; in figure 4.2, she visually summarizes Burke’s rhetoric. Although not an advanced technological move, Iris makes sense of some of Burke’s complicated ideas, drawing connections between major elements of the reading, and the visual employs a new semiotic grammar. Where linguistic representation calls for a sequential relation, the visual mode relates concepts spatially, and the arrows imply movement. In 4.1, the pentad is replaced by a cycle, implying the interconnectedness of the scene, act, agent, purpose, and agency, and as the human barnyard is placed in the middle of the cycle, it suggests a specific relation of human barnyard to pentad—an inescapability.
Through the handout, Iris asks her viewers—in this case, her fellow classmates (who, you’ll remember, met her with resistance)—to understand the concepts in a new way. She offered them the following quotes from Burke:

- The Pentad: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose. “…any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how s/he did it (agency), and why (purpose) (Grammar 1298).
- The *Rhetoric* must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard…” (1327).

In one visual, she connects the two ideas, arguing for a connectedness, and by bringing the visual into the classroom, she calls for a response from her viewers, a dialogue. But as the class went on, the class demonstrated an unwillingness or an inability to engage in a visual text.

Gunther Kress (2003) asserts that the visual mode of meaning-making is becoming the dominant mode; that as screens continue to become central to the social fabric, we will have to engage with the visual much more readily. Iris’s use of a visual within class calls on her colleagues to shift modes, but, for whatever reason, that shift was not made in class.

**Figure 4.2**  
I have had similar experiences in graduate classes—where the visual, while interesting, perhaps, or a form of entertainment, is not understood as a serious means through which to make meaning and engage in discussion. Iris’s visual does argue for specific relationships between concepts—why was that argument not taken as serious? Why did the visual not prompt a discussion of the relationship between the human barnyard and the Pentad?

My participants are graduate teachers who work to remap the space of the classroom as multimodal, but who find constraints in their seminars. In some ways it’s a question of purpose and agency: what is the purpose of the graduate seminar and what is my responsibility, over what do I have control. Lynn regularly reminds me, “It’s your education,
take control of it!” But in a seminar space, regardless of the expertise the graduate students have, graduate students are still students—often students who have excelled in the traditional teacher/student set-up. Breaking out of that mold, transitioning from student to colleague is not always easy, and in a field where the linguistic mode is the center, feeling you have agency to use the modes through which you learn most easily isn’t always probable. As Chad discussed, I feel like the classroom space sometimes turns into a space where people want to—for good reason—prove and show that they’re here for a reason. We have this legacy, with these great scholars here—I don’t know where it comes from, but there’s a pressure [to prove yourself]. I wonder if that creates a [classroom] space where multimodality—where it’s below us. Or where it’s retrofit.

Throughout the discussions of multimodality, participants highlighted the already-established modes of the graduate seminar as one of the major constraints. Much like first-year students, these graduate students enter the seminar trying to be on “best behavior” and work within the boundaries of the traditional seminar. In addition to struggling to understand texts, graduate students are also working to develop themselves as professionals and teachers as well. As Iris pointed out, in some ways the graduate seminar is a place to learn, but in other ways it’s a place full of expectation, a “domain of learning where you’re supposed to enter a discussion actively and informed.”

As my participants show, despite their linguistic abilities, the alphabet-based modes are not necessarily sufficient for all graduate learners. A visual mode increases their understanding of the texts they read at home and also allows them to better understand the dialogue created in the classroom. The pedagogies being incorporated in and developed for the undergraduate classroom are not, as Chad notes, “rudimentary.” By bringing in some of these multimodal activities that work towards engaging multiliteracies, we might open up doors for new scholars whose modes of learning are nontraditional.

I think, also, that the shift to the screen as the primary medium of communication ought to prompt us to encourage and utilize a variety of modes as well. The classrooms in which these participants work are primarily nondigital, but as the undergraduate classroom becomes increasingly digitized, the graduate students who enter the programs in Rhetoric and Composition will also have digital and nontraditional literacies. This need is separate, I think from the needs my participants were discussing in terms of their experiences in their seminars,
but is relevant nonetheless. In looking at the graduate seminar and my participants’ experiences within this graduate program, I find that, much like their teaching experiences, the integration of technology and an awareness (both on the professors’ and on the students’ part) of new technology greatly affects their experiences. So I now turn to discussing the experiences of graduate students in digital classrooms and with multimodality as a digital concept.

*Digital Spaces, Multimodal Constraints*

Part of the challenge of multimodality within the graduate classroom is, indeed the primacy of language or what Dunn (2000) calls our love of words. But as the field transitions into the technological age, the necessity of the ability to readily engage in alternate modes increases. The participants I spoke with seemed well aware not only of the larger societal transition but of the transition in the field. Those who teach in the digital classroom, as I discussed in the last chapter, are perhaps more aware of the way multimodal process and products are becoming inseparable from the composition classroom. Although most of the graduate seminars are taught in a traditional classroom, several professors do teach in a digital classroom.

Of the nine participants I spoke with, three of them have been involved in seminars held in computer classrooms. Mark and Jennifer were both enrolled in a seminar focused on digital pedagogies in the composition classroom, and Daniel was enrolled in a number of technical communication classes, where he was involved in learning WebDesign and the creation of multimodal texts. For Daniel, those were the only classes he would call “multimodal,” where he was encouraged to “use different forms of persuasion [and argumentation] other than just words.” Both Mark and Daniel spoke of their computerized classes as the singular points in their graduate careers where there was a real attempt to engage modes other than linguistic/oral. “There isn’t any major mode-switching in classes that aren’t new media,” Mark said. “The major mode of meaning-making is linguistic—it’s the major key. But sometimes I think our system is broken.” As in the participants’ discussions of their own classrooms, the digital space ensured a certain amount of multimodality.

Although Mark, who entered the program with an interest in and knowledge of new media, regularly produces new media works for his seminar classes, the class in computers in composition class is the first in which Jennifer felt comfortable and supported in endeavoring to
create a multimodal piece. While her final project was in some ways a traditional essay, it included multimodal elements. Her entire project was devoted to website analysis, engaging the visual mode and illustrating a visual literacy. In addition, she incorporated screen captures in her text—an activity that required one-on-one instruction twice over in order for her to master it. I do not think it insignificant that Jennifer, who considers herself a technology neophyte, produced a multimodal project only in a class that prompted these types of projects. In the syllabus for this class, the professor forefronted the importance of digital literacies and in her objectives calls for an engagement with multimodal projects. Although the class did not require an integration of multiple modes into the final project, Jennifer indicated that “hands-on” training highlighted in the syllabus served as an impetus for her use of visuals within the text of her final project.

One of Mark’s first multimodal compositions in his graduate career was for a genre theory class. Within the syllabus, the professor highlighted the possibilities for multimodal final projects, asking for “creative projects (e.g. an experiment in genres, a webpage on genre)” which might involve the visual mode; “a formal lecture with handouts” or “teaching presentation,” which engage the oral mode; or “a traditional conference paper.” In considering graduate students’ use of multimodality in projects or in class, I do think the professors’ willingness to encourage the engagement is important. As I consider the seminars in which I have witnessed a production of nonlinguistic modes, much of this production grows out of the professor’s acknowledgement and validation of those modes. In other words, regardless of the “agency” and “expertise” graduate students have, the professor’s role is still authoritative and their pedagogical moves are indicative of what is permissible within the classroom.

Lynn is a fifth-year doctoral student who has come into Rhetoric and Composition as a second career—her first was in graphic design. And so while her experience in both her MA program and the doctoral program she’s in now was limited in terms of access to multimodal designs and ways of making-meaning, her past experience makes her aware of the ways the visual mode functions. In her work she is primarily focused on girl culture, and many of her publications and presentations have involved screen captures either from movies or websites. Within the department, however, she feels tension between the visual nature of her work and what is understood as “permissible.”

For one seminar class, Lynn wanted to use a visual text as part of a rhetorical analysis, but the professor asked her, instead, to do a “completely textual analysis. It would have been
really cool to show what’s going on, but…my effort to be multimodal did not have a space here at the time.” Lynn, who is a member of the Digital Writing Collaborative, believes that now, three years later, she may not have been met with such resistance, but her experience indicates a “resistance to multimodality” that continued into her preparation for her reading list.

Lynn identifies her main area of research as Girl Culture, with a focus on Cyberage and Cyberspace.

But when I went to put together my exam list I was told I couldn’t use any websites⁴. And that angered me because that’s as much a text [as a book or an article.] My entire exam list has no websites. Maybe now they’re a little more relaxed? But when I came here, I don’t think they knew what to do with me.

Lynn laughed after she said that, but it seemed like there was a touch of truth in that last statement. She was one of the first people to enter the program interested in new media or cyberage.

Mark, as a self-titled computer nerd, seems to have felt the same way—a mutant in the land of the linguistic, perhaps. But he seems to have felt a bit less resistance, in part because the professors don’t know what to do with him.

I think there’s a novelty factor in our department because people haven’t seen it. Like, ‘Maybe if I try this and no one else has done it…’ One of the problems I think we’ll see here is a clash between the traditional luddites and new media scholars.

Mark and Lynn both insinuate the change that’s occurring in the department they study in: that through the Digital Writing Collaborative and the hiring of several scholars who work in new media, the technological changes seen in other departments is occurring.

Nonetheless, neither Lynn nor Mark are sure if their dissertation or thesis (respectively) will be multimodal. Lynn’s “not certain if she’s allowed to do it,” because of her reading list experience. And Mark anticipates that although his thesis focuses on gaming,

It won’t be terrible multimodal. It has to end up being in a publishable form, and there are hoops you have to jump through if you have multimedia and interactivity…You have to play certain academic games to do what you want and your thesis has to be something

⁴Although I do think Lynn’s interview represents her own experience as she understood it, I think it is important to note 1) that there are no departmental restrictions on the use of websites or hypertext as texts as part of the reading list at either the MA or the PhD level and 2) while Lynn may have felt resistance to using websites, other candidates at both the PhD and the MA level have been permitted to include such texts on their websites—even before she began working on her reading list.
that can be printed and bound and handed to someone… As much as part of me would like to rage against that and create this huge hypertext project, I don’t really mind doing what they want me to do.

Mark, perhaps because he’s a new media scholarship, understands the complexities of institutional changes when it comes to digital work, and I think he is willing to work with rather than against the rules. But I have to wonder how long scholars in new media will be willing to conform to nondigital forms—or if, as the change to hyper- and web-texts becomes more pervasive, the remediation of hypertext onto the page will even be possible.

**Conclusion**

As learners, those of my participants for whom meaning is best made through the visual or kinesthetic, especially, have felt limited in the space they have to process multimodally—and in some cases, to produce works that are multimodal, though those seem to be met with less resistance. In the New London Group’s *Multiliteracies*, Gunther Kress (2000) suggested, “The single, exclusive and intensive focus on written language has dampened the full development of all kinds of human potentials, through all the sensorial possibilities of human bodies, in all kinds of respects—cognitively and affectively—in two- and three-dimensional possibilities” (p. 96)

Likewise, Dunn (2000) argued that accessing alternative ways of knowing can help *all* students (not just those who are most comfortable in nonlinguistic modes) “think more broadly, deeply and critically” (p. 58). Because we learn and teach in a field that clings tightly to the primacy of language, Dunn (2000) points out that we must work even harder to acknowledge other forms of knowing. I agree. I think, also, that some of my participants’ responses illustrate a potential “dampen[ing]” of “human potentials.”

Recent texts like *Writing New Media* by Wysocki, Sirc, Selfe, and Johnson-Eilola (2004) take as a given the idea that new modes ought to be integrated into the classroom. As Anne Wysocki (2004) stated in her opening chapter, “I have not argued here and will not argue that we need to open writing classes to new media. There already exists plenty of such reasoned arguments” (p. 5). Even three years ago, she was correct—as evidenced by the long list of sources she subsequently offers: “(on why to incorporate the visual aspects of texts, for example, see Faigley; George; or Stroupe; on approaching literacies through multiple modalities, see he New London Group or any of the works of Kress alone or with van Leeuwen)” (p. 5).
Wysocki’s (2004) glossing over of why to include multiple modes and multiple media implies (rightfully so?) that as a field we have come to agree that the affordances of including multiple modes in the classroom is inarguable. The recent study conducted by Cheryl Ball et. al. (2007) and commissioned by the Conference on College Composition and Communication seems to signal the same thing. The theorizing of multimodality continues, but it is established enough to warrant an empirical study to demonstrate how it is being used.

But as we continue to do research on multimodality, new media, and multiliteracies, we need to research how graduate students and graduate programs are integrating and utilizing these facets of pedagogy and scholarship. The studies that have been done regarding graduate students (Brueggemann, et al 1997.; Huot et. al (2002)) have not focused on graduate learning, and my research indicates a need for investigating how graduate students are not only assimilating (Berkencotter, Huckin, and Ackerman 1980) and professionalizing (Brueggemann, et al 1997) but also how their needs as students are being met. If, as my research suggests, graduate students’ needs are not being addressed in the classroom, we ought to spend more time studying the spaces in which graduate students learn and develop as scholars. That is, as the world is being reconstituted through the integration of the screen and the visual, so, too, should the graduate classroom be a place open to remapping.
Chapter 5: Implications, Conclusions, and Further Research

This study examines the use of multimodality within the graduate student realm. In drawing conclusions and making suggestions for institutional change, I want to return to the issue of space and place. As teachers and learners, graduate participants revealed a varied level of freedom in terms of engaging their multiliteracies and producing multimodal compositions; here, I will look at these levels as they relate to the various sites (and therefore the various roles) in which graduate students functioned.

As Chapter Three reveals, graduate students are engaging in various modes as teachers. Not only do they employ oral and visual modes as tools in the classroom, but they also attempt to offer their students these modes as available designs for making meaning. Depending on the sites of teaching, however, the modal engagements varied. Those teachers who were in the digital classroom highlighted the visual as a major mode of interaction with students—and the visual was often linked to the screen. Mark and Lynn featured websites as examples of multimodal assignments within the classroom; Jennifer and Mark both employed audio essays, illustrating the use of digital technologies in the classroom. Patricia and Iris, whose classrooms were not wired, focused on the kinesthetic and visual modes, and discussed multimodality as it applies to the in-class processing of texts.

The change of site seems to indicate a change of vision in terms of modality, one digital, one nondigital; these varying visions cause me to question the relegation of multimodality to either the digital mode or the nondigital mode. In pedagogical approaches, multimodality ought to involve not only multimodal production of websites and audio essays but also the kinesthetic activities highlighted by Patricia and other participants. As the New London Group (2000) models, a pedagogy of multiliteracies opens up the discussion of available designs, rather than limits it. Depending on the site in which each graduate student taught, the available designs seemed to be limited. As Lynn and I discussed in a follow-up conversation, the presence of computers within digital spaces seems to insist upon favoring certain modes—namely the visual.

Regardless of the site, however, the participants revealed an attention to the way the students they teach are changing and evolving with new technologies. As teachers, the digital literacies of their students were not only central to a pedagogy that was relevant to their students’ lives. As Mark and Lynn discussed, the learning curve involved with new technologies can often serve as a tool that improves the probability of collaborative meaning-making within the
classroom. Their students’ evolving literacies and the evolving nature of composition in the overall field prompted participants to call for more training in new technologies. While this call was unanimous, the degree to which participants felt prepared to address students’ digital needs and go on the job market varied, depending on their experiences. Those involved in the Digital Writing Collaborative seemed much more optimistic about the support and training the institution provided than those who did not.

Nonetheless, participants discussed the transition from teaching in traditional classrooms to teaching in digital spaces as an anxiety-ridden experience. Those who had not yet made the transition, like Chad and Patricia, anticipated the transition as a stressful one, and their hesitance complicates the need for training, prompting me to question whether, as Barbara and Iris suggest, digital training should be part of standard teacher training.

In Chapter Four, I discuss graduate participants’ experiences as learners within the graduate seminar. Their experiences painted a picture of the graduate seminar as almost exclusively linguistic-based, and revealed a frustration in the limitations of modes of meaning-making. Despite the assumption by some participants that all members of their classes learn easily through discussion, some participants expressed a need or desire to bring in the visual mode in order to make sense of texts. These participants reveal a disparity, perhaps, between the pedagogical approaches they are taught to bring into the classroom and the pedagogies implemented in the graduate classroom. Where first-year composition instructors are asked to offer inclusion and Universal Design to their first-year students, some of the seminar classes excluded those learners who desired the visual or kinesthetic mode as a means of processing ideas or texts.

Their responses also illustrated the complicate nature of the graduate seminar, in that some of the constraints they felt were, perhaps, imposed upon them by other members of the class or by a larger disciplinary lean towards the linguistic mode. I want to suggest, however, that the material site of the seminar was important in encouraging and/or limiting multimodal activity. Those students who were part of seminars in computer classrooms (Daniel, Mark, and Jennifer) experienced more freedom in terms of modality; and in a later conversation with Patricia, who this semester took a webdesign class, she revealed that the nature of the computer classroom was also inherently multimodal, engaging nonlinguistic literacies regularly. I do not think, however, that we can discount the role of the professor as integral in limiting and
encouraging modal exploration. In addition to the site of the class, the professor’s prompts opened or closed doors for allowing graduate participants to compose and process texts in nonlinguistic modes.

The graduate students I interviewed revealed that broader discipline-wide expectations affected their desire to learn various modes. While those involved in the Digital Writing Collaborative or computer-based seminars seemed interested in integrating multimodality and hypertext into their work, other participants seemed to be motivated by the professional expectation to have digital literacies.

Within this institution, change is happening quickly, and I therefore hesitate to make suggestions as to how to adapt or effect change based upon what these few participants said. I do, however, find some implications for change within the participants’ responses.

1—a broader discussion about the purpose of graduate seminars and the needs of graduate students as learners
2—an attention to the space of graduate seminars—both digital and nondigital.
3—an emphasis on the possibilities for training and coursework within the graduate program.

Broadened Discussions of the Seminar

My research reveals that the purpose of the graduate seminar can be problematically nebulous, especially for first-year graduate students. As Mark discussed, during the first year of graduate school, graduate students are trying to “get close, but not too close,” still trying to figure out how to navigate the space of a graduate program. As they enter the seminar, learning how to be a graduate student is an ongoing process; because the seminar is often primarily discussion-based, first-year graduate students might infer that the appropriate, valid, and permissible mode of making meaning is linguistic—regardless of the professors’ stance on the issue.

While it might seem pedantic to involve graduate students in a discussion of the purpose of the graduate seminar, my research suggests that some attention to the graduate seminar as a center for learning might help clarify the students’ role in class. In order for these discussions to take place, however, more research and reflection needs to be done in order to clarify the overall broad objectives of the seminar and graduate programs. These discussions need to take place
among professors and perhaps discipline-wide. I suggest beginning these discussions in the hopes that they might lead to graduate students feeling more empowered to ask for what they need as learners and to insist that those needs are met. While I respect my colleagues and participants’ reflections, I have to stop to wonder if the responsibility of remapping the graduate seminar space might be in their own hands—that they need to take action to bring about change. In my experience, few professors would reject a suggestion of changing modal approaches or turn down a student’s request to go to the board and map something out. That said, these acts, as Daniel pointed out, come with risks, risks that are scary for a graduate student to take. Will s/he offend the professor? Will other colleagues role their eyes? Am I overstepping my boundaries if I take class in the direction I want it to go? Perhaps beginning discussions about the purpose of the seminar will prompt graduate students to offer their own thoughts about how class might be constructed.

Nonetheless, I do think that as we reflect on the purpose of the graduate seminar, we might consider the differences the graduate seminar inheres. While I do not suggest that Universal Design pedagogical approaches to the classroom are appropriate for the graduate seminar—the graduate seminar is not a “universal space,” it is selective and need not be inclusive for every type of learner and thinker—the attention Universal Design brings to difference, to varying literacies and varying needs, offers a spirit of learning that might enhance the graduate seminar. In other words, my research suggests that my participants felt their professors and colleagues assumed that, as graduate students in Rhetoric and Composition, they had typified, if not the same needs. The vision of the graduate student in Rhetoric and Composition as a linguistic learner limits the possibilities within the graduate seminar, and I think anticipating difference, rather than applying multimodal approaches as retrofit might help graduate students whose preferred modes of learning are nonlinguistic. As I look at texts, like Nakata’s (2000), which highlight the cultural diversity within classrooms, I imagine that anticipating difference becomes even more important as the seminar grows to include various races, ages, and classes. Although the program at this university is fairly homogenous in its racial and class demographics, anticipating difference might also offer more gentle transitions as the program admits students from a variety of cultures.

*Space Matters*
In addition to discussing the purpose of the graduate seminar, I want to suggest giving attention to the spatial construction of the graduate seminar. In following with Dolmage’s (2008) discussion of Universal Design as well as Porter et al.’s (2000) discussion of institutional critique, I think it is important to look closely at the message our seminar spaces send to graduate students. For example, at this university, most graduate seminar rooms looks like this:

![Diagram of seminar room layout]

The physical limitations of this set up have been discussed by participants in various ways—in the ways it constrains the body, in the way it limits activity, in the tone it sets for the class. The long table in the middle inhere the cultural values of a board room, that is meant “for serious discussion” as opposed to an active space for learning. It positions the professor at the head of the table near the chalkboard, which is the only place to create visuals. It also inhibits eye contact between graduate students at opposite ends of the same side of the table. The implications of this type of learning environment are many. Can changing the set up of the graduate seminar space help change the dynamics of the classroom? I am not sure. But increasing the mobility of graduate learners, offering more spaces for multimodal learning, and removing the cultural implications of the boardroom might improve the freedom graduate learners feel in moving openly.

In addition, my research suggests that as graduate students in this program move into digital spaces, which often include screens and increased access to visual modes, they are prompted to engage in multimodal production. I do not think this correlates directly to the space itself—those classes are typically taught by teachers in Technical Communication or Computers and Writing, whose pedagogies already seem to value multimodal compositions. But my participants’ experiences in their own classrooms as teachers indicate that merely giving students
access to computers prompts those who are interested in or in need of alternate forms of composition increases the probability of that engagement. A discussion of the space in which graduate learners take seminars might prompt us to look towards digital classrooms as options for graduate seminars, even ones that don’t focus specifically on new media or technical communications. Mostly my suggestion is to begin asking questions about why we choose (if, indeed, we do choose) to hold seminars in these specific classrooms and then to interrogate what implications these spaces hold for graduate learners.

*Digital Training and Multimodal Seminars*

In some ways, my participants reveal a dissonance that may or may not be imposed by the institution. Where some of my participants (continue to) ask for classes that are multimodal and request training in digital technologies, my experiences, as well as those of my participants, indicate that the requested multimodal classes and training are available, but that graduate students are either unaware of the possibilities or choose not to engage in the opportunities. As Mark, Jennifer, and Daniel revealed, seminars that focus on multimodal activities and products are available, and I think the results of my study were skewed by the fact that nearly half my participants were first-year students who had not, perhaps, been exposed to the various possibilities in seminar choices. Seminars in Webdesign are offered regularly towards credit for either the Doctoral or the Master’s degree in Composition and Rhetoric; likewise, the Computers and Writing class is taught every other year. While I do not suggest that graduate students should wait for these classes to come around in order to be engaged in multimodal learning, I do want to suggest that these opportunities to learn in digital spaces might have been overlooked by participants who were either unaware of the opportunities or by those who were finished with coursework and had not chosen to take them.

As Lynn, Mark, and Jennifer shared, the training provided by the Digital Writing Collaborative, while not comprehensive, does provide a support for learning new technologies. Iris and Barbara both discussed a desire for an institutionally imposed training in digital technologies; Chad, on the other hand, seemed resistant to learning new technologies as part of his curriculum within the first year. Their varying experiences show a need for further research in if, how and when the graduate student in Rhetoric and Composition ought to receive training in new media pedagogies and production. As it is, the curriculum does not require the
Computers and Writing seminar for either Master’s or Doctoral students; nor does the teacher training include any training in digital technologies, save for one day on online library research. As Atkins (2006) discusses, most graduate students feel dissatisfied with their programmatic training in digital technologies; at this university, the students here who are involved in the Digital Writing Collaborative seem overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of training they receive, which speaks well to the work currently being done to increase the resources for graduate teachers as well as faculty members.

I want to suggest, also, that in planning coursework and degree requirements, the institution might consider what kinds of environments students are learning and teaching in as part of their overall development as teacher/scholar. As the change to digital technology becomes more pervasive, graduate students in Composition and Rhetoric might be required either to take a course in a digital space or to teach in a digital space. This would provide students with the experience of teaching or learning with new technologies and would also ensure that graduate learners’ potentials for learning are not being limited to the linguistic mode. As my graduate teachers and other scholars in the field have discussed, the new media age has made it necessary to become adept at engaging in multiple modes. Discussion of the graduate student curriculum requirements ought to reflect these changes.

Moving Towards Change

While my study is decidedly small in scope, focusing on just one institution, it does highlight a need for further research on the graduate student as a learner and the graduate seminar as a pedagogical space. The seeming inattention to difference among graduate students prompts further research in disability Studies as well as cultural literacy studies to focus on the graduate population and its heterogeneity.

In addition, the disparity between the digital teachers and the nondigital teachers’ definitions and discussions of multimodality prompts us to continue theorizing about multimodality in both a digital and nondigital realm. I follow Ball et.al. (2007) in a short line of empirical studies devoted to the use and integration of multimodality in the classroom. Subsequent studies about multimodality are needed to clarify definitions, to broaden our understanding of the affordances, and to examine more closely the problems encountered in multimodal pedagogies.
My research provides little conclusive and generalizable evidence; rather it prompts questions and further study. Studies that follow need to ask questions of professors and their pedagogies within the graduate seminar. In reflecting on my project design, I would have liked to interview professors and their objectives and views of the graduate seminar as a multimodal place. Further research might also include a broader, nation-wide assessment of the purpose of the graduate seminar and an examination of the nature of professionalism and job market pressures as felt by graduate students. A broader survey will allow for a greater understanding of the overall field’s moves towards multimodality and the way multimodality functions within graduate programs that are bigger.

While this study has decided limitations, it also serves a place from which to begin making changes in the way we discuss and consider the graduate program as a site of learning, teaching, and professionalization. The participants’ discussions prompt a consideration of the graduate student position, especially as learner, and they encourage us to look more closely at the purpose of graduate education. Although I fall short of Institutional Critique as Porter et.al. (2000) propose it—for them, institutional critique necessarily must fight for change—my position as researcher and graduate student limits the amount of action I can take institutionally. However, in the spirit of institutional critique, I hope to present a brief version of my participants’ experiences to administrators, presenting some concrete reflections of the program via the participants’ experiences. Further, this study reveals the need for looking at multimodality as both a digital and a nondigital concept. It offers some examples of how graduate teachers are working to integrate multimodality, while also offering some cautions in terms of training and transition into the new media age. Most importantly, graduate participants were offered a space to voice their opinions, thoughts, and share their experiences—putting them to paper (screen?) does, I think, validate their experiences and forefront their needs.
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