

ABSTRACT

STUDENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: ACTIVIST LITERACY AND DIGITAL MEDIA

by Karryn Audra Lintelman

This thesis describes a person-based research study that investigates the literacy practices of students who self-identify as activists at Miami University. Research methods are drawn from activist methodology and empathetic interviewing techniques. This study presents and analyzes data from ten interviews with student activists, focusing especially on three in-depth case studies of specific student activists and the texts they have created for their work. In particular, this study addresses the following questions: How and to what extent do student activists understand and practice rhetorical persuasion? How do sponsors, material conditions, and contexts support the activist literacies of participants? How do student activists conceptualize and employ digital technologies and multiple modalities in their work? What advice can activist students provide for teachers of writing? The project ultimately reveals implications for teachers, especially those interested in public writing and critical pedagogy, as well as for future research.

STUDENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE:
ACTIVIST LITERACY AND DIGITAL MEDIA

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

by

Karryn Audra Lintelman

Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

2009

Advisor _____

Dr. Jason Palmeri

Reader _____

Dr. Heidi A. McKee

Reader _____

Dr. John Tassoni

CONTENTS

Chapter One: Critical Pedagogy, Public Discourse, and Digital Writing	1
Chapter Two: Participants and Methodology	19
Chapter Three: Defining and Situating Activist Literacy	27
Chapter Four: Three Case Studies	45
Chapter Five: What Writing Instructors Can Learn From Student Activists	82
Appendix	94
Works Cited	96

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Jason Palmeri, who was a fabulous advisor for this project. Jason, your encouragement, conversations, considerable feedback, and enthusiasm guided me throughout the entire process. I would also like to thank Dr. Heidi McKee for her valuable teaching and feedback and Dr. John Tassoni for his participation and thoughtful questions. I must also say thank you to the many friends whose presence at Kofenya and elsewhere fueled my work while keeping me relatively sane, and to my family whose selflessness is always manifest. I warmly thank Trevor Furrer, who was with me when I put the letter in the mailbox, who listened to me vent, and whose continued friendship and support is a priceless source of energy. Finally, I thank those who participated in this study for talking with me and for doing such great work in the world.

CHAPTER ONE

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, PUBLIC DISCOURSE, AND DIGITAL WRITING

Kim, an environmental student activist, works with Greenpeace over the span of a summer. She participates in their global warming awareness campaign in Oregon, where she gains experience creating photo petitions. These are different from petitions filled with signatures; instead, they visually link images of citizens with their arguments and support for environmental protection and policy change. When Kim returns to college in Ohio, she organizes a similar action with her campus environmental group. Individual students hold signs and are photographed in front of a pile of coal on campus, each creating a visual argument against non-renewable energy and in support of sustainable and green university energy policies. The group plans to collect the photos into one petition, complete with a cover letter, for the university's president. Kate, another student activist, spends time in high school reading various blogs on feminism and feminist issues and movements. She calls this reading her "self-education," which gave her the knowledge, critical awareness, and agency to become an active feminist herself. In high school, when male teachers make sexist remarks, Kate corrects them, and makes her position known in other visible ways as well. In college, she chooses women's studies as one of her majors and works on and writes for activist (including feminist) campaigns. Emma, a student activist as well, spends a summer working with Indymedia in Chicago. She goes to lunch with a fellow media activist who brings up the issue of Network Neutrality, which Emma has not heard about. They discuss the issue—how stakeholders against Net Neutrality seek to gain greater control of the internet and limit the ways users can access its content. Emma is surprised and angry. On her walk home from lunch she plans an informative video, a call to action to preserve Net Neutrality; she completes the video and posts it online, where it receives an audience, not long afterwards.

The vignettes above, which are discussed in more depth further in this thesis, reveal just some of the literacy practices of student activists in the twenty-first century, practices that deserve the attention of educators, particularly teachers in the field of composition and rhetoric, if we are interested in supporting their participatory, democratic work. The field of composition and rhetoric has long been concerned with theorizing issues of empowerment, public writing, and social action. Listening to students who are voluntarily utilizing their time, knowledge, and

abilities for their own social and political goals outside of school, then, is another necessary method by which to contribute to these conversations. To accomplish this, I designed a person-based research project to investigate the literacies of students who self-identify as activists. This project is located amongst three main questions related to ongoing conversations in the fields of composition and rhetoric and literacy studies. These questions, which I will review in terms of how my work is situated in the field, include: 1. How can teachers prepare students to be critical and active citizens? 2. How might teachers build upon and support the literacy practices students bring with them to class? 3. How are digital technologies transforming current literacy practices? To begin to discuss some of these questions from a fresh angle, I interviewed student activists about their literacy backgrounds, about the literacy practices they use in accomplishing the activist work they participate in outside of class, and about the print and digital texts they compose as part of their activist work. Such texts are often necessary for activist students to promote the actions that they are taking around campus, often in conjunction with student groups, and in other places in their lives. By studying the literacies of activist students, particularly in relation to their rhetorical production of specific texts, I attempt to understand the significance of specific literacy practices and rhetorical considerations in their work. As a result, this study may be useful in considering how teachers can assist in the development of forms of activist literacy¹.

Attempting to find answers to these questions from the participants' perspectives, as well as through my own rhetorical analysis of student texts, has helped me to conceive of an activist literacy as a set of practices that are necessary in accomplishing the work that students are dedicated to, as well as to better understand the ways that social contexts can shape such a literacy. The activist work I study originated with students themselves, mostly outside of their classrooms, and as such it deserves our attention if we are indeed interested in how to encourage and enact student writing for public audiences.

¹ I use the singular "literacy" here and within this thesis to designate the concept of literacy practices that are associated with the work of student activists. However, I do not aim to negate or overlook the complex and contextual nature of literacy and its various conceptions. In fact, I will show that "activist literacy" is actually comprised of multiple literacies, including the alphabetic, technological (which, according to Stuart Selber, includes functional, critical, and rhetorical literacies), visual, oral, aural, and critical, among perhaps others. When it is more grammatically or conceptually correct, I use the plural "literacies."

How can teachers prepare students to be critical and active citizens?

Critical Pedagogy

Composition instructors have long been concerned with the question critical pedagogues raise: How can teachers prepare students to be critical and active citizens? In considering this question, it is necessary to consider critical pedagogies that seek to encourage students to consider writing and critical thinking in ways related to social action. According to Patricia Bizzell, the critical pedagogical theorist, Paulo Freire, “has been of profound importance for a whole generation of American writing teachers” (319). She believes that Freire’s concept of ‘critical consciousness’ has been his most important idea influencing composition instruction in the United States (319)². Freire has defined conscientização, or the formulation of a critical consciousness, as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 17). Though Freire contextualizes his work in specific laborer communities in Brazil, composition instructors, like Bizzell, have drawn from his educational critiques and insights. That is, they have supported and drawn from practices such as problem-posing and student-centered education, which relies on dialogue between the “teacher-student” and “students-teachers” (Freire 60), rejecting the banking method of education in which teachers seek to deposit information into supposedly ignorant students (Freire 53).

As I just alluded, dialogue is an important Freirean concept that has been adopted by composition instructors who seek to decenter the authority of the teacher in the classroom. Freire writes, “if it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (69), revealing the role he sees dialogue playing in the attainment of literacy and in interaction through it. In addition, Freire sees dialogue as something that both requires and generates critical thinking (73); as such, it is essential to his concept of “education as the practice of freedom” (74), a practice that seeks to transform reality rather than to educate for conformity to the status quo.

² Though here I position Freire as one origin of critical pedagogy theories in composition and rhetoric, it is important to note that there is a long tradition of critical pedagogy in the U.S. before his work. See Susan Kates’ *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937* and Myles Horton’s *The Myles Horton Reader: Education for Social Change* for a few examples.

Reading over the work of critical pedagogues, it is clear to see the impact that Freire has had. For example, Christian Weisser has stated that “one of the most influential proponents of Freirean theory over the past twenty years has been Ira Shor” (40). Shor has adopted and worked with Freire’s concept of problem-posing education to enact “critical teaching” and “dialogic pedagogy” (Shor 2). He has also theorized critical consciousness, breaking it down into four general qualities, one of which is critical literacy. He defines critical literacy partially as “habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath the surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements...to the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event...policy, mass media, or discourse...” (Shor 129). The other qualities comprising critical consciousness include “power awareness,” which refers to understanding how power interacts in society; “permanent desocialization,” which refers to the ability to question the status quo in regards to learned values and institutional inequality and injustice; and “self-education/organization,” which refers to taking the initiative for transformative education (129-130). Shor discusses these as abilities students need to develop and obtain critical consciousness, in order to realize that society, being “a human creation,” can be changed (128). He offers this as one component of educating students for their roles as participants in a democratic society.

In addition, bell hooks’ critical pedagogy has been influenced by Freire’s work, as well as by feminist theory and her own life experiences, though she also writes about the element of pleasure or excitement she sees as being absent in prior discussions of critical and feminist classroom practices (7). It is this excitement that hooks celebrates in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, while discussing the pleasures of teaching and learning as “an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy” often affecting professors and students (10); it is also an act that contributes to the intellectual, critical, and spiritual growth of students. Along with community and collaboration, critical thinking resides in a central location in hooks’ commitment to “education as the practice of freedom,” a concept she draws from Freire and builds upon. Like Shor, hooks sees critical thinking as “the primary element allowing the possibility of change” (202); it is a necessary precursor to societal change. However, she reminds us that Freire has made it clear that critical consciousness alone cannot transform, but must be joined with praxis, the combination of action and reflection (Freire 33). hooks thus believes that “our lives must be a living example of our politics” (48) in order

for change to occur. As student activists attempt to enact their politics in their lives—through groups they join, texts they create, ways they speak and interact, actions and events they organize, and activities they take part in—talking to them provides a way to better understand how critical consciousness is tied to everyday individual and collective actions they engage in and the various literacy practices these actions require.

In *The Struggle and the Tools: Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner City Community*, Ellen Cushman laments the fact that critical consciousness is often defined in a limited way as something that inevitably leads to collective action that challenges the status quo. Cushman believes that “when we view the impact of critical pedagogy from these grand levels...we miss the particular ways in which our teaching and research might contribute to students’ abilities to take up their civic responsibilities once they leave our classrooms” (“Rhetorician” 23). Instead, Cushman argues that a more inclusive definition that excludes the word “collective,” would not “disregard other forms of social and linguistic agency found at the point where power is applied in the daily” (“Struggle” xx). While students in my study are often involved in collective social action as members of activist groups, many also participate in individual actions that also work for change and qualify as activism in this study. Taking Cushman’s cue, I hope my study works in valuing both collective and non-collective forms of resistance students are engaging in, especially at the level of their daily lives³.

The Public Turn

Though critical pedagogues like Shor and hooks advocate student-centered and collaborative classrooms, they would agree with Susan Jarratt about her views of conflict in the classroom, which she advocates so as not to avoid the actual race, sex, and class differences that exist in classrooms, between teachers and students and between students themselves (265, 267-68). She argues for helping students debate about public issues, and thus “making the turn from the personal back out to the public” (277). Jarratt turns toward historical rhetoric to emphasize Sophist theory that “assumes that knowledge is always constructed socially and that public action is guided by informed debate among members of a democratic community...Conflict is

³ It is worth noting that Cushman’s study is ethnographic and focused on an inner city community and the ways that agency and resistance are enacted through the micro politics of daily linguistic and literate practices; thus, her work is different from mine in significant ways.

central to their theory of rhetoric and democratic politics” (271). Jarratt thus views the ideal composition classroom as a place that embraces conflict, where “students argue about the ethical implications of discourse on a wide range of subjects and, in so doing, come to identify their personal interests with others, understand those interests as implicated in a larger communal setting, and advance them in a public voice” (277). Here Jarratt specifically emphasizes a public turn in writing pedagogy from a rhetorical standpoint.

This emphasis on public issues and writing for public audiences has long existed within composition studies. In 1996 James Berlin wrote that “[t]he objectives of English studies are many. The most significant of these is developing a measure of facility in reading and writing practices so as to prepare students for public discourse in a democratic political community” (110), a participatory end-goal many in composition share even if they do not specifically identify as “critical pedagogues.” Christian Weisser’s *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere* provides an overview of the origins of the concepts of the public, the public sphere, and public writing in the field of composition and in the academy. Weisser traces the field of composition from its early stages as a discipline in the 1960s and 1970s to the turn of the century, as it “gradually expanded its focus from the individual writer, to social notions of how knowledge is generated, to more political—and public—investigations of discourse” (90). Weisser notes that it is possible to argue that the work of Freire “is directly responsible for the discipline’s current focus upon public writing” (37), which Weisser defines as “written discourse that attempts to engage an audience of local, regional, or national groups or individuals in order to bring about progressive societal change” (90). He states that “while radical theories enabled many compositionists to envision discourse as a political act, more and more scholars today are broadening this notion to investigate sites outside of the classroom in which discourse is generated and used” (91). This investigation includes public writing and service-learning initiatives, which Weisser believes are in strong positions to become next main focal point of the field’s theory and conversation (91).

The work of Ellen Cushman, Paula Mathieu, and Nancy Welch, among others, serves as evidence to the validity of Weisser’s claim. In *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*, Mathieu examines university-community relationships and service learning initiatives to understand, evaluate and re-imagine how such partnerships with local communities work. She talks to and interviews community recipients of university outreach, including service

learning initiatives, asserting that there are “many, many voices teachers and scholars need to be hearing and learning from if we decide to venture into the streets” (xv). By “venturing into the streets” Mathieu refers to many of the projects the public turn inspires: public writing, course content centered on public issues, service learning, and public scholarship (connecting academic work to community issues). Her work is a useful reminder of the necessity of engaging in dialogue with the people whom pedagogies affect, as I attempt with students (within the academy) in this study.

Drawing upon Weisser, Mathieu also traces the multiple origins of the public turn in composition, which she views as one branch of the field that “generally asks teachers to connect the writing that students and they themselves do with ‘real world’ texts, events, or exigencies” (1). In outlining the public turn, Mathieu cites diverse theories and pedagogical practices ranging from classical rhetoric to John Dewey’s experiential learning theories, and from Freire’s work to the publishing potential the internet ushered in, among others (8). In addition, drawing on Michel de Certeau’s distinction between strategies and tactics, Mathieu argues for a tactical approach to university outreach. This means she views public writing as projects that “respond to problems but determine their own length, scope, and parameters,” and do not seek to completely “solve a problem, ameliorate a deficit, or fix an injustice” (50). Such an approach “marvels in the potentiality of writing while acknowledging the limits of its power” (50), and it is rhetorical, changing, and situated, whereas strategic approaches are not. Mathieu states that “seeing community work as tactical helps teachers and students realistically assess what work is possible and be open to radically redefining what is desirable academic-community work” (17). She further asserts that “as part of asking students to engage in public writing, it is useful to help begin with a historical understanding of how public discourse has and continues to change the world” (50). This can illuminate the fact that writing can play a role in social change, as it has throughout historical movements, though its impact often is not immediate, and patience may be required to assess its outcomes (50). This serves as good advice for instructors working to engage students with public writing, who may otherwise be disappointed or disillusioned by their attempt at entering the public discourse because change often takes place over the long term (though tactical projects have historically contributed to it) (50). Mathieu’s tactical approach, in terms of this study, provides a rationale for examining the work student activists are composing and taking part in, and not necessarily judging it in terms of success or failure, because of the

“unpredictable” nature of the public sphere and the “patience and persistence” social change requires (50).

In *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World*, Nancy Welch is also concerned with teaching public writing and rhetoric, as well as with trying to answer the question “of how ordinary people reach and persuade influential audiences” (4) in today’s world, a crucial question for student activists. Welch’s main purpose is to explore how teachers can “teach writing in a way that supports access, voice, and impact while also acknowledging the formidable constraints that convince most people there’s very little they can do, very little that people have ever done, to affect the course of national and world events” (4). Welch points out the failures of “contemporary maternalist and postmodern rhetorics” (69) to engage adequately with today’s world, and believes, like Jarratt, that, in terms of rhetorical theory “we musn’t repudiate assertion, musn’t relinquish our willingness to take a stand” (59). She illustrates classroom practices she engages in with students that help them to ‘take their own stands’ effectively. However, Welch does this while asserting/remembering that many of her students’ future careers, not to mention possible activist work, “will depend on what they learn now about collective, not individual, rhetorical strategies” (71), thus constructing a pedagogy that brings together the collaborative and persuasive skills critical pedagogues and composition instructors view as important. It is clear throughout her work that Welch views collective movements as the key to historical and future social change, though I would argue that she does not seek to devalue everyday individual forms of resistance such that Cushman advocates, or the tactical projects that Mathieu discusses, because these have historically contributed to wider social change movements. Comparing her pedagogy to the data I have collected from student activists may be useful, I believe, in conceptualizing pedagogical practices useful for an activist literacy. This is because I wish to consider, in relation to the activist work students currently engage in, how instructors might best develop and implement critical pedagogical models and public writing initiatives that prepare students to argue persuasively for social changes they believe in.

How might teachers build upon and support the literacy practices students bring with them to class?

Composition instructors have also been concerned with the question “How can we support the literacy practices students bring into the classroom?” Considering the work that has

been done in relation to this question reveals the ways that literacy practices both construct and are constructed by social, historical, and material contexts. In 1984, Shirley Brice Heath discussed how the literacy practices of both children and adults are shaped by their social contexts and demands. Her research has helped to situate literacy as a social practice and to dispel the dichotomous view between oral and literate societies, by proving that oral and written literacy practices do not exist along a continuum, but instead are parallel and “ever shifting” (Heath, “Protean Shapes” 466). Heath’s work provides a basis for understanding that children attain literacies at a young age and bring those with them into the school setting.

Acknowledging the literacies that students bring to class is essential to valuing them and enabling teachers to build upon and support them. Importantly, Heath also defines a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” and further, drawing from Anderson et al, as “any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role” (“Protean Shapes” 445). This definition provides an entry for studying activist literacies in relation to the texts that activist students produce, which I discuss in this study.

Drawing upon Heath’s work, Brian Street, an important influence on New Literacy Studies, which focused the field of literacy studies on such social constructions, writes that, “an understanding of literacy requires detailed, in-depth accounts of actual practice in different cultural settings” (“New” 430). Street also defines “literacies” as “the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (“New” 430). The idea that there is not a single literacy that can be assumed, but rather multiple literacies that can be explored, paves the way for my own conception of an activist literacy that is contextually situated. In a later essay, Street distinguishes between literacy events and practices, defining literacy events as “observable behaviors around literacy” and literacy practices as “cultural practices with which uses of reading and/or writing are associated in given contexts” (“Meanings” 38). Throughout this text I use the term “literacy practices” in this sense, though my definition of writing is expanded to include digital forms of composing.

Similar to these developments in literacy studies, Gail Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe discuss the concept of a “cultural ecology of literacy,” a term they use in their study of a particular literacy: technological literacy (5). They developed this concept to “suggest how

literacy is related in complex ways to existing cultural milieu; educational practices and values; social formations like race, class, and gender; political and economic trends and events; family practices and experiences; and material conditions—among other factors” (Hawisher and Selfe 5). Drawing on the work of other scholars, such as Street, Gee, Graff, and Brandt, Hawisher and Selfe define literacy “as a set of practices and values only when we properly situate our studies within the context of a particular historical period, a particular cultural milieu, and a specific cluster of material conditions” (5). In addition, Hawisher and Selfe’s project also incorporates Deborah Brandt’s concept of “sponsors of literacy,” which Brandt describes as being “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (Brandt 19). Hawisher and Selfe use this definition to discuss the sponsors of technological literacy, such as family members and friends, who have been important in the lives of some of their participants (174-76). However, they distinguish that they use Brandt’s concept “in terms of benefactors or supporters who give little thought to the recompense or benefits that they may receive in return” (174). In this study I draw upon their concepts of literacy sponsors and the cultural ecology of literacy to delineate the people, organizations, and other sponsors that have supported the activist (including the technological) literacies of students I interviewed. I do so because I have come to understand that the development of an activist literacy depends largely upon an individual’s specific context and history of sponsorship.

How are digital technologies transforming current literacy practices?

Multiliteracies

Hawisher and Selfe’s work, among others, has shown us that teachers, students, activists, and the general public are taking advantage of the networking, writing, and publishing potential now available via the internet, which makes such trends important for composition and rhetoric scholars to consider. At least since the rise of the personal computer and subsequently the World Wide Web, scholars have been asking the question “How are digital technologies transforming current literacy practices?” This question has been answered in a variety of ways, especially in terms of broadening the concept of literacy, similar to work Street has done. For example, the New London Group has theorized the concept of “multiliteracies” “to include negotiating a

multiplicity of discourses” that exist due to our diverse global societies and the variety of texts multimedia technologies have enabled (9). They write that “one of the key ideas informing the notion of Multiliteracies is the increasing complexity and interrelationship of different modes of meaning” (25). These modes identified by the group so far include the linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal. “Multimodal Design, however,” they write, “is of a different order to the others as it represents the patterns of interconnection among the other modes” (25). The group believes that “all meaning-making is Multimodal,” and thus in our technological world we must have multiple literacies to make choices involving various elements of design (29), and, likewise, to comprehend such design.

In addition, Stuart Selber has theorized the importance of functional, critical, and rhetorical literacies of technology in order to position students as users, questioners, and producers of technology in relation to society. Selber defines a functional literacy as basic technological how-to knowledge that students must know to simply operate a computer as a tool, and critical literacy as that which teaches students to question technology and develop an informed awareness of it. Rhetorical literacy, then, situates students as producers of technology and “insists upon praxis—the thoughtful integration of functional and critical abilities in the design and evaluation of computer interfaces” (Selber 145). Thus, Selber argues that students need what he also calls “multiliteracies” in order to effectively interact with technology and compose texts with it. The Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) collective at Michigan State University also advocates a well rounded digital literacy: “Like many others, we are concerned that the depth and intensity of the media that washes over us is writing us more than we are writing it. There is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done to develop critical pedagogies for engaging digital media, particularly those that demand student productivity” (WIDE). As the participants in my study have shown a digital literacy to be essential to much of their work, it is clear that understanding computer hardware, computer software, the texts that can be created with them, and how to compose such texts, is essential to an activist literacy that can work to promote social inquiry and action for change.

Civic Participation

As I have suggested, there has also been a certain movement in the field of computers and composition to help students become active producers and critics rather than passive consumers of both media and technology, which shares similarities with critical pedagogical goals of teaching writing for public discourse and democratic participation. Such democratic aims shared by critical pedagogues have been translated to extend beyond alphabetic reading and writing as we have moved into the information age, and have moved from (but not excluding) the page to the screen. In effect, they have been extended to goals for multiple literacies, as evidenced in the claims of computers and composition scholars about the affordances of digital writing in the classroom. For example, Jeffrey Grabill has recently attempted to build a theory of civic rhetoric in *Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action*. In light of his study on the work citizens take on in communities, Grabill calls for civic-minded writing programs that teach digital literacies to students, who will need them as “the civic rhetors of the 21st century” (3).

This is also a central concern in the work of computers and composition scholars such as Grabill and Simmons, among others, and is supported officially by CCCC’s 2004 *Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments*, which espouses that writing programs should “assure that students learn to use the technology, not just consume it” (3). The statement also announces that digital writing courses should “provide students with opportunities to apply digital technologies to solve substantial problems common to the academic, professional, civic, and/or personal realm of their lives” (1), which highlights the importance that such theory has gained in the field. Further, the statement suggests that digital writing can be easily shared; this is one reason why the affordances of digital writing can allow students to write for public audiences, an objective which has been important to rhetoricians since the classical age. Challenging conventional conceptions of public writing in print-centric classrooms, Kathleen Blake Yancey asserts that writing for public audiences is often only imagined in most academic courses (Yancey 302). Outside of academia, however, the practice of writing for public audiences is central to most writing work (Grabill), and as evidenced by the work of other scholars and by the data I have collected, can be supported more effectively by digital writing programs.

Delivery

Digital compositions can be shared with audiences through computer networks and web publishing in a variety of ways, which allows students to distribute their compositions to large and perhaps widespread audiences (WIDE). This has led to a renewed emphasis on delivery in terms of the rhetorical canon within the field of computers and composition, especially in relation to the delivery of digital texts, which requires attention be paid to choice of medium and techniques for increasing circulation. This movement has the potential to better instruct teachers and students in composing rhetorically and in using the affordances of the internet and digital media to compose and distribute texts for public audiences.

For example, in James Porter's "Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric and Human-Computer Interaction," he discusses the history of the rhetorical canon of delivery and seeks to reformulate a new "robust canon of delivery" to guide, theorize, and understand digital writing in the information age. He states that "in the digital realm, online writers need to become rhetorically smart *distributors* as much as *producers* of discourse" (13, author's emphasis). Porter outlines five key components of his theory of digital delivery and organizes scholarship in the field around each one. These topics include body/identity, distribution/circulation, access/accessibility, interaction, and economics. Though these topics are interconnected, perhaps the most immediately relevant topic in terms of my study is distribution/circulation, because student activists, who are composing digital texts, need to consider these issues in order to persuade public audiences with them. Porter writes that "digital distribution refers to rhetorical decisions about the mode of presenting discourse in online situations: What is the most effective way to distribute a message to its intended audiences, in a timely manner, and in a way that is likely to achieve the desired outcome? Circulation is a related term that pertains to how that message might be recycled in digital space" (11). Porter's concept of digital delivery is helpful in thinking about the texts activist students produce, and the considerations that teachers need to help them make regarding how those texts will actually reach the audiences that they wish to inform or persuade.

A renewed emphasis on delivery in digital writing can also demonstrate the centrality of delivery among the rhetorical canons, as Kathleen Blake Yancey has argued. Yancey describes the more conventional composition classroom as separating "delivery and memory from

invention, arrangement, and style in ways that are counterproductive” (316). In reference to digital writing, though, she writes:

As my options for delivering texts have widened—from the page to the screen to the networked screen and then back to the page anew—I’ve begun to see the canons not as discrete entities...but, rather, as related to each other in much the same way as the elements of Burke’s pentad are related: the canons interact, and through that interaction they contribute to new exigencies for invention, arrangement, representation, and identity. Or, they change what is possible. (317)

Rethinking the importance of delivery in digital writing, that is, can also reveal the other canons in a new light. In summary, Yancey writes, “the potential of arrangement is a function of delivery, and *what and how you arrange*—which becomes a function of the medium you choose—*is who you invent* (318, author’s italics). This idea is supported by the WIDE collective, who have written that “the arrangements that students need to understand and be able to produce must fluidly account for the cultural conventions of textual organization, form, and content that their particular and multiple audiences will bring to bear when reading and navigating” (WIDE). This illuminates the way that considerations of delivery are central even from the beginning of the composing process, and the ways that a digital composition can take on more ‘real-world’ importance than a traditional essay that is written only for a student’s teacher. Digital composing can thus provide a way to teach the mostly unfamiliar concepts of rhetoric in a familiar way, by drawing upon literacies students already have or are practicing outside of the classroom, such as the technological, visual, and aural.

Calls for technological literacies, though growing in popularity, have not emerged without question, as some instructors and scholars do not believe that the English department is the place to teach them, as noted by the WIDE group. However, digital media projects may in fact be a more effective way to teach students the canons of rhetoric than traditional print-based compositions, as Yancey points out, and to provide more opportunity for public writing. This is also supported by the WIDE group, who writes:

[W]e argue that computers and writing specialists routinely consider more of the classical rhetorical canon—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—than mainstream compositionists do. They also routinely invite more real-world practice into

their writing classrooms via technology across all of the canonical categories. (WIDE, “Rhetorical”)

Broadening consideration of rhetoric, especially in terms of delivery, and inviting writing practice that extends beyond the classroom, is a further way that computers and composition scholars have worked to extend the composition classroom as a site for providing tools necessary for and increasing the effectiveness of student participation in public discourse.

Composition and Student Activism

Perhaps I should add another question to those I have just surveyed. That is, I need to consider the question “How have composition scholars previously studied activists, particularly student activists, and how does my work fit in?” To begin to answer it, I will review some work similar to my own that has been done in the field. For example, Eli Goldblatt has published a conversation in the *Community Literacy Journal* with Philadelphia activists he works with through Temple University’s New City Writing program, discussing the role of literacy in their work and lives. In considering the public turn in composition studies, Paula Mathieu also interviewed activists outside of the university to understand ways to connect the writing they do to classroom writing projects. She talked to a Chicago activist who works on campaigns to ensure that the poor and elderly have affordable utilities (28). Mathieu writes, “Public writing, in C.’s work and the work of many activists, is about creating an ongoing discourse around an issue and working to keep that idea in the public’s mind” (30). Further, she states, “The public projects of C. and his collaborators differ from typical classroom writing assignments in various ways; C.’s campaigns focus on specific issues in ongoing ways that change in content and form as the time and audience dictates. Public audiences are often unreceptive or difficult to move; clear measures of success or completion are difficult to find” (31). This reveals the types of rhetorical situations and obstacles activist writers often face. Such work by both Goldblatt and Mathieu is important, because it provides an example of actual literacy practices activists engage in outside of the university to compare to the work being done inside composition classrooms. If writing for public audiences is a major concern for composition instructors, such work should be more aligned with the kinds of public writing students are already doing.

One scholar who has studied youth activists, Mollie Blackburn, conducted an in-depth three-year long ethnographic study at a youth-run center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,

and questioning (LGBTQ) youth (12-23 years old). She observed what she termed their ‘literacy performances,’ which she argues, “when examined in relation to one another, uncover the adolescents’ power to use literacies to work for social change” (470). Blackburn concentrates on participants (who generally identify as high school or college students or graduates) trained as activists to educate various audiences about LGBTQ issues and against homophobia and heterosexism (471-472), ultimately showing “the ways in which their reading and writing of words and worlds” worked to disrupt and question unequal power dynamics, but also at times to replicate them (475). Blackburn’s research is notable for its emphasis on student activist literacy performances outside of school, as well as for theorizing the concept of literacy performances.

Similarly, Zan Meyer Gonçalves has conducted an ethnographic study of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) student activist members of a group with the same goals as Blackburn’s youth. They are student speakers for “the Speaker’s Bureau, a university-based educational outreach program designed to address homophobia and heterosexism on campus and in the community” (1) at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Gonçalves focuses on the students’ literacy practices and the way they make contextual rhetorical choices in speaking to various audiences, especially in relation to their construction of ethos. Drawing from her observations of these students’ identity performances, she writes, “Ethos, the performance of specific and multiple identities in order to make allies around issues and effect change, is at the center of my ethics for teaching social justice” (134). As such, Gonçalves argues for creating opportunities within the composition classroom for students to consider and construct their ethos more fully in their speaking and writing, and provides plenty of pedagogical examples from her own classroom. Her aim is for students to “build a bridge between the personal and the public” (xvi), which reveals her goals for student engagement, for “invit[ing] the students in our classrooms to become citizens” (145). As such, her work is important for teachers interested in supporting students’ use of language to enter public discourse, perhaps for activist efforts.

Jonathan Alexander is another scholar who has examined youth activism in his book *Digital Youth: Emerging Literacies on the World Wide Web*, as he explores a “Web-based activist effort” by a former student of his “whose primary goal is to provide alternative sources of news information about the ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict” (Alexander 306). Alexander believes this student, a graduate and free-lance writer, has developed “a *literacy of pragmatics*—a strategic use of the Web that simultaneously uses and acknowledges its very real limitations as

a communications tool” (313). Alexander gears his own classroom towards the “social turn” in the field, following Bruce McComiskey’s “social-process pedagogy,” which emphasizes critical content without sacrificing attention to writing and writing process (Alexander 348). From this perspective, Alexander developed a digital writing course on HIV and AIDS issues in which students collaboratively created a website for their campus community. Alexander discusses the development of the “activist site” and the students’ “growing sense of writing as potentially interventive *and* a willingness to engage various forms of Webbed writing to create ‘sites’ of intervention” (357) as their ability to negotiate multiple literacies and rhetorical considerations to intervene in the dialogue of public issues.

The work of Alexander and the other scholars discussed is deeply important and informative, though my own study takes a somewhat different approach to this subject, and is perhaps most closely aligned with the work of Gonçalves, who also focuses on college student activists. The activism that I explore does not take place solely on the web; rather, it deals with students currently using the internet and creating a variety of texts, including digital media, on their own, to further promote action they are already taking around campus and in other places in their lives, often in conjunction with student activist groups. There has been little person-based research on such activism that college students enact outside the classroom in the field of composition and rhetoric, with Gonçalves’ work as the obvious exception being considered here. That is, though the participants in my study often make connections between their school work and their activist work, the latter is not always required by a course or teacher—students willingly, of their own accord, participate in it. As such, it deserves consideration if we are indeed interested in how students can assert themselves in public dialogue and write for public audiences. Student activists tend to cite various sources and inspiration for their actions, such as family or personal experiences they have had. By interviewing them, most of whom have already developed a critical consciousness through these overlapping paths, I ultimately aim to provide insights that can help composition instructors better prepare students for the kinds of civic participation they may engage in during college and beyond.

In the following chapter, I discuss in-depth the methodology of my study, including recruitment and the participant pool, research methods I drew from, ethical issues, and the interview process. In chapter three I analyze interview data in order to define and theorize the terms “activism” and “activist literacy,” in an attempt to contextually situate the terms and

describe how they are used in this study. I also examine the context of Miami University, where this study takes place, and the various literacy sponsors of participants, in an attempt to understand how they have played a role in participants' activist literacy. In chapter four I present case studies of three participants who were most informative and representative of the entire data set. These case studies answer key research questions, as well as allow me to convey the voices and perspectives of participants more fully. Finally, in chapter five I discuss implications for writing instructors and for future research that my work suggests. Overall, I believe that these chapters can work to fill a gap in the field where the subject population of student activists has been neglected, though their work outside of the classroom can be especially informative.

CHAPTER TWO

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the participants and discuss methodological and ethical choices I made in carrying out this research. I chose to conduct an interview-based study of student activists at Miami University because I seek to bring student voices into scholarly conversations about critical theory and public writing, allowing them to be heard within the dialogue. While we may not consider the participants in this study to be ‘average’ college students due to the nature of their involvement and activity beyond the classroom, they are an exemplary group of students who may exist in whatever number on virtually every campus, and as such we should have more knowledge about them—especially since they may be a model of the level of engagement that many writing instructors would like to see in students.

Recruitment and Participant Pool

After securing IRB approval, I began this project working through an offline social network. A fellow colleague who self-identifies as an activist provided me with some starting points—namely, people this colleague has worked with who might be interested in participating in my study, a strategy similarly used by Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe to locate participants for their *Literate Lives* project. From there, I solicited participants via an emailed letter of recruitment that invited them to also forward the letter to other interested persons they might know. Rather than providing a definition of “activist” or “activism,” I made a call for those who self-identify as activists so as not to limit the potential participants, and so that I could attempt to define the terms in this study as participants themselves did. I went through this recruitment process twice, once during the spring semester of 2008 and once during the following fall semester, as this larger project originally stemmed from a smaller one consisting of only four participants.

In the end, my interview pool was made up of ten participants total, each of whom self-identified as an activist, either in working with campus student groups or individually, inside or outside of the university setting. These participants included eight undergraduates and two graduate students; in my descriptions of them, I draw from the information they shared with me during interviews. These descriptions will provide a basis for understanding who the participants

are and what kinds of work they consider to be “activist.” The men I interviewed included John, Andrew, and Martin⁴. John is a white senior studying economics and math. He has worked with a student group for a living wage campaign on campus, serving as their webmaster. This group seeks to attain a living wage policy for university staff workers. Andrew, a white graduate student in psychology, has also been involved in the living wage campaign. He has participated in some of the annual School of the Americas (SOA) protests in Georgia⁵—including in the making of large puppets used there—and in what he called an “activist” theater class that worked on a project with local high school students. Martin, a white graduate student studying literature, has worked at another university for events like Take Back the Night⁶, and at this university has worked with same living wage group mentioned above. He also participates frequently in internet petition and letter writing campaigns.

The rest of the participants I interviewed were undergraduate women. Emma is an Asian American student who studied democratic education as an interdisciplinary studies major. She has graduated since our interview, though during her college career she worked on voter registration drives, with the Indymedia group in Chicago⁷, and with the living wage campaign as well as other groups on campus. Liz, a white senior studying zoology, is president of the student group for peace and justice on campus; she has also attended some labor unionizing rallies and participated in other kinds of work she called “local activism” (Liz Interview). Similarly, Jane, a white sociology and pre-med major, has also been president of the student group for peace and justice, and has organized trips for the group, including one to the SOA protest her sophomore year, as well as a petition drive for the living wage campaign on campus. She has also now

⁴ All participant names in this study are pseudonyms.

⁵ The SOA is now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. Its main critic, the School of the Americas Watch, states that it “is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers, located at Fort Benning, Georgia... Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been tortured, raped, assassinated, ‘disappeared,’ massacred, and forced into refugee by those trained at the School of Assassins” (“School”). The SOA Watch uses fasts, vigils, nonviolent protest and demonstrations, and media and legislative work in their work to close the U.S. military run school.

⁶ Events organized under this name seek to end sexual violence. See: <http://www.takebackthenight.org/>

⁷ The Independent Media Center “is a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth.” It was established in 1999 as a network for independent news coverage of the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle. IMC’s have since spread “through a decentralized and autonomous network” all around the world (“About Indymedia”). The Chicago Indymedia center maintains an open publishing website and produces a monthly news radio program and TV series. See: <http://chicago.indymedia.org/index.php>

graduated. Kate is a white sociology and women's studies major who transferred to the university's main campus from one of the branch campuses. She developed a new student organization that connects students with Spanish-speaking immigrants in the surrounding area to conduct language and cultural exchange circles together. Kate has served as president of the group, which also takes other actions concerned with immigrant's rights. She also has worked with a women's studies class on a "no hate campaign" spawned by campus events, and she mentioned wearing her "this is what a feminist looks like" t-shirt as a form of activism in which she engages. Another participant, Kim, is a white student, a junior interdisciplinary studies major focusing on Native American and environmental studies. She plans to work on an undergraduate thesis on ecofeminism and indigenous communities. She has worked with several environmental groups, including the national organization Greenpeace, and a local campus organization. Kim has also participated in many forms of activism, including organizing a "teach in" on climate change which involved nine faculty members from various departments⁸, and creating video testimonials and photo petitions about students' environmental concerns. Sonia is a white interdisciplinary studies senior who participated in a community engagement program sponsored by the university's architecture department, in which she lived in an inner-city neighborhood and worked with community groups there. Through this experience, she worked on a campaign to prevent the city from closing the neighborhood's pool. She has also researched activism in Chicago and Brazil for a senior project about community engagement, and she created a video with classmates criticizing police violence. Finally, Kristen, a white senior studying German and Arabic in an interdisciplinary program, worked on voter registration drives leading up to the 2008 presidential election and organized a film festival on campus showcasing films made by Iraqis, including students, because she thought that "more American students should see these films" (Kristen interview).

My participant pool thus consisted of three males and seven females, all but one of whom identified as white. The number of females over males who responded to the recruitment call may perhaps be related to the fact that the latest campus climate study (2003) reported that women are more likely than men to participate in campus groups (Dey), and the lack of racial diversity may be related to the larger student demographics on campus. All of the interviewees,

⁸ The participation of the faculty members here is commendable, as is staff and faculty participation in the living wage campaign actions, as Nancy Welch reminds us that "The teach-in and rally continue to be risky forums for vulnerable and high-profile individuals" (35).

excepting the two graduate students, were within the average age range (18-24) of traditional college students. In addition, all of the participants are involved with progressive groups or causes falling on the left side of the political spectrum, so this is the specific type of activism that this study engages. While I did at one point send a recruitment email to members of the college republicans at the university, I received no response from them or any other right-leaning activist, and so I do not have data to discuss activism that falls on that end of the political spectrum.

Nevertheless, the variety of answers participants gave about the types of work they have done for activist purposes, as detailed above, shows that there are several types of actions that fall under the category of “activism” included in this study. Some of the work was quite similar; for instance many students were involved in the same group working for a living wage campaign on campus at various times. But, the range of actions they labeled as activism varied widely, from creating puppets and teaching other students, to organizing trips and creating video testimonials, to wearing t-shirts and writing emails. The definition of activism that this study is concerned with is thus fairly expansive, as will be discussed in-depth in chapter three. Because this is a small pool to draw from and I realize the limitations of the sample, I do not intend to make broad generalizations about student activism. I do believe, however, that the results of this study can be informative, serving as a starting point for future, more in-depth investigations of students’ activist literacies.

Empathetic Interviewing and Activist Research

I gathered data for this study solely through interviews with participants, which returned rich results. Hawisher and Selfe demonstrated the power of the interview and of the data it can yield in *Literate Lives in the Information Age*, as they conducted interviews of participants to gather “technological literacy autobiographies” (7). Like Hawisher and Selfe, I am also interested in the backgrounds of the participants and in how their backgrounds have intersected with technological experience and literacy, especially since most of the participants have grown up within the Information Age. However, my own study is nowhere near as expansive as theirs, and my sole focus is not on technological literacy. Nevertheless, I did find the interview format to be a conducive and rich conduit for studying closely the experiences, thoughts, work, and

literacy practices of a few particular student activists. It may perhaps have been helpful (though possibly improbable due to what I found to be sporadic composing processes), to conduct participant observation of activist students while composing as well, though time restrictions did not allow for this.

I conducted one 30-45 minute face-to-face interview with each participant. The questions I posed during interviews mostly focused on definitions of activism, the activist work participants engaged in, the knowledge or abilities necessary for their work and how they acquired or did not acquire them, their technological literacy and the use of digital writing in their work, and specific texts the students have created in support of their activist goals⁹. The interview process was based on what Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey have called “empathetic interviewing.” According to Fontana and Frey, “empathetic approaches take an ethical stance in favor of the individual or group being studied. The interviewer becomes an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policies and ameliorate the conditions of the interviewee” (696). While I did not begin to participate directly in activism with the participants I interviewed, it was clear in my recruiting that I was in favor of the work they do and that I was interested in understanding how the field of composition might better support it. For instance, my recruitment letter stated, “The purpose of this study is to see what work student activists are accomplishing, or want to accomplish, outside of the classroom, and what literacies are necessary to accomplish that work, in order to possibly help composition instructors better prepare students for the kinds of civic participation they may engage in during college and beyond.” Thus, from the beginning, participants were aware that I was ‘on their side’ in creating a study to help instructors better serve their needs. This, potentially, could have been one reason they responded to the recruitment call and agreed to participate in the research.

The concept of empathetic interviewing has some resemblance to Ellen Cushman’s activist methodology, though Cushman describes it in terms of ethnographic research. She writes, “activist research shows how knowledge can be made with those we hope our critical theory serves” (“Struggle” 37), which is one of the main goals I had in interviewing student activists to listen to their perspectives and find out more about their literacy practices. To

⁹ Interview questions are included in the Appendix. This was the script I used in each interview, though I occasionally deviated from it to ask follow up or clarifying questions.

achieve this shared making of knowledge, Cushman calls for dialogue, self-reflexivity, and reciprocity between researcher and participant (“Struggle” 36). I engaged in some of these practices to an extent, though my research is not ethnographic. That is, I asked participants whose data appears in the case studies to read and comment on my draft if they were interested, comments that I listened to and engaged with during revision. This process opened up a dialogue so that participants could affirm, revise, extend, or deny my representation of their stories and their words¹⁰. I also chose to quote participants often and at length within this thesis in order to allow them to speak for themselves and to preserve their voices, word choices, and phrasing.

While it is traditionally assumed that the role of the researcher is to be as objective as possible, there are others who understand that nothing is entirely objective when “historically and contextually located” people with “unavoidable conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings, and biases” are involved (Fontana and Frey 696). Understanding the participants and myself as such people, I did not want to impose a false objectivity upon our interactions. Fontana and Frey write, “if we proceed from the belief that neutrality is not possible (even assuming that it would be desirable), then taking a stance becomes unavoidable. An increasing number of social scientists have realized that they need to interact as persons with the interviewees and acknowledge that they are doing so” (696). This is how I proceeded with the interviews, as I found it impossible not to empathize with participants and show support for them. First of all, they already realized that I was interested in their work and in understanding possible ways for writing teachers to consider their viewpoints and literacy practices, which demonstrated to them my motivations in the interview. During interviews they also seemed to be comfortable disparaging, at times, the university administration, conservative political views, and non-active student peers. For example, Kim talked about how she felt like “the world’s great” in San Francisco when she was around a lot of “green” people, but said, “you come back to Ohio and you’re like, not really. [John] McCain everywhere or whatever.” Statements like these signaled to me that participants considered my views to be in alignment with their own, presumably due to the nature of my research topic and to the fact that they were involved in more liberal/progressive forms of activism, which they seemed to assume I was sympathetic with (or

¹⁰ Two of the case study participants, Emma and John, responded to this inquiry while Liz did not. Emma and John both validated the drafts, with John providing some further information or clarifying comments in a few sections of the material he read.

just didn't care if I was not). In fact, I do situate myself on the left end of the political spectrum, and have participated in some forms of activism similar to that participants have engaged in, such as in anti-war marches and demonstrations, petition signing and emailing/letter writing to political representatives, and considering social justice, environmental, and human rights issues when spending money on food, clothing, and other products¹¹. I share, with participants, goals for civic participation for myself and for students, and change in unequal and violent aspects of our society. Though I did not tell participants this outright, I believe this is what they gleaned from my recruitment call and from our interaction during interviews. I feel that viewing the interview process less clinically helped to allow participants and myself to feel more relaxed and less constrained, and to recognize our roles as people instead of 'subjects' in the process. I do not believe, however, that this method weakened the validity of the interviews. Rather, I see it as making the participants more open and our dialogue even more transparent.

The interviews were structured—I presented specific interview questions to each participant—though open-ended, during which it was possible and probable to ask unscripted questions or to follow particular strands of the individual conversations. In five out of the ten interviews, participants also showed me a text or online project they had created or contributed to, which they explained to me and I asked questions about. In the other interviews, we discussed a specific text or texts the student had composed or helped to compose, though I didn't actually see it. Thus, the interviews I conducted focused both on the students' subjective retelling of their activist involvement, motivations, and past learning experiences, and an explanation and analysis of particular texts related to their activist work. I focused on discourse

¹¹None of the participants mentioned this latter form of action as activist in interviews, though I know from other conversations that some, like John, consider issues like worker's rights in choosing where and where not to spend. This can be considered activism on a day-to-day level because conscious spending and consumption has the potential to effect change in the operations of businesses and corporations. The idea of shopping as activism can obviously be seen in historic boycott movements that have effected change, like the 1960's grape boycott organized by the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee which resulted in contracts and better treatment for farm workers, and less obviously in everyday individual choices to buy or not to buy from particular companies or businesses. To provide one example, the increasing consumer interest in organic foods and products and "green" products in recent years shows how consumer demand can alter markets in some ways, the kinds products that businesses carry, the way such products are produced and supplied (which can benefit working conditions), and even the ways that companies advertise themselves/their products. See Patricia Allen and Martin Kovach's "The Capitalist Composition of Organic: The Potential of Markets in Fulfilling the Promise of Organic Agriculture," and Andres R. Edwards's *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift* (2005).

based interviewing to learn about the choices participants made in composing their various texts rather than on other strategies, like composing aloud. By asking questions about their texts such as “How did you choose the format that your project would take and why? (i.e., why a short film, specifically?)” and “Who did you consider your audience to be when creating this project? How did this affect any decisions you made?” among others (see appendix), I was able to gain insight into participants’ understanding of the rhetorical contexts they were working within, how they viewed the rhetorical functions of their texts, and the choices they made in composing. Further, realizing the impossibility of full objectivity or neutrality from the beginning allows one to be “inclined to trust interviewees’ statements” (Odell et al. 228), which I was throughout this study.

After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed each audio-recording to include most of the false starts, pauses, and fillers of the subjects’ speaking voices. However, following Deborah Brandt’s choice in transcribing interviews for *Literacy in American Lives*, I chose to remove most of these from this report to aid in clarity. Since this is not a study on the use of language by these students, removing such filler words does not affect the data or detract from the “contextual meaning of passages” (Brandt 14), but only improves the clarity and coherence of the interviewees’ statements. The data will be presented largely through three case studies of John, Emma, and Liz, as their interview data best represents the data set as a whole, though in the next chapter I also discuss some basic findings by including the voices of the other participants to provide their perspectives and to draw from as much relevant data as possible.

CHAPTER THREE

DEFINING AND SITUATING ACTIVIST LITERACY

In this chapter I present data from interviews about how participants define activism in order to contextually situate the term. I also discuss how participants implicitly define “activist literacy” through the data they provide about their work, literacy practices, and activist texts. Next, I examine how participants’ activist work is shaped by the context of Miami University and how they view this contextual location. Finally, I discuss the numerous sponsors that have played a role in the development of participants’ activist literacy. Much of the data presented in this chapter focuses on participants who are not featured in the three case studies located in the next chapter (John, Emma, and Liz being those who are featured).

Defining Activism

During the interviews, I asked each participant to define activism in their own terms, definitions I present in order to illustrate further how students themselves view their work and to establish a basis for conceptualizing an activist literacy. Participant definitions tended to fall within two categories. The first category consists of exclusive definitions of activism, while the second includes students who were more hesitant to impose a limiting definition. Within the first category falls John, who saw activism as lying on a “spectrum” that, on one end, ranges from doing nothing, to talking about an issue with people, to voting, all of which he considered pretty negligible contributions. In the middle of the spectrum was advocacy, which he considers as educational or informative campaigns, while activism itself was at the opposite end:

[Advocacy is saying] we’ve got this problem and we’re going to try to just convince enough people to change it and if we convince enough people and stuff it will be good, we’ll figure it out eventually, and activism is kind of like saying ‘no, there’s a systematic cause to this problem and not only do we need to educate people but we need to build power to confront the actors who make this injustice happen.’ And so when I think of activism I think of, I mean yes, education and making websites or whatever it takes, but purely at the core it is about building power to confront the people who cause injustice. You know, who have that authority to stop it. (John Interview)

John offered a concise summary of the above definition of activism when he stated “the whole point is not to work in a soup kitchen but to make soup kitchens unnecessary,” which to him is the main difference between activism and other forms of action. That is, he sees activism as action that should work to solve the roots of a problem, not merely to ameliorate it temporarily or to convince others that it does in fact exist.

Similarly, Emma also said that she drew a distinction between activism and volunteer work, with “the biggest difference [being] the idea of empowerment and collaboration, like with activism I think that you’re seeking explicitly to empower whatever group you’re working with, and that you take no part in wanting any sort of recognition for that.” She too wanted to “get rid of the need that [groups activists work with] have for your work” by helping them to acquire their own knowledge and skills from which to draw upon (Emma Interview). She stated, “Volunteer work, like a food drive, that doesn’t really solve the problem, you’re kind of perpetuating its existence actually, because you’re not doing anything to change it...afterwards they still need you to supply that charity, you know, so that would be the difference that I draw.” Instead, like John, Emma also sees activism as involving taking action aimed at fixing a problem, rather than simply alleviating it for a short time¹².

A similar definition emerged again in Jane’s interview when she discussed the difference between spreading information and activism:

Activism, to me, is being kind of directly and actively involved in creating change, so not all action is activism. I don’t think that like the conservative week and progressive week [on campus]—they’re interesting and they’re doing something—but I don’t consider it activism because they’re not creating change, they’re just spreading information about things that are already happening, but not creating change, so activism to me is being involved in creating and shaping the world that you live in, directly. (Jane Interview)

The theme existing throughout all three of the above definitions is that activism involves direct action aimed at making specific, long-term change. A potential metaphor for this definition is

¹² Paula Mathieu has discussed the ‘incompleteness’ of all projects when viewed from what she terms a “tactical view.” She writes “any act of service promotes certain needs while undermining others. Serving a cup of soup at a shelter provides immediate needs to a hungry person but does nothing to change the system that makes that person hungry in the first place. Lobbying for affordable housing seeks to change the system that makes people homeless, but does nothing to meet immediate needs” (111-112). In this view, both forms of action can be seen as important, yet incomplete on their own, tactical projects for change.

that these students see activism as something that should work to heal a social wound, rather than temporarily bandage it, which they see other forms of action as supplying.

The second category of definitions was more open. A few participants did not offer an exclusive or inclusive definition of activism, but cited some components that they see comprising it. For example, Kristen understands activism as having initiative to take some action if you want something to change or to occur, which she believes she did when she hosted an Iraqi film festival. In addition, Kim sees activism as requiring relentless energy and good communication skills, while Sonia sees it as something that requires organizing, communication, and protest techniques, though these participants did not define the term beyond listing these elements.

Other students offered more extensive, yet inclusive, definitions. For example, Liz was less exclusive in her definition of activism, as she discussed what she considers to be past versus present conceptions of it, stating that:

People have different views of what activism is. I guess to me it seems nowadays anyone who's considered an activist would be anyone who is openly vocal about their political opinions and then doing things to try to influence other people's opinions, like going to a rally, going to a protest, setting up an action against a certain way of seeing things...I think in the past an activist has been someone far more extreme, and everyone's so sensitive about politics these days that anyone who's vocal about their opinions is an activist. I don't think that's a bad thing, really, because I think it's a way to identify with that group of people and to then get together and be like 'hey, we all like making noise, let's go try and change something.' (Liz Interview)

It is hard to support the claim that people are more sensitive about politics today than in the past, but this definition is interesting because it seems to reflect that the general population is apolitical, and that anyone veering from the status quo by vocally expressing political opinions is an activist. This seems to position activism as an almost deviant behavior.

Similarly, Kate did not want to impose a definition of activism on others. She stated: I don't think you can say 'well you have to have this to be considered an activist,' I think that if someone thinks they're an activist and they're doing something that means a lot to them and they think they're an activist then sure, they're an activist. Not everyone might consider them an activist and it might be something small, it doesn't always have to be a rally or hosting an event, it could be something that someone's doing everyday, you

know, [like] wearing a t-shirt or speaking up for others if you hear an offensive joke...or it can be a big event. I just don't feel like I should have to define it for other people, because I know it means something to me in a sense that maybe an activist is, [for instance] I see things that I don't agree with and I want to do things to improve upon that, but that's just my personal definition. (Kate Interview)

This definition leaves open the types of actions that can be considered as activist, and as such it is a definition that I sympathize with, because it allows a broader range of civic participation to be considered within the term, and values that which takes place on the level of everyday life, which Cushman has discussed (“Struggle”). Martin likewise was hesitant to limit activism by defining it in exclusive terms. In fact, he widened the scope by inviting a more global perspective, stating:

Activism would be the right combination of praxis, obviously, theory, and also poetry. I think ways of making—that's an area where digital media does become really important—as ways of making or inventing and making people's lives inventive and making people pay attention to life, there needs to be a strong poetic content to forms of activism, as there are everywhere around the world at the moment—the Indian women's movement, or you look at Bolivia, or you look at Mexico, it's happening all over the world, so I would argue that we need to pay a lot more attention to global activism, maybe before we start defining activism for ourselves. (Martin Interview)

Here Martin speaks specifically about the necessity for action and theory, though he also added the element of poetry to his concept of activism. This might be viewed as applying creativity in approaching activist work, as he sees being applied in many parts of the world. He realizes that looking at what others are doing in the world, not just in one place or within one group of people, is important when considering a definition of the concept. In addition, the element of creativity that he mentions is actually evident in many of the activist actions the participants described themselves taking—in creating puppets for street theatre, or in making a visual text to present to the university president, for example.

In addition, Andrew makes the good point that activism exists at both ends of the political spectrum, a fact that should be considered in defining the concept. He stated, “I would like to define activism as a progressive thing,” but noted that activism also exists for conservative causes. So, whether it supports liberal or conservative issues or ideas, he said:

it has to do with action, obviously activism is action, but like organizing, bringing people together, I think it's essentially political. I think it's also defined in distinction to kind of organized institutional forms of politics, such as government, or like what you'd find in an institution, like in an educational institution, almost in response to the lack of what those institutions are doing. So if people feel like the institutions aren't responding to what they consider priorities, then they will organize amongst local people—with the internet now, you know, more globally—to get those issues addressed. (Andrew Interview)

Here, Andrew makes an interesting point in defining activism as something in opposition to policies, actions, or lack of action conducted by institutions, which much of the action taken by the participants has been, and he also defines the concept more generally as organized forms of action, as other participants have done. Moreover, Andrew also brings up the issue of ideology in defining activism, reminding us that it can work to serve conservative or liberal political ends, and that it cannot be defined exclusively in terms of either. Andrew's point also provides a way to address the fact that, though the definitions above do not explicitly define activism as a progressive practice, all of the people defining it in fact do participate in activism for progressive organizations or causes on the left side of the political spectrum. Thus, while they generally all define activism in terms of taking action for causes they believe in or to create change, the actions they take all share an interest in progressive reform. In terms of their work, this is generally defined as working towards equality, social justice, human rights, and against non-democratic forms of power.

While the above definitions involve somewhat different perspectives, they all reveal that the participants are invested in the idea that it is possible to take or create some kind of action through which it is possible and desired to create change—in whatever form—or to make a statement with the ultimate aim of creating change. The rather broad term of 'activism' is thus used in this study to provide a name for this type of actual movement or action with some final goal for change in mind, which students are taking both within and outside of the university environment.

Theorizing Activist Literacy

As I have discussed earlier, over the years there has been an increasingly expanding definition of literacy. From Heath's contextually situated literacy events and her inclusion of orality as a literacy practice, to Street's definition of "literacies" as "the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" (430), scholars have come to understand that there is not a single literacy that can be assumed, but rather multiple literacies that can be explored. In addition, scholars such as those comprising the New London Group, as well as Selber and others, have further expanded the notion of literacy to "multiliteracies" in order to include the production and comprehension of texts beyond print, due to the digital age in which we live. The New London Group writes, "first, we want to extend the idea and scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies; to account for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate. Second, we argue that literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies." (9). Reflecting the diversity of text forms elucidated by the New London Group, participants in my study have created a wide variety of texts for their activist work, including websites, posters, brochures, videos, letters to representatives, editorial letters, photo petitions, blogs, and video testimonials. These examples highlight the prevalence of multimodal and digital work student activists are engaged with, revealing the importance of multimodal and/or digital literacies within an activist literacy.

To gain understanding about what literacy practices are involved in the creation of activist texts in multiple media, I posed to participants the question "what skills and/or knowledge do you think are required for activist work?" The resulting data largely revealed four core skills that participants understand as necessary for an activist literacy: persuasion, critical thinking, networking, and collaboration. Significantly, each one of these "activist skills" entailed the intertwined literacy practices of reading, writing, and speaking using a wide range of modalities and technologies.

Kim articulated the centrality of persuasion in her environmental work when she discussed the importance of strong, well-articulated messaging for her group when they canvass door-to-door and when they speak for their cause to people like the university president, stating:

Being able to articulate your point and having strong messaging, really strong, solid, repetitive messaging, so you really drive your point home, and you don't beat around the bush...like when my group would collect petitions for Power Vote¹³, they know what they're talking about, they have talking points and they've practiced and stuff, it's not like it's rehearsed, but I mean knowing what you're talking about and really driving the point home over and over again...is a really good thing, and also communication skills with the people you're targeting. [For example] I have to be able to talk to [the university's president] without getting too worked up about my cause, you know, if he doesn't feel the same way about it. (Kim Interview)

This quote reveals Kim's concern with and knowledge of persuasion and rhetorical appeals and tactics, with creating clear and succinct messages, with catering to specific audiences, and the way these practices are necessary in one aspect of her activism—all concerns of composition instructors.

Jane, who works with a student group for peace and justice, highlighted one example of the critical thinking skills needed by activists when she discussed the ability to 'read' the media and to find and make use of reliable sources of information:

There's a wealth of information out there, but where do you go and how do you decide if this is reliable information or if it's biased or if it's kind of leaving something out? And being able to supplement information you get from kind of mainstream [sources] with other sources, that's I think now important to effective activism, and then finding some way of sharing that information...And then the ability to kind of reflect and integrate what you've learned, and translating that into effective action is really important...you have to somehow kind of reflect on what that means, and then what would be the best way of acting on it...I don't think that's just a natural thing, because people have a hard time [evaluating information], so I think that's a definite skill. (Jane Interview)

This example highlights the importance of being able to critically sift through information and sources that surround us, and to be able to put it to use effectively, which is one way activist

¹³ Power Vote is a national organization of youth voters concerned about the global climate crisis, and who worked to secure votes in the 2008 election for clean, sustainable, and just energy. See: <http://www.powervote.org/>.

students use critical thinking skills. Participants also bring up other necessary applications for critical thinking skills, such as in considering their own subject positions in the world, including gender and class, and their backgrounds. For example, Kate, who began the language exchange group to support local immigrants, said that “the way I grew up everyone just said immigration was bad, and that every Latino/Hispanic person is Mexican and that they’re all criminals and they’re all taking our jobs,” opinions which she subscribed to in that context because she “never really thought about it” (Kate Interview). However, when her mother married a man from South Africa, she said that she began thinking about it more, and in college she began “working directly with people, and it’s just like ‘oh my gosh, I can’t even believe that I used to think this way,’ because it’s how you’re raised, you know” (Kate Interview). It is clear that Kate has spent some time thinking critically about her background and how she was influenced by a specific social context, a process which has also been important to other participants as a catalyst or factor in their activist work. Without this literacy practice they could not, in Freirean terms, read and interrogate their own subject positionings or the world around them.

Networking is also an important component of an activist literacy. For example, Kristen, who hosted an Iraqi film festival, responded that “[n]etworking is a really good skill, knowing the right people or finding the right people, asking the right questions, like who should I go to for this and that.” In addition, Andrew used forms of networking to advertise a Theatre of the Oppressed¹⁴ workshop that he helped to organize. That is, he spread the word about the event through fliers, but also through emails to department secretaries, who he asked to email to all faculty, so they could “relay the message on to their students” and others (Andrew Interview). Andrew also posted the event on Facebook to extend it to a larger network via that medium, and he put it on the online university calendar as well. This is one example that shows how both offline and online networking, which require speaking and writing to others, are invaluable literacy practices for activists, as much of their work and events need to be promoted through such networks, and their work is usually done collaboratively or with the help of others at some point along the way.

¹⁴ Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of participatory theatre that focuses on methods for resisting oppression in daily life. It was developed by Augusto Boal, who was influenced by the work of Freire. See Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and <http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org>.

In speaking about collaboration, Emma emphasized the fact that in terms of most activist work, almost nothing can be accomplished, especially significant change, by one individual alone. Martin, who has participated in events like Take Back the Night, among others, also discussed collaboration as a fundamental literacy practice for activists who must know how to work and create with others. He said, “I think collaboration between students and teachers and staff and all the people that make up a university campus, and the people that live in the local area, the town, that becomes crucial, I think, today, as a form of networking, and most—but sadly not all—of these people have internet access, and that’s something we can really use.” This statement highlights both the reliance on others that participants note in accomplishing most activist goals, as well as their concerns about working *with* groups they support, rather than merely *for* or even *in spite of* them. One example of this is the collaboration that exists between students and workers in the living wage campaign that Martin has been involved in. His statement also draws attention to the important link between networking and collaboration that exists—as collaboration would be hard to achieve without networking—as well as to the fact that, due to the digital divide, not everyone has access to the internet, and thus to valuable forms of digital literacy¹⁵.

Ultimately, all of the participants’ definitions of activism and the literacy practices they engage in reveal that, though nuanced and often complex, they seem to be on the same page with each other. This allows me to begin to outline an activist literacy. The participants all share a belief that action can lead to change, and the practices involved in their literate work to create change include:

- analyzing audience and adapting messages to them
- choosing the appropriate medium and modalities for communicating a message
- enabling the circulation of activist texts in digital and non-digital spaces
- finding, analyzing, and effectively utilizing information
- critically reading the world (Freire)
- networking and collaborating with others through speaking and writing in both face-to-face and digital spaces.

¹⁵ For information about access to technology and the digital divide, see Jeffrey Grabill’s “On Divides and Interfaces: Access, Class, and Computers,” Charles Moran’s “Access: The A-Word in Technology Studies,” Iswari Pandey’s “Literate Lives Across the Digital Divide,” and Selva’s *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*.

This definition of activist literacy seems to align most with Nancy Welch's call for 'making rhetorical space' in order to develop "literacy practices and rhetorical orientations" (Welch 53) that make it possible to discuss and think critically about public issues, build audiences, organize, and work with others to inspire writing that engages with the public sphere (Welch 112-13). The contextual situations of these practices are discussed in the next section.

Situating Student Activism at Miami University

Because all of the participants are students at Miami University, and because context is deeply connected to particular literacy practices and activist work taking place, it is necessary to discuss the institutional context of the university. The large midwestern university campus in Ohio on which this study takes place is located in Oxford, a small town about an hour from Cincinnati. The university's main campus includes about 14,488 undergraduates and 1,812 graduate students, according to the university website, and there are two smaller branch campuses in nearby towns. Based on Fall 2008 enrollment, ten percent of the overall freshman class was comprised of "multicultural" students, while about nine and a half percent of the entire undergraduate population is "multicultural" ("Quick Facts"). Further, 64% of the freshman class came from within state, and data from the latest campus climate study (2003) shows that 70% of white undergraduates came from living in suburbs, with 24% from small or rural towns (Dey). Only 4.3% of the 2006 incoming class was defined as "low-income"¹⁶ ("Diversity"). These statistics reveal that the university is not very diverse in terms of race and class. While there are numerous demographic statistics available about the university, students' comments about their peers and the social and academic environment at the university are also important for describing the context of the place, since they reflect their own perspectives and lived experiences.

Senior English Literature major Audrey Lehr presented a paper at the university's 9th annual Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality Symposium that I find to be helpful in describing the student body and atmosphere at the university, as she is a student who has spent four years getting to know the place firsthand. In her paper, entitled "Old Miami, New Miami: Reconsidering the Miami University Student Community," she writes of the main campus:

¹⁶ "Low-income" is defined in the "Diversity Update 2006" document according to the student's adjusted family income from their submitted FAFSA form.

Both inside and outside of Oxford, Miami is reputed as a school attended by students who share many of the same characteristics regarding their backgrounds and interests. Indeed, a very specific composite comes to mind when considering the “typical” Miami student: Caucasian, upper-middle class, suburban, Christian, and heterosexual with a lean physique, and so forth. Of course this stereotypical image does not apply to many Miami students—this school *does* have diversity, though not enough of it. Still, this antiquated notion of a Miami student seems to prevail in the collective consciousness here at the university. As a student, one always has the sense of what is and is not very “Miami,” regardless of what one has encountered through experience. (Lehr 1-2)

While it is difficult and problematic to attempt to define a “typical” student at any university, Lehr’s claim about the university’s reputation is not made without external backing, and it obviously reflects some of the demographic information presented above. For instance, she cites the Princeton Review’s 2009 *The Best 368 Colleges*, which awarded the university with rankings “on lists of intolerance” to back up the impressions she has received here herself (Lehr 5). For example, the Princeton Review awarded the school such rankings as: second place for “Little Race/Class Interaction,” fourth place for “Homogenous Student Population,” and eleventh place on the “Alternative Lifestyles Not an Alternative” list. Lehr thus goes on to state that “The characterization of the average Miami student is so exclusive that any personal characteristics differing from the stereotype are implicitly categorized as ‘other’ and are collectively marginalized into a category that comes to represent anything that is ‘not Miami’” (2). This reveals the way that difference is considered and constructed at the university, as she sees it.

While it is obvious that Lehr’s analysis is focused on the Oxford campus rather than the branch campuses, this is the campus that the participants inhabit. As such, her construction of its “typical” student provides a more explicit contextual analysis to accompany the opinions that participants in the study reveal. That is, from their interviews, it is clear that many of the participants also have similar opinions about the student body and the campus atmosphere, and Lehr’s work provides additional confirmation of their own statements. The way study participants discuss other students on campus, and particularly those students’ attitudes towards the activist work that they engage in, seems to concur with Lehr’s statement that “[a]ccording to the logic of binaries, student attributes that fall into the ‘not Miami’ category are thus deemed inferior and deviant” (4). In other words, based on the interviews, it seems that participants

would agree that activist work (as distinguished from community service) is often considered ‘not Miami’ by most Miami students. Though the participants are student activists, they do not believe that many of their peers are, and they tend to claim that activism is avoided, and perhaps even stigmatized, by the larger student body¹⁷. For example, participants had similar things to say about the campus environment and student body. While talking about advice he would give to teachers, Andrew said that teachers should try to help students to think critically by posing questions problematizing everyday life for them¹⁸, but said “I think—we both go to the same school here—I know it’s probably somewhat challenging to do that with students here,” alluding to the conservative and apathetic reputation of the student body.

In her interview, Kate referred to two specific and recent incidents at the university which can lend even more context to understanding where such opinions about the student body and general social climate, like Andrew’s and Lehr’s, stem from. These are the events that spawned her women’s studies class “no hate campaign.” The first incident she mentioned involved a fraternity that issued t-shirts with the phrase “No one over 150 until after 1:50,” apparently a sort of motto for the men involved advertising that it is only acceptable to “pick up” or consent to sexual relations with a woman weighing more than 150 pounds after closing time at bars—and presumably after one is intoxicated enough (Kate interview). This incident reveals the weight preferences, pressures, and standards that exist for women quite visibly on campus and which serve as normative agents. The second incident Kate described is one in which a student hung a tire swing and several nooses from a tree without a label or sign as an art project for a class, which was supposedly intended to symbolize the death of childhood. The incident was investigated when some students reported it, and overall it revealed extreme lack of awareness and understanding for how such a common cultural and historical symbol of racism and violence could affect members of the university community¹⁹. While each of these incidents did create a response by some of those who found them offensive, including the administration in the latter

¹⁷ Liz’s definition of activism, discussed in the definitions section, began to hint at the idea that it can be viewed as a type of deviance, a departing from the norm that sets one apart as ‘other,’ and doubtless her experiences in this specific context have helped to shape that definition for her.

¹⁸ Andrew offers “problem posing” advice to teachers, a concept which stems from his own study of critical theory and pedagogues such as Paulo Freire. See Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Ira Shor’s *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*.

¹⁹ While revealing incredible ignorance about race relations and historical symbolism, this incident did not imply the presence of an overt hate group at the university. Information about this incident is compiled at: <http://www.cas.muohio.edu/cawc/patterson.html>

case, they mainly serve here as examples, originally put forth by Kate, of attitudes that exist at the university that perhaps help to fuel the opinions of the participants.

Further, Kim's short anecdote about her father's response to her activism highlights not only her own perception of the university, but also a view of activism that exists outside of the university. She said:

My dad works for the EPA, so he's always made me environmental, but he didn't want me to work for Greenpeace. He thought it was too radical, and then even kind of [inaudible], but then he figured out that it made me happy and that I was good at what I did. But then I didn't want to come back from San Francisco [where she worked for Greenpeace] and I tried to drop out of school, cause I hate Miami, cause there are no activists here. He got so mad at me and called me an f'ing hippy, so you know...they support it but they really don't understand half the time. And they didn't understand why I wanted to run off to San Francisco and spend eight-hour days canvassing, but I wanted to, you know. (Kim Interview)

This statement illustrates that Kim too sees the student body as inactive as well as uniform, as she claims that "there are no activists here." It also reflects her father's opinions about activism, and the external pressure from him that Kim feels to continue her education in an environment that she "hates." Kim's opinions and her father's preference for his daughter's education over her activism highlights the disconnect between academic and activist work that other students also see as existing.

The themes, attitudes, and opinions described above about the university context surface further in the case studies and will become more solidified. It is because students such as Lehr and the participants are the ones interacting with their peers every day on campus, in class and outside of class, that it is important to consider their views when discussing the university's institutional context. Students largely comprise and contribute to the learning, social, and activist atmosphere of a school, and thus their perspective is valuable.

However, contrary to Kim's assertion that "there are no activists" on campus, this study itself, and Kim's own involvement in it, prove that there are at least some in existence. While I have described one prominent contextual attitude that the participants and other evidence offer, Jane is the one participant whose attitude about her situation as an activist trying to find others to work with her group for peace and justice was explicitly less pessimistic. She said that her group

sat at the student club/organization fair at the beginning of the 2007 school year and collected about 300 signatures from students interested in her group, though at their first meeting of the semester only about three new people showed up. She realized there was a disconnect, and wondered about it:

Somehow [I'd like to] to figure out how to tap into that group of students I know is [here] that are more progressive, that want to be involved in activism, but somehow we don't find each other, or maybe they don't get energized by what we do...I've talked to plenty of students who are upset about things that we talk about and would be interested in being involved but they just don't know how to tap into those things on campus...maybe people are busy or people say they're interested in these things but aren't really willing to give up their time for it, so I mean there's a combination of those things. (Jane Interview)

In this statement, it is clear that Jane is not critiquing the university for being entirely apathetic or conservative. Instead, she is convinced that students interested in progressive and activist work exist at the university, but are not actualizing their interest in work with groups like her own.

For example, she talked further about a junior who joined a trip her student group went on, a student who told Jane that she had been looking for that group of active people her entire three years at the university and only then had found them. Jane said "I think that she can't be the only one on campus that feels this way, so just how do you find, out of 16,000 students on campus, the people that will be excited about what we do?...I don't really know how to improve on that but that is something that we've just kinda been baffled by, for as long as I've been involved" (Jane interview). Jane has some obvious faith in the student body based on her experiences, and sees the problem mainly as one of connection or communication, which may be an interesting disconnect to further investigate.

In fact, there are actually numerous student groups at the university that can be considered activist groups. One prominent student activist group working at the university is the group involved with the living wage campaign for university workers, which might be detected by the number of participants in this study involved in it. According to their website, the group "believe[s] that the University has a moral obligation to pay its employees just wages and are working to make this a reality." The group began in 2002 and has since taken many actions with union and community members, staff, faculty, and students, and has made open demands on the administration. Further, over 300 recognized student organizations exist at the university.

Though these groups range from those centered around career-interests and fine arts, to Greek societies, sports, and more, there are also groups focused on specific forms of activism. These include: women's rights and pro-choice groups; groups working against the genocide in Darfur; the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Alliance; Students for a Free Tibet; Students for Israel; Students for Palestine; a pro-life group; environmental groups, a Radical Student Alliance, and more. The existence of such groups proves that there are politically motivated students working at the university to achieve various sorts of change. There is also a history of activism at the university, including that surrounding the civil rights movement and the Vietnam anti-war movement in the 1960s, as well as a history of feminist activism that has existed in various forms since the early twentieth century (Abrams).

In fact, the Western College Program that four of the participants—half of the undergraduate participants—were graduates/soon to be graduates of, cradled much of the activism during Miami's past and present. Kristen said that most of her coursework in this program involved “out of the box thinking,” which influenced her and other participants in the program. Historically, Western was an early women's college until 1971, a training place for 800 Freedom Summer volunteers during the civil rights movement, and later a leading interdisciplinary program (“Western”). In the fall of 2009 it will be integrated into the College of Arts and Sciences. At that point, its new curriculum will actually focus on “the history and practice of activism” in an attempt to keep the program, now in its “third wave,” grounded in its active legacy (“Western”). However, despite this history and evidence of students engaged in activist work on campus, most of the study's participants, including those that the case studies are focused on, are less optimistic about their peers and the activist environment at the university than Jane is. This may provide some insight into how the overall campus context affects participants.

Sponsors of Activist Literacy

As I have discussed earlier, Deborah Brandt defines literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (Brandt 19). Hawisher and Selfe draw from Brandt to discuss the sponsors of technological literacy, such as family members and friends, who have been important to some of their participants (174-76), though they do not stipulate that such sponsors receive benefits in return. Likewise, I have found that there are various sponsors of literacy and avenues of sponsorship in the lives of activist students, as my participant data illustrates. Participants include parents, teachers, friends, fellow activists, schools, various websites, organizations they work for, authors or books, personal experiences they have been through, and classes as sponsors of their activist literacy. In addition, access to material technology, such as computers and high-speed internet access, is also important to activists, their literacies, and their production of digital texts. This access is usually enabled by sponsors like school and family. I provide some examples of such sponsorship here, though the case studies in the next chapter will also highlight forms of sponsorship further.

For example, Kate talked about the sponsorship she received in critical thinking before she came to college:

I did a lot of self-education about feminism and activist movements within feminism, and I read a lot of blogs, and things like that, and I just read a lot and to me that was my own, I guess, education. Ever since then, ok, I’m going to wear my ‘this is what a feminist looks like’ t-shirt, or when my high school English teacher calls important female figures in history “chicks,” then I’m going to point it out to him that that’s not appropriate, and so I think that to me, that was activist work, especially because I became *that girl*, and it’s frustrating. (Kate Interview)

This statement shows that for Kate, reading blogs (and books, which she also mentioned) supported her knowledge of feminism and her critical thinking abilities so that she was able to perform actions to resist sexism she encountered. It also reveals that Kate felt set apart from other students by performing such actions, though she still continued to go through with them because of her developing critical consciousness. During college, a two-year academic leadership program she was in also sponsored Kate’s activism. Through this program she started the language exchange group between students and Spanish-speaking immigrants out of a civic

engagement project she had to develop. She said, “If I wouldn’t have had funding and support and faculty advisors with the Wilkes program, I don’t think we could have done the work that we’ve been able to so far,” which shows that she found this sponsorship invaluable to her work.

In addition, Kim talked about the way different organizations she has worked for have sponsored her activist literacy. She worked for Greenpeace in San Francisco over the summer of 2008, where she worked and received training to participate on a campaign in Oregon for two weeks. From there, she said, she “stayed in Oregon an extra weekend and worked on [Greenpeace’s] Rolling Sunlight global warming awareness van at a festival, and got some good experience there doing video testimonials and photo petitions, as well as regular petitions and letter writing” (Kim Interview). She went on to detail other projects and campaigns this experience led her to participate in, until she returned to Miami. Once she returned, she co-headed a day of action with her campus environmental group for which, she said, “we got this literally two tons of coal from the physical facilities department, and we put it right [in the middle of campus].” The group made photo petitions during this event to compile into a scrapbook for the university president. To explain what a photo petition is, Kim said “you have a sign that says a message to a target person, like our target person is President Hodge, so we had these speech bubbles that I cut out and wrote stuff on, like ‘buy less coal,’ or ‘let’s use cleaner energy’ or ‘let’s be the greenest campus there is,’ and we just take pictures of students in front of the coal holding the signs” (Kim Interview). This anecdote shows that Kim took the literacy practices she gained in working with Greenpeace in Oregon, particularly composing rhetorically persuasive photo petitions, with her when she came back to school, which helped her to develop this event aimed at persuading the university president to listen to student opinions about university energy policies. She also mentioned that the group was planning to write a cover letter to deliver with the collection of photo petitions, a piece of writing saying “we understand the economy, we understand the hiring freeze, but we want you to know that the students still hold being green and being a sustainable university as a high priority” (Kim Interview). This letter further shows the rhetorical literacy practices involved in this action, as the students want to show they are knowledgeable about the current financial situation of the university to improve their ethos, in order to make the argument that it shouldn’t deter sustainable and “green” (energy) initiatives. Incidentally, the entire action reveals the “rhetorical preparedness” that Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee say is necessary for rhetors to enter into “a kairotic moment.”

Rhetorical preparedness includes “an awareness of the communities who are interested in an issue, as well as awareness of their positions on it” (Crowley & Hawhee 50). With this awareness, Kim and her group attempt to retain their environmental agenda as a campus issue, and especially as an administrative issue, through a financial climate that may otherwise cause it to be neglected or put on hold.

Finally, family and school sponsorship also plays a role in the development of activist technological literacy. For example, Sonia’s technological literacy was largely sponsored by her parents. She said, “my mom is a computer science teacher, so I’ve grown up around computers definitely, and then my dad is a big technology/gadget man...my dad’s taught me to use web navigation stuff, GPS, recording stuff. And my stepdad’s a photographer, so having that from him, like being surrounded by people who know how to use technology has been helpful.” This shows the sponsorship that Sonia received growing up around people with well-developed technological literacies. She was also involved in a two-year media communications program in high school where she learned “digital photography, graphic design, broadcast, video editing, sound editing, let’s see, just writing, I think flash, web design, anything that’s associated with the media I definitely learned how to do, you know, run a camera” (Sonia Interview). This shows that Sonia was also sponsored by her high school academic program, which she perhaps got involved in due to her initial experiences with technology growing up, or by the urging of her parents, who find such a literacy valuable and important in their own lives. Together, these examples show that studying activist literacy in particular contexts reveals the various sponsors through which it was formed. Indeed, it reveals what Hawisher and Selfe term the “cultural ecology” of literacy—the “social, economic, educational, technological” factors that serve as support for forms of literacy and which are specific to circumstances of each individual (5). In the case studies that follow, it will further become clear how the sponsorship each student has received from various sources has also played a large role in supporting their activist literacy.

CHAPTER FOUR

THREE CASE STUDIES

In this chapter I present case studies of three participants whose interviews were most informative and who are most representative of the entire data set. These case studies also most fully answer four key research questions: How and to what extent do student activists understand and practice rhetorical persuasion? How do sponsors, material conditions, and contexts support the activist literacies of participants? How do student activists conceptualize and employ digital technologies and multiple modalities in their work? and What advice can student activists provide for composition teachers? Each case study supplies background information about the participants and illuminates these questions in different ways, in addition to discussing specific texts each participant has composed in their activist work. In presenting the data, I have chosen to quote the participants often and at times at length, in order to convey their voices and perspectives more fully.

John

John is a senior economics and math major who works with the campaign for a living wage on campus and is largely responsible for their website. His definition of activism was one of the more exclusive ones, as he rejected advocacy and actions that only focused on the surface of a problem, as opposed to its roots, as forms of activism. John is an extremely critical thinker who has read writers like Freire and Saul Alinsky²⁰. As an activist, his goals are “to win a living wage policy and to educate people to be empowered and activists” (John Interview). This case study focuses on John’s technological literacy and its sponsorship; his understanding and uses of rhetoric in his activist work and in the website he has created, including digital delivery issues he has faced; and the advice he has offered both directly and indirectly to composition instructors.

John’s technological literacy was largely sponsored by his family, as his father worked with computers, which, John said, spawned his own early interest in them. John began working with computers, programs, code, and “devour[ing] technical manuals” before the eighth grade, so that by the time he was seventeen, he said, “If I had to I could put together a decent looking

²⁰ Alinsky was a community organizer and author, who, among other works, wrote *Rules for Radicals*, which provides organizational strategies for those who want to oppose concerted power to achieve a greater form of democracy.

website” (John Interview). Family resources and access to technology surely supported him and served as sponsors of his digital literacy, though John also embodies an ethic of self-education, as he developed this literacy early and outside of the school environment.

This early experience and sponsorship in working with computers gave John the ability to design and take responsibility of his activist group’s official website. Though this website is for a recognized student group on campus, John hosts it on personal web server space that he already had and pays for rather than on the University’s website, presumably because the university web space available to each student will only host a static webpage, which was not conducive to the purposes of John’s group. Another reason, which John pointed out in the participant validation process, is that during a staff strike in 2003 the group did not want the university to be able to control the content they could post (or delete the site altogether) if it was hosted on their server. Because the group wanted members to be able to post information and comments, John set up the website with WordPress²¹ blogging software, though he had to learn PHP to edit it. This process required some knowledge of HTML and CSS (all web coding standards), which he already had.

It is clear that John sees rhetorical arguments as central in the work that he does as a member of a student activist group. For example, about this work he said, “there’s strategic decisions you have to make about, you know, how are we going to confront this person, in what time frame, what are we going to use to do it, what kind of tone are we going to take and how do we interact with the student body who’s so apathetic, that sort of thing...” This statement shows that John places emphasis on considerations of tone, audience, and genre or modality, and it reveals John’s perspective on the student body, which, along with the administration, comprises his group’s main local audience. It also reveals that he has an implicit understanding of the concept of *kairos*, as he understands the timing of an action or literacy event as an important consideration in taking it. Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee write that “*kairos*” “suggests a special notion of space and/or time...similar to ‘opportunity’” (45). Likewise, Paula Mathieu discusses community outreach and public writing work that fall in line with her concept of tactical projects. She writes that such projects are “all rhetorical, guided by tactical concerns for

²¹ WordPress is a free personal publishing platform and open source project on the web. See www.wordpress.com, where users can create blogs hosted on the WordPress servers, and www.wordpress.org, where users can download the WordPress blogging software to host on their own servers, as John did.

timeliness and relevance, which define their form” (131). This is similar to the way that kairos is important in John’s activist work as well, as his rhetorical choices involve considerations of “time frame.” It is clear, then, that strategic communication and persuasion plays a major role in John’s activist work. When asked about what specific knowledge or proficiencies he needs to accomplish this work, John further emphasized the role of rhetoric:

In terms of skills probably the number one thing is being able to communicate, which encompasses basically every human activity if you want to be broad about it, but I mean specifically talking to people, communicating the issue and your reasons for being in it, understanding maybe how the opposition’s path of psychology works, so that you can kind of like fuck with that, right? So let’s say your having a protest and you want your message to be the most convincing possible, well in some sense it’s an act of communication, you know, and so you have to be able to analyze it...And of course writing, writing’s really important because that’s how we can make our permanent contribution to the dialogue. For example, we have to write press releases and editorials to [the university’s student newspaper] because like every other week somebody writes a really stupid thing in there, you know, and so we have to have a perfect tone so that people continue to like us but we prove the other people wrong...it’s very delicate, so it’s a lot of nuance sort of stuff, but communication probably is the number one thing.

In this statement, John first illustrates a clear understanding of persuasion and audience when he mentions taking into account the way the audience thinks and feels about an issue in order to address them in the most effective way possible. He also understands a difference in methods of delivery, as he distinguishes between communicating through speaking, protesting, and writing. John’s implicit understanding of kairos also resurfaces, as he discusses the necessity of responding when writers address his group in the student newspaper, and mentions the rhetorical maneuverings that are involved in such constructions of counter argument. This also reveals an emphasis on ethos, as it is clear that John recognizes that in such instances the group is writing to manage and defend their work and reputations, in order to influence the way that other students on campus view them.

John explained further that he understands logos and ethos in constructing an argument, “but when it comes to the emotional part I pretty much just guilt trip people or something, and I don’t like doing that, but I just always felt like I had trouble seeing the emotional part there”

(John Interview). He went on to discuss an experience that influenced his understanding of pathos. He said, “I worked at a clothing store in high school for a couple summers and that really taught me to be fake and convincing with people, which I don’t like doing, but it’s a useful skill, and I’ve kind of learned how to sell the living wage if you will, and that took a while...” Here John explains how he has come to associate his former position as a persuasive salesperson—an uncomfortable position for him—with making persuasive appeals for the living wage campaign. These statements reveal both an uneasiness with using emotion as a persuasive tool and the importance of ethos for John, because he associates pathos as a form of marketing related to capitalist business practices and identifies imitation of the latter as damaging to his group’s, and his own, representation.

While the statements above illustrate that John is aware of the limitations or problematics of some of his uses of rhetorical appeals in arguments, they also reveal a particular understanding and implicit self-definition of rhetoric. John’s definition is apparently very concerned with ethos, and the way he and his group appear to audiences and to those who contest their viewpoints. It also positions pathos as a potentially manipulative appeal that can function as a type of “guilt trip.” That is, the pathetic appeal seems to be defined for John, and for other participants, as kind of a fake, underhanded, or even forceful put-on, and as such makes them feel uncomfortable with the way their ethos is represented. This has resulted in an emphasis on logos in its place to better support the group’s ethos, which will become more apparent as I discuss the website John has constructed for his group.

Various rhetorical skills play a large role in John’s management of the website, even if he does not explicitly recognize each of them. Instead, he generally sees the site as an argument for his group’s overall ethos, as well as for the validity of their cause. For example, when asked about audience, John said that his focus on a student audience definitely affected his decisions when creating the website. He stated:

I could have had something that was like really business looking and very kind of like ‘we’re trying to sell you something’...I mean it’s all about presentation right, and we kind of wanted to appear, because we are, approachable and honest and straight to the point, and so there’s no like real bullshit on here...of course we don’t do stuff like slam [the university president] on here because we have to be upstanding, but yeah, I mean I

remembered that we're basically targeting students and what do they think is cool, you know.

This statement makes clear that John did not want his group, through the website, to mimic practices of a capitalist business in trying to market the living wage campaign. As his group, by the nature of its work, is ideologically positioned in opposition to such traditional models of business, this makes sense. It also again shows John's discomfort with "selling," which he associates with manipulative appeals of pathos. He is concerned about his group's representation, which explains his focus on "honest" facts instead of emotional appeals to persuade. This reveals that within his implicit definition of rhetoric, John does not have a way to theorize the potentially positive role of emotion in persuasion and social change. As an element that is missing from his definition, this example points to an area of rhetoric that composition instructors can help students to better theorize and understand, especially since it is in direct opposition to the "objective" logic that tends to be emphasized across universities. Some recent scholarly work has focused on the rhetorical role of pathos and emotion in the classroom and in civic life (Jacobs and Micciche; Marcus; Ahmed), which I discuss in more depth in chapter five.

Further, John's concern with ethos is also clear here. He reveals that the group does not want to appear disrespectful or inflammatory, thus discrediting itself, by "slamming" the president on the website. Instead, they want to appeal to what is "cool," so that students will respect and support them. It is clear that John conceives of the website as an argument for the group's ethos, as he sees it as "an extension of who we want to be viewed as, you know, so yeah a lot of thought goes into what goes up here...evidence of us building community." John again showed concern for representing the group when he talked about a decision to post a specific picture of members taken after a training workshop on the website. He wondered at first if the photo really had much to do with the campaign, but then ultimately decided that "it's important that [group members are] viewed as people, preferably cool people," so that others will be more likely to want to join and to view the group as fun and friendly, as well as seriously committed to their goals (John Interview). This photo does work as an ethical appeal, because it depicts an interesting and bonded group that has built a base around its cause.

In addition, John sees the site as something tangible with which to oppose the negative representation the group has encountered. This has come from some people who don't understand the group's work or where they're coming from, who tend to think, as John put it,

“oh you’re just a bunch of hippies and you just want to yell.” The site then stands as something to prop up their ethos, to show them as credible and to dispel such notions. John believes that, when looking at the website, it becomes:

Pretty apparent really quickly that not only do we know what we’re doing, for example we put up our research results and stuff, but we have a long history, we’ve tried a lot of different things, there are lots and lots of community members who support us, we have photos and videos actively documenting what we do...This is helping people get an understanding of who we are and where we’re coming from and why our campaign is worth participating in. (John Interview)

By revealing the function of the website as John sees it, this statement also illustrates the reasons for the importance and centrality of logos in his self-definition of rhetoric. That is, documentation and facts are necessary for the group and their work to be taken seriously by others, while appeals to pathos are seen as damaging to the group’s ethos, as they may inspire associations with stereotypes of angry/emotional (“yelling”) activists and/or capitalist business practices.

As stated above, the emphasis on logos to support the group’s ethos may seem quite necessary for student activist groups working in this particular setting. What I mean is that, on a campus that has not proved to be particularly receptive to such work and such groups (as evidenced by comments about certain views of John’s group, as well as by other participant testimony), they seem to feel a very real need to rely on that solid information and careful, attractive representation of themselves in order to be taken seriously, rather than on swaying their audiences by other means which may be more easily discredited. As mentioned earlier, perhaps such students have also been influenced by the academy, which itself tends to value reason over emotion (Kerr 25).

John further analyzed the elements of the website as he views them. For instance, he sees the group’s prominent logo on the website—three hands gripping each other—as a symbol for the “necessity of having more than one person involved in [the group’s] work,” which is important because they value collaboration and strive to bring together students, staff, faculty, and community members in pursuing their goal to achieve a living wage. The logo was designed by a member of the group who is a graphic designer, which is also significant because other student activist groups also often rely on the specific knowledge and abilities of their members to

achieve certain objectives. For instance, there is a photographer in another group who takes pictures at their events and actions. Likewise, John's literacy included web authoring, so he is responsible for the website. This means that the objectives that groups can accomplish often depend upon the skills of their members, which reveals the importance of a variety of knowledge, experience, and literacies in members.

John also believes that the website is very easy for anyone to visit and to use to learn about the group and living wage policy issues, and he views this usability as important. Due to the blog format of the website and its simple yet organized and appealing design—including its clean black, white, and green color scheme—it is in fact very usable. The links to pages are all listed visibly across the top of the website, revealing its content, while the meeting time and place of the group is listed on the right, along with a search feature and a succinct list of links to the latest news entries. The main page of the site is the news page, on which John and other members post updated news and information. Another page provides in-depth information about the group's history, and a "literature" page professes to include "a range of documents from our flyers to financial reports on Miami University's wage structure." Indeed, the page includes links to such information, as well as to reports of the area, legislation related to the university and groups like student government, and articles and editorials written by and about the group. At the top of the webpage, they include a note: "To our fellow activists: feel free to creatively appropriate any [of our] documents which may be useful to your campaign." Not only does this page thus serve as an information center about the campaign, but it is clearly offered as a resource center for other activists.

Further, the "Allies" page lists all of the endorsements the group has received, including those from student groups, local area organizations, over forty individual faculty members, national organizations which they describe and provide links to, and prestigious scholars from outside of the university—including Noam Chomsky. The group received Chomsky's endorsement as a result of an email sent by John, which John was surprised but excited about receiving a response to. This page quotes Chomsky's endorsement of the campaign to further support the group's work, as his statement asserts the need for a reversal of economic policies which, it says, have "increasingly concentrated [wealth] at the high end of the economic spectrum" while leaving workers behind. It is clear that the group relies on these endorsements—while making an explicit call for more—to supplement their ethos. This is

necessary because the group's cause—securing a living wage for university workers—is contrary to the aims of the administration of a university that, like most businesses today, want to keep operating costs low²². Thus, the group has a need to attain as much credibility for their argument as possible through the support of other groups and individuals.

John is especially proud of the endorsement by Noam Chomsky, who is a “big name” (John interview), and is “[o]ften regarded as one of the leading intellectuals of our time,” as the group's website states. Chomsky has been involved in political activism and left-wing politics, which many of his publications focus on, and as such his endorsement would appeal to other individuals and groups who respect his work in these areas and/or as a distinguished linguist and academic. However, it probably would not have much success in convincing those who do not already support a living wage to join the group, as many from the other side of the political spectrum tend to view Chomsky as a political dissident and radical, beginning with his outspokenness against the Vietnam War (“Noam”).

Other than the pages mentioned above, the website also includes pages devoted to video and photos. The video page includes three embedded videos, one of a rally and two of staff testimonials. These videos are effective in allowing a viewer to gain more understanding about the group and to see them in action, as well as to see firsthand the people they are working with to achieve a living wage. Likewise, the photo page documents various actions the group has taken, including the rallies they have held and signs they have posted across the university, as well as group members themselves. These two pages, as well as the others, are obviously well positioned to contribute to the group's activist goal and to their overall ethos, as they stand together as a detailed, informed, well-cited, supported, and multimodal argument for a living wage for university workers.

John said that the choice of modality and medium is not usually a huge decision for the group, which provides insight as to how he and his group imagine digital media projects and their uses:

I mean the videos we use for things we need to be video, like videos of rallies or videos of very convincing testimony by a staff worker or something, but let's say we have a

²² For information on the corporatization of the university, see: Jennifer Washburn's *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*; Derek Bok's *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education*; and Eric Gould's *The University in a Corporate Culture*. See also Welch, especially page 15, and Mathieu pages 11-13.

history and [we're not going to] make a little documentary about the history, no, if it's easier to write it we're going to do that, and probably the issue is time, I mean this stuff takes a while, and so we'd like to be all creative and nice about it, but quite frankly, no, you know? (John interview)

The group is working under limits of time and resources, which does not always make it easy for them to consider what may seem like superfluous rhetorical decisions. However, John does seem to understand differences between modes of delivery and the effects of such choices. That is, he sees digital media, like video, as necessary for capturing specific moments and for providing solid evidence of the group's work and reasons for it.

The worker testimony videos, for instance, show emotional testimony from two female staff workers who are well spoken and who talk about their jobs as something they genuinely like and appreciate, though they position themselves solidly against the low wages offered by the university. One woman discusses her health problems and the health benefits plan that she is struggling with. She also shows a poster that breaks down her earnings and her necessary personal finances, which leaves her with only forty dollars to spare at the end of a month. Her voice becomes emotional at the end of this explanation, as she asks the audience to “walk a mile in her shoes,” and suggests that “maybe it's the guys at the top” who should try to live like the workers do. As such, this video, as well as the others, obviously appeals to pathos in a way that perhaps writing could not have done. That is, the viewer of the video gets to hear the audience laughing, clapping, and otherwise reacting to the woman's testimony. They get to see and hear the emotion the issue raises in her, and they get to see another woman patting her back in comfort. This video helps the group to make a strong argument for their campaign on the website, because through video it is easier to see and hear the experiences of actual workers—who can be shown as people with real identities and lives—and the effects of the wage policy on them, than it would be through a written account. John understands this to a point, though he seems to see the videos mainly as “convincing” of the logic and necessity of the group's work, which of course they are, though he does not discuss the advantage that the emotional impact of the videos has.

Though John sees the site as functioning in positive ways as I have discussed, he also recognizes some problems with it. For instance, there is a place on the website for press to contact the group about obtaining information, though they have never received any messages

for that purpose via the site. Though this may be partially attributed to problems or bias within press organizations themselves²³, John views this as an issue of visibility, and believes that his group is competing with other websites for a “critical volume” (John Interview). While other sites may have more resources for promoting and updating their websites, one of John’s problems is time. That is, while he would ideally like to be able to update the website twenty minutes per day, a reasonable amount for a webmaster, school and activist work on campus, among other activities in his life, take up a tremendous amount of time and do not often leave extra to spare. He also has to worry about passing his expertise down to other people in the organization—an example of students learning computer skills outside of the classroom—who will be left to maintain the site when he graduates.

The concept of digital delivery ties directly into these issues of time and visibility. James Porter and Dànielle DeVoss have defined digital delivery as such:

What we are calling digital delivery refers to “electronic publishing” but not just “publishing” in its technical aspects. We are also arguing for an expanded notion of delivery, one that embraces the politics and economics of publishing: the politics of technology development as they impact production and distribution, and the politics of information (What information can be distributed and by whom? What information must be suppressed or controlled?). (194)

This concept, which has further been explored elsewhere (Yancey; Porter; DeVoss and Ridolfo), is useful in thinking about John’s website and some of the problems he faces with delivering it to audiences. That is, if someone searches on Google for the group, their old website, which has not been updated for two years and which is considerably less appealing and less well-constructed than the current one, is the first search result, while the current site is listed second. John did not say how he could remedy this problem or if he has the knowledge or ability to

²³ Indicating mainstream media bias, Smith et al write that, “...media institutions operate under logics that are independent of and often contradictory to movement agendas”(1399). For example, they state, “Social movement organizations seek to draw attention to the problems and issues they deem important by organizing public demonstrations often with the aim of attracting mass media coverage. But most protest events do not receive any print or electronic media attention” (1397-98). When the media do report on activist causes, the result has been discussed as such: “News coverage of demonstrations, both in Europe and the United States, is often filled with images of violence and hooliganism. Most of that coverage makes little effort to describe the diversity of issues and demands in the movement—opting, instead, to lump them all together under the largely journalistic construction ‘anti-globalization.’” (Bennet 18). This is merely one of similar descriptions of how activist movements are often represented—if at all—in the traditional mass media.

delete the old site (providing he had the time), though he does know that “there’s this whole field of website design called search engine optimization²⁴ where you can do all sorts of different things to get your site to the top” (John Interview). John also understands that this is basically a limitation of the medium—stating that, “if you [just Google] ‘living wage’ we’re probably not even going to be in like the top 500 since there are so many websites”—because manipulating searchability on the web is something that he has not received instruction in (John Interview). Technical communications scholars such as Dimitroff and Zhang discuss ways to optimize search engine visibility in their work, including methods dealing with keyword positioning and keyword duplication. However, one simple way for John to perhaps gain more visibility for the site, even if he has no knowledge of this field specifically, is related to the blog format itself. That is, he could develop a blogroll on his site that provides links to other relevant blogs his audience may be interested in, or to other living wage campaign websites. Linking to other blogs can be a good way to get more of them to link to his own site, thereby gaining more visibility for his group²⁵. There actually is a blogroll area set up on his site, but there are no links currently provided.

Instead of using the method of linking as described above to achieve visibility for the site, John’s group puts their web address on all fliers or literature that they give out. John seems less worried about local people finding the site because it is provided on such materials, and he thinks that they can actually just see the group in action on campus. While this actually depends on whether people actively attend his group’s campus events, or even happen to run into them, John is more concerned about outside groups or individuals finding the site. He said, “[i]deally we would like the website to be the best tool possible for getting support for our campaign from the outside. It hasn’t been that, it’s been more of like a continuous update of what we’re up to, so that’s a gap and I’d say that I don’t really know how to fix it. I’m ambitious too.” It seems as if one of the simplest steps he could take to begin this process would be to start linking to try to attain more visibility for the website. This issue supports DeVoss and Ridolfo’s claim that “we certainly aren’t often enough asking them [students] to think about rhetorical velocity, about how

²⁴ For information about this field, see Shari Thurow’s *Search Engine Visibility*; Michael and Salter’s *Marketing Through Search Optimization: How to be Found on the Web*; Couzin and Grappone’s *Search Engine Optimization: An Hour a Day*.

²⁵ San Murugesan, in an article for *IT Professional*, affirms that “a blog post can link to other blog posts, so interesting posts travel from site to site. And, through these linked blogs, people with similar interests can build relationships and form communities” (35).

their texts might change shape in digital realms, and about how delivery shifts in networked spaces.” With instruction in digital delivery issues, however, John may have better understood helpful methods through which to gain visibility for his group’s website.

When I asked John about advice he might give to writing instructors who want to help students in work they may participate in outside of the classroom, John referred to Freire and stated that “in some sense activist writing is critical writing, almost by definition, and so in order to really do that effectively you have to have a critical view of the world, and its terms in which you are embedded.” Further, he stated:

Let’s say you’re trying to analyze the living wage issue or something, the fact that you recognize that there is a market economic component, there’s this historical component, there’s this component, that component, not only recognizing those but kind of seeing them as chains of reasoning, really, and being able to inject your own logics into those so you can really make your point...I guess what I’m talking about really is just the ability to understand and then modify a stance. (John Interview)

These statements show that John advocated a Freirean critical, investigative, analytical pedagogy encouraging of multiple perspectives on an issue, as he further encouraged educating students “about the systematic problems around them, and then ensur[ing] that they feel like they can actually do something to change it,” instead of just “learning the subject matter in this kind of like removed sort of way” (John Interview). John thinks that such methods can empower students to write about issues that they are passionate about, or those that they want to change. He also seems to see rhetorical argument at the center of such a pedagogy.

Further, when discussing the writing style he has had to accommodate to in school, John talked about the research paper genre as being too formal. Differences between research papers and the writing that John does for his website obviously exist, as web writing can be more informal and less lengthy, though similar strategies are used in both. The Writing In Digital Environments (WIDE) collective at Michigan State University argues that the prevalence of digital writing, “requires a large-scale shift in the rhetorical situations that we ask students to write within, the audiences we ask them to write for, the products that they produce, and the purposes of their writing,” which points out some of the ways that writing is changed in online contexts. For example, WIDE notes that “[t]oday, writing means selecting among and scripting multiple media, including photographs, charts, video, images, audio, diagrams, hyperlinks, and

more. Students need to understand how these media signify and how to layer and juxtapose media to create sophisticated messages.” This illustrates examples of how digital media also affects writing on and for the web. However, WIDE also states that digital writing involves “attending to audiences, purposes, and contexts; selecting among genres; identifying appropriate tone; selecting among and integrating source material.” Thus, despite the “shift” in rhetorical writing situations that occurs when writing for the web, many of the core considerations and literacy practices of traditional writing are still central to the process.

For John, the most significant difference between writing research papers and writing for the web, it seems, comes down to the fact that he views the digital writing he engages in as more relevant to specific purposes in the real world, and the traditional research writing he is asked to do in school as perhaps only mandated exercise. In other words, his critique provides an argument for writing that acknowledges and emphasizes “real” purposes in public discourse, such as the type of public writing that Mathieu and Welch, among others, have advocated, as I discussed earlier. In fact, he stated that he would appreciate “a definitive workshop on ‘writing the convincing persuasive essay’ for an activist” to help him accomplish all forms of writing work he attempts. Since his website exists online and acts as an informative and persuasive tool for his group, and because it can receive an actual reading audience (even if it is not to the extent John would like), the writing becomes immediately useful in a way that is personally relevant to him while a research paper may not always be. In addition, though John did not mention this as advice to teachers specifically, we can surmise from his statements that composition instructors could also think about ways to aid students in theorizing the role of emotion in rhetoric as well as ways to enhance the circulation and rhetorical delivery of their digital texts.

Emma

At the time of our interview, Emma, an Asian American woman, was a senior interdisciplinary studies major writing a thesis on democratic education “looking at business rhetoric in educational philosophy” (Emma interview). Her definition of activism, focused on empowerment and collaboration, closely resembled John’s definition, as each drew a distinction between volunteer work and activism. Emma said that her activist goals include “changing the status quo, but also there’s a subtlety to that too, and that’s empowering disempowered groups,

or marginalized groups, who wouldn't normally have a voice." Emma's deep involvement in activism, as well as her technological savvy, began once she came to college, where she started working with the same living wage group that John was involved with. She also became involved with other groups, such as the national Campus Progress group that utilizes digital media—such as an online magazine and multimedia projects—to empower “new progressive leaders” (“Campus”). Emma serves on an advisory board for them, helping to develop activist trainings and workshops. She has also organized to save her academic program when the university was shutting it down, and she worked with the Chicago Independent Media Center (Indymedia)—where among other activities she made a video and hosted one of their TV shows. This case study most fully focuses on the sponsors of Emma's activist literacy, including her digital literacy; her digital writing practices and blog and video projects; and her advice for writing instructors.

The sponsors that most clearly have had a major impact on Emma's activist literacy include her family, friends, other activists, experiences, education, and organizations she has worked with. For instance, Emma discussed her initial interest in activism as stemming from personal background experiences:

I think that I grew up kind of always being aware of social inequality, and I think this is a big part of it, is that if people grow up being privileged, and not seeing anything else, they kind of just take it for granted...For me that was a huge part of why I got involved in social change movements to begin with, is that I was really unhappy with how things were, like I witnessed racism and homophobia, poverty, huge class issues where I grew up, and I was immediately affected by all of those things, so having that experience made me really want to change it. But if people never have that kind of experience, you know, they would never know...as soon as you step out and see that there's suffering you can't understand why, and you want to change it. (Emma interview)

This statement reveals that some of Emma's experiences growing up have played a major role in contributing to the development of her critical consciousness, thus acting as a support or sponsor of her activist literacy. She also said that some classes she has taken and books she has read have influenced her. For example, she became involved in the living wage campaign because of a class she took on poverty and the working class, in which she read books like Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* and excerpts from *The Grapes of Wrath*. During this class, she

realized that “I was privileged and so I got to come to college, but a lot of people growing up in working class backgrounds don’t really have the same kind of opportunities, and so that made me really aware of just like these myths of meritocracy...at first it wasn’t that I really wanted a living wage, it was just that I thought that a lot of people probably had the same delusions as I did” (Emma Interview). The class and the readings thus also contributed to the formation of her critical consciousness and inspired her to join the group. This shows that Emma also attributes knowledge gained from seeing—or empathizing—beyond the realm of one’s personal conditions as important for activists, and that she believes a critical awareness of issues and problems is necessary for people to understand them and want to solve their root causes. For instance, she also stated “I’ve noticed that a lot of students don’t really have that critical awareness, and they’re happy just to donate money to UNICEF every year without thinking about, well, why did those people need our money in the first place?” This is a question she obviously thinks needs to be asked.

Emma also had various support for her technological literacy, which is a central aspect of an activist literacy. Emma’s technological background is opposite from John’s, as she did not have much experience working with computers until college. This may be due to the social construct of gender roles and the way that girls are often diverted from taking an interest in subjects like science and technology (Verbick; Sanders), though Emma did not comment on this factor, but only reported using computers solely to type papers for school until she came to college. Until then, she did not even have an email account. She was able to “pick it up really quickly” though, once college began, partially through a course required for her program that she took freshman year called “Interdisciplinary Technology,” in which the students learned how to make webpages and work with video programs and video editing (Emma Interview). However, about that course Emma stated, “when we did [an iMovie project for class] I didn’t work with the software at all, so I should have, but I didn’t learn it in the class. The way I learned was just like playing with it on my own the summer I got my computer, and you know, I just figured it out that way.” This is interesting because it seems that creating the project in a group ensured that every student did not have to learn to use the technology themselves, which may be important for instructors to note. Also, despite the fact that the class was not extremely helpful for her, she said “it would be great if we had classes in that kind of thing.” Though it is difficult to determine exactly how much Emma did or did not learn in her technology class, or how

worthwhile she really thinks such instruction is, it confirms the fact that technological literacy is often attained through various conduits or “cultural ecologies,” as pointed out by Hawisher and Selfe. In this case, Emma’s MacBook, which she got when she came to college, and her parents who bought it for her, form one part of this ecology, as she learned to work with it and use its features and software for various purposes. As will be illustrated next, Emma also began blogging online and making YouTube videos, and thus the blogging website and software acted as support for her digital writing and activist literacy, as did the YouTube platform and community.

Emma said she really began working with digital media when she decided to make her own blog after finding blogspot.com while surfing the internet for information about a movie. She said, “I just did it on a whim and thought it was really fun, and people were reading it, so I really liked the idea of having my own voice heard on the internet, and so that was my first big thing. Since then I’ve started and ended maybe three or four different online projects like that.” Blogspot (or Blogger) and other blogging websites make it easy to begin a blog because users simply sign up for an account, choose an available template to design their blogs, and begin writing and posting information. Also, linking to other blogs, as suggested in John’s case, may help to gain visibility and readership. On the blog she hosts now, Emma has “tried to stay more focused on talking about, or on being critical of different things, so it’s kind of like a personal website, but then I talk about, like if I have an idea for my thesis [on democratic education], it goes on the blog, or if something happens with my activism I usually put it up there...I like to think of it as a subversive text” (Emma Interview). As such, the blog seems to work for Emma as a bridge between her academics and activism, as it provides space for her to express and organize ideas that relate to both areas, which may be one major motivation for her to keep the blog. As a tool she is using outside of school to critically think, write, reflect, share, and discuss academics, activism, and her life in general with others, it is clear that blogging is a mode of writing that composition instructors should pay attention to and should be willing to explore with students, as scholars have suggested (Lowe and Williams; Fernheimer and Nelson).

Further, the blog has created an audience for Emma’s writing. She said that her blog receives about fifty visitors per day, about twenty of which are regular readers, all of them people she has never met in person before. About these readers, she said:

I don't know how they found me. I know some people were searching for some of these things that I talk about, like the Situationists, so I guess not a lot of people write about the Situationists [on her blog hosting site], so someone typed in those two search words, and found my website one day, and then they kept coming back because they thought my writing was interesting. (Emma interview)

The blog allows Emma to receive comments and feedback on her writing, which inevitably inspires reflection. This is perhaps another reason why she continues to write on the blog, as she sees herself in dialogue with others who are reading and valuing her writing. For instance, at the top of the blog she even has "A Crisp Endorsement" from a reader, which professes, "I love the way you write in your blog. Very honest and true," with the reader's name appearing below.

This endorsement does adequately summarize Emma's writing style, as it is appealing for the veracity of its voice and the honesty with which she writes about various topics. For instance, in a post from around the time of the interview, she writes about watching a debate for the 2008 primary Democratic Party elections:

This is exactly why youth, across the board, in surveys and polls on civic engagement, continually abstain from political activity. BECAUSE IT'S UGLY! why would we want to participate in a system that continually reeks of corruption, greed, equivocation, and disregard for real issues in the name of competition? i hate having to watch adults - full-blown grown-ups dressed up in power suits fer cryin' out loud! - whining and picking on each other to try to win sympathy from a (let's face it) apathetic crowd. these are our supposed leaders in D.C. and i can't even trust them to sit there and have a civilized, well-reasoned discussion for half an hour?! and you want me to vote for them???!!!

This example shows that her writing style is expressive, descriptive, has a distinctive voice, is very opinionated, and is even somewhat humorous, which makes it compelling to read. In fact, near the end of 2008 Emma celebrated the achievement of receiving, up to that point, 20,000 visitors to her blog in a little under two-and-a-half years by writing a post that thanked her readers. As will become even more apparent, this shows that unlike John, Emma seems to be successful in delivering her digital text in a way that reaches her desired audience. One reason her blog may receive so many visitors may be that it is hosted on a popular blogging website and is presumably set to be searchable and thus open to the public, though as the next case study will illustrate, just setting up a blog does not ensure it readership. It is perhaps more likely that

Emma, as she speculated herself, includes unique content, and regularly posts new material, thus holding her audience's attention with variety as well as with her voice and style. Since she has kept blogs before this one, she is practiced in the genre, which her audience can probably also recognize.

In addition, much of Emma's other work, though also active offline, is centered around digital writing. For example, she said, "I don't know how my activism would work without the internet, because right now, I can think of like, in terms of email, there's at least fifty people, we all keep in touch with the work that we're doing, and that happens through the internet." This is a key example of the networking that can occur online, which is valuable to activists. Jonathan Alexander has written that "E-mail, chat, online gaming, personal Web pages with guestbooks and message boards, and a host of other interactive media—these allow not just for the exchange of information but the potential development of alternative communities and worldviews" (33), revealing that such networking can be important to community formation and collaboration, as in Emma's case. Emma also discussed the writing she does online more specifically:

The writing I do for my activist work would be mostly on my blog, and then occasional letters to the editor, or I send out a lot of emails about the campaign over listservs that I'm on, and I always get something back like 'oh, don't you know a living wage would mean this and this, a lot of just challenges...but I find a lot of my time is spent writing emails back to clarify that yes, I've thought about these things, and this is why I'm doing this. So I feel like every time it's kind of like I'm approaching a paper, it's like, this is my argument, this is how I'm going to reason it out.

The final sentence is especially interesting because it reveals that Emma thinks about writing online as similar to conventional academic writing—in both cases she has to focus on making an effective and persuasive argument, which is the same way that John thinks about writing for his website. However, she also commented:

I think that now with technology being so omnipresent that everyone, or that I've noticed, students just can't find a way to engage unless it's through a computer or something, and I find that just a lot of them aren't interested in this like strict academic work anymore. Even me, I consider myself an academic, but I find that it is sometimes hard to write papers in that way now, because everything is getting, it's becoming so hypertextual.
(Emma interview)

What Emma expresses here is similar to the contradiction John felt between writing research papers and writing that has, in his view, some real world application. To Emma, it seems that the academic writing she has been confronted with is disconnected from the type of writing she composes on her blog, for instance, where she can provide links to websites related to what she is writing about, post pictures and videos to accompany or enhance her writing, and, perhaps most importantly, reach real audiences.

While working with the Indymedia group in Chicago over the summer of 2006, Emma became interested in YouTube, which she said was starting to become popular at the time²⁶, and she decided to make a video on network neutrality issues to post on the site²⁷. During the interview, we watched and discussed this video. It was the first video she made that had an activist intent behind it; she stated, “this is the first time that I used [iMovie] for a specific purpose,” her purpose being to get the message out about the issues of net neutrality. However, she had made other informal, personal videos before and posted them on YouTube, such as a video of her roommate and herself, and a video for her father for Father’s Day. These previous projects provided Emma with a foundation when she did decide to create a video for activist purposes, as they contributed to her video editing knowledge and understanding of the YouTube audience, which is one reason why experience in composing digital media is important for activists. Emma’s editing skills have also probably been intuitively enhanced by being a general consumer of media including television, films, and other YouTube videos.

The whole composing process for this video was fairly sporadic for Emma. She recalls learning about the net neutrality issue from a coworker:

I had had lunch with one of my coworkers at this Indymedia place, and he was talking to me about what had happened, and I didn’t really know too much about it, and that’s one thing that really infuriated me was that this thing is huge, like this thing could potentially

²⁶ YouTube debuted in April 2005, and about a year later Emma was among the participants who helped establish its popularity by the end of 2006, when “*Time Magazine* named ‘You’ the Person of the Year for 2006 and helped cement YouTube as the number-one site for sharing videos online” (Dean and Lastufka).

²⁷ Network neutrality ensures everyone who logs on equal access to the Internet, as it now stands. The debate revolves around internet stakeholders and users who want to ensure continuing web innovation and fair and free access to all websites, and broadband carriers who seek to their advantage to control online activity, limiting what sites would be available to (non-paying) users. For more information about this issue, see: Thomas M. Lenard’s *Net Neutrality or Net Neutering: Should Broadband Internet Services be Regulated?*; Jon M. Peha’s “The Benefits and Risks of Mandating Network Neutrality, and the Quest for a Balanced Policy” in the *International Journal of Communication*; and www.savetheinternet.com.

change the way that the internet works, and our idea of democracy and the media, but no one knows about it, and for me not to know that was weird, because usually I keep up to date on those things. So I was like if I don't know, I bet a lot of other people don't know, they don't realize how urgent it is. So on my way home from the lunch, I was kind of thinking about ways in which I could do something about it, and the first thing that came to mind was like, oh, a video would be great because people would learn about it that way. So I just kind of planned it out in the fifteen minutes it took me to walk home.

This statement reveals an example of the way Emma's experience at Indymedia worked as a sponsor of her activist literacy, as she discussed pertinent political issues with friends there, which inspired her to action. She also worked on digital media projects in her time there, which may have inspired her in part to use video as the medium for her message. This statement is also noteworthy because it shows how the kinetic movement of walking aided Emma's invention process, allowing her to plan out her video in that time span²⁸. If the invention process was quick, though, so was the first part of her actual composing. She stated, "I actually did the whole thing in like a ten minute take, I didn't have a script, I just kind of talked about what I knew, except for that one part when I was reading the legislation, but the way I edited it I think helped to keep people's attention better." Though it may have taken only ten minutes to record using the affordance of the built-in camera and microphone on her Apple MacBook, the editing (and preliminary research) process obviously took more time. The way she edited the video does help to maintain a viewer's attention, as it includes titles, credits, music, and jumps between footage of Emma speaking in various positions, title slides, and still images.

The editing process is where Emma's rhetorical knowledge and strategies are most evident, as the editing choices she made reveal an understanding of audience, multimodality, delivery, genre, and the effects of humor. For instance, Emma begins the video by saying on camera, "Alright, listen up guys. This is *by far* the most important video I'm *ever* going to make." This introduction is slightly funny, though it also informs the audience that she is going to relay an important message. In addition, Emma addresses her audience using pronouns like "you" and "we," thereby implicating them as people, like herself, who will be affected by the

²⁸ In "Chronotopic Lamination: Tracing the Contours of Literate Activity," Prior and Shipka have discussed "the dispersed and fluid chains of places, times, people, and artifacts that come to be tied together in trajectories of literate action," arguing that literate activity has much to do with the ways that we move within and transform the worlds we inhabit.

issue she is talking about, thus giving them a reason why they should care and want to take action. She also includes “catchy” instrumental music to get people “excited.” Emma considered the fact that the video is not boring—because it utilizes movement, sound, and editing techniques, instead of solely being “a textbook that moves” (which she criticized another video made by someone else on the same topic as being)—to be particularly effective. In addition, the volume of the music varies appropriately throughout the video and serves as an effective component of it. That is, it starts out soft while she is talking, and then builds, transitioning perfectly into a faster, deeper beat once she stops speaking. At this point, text slides and photos concerning the issue begin to appear, such as “Who are the bad guys?” (followed by corporate logos) and “The Defenders: net neutrality supporters” (followed by other logos). Also, while explaining the issue, Emma mentions various corporations and after naming each one she edits in clips of herself whispering “evil” very close to the camera to a humorous—yet pointed—effect. In addition, Emma also edits in other short clips of herself doing goofy things, like jumping up and down and saying “Yay” after explaining that net neutrality means that people do not have to pay to use websites like YouTube. She also includes a clip of herself looking very scared after she says, “we have nothing to protect our rights,” working to create an overall interesting and humorous comment on a serious issue.

Further, the footage is also edited in a way that showcases Emma’s ethos through delivery. That is, her video is very performative, and the persona she creates through it is of an informed and concerned young person with a sense of humor. It works persuasively because Emma appears credible, while at the same time the humor saves her from appearing as overly ‘preachy.’ This ethos that she projects has indeed worked to persuade the majority of her audience, as judged from the comments the video has received on YouTube. It is obvious that she does not have the same issues using emotion to persuade that John has, since the video provokes laughter, and perhaps even fear, in representing the revocation of net neutrality as a dire problem.

Overall, Emma’s project fulfilled her purpose because other people were searching for information on net neutrality, and when they did her video appeared. She knew from the contact that she had received from some viewers that it had been an effective method of informing them and potentially getting them to act on the issue. In addition, the video has so far received 59 comments on YouTube, many of which are supportive and flattering, while some argue between

explanations of the issue, and a few are clearly not in support of what she is advocating. With the majority of viewers who left comments in agreement with her, though, it can be concluded that Emma did ultimately succeed in her purpose.

The audience Emma had in mind was basically anyone online, but mostly people her age or younger “who may not have even been keeping up with net neutrality, but who might be on YouTube, and I think when I first made it too I was thinking, ‘oh, I hope this gets featured on their website, because then more people will see it’” (Emma Interview). It is clear that Emma has an understanding of the YouTube community, due to her prior experience posting videos to the website, which allowed her to draw such conclusions about her potential audience and the effect her video may have on them. She also knew the way that YouTube works, which helped her to decide that it was the right platform through which to deliver her video.

When asked about other specific choices in making the video, Emma said about the medium that “it’s not that I chose to do it via film, it was that I chose YouTube as my particular outlet, because from what I knew about net neutrality, YouTube wouldn’t exist if, you know, we didn’t have [unrestricted use of the internet] any more.” Emma seems to see net neutrality as essential because the internet as we currently know it—as a largely free and open forum—has a lot to do with her ideas about democracy and activism. Also, Emma said she wanted to “use this thing that we really love [YouTube] to save the thing we really love [internet access].” She thus realized that the choice of medium itself added to her message, in showing how useful open access to the internet is.

Emma also thought that video would be best to reach her audience with, which reveals an implicit theory of digital delivery at work. For instance, she stated:

I was thinking that people would probably be searching for [information on this issue], and people like watching videos more than they like reading something, and when I first was getting into my activism I was thinking that the best way to change things was through the media, because people watch TV all the time, and they don’t think about how they’re being inculcated with all these ideas, and they’re not really challenging things, so to use the media in a way that brings them to that critical point, it was a big deal for me. I thought that them watching a video would probably be more effective, and it would reach them quicker, than if I tried to write a long article that nobody would probably read.

(Emma interview)

While Emma is not against print literacy—she clearly invests a lot in reading books, both in and outside of school—she recognizes that there is an audience that video could reach and impact more effectively than writing perhaps could. In addition, Emma seems to have a sense for *kairos*, which provoked her to use video to deliver her message. That is, she wanted to reach audiences as quickly as possible, and she understood, at least to a point, the mediated world in which she is living, where images (i.e. video) have a lot of persuasive power.

Emma's video was actually featured on another website devoted to the net neutrality issue, and she said that many people got in touch with her about it afterwards. To date, her video on YouTube has been viewed 3,553 times since it was posted halfway through 2006, which also shows that she was probably correct in thinking that her digital media project would be 'the quickest way to get something out.' The success of Emma's project reveals her success with digital delivery, especially with the Distribution/Circulation component of it that Porter writes about (11-13). Emma seems to have reasoned this concept out on her own, possibly with a thorough understanding of the *kairos* of her situation—of the urgency she felt to make a statement quickly—combined with other knowledge she had gained through prior experiences with YouTube and through working with other sponsors such as Chicago's Indymedia²⁹.

Emma's example reveals another side to the issue of digital delivery different from that discussed in John's case. Here, Emma thought, and has some evidence, that her chosen medium of composing would actually reach more people faster, while John's problem was that his website was not reaching wider audiences. The question, 'Why did hers succeed?' can be answered by thinking about Emma's ecology of literacy, as discussed above. YouTube and the website that featured her video supported the digital delivery of her message to an extent. Also, in creating the video, Emma has her family to thank for purchasing her MacBook, as well as teachers and friends, and colleagues at Chicago's Indymedia, who helped her to further develop activist literacy skills, including technological skills, as well as to become aware of the net neutrality issue in the first place.

²⁹ In working with this organization, Emma would have become aware of the necessity of commenting on, counter-constructing, or providing coverage or viewpoints overlooked in arguments or news information created by the mainstream media in a timely and relevant fashion, as this is the very nature of their work. The Chicago Indymedia's website acts as a center where anyone can publish stories or opinions "and thereby quickly reach a wide audience" ("Chicago").

After viewing the video in the interview—the first time Emma had seen it again after a length of time—she was somewhat frustrated with the ending, in which she directs viewers to a certain website and instructs them how to contact their representatives about the issue. She stated, “I think my intention was good with it, but then I don’t like how I ended with ‘call your representatives, have them do something about it,’ it should have been like, ‘you can make your own video too, why don’t you engage in the dialogue,’ but you know.” She went on to say that “It’s frustrating because in our society a lot of change happens through legislation and policy makers, but now one of my biggest messages is that everyone has a voice and everyone should be doing things, so I guess if I could change the video I would find a way to make it so that viewers would feel more empowered, like ‘I can do something myself,’ rather than ‘I should call my representative and have them do it.’” Though Emma recognized that representatives do usually have the most power to direct policy, her definition of activism and this statement show that she believes that individuals are indeed able to create, or at least stimulate, change. Emma did not think that there were many surface problems with the video other than this problem that sent a slightly different message than the one she values more.

Emma’s video in fact is not overly serious or perfectly constructed—features usually expected of academic work. For instance, the edits Emma does make are somewhat abrupt, some of the digital images she incorporates are somewhat blurry, some of the video of herself speaking becomes pixilated, there are a lot of everyday objects in the background that detract somewhat from her speaking, and she often utilizes humor. However, it still functions as an effective argument, and thus can fit into the persuasive essay genre that John talked about, albeit in a digital format. That is, it is similar to a persuasive essay because Emma is working to inform and persuade, by the provision of facts and opinions, her audience about this issue. Because video does not fit into the traditional conception of a persuasive essay, though, and because differences in rhetorical considerations do exist between the two, this points to the fact that it is important for compositionists to focus on the teaching of persuasion through various modalities of delivery in order to better serve the needs of students.

As discussed above, time was a factor in the making of the video, both in the limited time that Emma had to spend on it, due to her other obligations, and in the limited time she had to make a relevant statement. In considering her work on campus, she talked about this issue further:

A lot of student groups, or at least student activist groups, don't get a lot of help or recognition from the administration, obviously, but even worse I think the administration tries to demonize a lot of student activists because, you know, we like to rock the boat and that's not always appreciated, so I think that's been the worst thing, because it takes so much work and time and energy, and we are full time students, and I tell people that my activism is often like, I feel like it's a second or third job, so it takes a lot of time and energy, and then for us not to get like any kind of help with it, not that we do it for recognition anyway, but, you know, it's frustrating to feel like your not getting anywhere with it.

Her comments here echo John's issues with time, and allow us to consider the actual material issues of time and resources activist students are working through. However, this also points to the importance for students—which other participants also mentioned—of receiving support or encouragement from faculty for their work, which they often cannot receive from the administration or even from a majority of their peers. In addition, it re-emphasizes the disconnect that exists for Emma between her academic and activist work. In this light, writing instructors should be concerned that Emma does not have the opportunity within her coursework to create texts (including digital media) related to her extracurricular or activist goals for public audiences.

Further, when I asked Emma about advice she might give to writing instructors, I was surprised to learn that she was teaching a class of her own entitled "Education for Social Change" as part of her thesis project for graduating. She had a faculty mentor who is officially a co-teacher, but she said "he actually doesn't come regularly because we're trying to make it just a student-based classroom." The students she taught were mostly sophomores and juniors, and many were taking the class as a credit fulfillment, while some were just taking it as an elective. Emma said that she was finding the students uninterested when she gave traditional paper assignments, saying, "they felt like the purpose and the form was really imposed on them" (Emma Interview). After talking to students who were not turning in papers, she found that they preferred writing reflections in a blog format rather than as a formal paper. Emma said, "I don't know if it's because we've been taught to censor ourselves or to be really editorial about everything we write for a formal paper, but you know the ideas in general should be the same between these two different mediums, it's just LiveJournals aren't considered a formal medium

for this kind of academic writing.” The latter point is apparent, as Emma herself did not at first consider assigning digital writing work even though this is the type of writing she does for her activism and seems to be most comfortable with. Again, this highlights the problematic disconnect that exists for her between academic and activist work.

Eventually, Emma had her students write in online journal or blog formats:

I suggested that instead of turning in papers, why don't they just journal about it like they normally would, and that's what I would prefer anyway, because then they would be taking what they were learning and apply it to outside the class, and I found that I got more papers that way, and they were actually more interesting to read too because they were wittier, people were actually being expressive...I think that maybe we need to reconsider what is acceptable writing and what are acceptable forms of writing, because we're really limiting it if we just say it's a formal paper. (Emma Interview)

This statement reveals that, after talking to the students, Emma realized what she herself had known about writing all along, that digital writing (in forms like emailing, blogging, or creating video, among others) is a valid way to make an argument, though she originally excluded it from the class she taught. She excluded it because it is not considered 'academic' in the traditional sense, and she probably did not have many teacher-models who did consider it academic work. After reflecting on her class's response to their assignments, though, she found it a better way for them to engage, to produce more interesting writing, and to put writing to practical use by extending it into the public sphere, something that John too, as discussed above, would appreciate in a teacher.

Liz

Liz is a senior zoology major who, when she graduates, is planning on attending a sustainability, permaculture design, and community building program in Oregon for the summer. Beyond that, she is unsure what she will do, though she suggested that she is thinking about working for the Student Conservation Association. Liz's definition of activism considered the difference between activism in the past versus activism today, as she said that today anyone who is politically vocal can be considered an activist. She considers this as a way for likeminded people to identify with a group and get together to work for change, and her definition is thus

somewhat more inclusive than Emma's and John's. Liz's involvement with activism began during her sophomore year of college when she went to a peace delegation³⁰ with a student group for peace and justice at the university. She began working with that group afterwards, and now serves as their president. Other activist work Liz has participated in includes some labor unionizing rallies and community volunteering efforts (Liz Interview). This case study analyzes the sponsors who have supported Liz's work, including those who have sponsored her digital literacy; the role of rhetoric in her activist work; her blogging projects and the digital delivery issues surrounding them; and the explicit and implicit advice that she has for composition instructors.

Liz described how critically considering her own identity and background, coming from what she called the 'upper class,' has influenced her activist work:

I come from the upper middle class, upper class, and having that perspective growing up, then when you go somewhere like Colombia or Chiapas, Mexico, and you see what these people have versus what I have, I think it gives me a different perspective. It gives me the perspective of the inequality to an extent, to the point where, like where I self-identify within money and within class has been a struggle, because I don't know how I feel about that, because I did come from the upper class, and to look at what everyone else has, you know, it gives me the perspective...well this is unequal, and it makes me uncomfortable sometimes, and that's something that I've had to deal with a lot, and it kind of makes me want to keep going though, because I can see that it is so unequal. (Liz interview)

It is clear that Liz has spent some time reflecting on issues of class and her own privileged positioning, a process which has also been important to other participants, like Emma, as a catalyst or important factor in their activist work. Without this literacy practice they could not, in Freirean terms, read their own subject positionings or the world around them. Liz has developed a critical consciousness about class, and, at least in part, her firsthand experiences have aided in that development.

³⁰ The student group for peace and justice that Liz belongs to takes what they call a delegation trip each year during spring break. They travel to different countries each year, usually to "pretty high conflict areas," to learn about the country's history, people, and social/economic/political problems they face. For example, last year Liz went on the trip to Chiapas, Mexico, and this year she is organizing the trip to Guatemala (Liz Interview). While the group brings their knowledge back to campus each year to share what they have learned during a weeklong event they hold called "Globalization Gone Wild," the ability to take such trips can also be viewed as a marker of privilege.

Further, Liz described how her parents have worked as sponsors of her activist literacy. She stated, “my parents have always been very active in things, and you know very supportive in whatever we [she and her siblings] want to do, and that’s helped, like when I come home with some crazy big idea like ‘we’re going to do this,’ just having someone say ‘alright, sounds good,’ you know, that’s supportive.” She discussed her mother’s role as a sponsor and supporter of her activist literacy more specifically. Liz described her mother as a strong feminist whose opinions influenced Liz significantly since she was young, and said that she is “just all about fighting the good fight, she thinks it’s important to do and she thinks it’s great, she’s endlessly supportive” (Liz Interview). In part due to her mother’s influence, Liz has come to believe that every woman should be a feminist because of the society that we live in. In talking more specifically about women and activism, Liz said that she does not feel like it is difficult for women in the United States to participate, though she recognized that for women in other countries it can be harder for them to speak out and accomplish similar work³¹, presumably due to differences in social contexts and political dynamics. However, in reference to feminism in the U.S. she said, “a lot of women I’ve met are kind of to the point where they’re like ‘well, we’re done, we did it, it’s not an issue anymore.’” Liz does not agree with this attitude, and she thinks that women are instrumental in activism, because as mothers, providers, and figures who assume many roles in the community, people notice when they take a stand and organize, which she sees as “a really influential part of a lot of social change” (Liz Interview). Liz’s opinion that it is not difficult for women to be activists in the United States, and not more so than men, was a frequent one in most of the interviews. In fact, other participants (Andrew, Sonia, Kim) also said that they mostly come into contact with women in their activist work.

Liz, now president of the student group for peace and justice, talked further about her motivations and support for getting involved in the beginning:

The people who are in the group seemed like really nice people, and they were encouraging of me to get participating in it, and I think it was...just the more I saw what my other friends were doing at other universities...it kind of became like well, what am I

³¹ Mary Eagleton states that in most narratives about the history of feminism, black, lesbian, and Third World feminisms remain “‘other’, defined *in relation to* the dominant white, heterosexual account” (3, author’s italics). Likewise, in writing about the history of feminism in composition, Ritchie and Boardman discuss “the way feminism itself is shaped by and embedded in existing hierarchical discourses” (599). Such accounts reveal the problematic tendencies of many western, American women to make assumptions about the lack of agency of Third World women.

doing about this, am I just going to sit here and read my books quietly? No, I don't want to do that anymore, you know, you've gotta get out there and try to do something, and you know schools and books and grades are important, but you've got to be applying it to something that makes your heart content too, and so I've started to kind of find little ways to stay involved in say, both the academic side with the school, and then to also be doing something for the people around you. (Liz interview)

Here Liz's statement reflects the opinion of other participants, including John and Emma, when she reveals the disconnect she sees between academics and activism. It also illustrates that her friends and other students around her were (and are) obviously big influences in her activism, thus revealing more sponsors of her activist literacy. Liz also mentioned that certain professors have encouraged her work in significant ways as well. For example, she stated:

I've met some good professors that...just encourage you to speak about things and to question things, and—because sometimes they're a little older, and they're so established in themselves—that to hear them say to you 'that's the right thing to be doing, you should keep doing this,' that's really encouraging to keep going through because especially here no one wants to get involved, no one wants to do anything, so you've got like your four people excited about your action, but then here's someone else saying, 'when you get out of this space, that's going to be so useful, and you've got to learn to do it,' that's been encouraging. (Liz Interview)

Liz's statement, and those from other participants, reveal that student activists and their activist groups rely on support—even if it is just encouragement—from faculty, because they do not often receive it from the administration, and in many cases, at least at this particular university, from the larger student body. This points out that faculty support can be considered another important avenue of sponsorship for student activists, not only through what they teach in class, but through interaction with students outside or beyond the classroom as well. For Liz, her sponsors have largely included family members, friends, fellow activists, and certain professors and instructors.

In addition, Liz's activist group is sometimes asked by professors or instructors to talk to classes about the work that they do, and she believes that this gives her a chance to influence students (similar to the ways she was influenced) to begin activist work. Liz said:

We think that when we get invited to come talk to a class, that's showing that we're students, we go and do this stuff, you could do this too for whatever cause you want. Even if they don't like the trip that we took or they don't agree with everything we're saying, it shows that we're just students too, we go and do all this stuff that [they] could do. I think that's kind of cool to see other people around you doing it, because that's kind of what it took for me was to see and hear all of my friends in this new group be like 'oh yeah we go [on a delegation trip] every year, it's really cool, you know, we're extremely worldly and cool,' and it's like, 'I want to be worldly and cool, so you go with them. (Liz interview)

This statement shows that Liz understands the importance of the sponsors who have supported her activist work, and that she now is interested in acting as a sponsor of others. It also reveals the concern that Liz's group—and other student groups, like John's—has with representing themselves in a positive way to show that they are “cool.” That is, the groups see representation as important and are trying to construct a positive ethos for themselves as they work for recognition and positive response to their causes on a campus where, according to many participants, this is not often easy to achieve. In allowing Liz's student group to visit their classes and speak about their work, the professors she speaks about also play a role in assisting them in their construction of ethos, which may be of interest to composition instructors.

Liz also discussed sponsors who supported her digital literacy when asked about her experience with computers or digital media. She talked about using Illustrator and Photoshop to make posters and programs for her group's yearly “Globalization Gone Wild” event, saying that she learned the programs “just by working with them. A bunch of my friends, well in high school and stuff they learned how to use them and I would just kind of learn vicariously through them. I never really got shown how to do much though, I can just do enough to get around, I couldn't do anything fancy on them” (Liz Interview). When asked if she thought that it would help to have more formal instruction with such programs, she said:

I think so, I think it would be much more efficient. I wouldn't have to spend so much time doing it, and then I could do stuff like brochures, and like [make] a print object easier, to make it look nicer by using the nicer software. I think especially if we ever wanted to use a video, I mean you would have to use Final Cut Pro, and being able to be

efficient in that would also be useful. That lab [on campus] is great though, they'll help you with everything. (Liz interview)

Here Liz points to the support that is available on campus when she mentions going to the lab for assistance with digital projects. This lab serves as an important institutional sponsor of digital literacy on campus, as it supports students by providing access to computers and software, and assistance in understanding programs and creating digital projects. This statement also reveals how Liz's friends in high school served as sponsors for her digital literacy. In addition, the passage is interesting because it reveals that Liz seems to equate better programs with a better material result. This may be true for professionals, but effective videos can also be made with programs like iMovie, as seen in Emma's case, and effective brochures can be made with programs as common as Microsoft Word. Perhaps without much instruction or opportunity to use these programs, however, Liz is not aware of this.

Liz also discussed the role of persuasion in her activist work:

I think it would be more advantageous to myself if I were more persuasive. I'm not a good salesman, I don't like forcing things upon people, and talking them into doing it, but you need that if you're going to get people involved in what you're doing, especially if they're unsure. You have to really sell your idea. I'm not good at doing that, I hate making people feel uncomfortable...I hate doing that. And I think it would be helpful if I could to a certain extent be more like, 'you should really get involved,' I think that'd be helpful.

For Liz, literacy practices of persuasion and rhetoric are central in her work. However, this statement also reveals the same uneasy feelings about persuasion that other participants, like John, expressed. That is, Liz talks about "selling" ideas to audiences, a concept she is uncomfortable with. She seems to have the same implicit theory of rhetoric as John, which associates forms of persuasion with marketing. As an activist who stands against neoliberal economics—her group's most recent delegation trip focused in part on the effects of free trade versus fair trade in Guatemala—she views this type of persuasion as harmful to her ethos. When asked if there was a way she might develop persuasive skills she is more comfortable with, Liz answered:

If I have people with me who are like that and are supporting that tendency, like if I'm with someone else campaigning or if you have someone else with you trying to sell an

event or an action it's easier, because they'll help feed off what you say and you can feed off what they say, so I like working with people who are good at that...I mean those people are encouraging to me to be around. I think if I spent more time with people like that and realize the polite ways to convince people, and like a more subtle way to persuade people, then I could probably learn something from them. (Liz interview)

This answer shows that Liz understandably feels more comfortable working for her cause with others, thus revealing the importance of collaboration as a form of sponsorship in activist work. That is, when working with others, she learns from them and is further “encouraged” in her work by them. However, Liz said she lacks understanding in “the polite ways to convince people,” which shows that she does not know which appeals to use in persuading people face to face. Remembering that Liz’s group and others, like John’s, want to be seen as valid and “cool,” it may also be that Liz and her group feel more comfortable persuading in a rational way that will represent them as rational people—not as some laughable fringe group, which activists have a tendency to be characterized as. In attempting to maintain their ethos and the validity of their causes, activists may have to struggle with combating such negative stereotypes of themselves, which can influence their understanding and uses of certain forms of persuasion and rhetoric.

Forms of writing Liz engages in for her activist work include: writing emails to set up meetings, get funding, and find volunteers; participating on listservs to send and receive information; and writing on a blog. Liz set up the blog this year for her activist group, because though they had previous presence on the web—“on occasion there’s been a Facebook group, but I think that was more to share pictures” (Liz Interview)—it was not very official. She was inspired to begin the blog after her group’s delegation trip to Chiapas. That trip was in part supported by the university’s writing center, who gave monetary sponsorship on the stipulation that the group keep an active blog, which would be hosted on the writing center’s website. During the trip, everyone in Liz’s group took turns posting to the blog, with each person writing about three times throughout the week. When asked if the blog attracted an audience, she said, “there were people responding and writing questions and responding to what we posted. I mean, I think some of it was parents reading it, some of it were the people from the writing center, but then there were just professors and stuff, someone must have said this was going to be there and they checked on it.” Liz found the blog to be a good tool for both the group to have, as they could actively document and reflect on their experiences during the trip, and for people back

home to read, so that they could follow along with what the group members were learning and experiencing.

It is clear that the writing center served as more than just a financial sponsor, as their initial suggestion of the blog led Liz to understand this as a possible mode for future writing projects and work related to her activism. That is, this year, after the trip, Liz decided to create a blog to be used as a kind of information center for her student group. She has a personal blog, and from both experiences, she thought that hosting another one for her activist group would be an easy way to inform people and allow them to write back to the group. Concerning the blog's design, Liz just chose a template from the hosting site, and "wasn't super picky about what it looked like," a choice probably due to issues of time and ability. The blog contains posts about the group, actions they are taking, contact information "if you wanted to be involved with campus events that were going on," a search engine for people to search the blog's history, as well as links that Liz put up to news resources that readers might otherwise not know about. She also originally wanted to set up others as administrators, so that people besides herself could post and contribute, though no one took her up on the offer. She nevertheless thought that "at least everyone can comment and do that whenever they want, then you can look at those feeds, but it didn't catch on like I'd hoped." She further stated:

I don't think anyone looks at it, so I mean I haven't updated it, I was keeping it updated for a while, because we printed out new brochures for [a fair at the university] and I thought, well, it will be an easy way for people to just quickly check it and see what we are doing. But, no one's added comments, no one's asked to become an administrator, you know to make their own posts, so it's there, I can take you to it, but I don't know if anyone uses it. (Liz interview)

This statement reflects the main problem that Liz has had with digital delivery—though she initially thought it would serve as an efficient and informative space for her group, no one was visiting or using the blog.

When we talked about what the difference may be between the writing center blog being read, and her blog being ignored, she said:

That blog was sponsored by the writing center, and it was a .edu website, like the address linked it to the university, and the one I have that I started was just a Blogspot [address], and I think, I mean it was obligatory for us to be writing on [the writing center blog], that

made a difference, and this one, the one that I started...I just thought it'd be easier than getting emails on your listserv, like if everyone knew just 'oh just go check in on the website once in a while.'

It is interesting that Liz made a distinction between the web addresses of the blogs, and she may be right in assuming that the .edu address, and the sponsorship of the original blog on the writing center's website, seem to have given it more credibility, more traffic, and thus more readership. However, it is also true that Emma's blog, which was also hosted by Blogspot, did receive a large audience. What is further puzzling is that Liz's own group members are not using the blog, though it is somewhat unclear, without further questioning, if she originally intended it more as a tool for the group, or more as a resource for those interested in them, or for both. Liz did say that they publicized the blog on all of the brochures they handed out at the student fair, so it seems to have been intended, at least in part, as a resource for people outside of the group, including those interested in joining.

Liz is another example of a student struggling with digital delivery issues. As in John's case, it points to the fact that many student activists do not know how to reach audiences with their websites and other digital media projects without further sponsorship. Liz, like John, could perhaps try to publicize her blog through social networking sites, like Facebook or MySpace, by providing links to it on her own personal profile, and by linking to other blogs on her blog itself. Porter alludes to this option when he writes of the "popularity of blogs and social networking spaces like Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube" as important sites for interaction and communication between individuals (21). As such, they have the capability to draw an audience's attention to specific texts. I asked Liz if she plans to discard her blog as a failed experiment, or if she would like to keep it and try to attract readers. She replied:

Yeah, I don't know, I think we're going to try to do [the writing center blog] again for the delegation [to Guatemala] this year, because that blog [last year] worked really great. This blog I'll probably keep updating it just because I probably will, that's me, you know. Someone might be checking it somewhere, I think it is still useful stuff, like I wish that, I think part of the problem is that we've [her activist group] got so few people participating this year...just in general it's been a hard year to get people to come to stuff [like meetings or events], maybe they would participate if I was knocking on their doors, I don't know.

Thus, though Liz is willing to continue with the blog, she does not really have an idea about how to deal with the digital delivery issues, or how to establish an audience for it, though, as she remarked, part of her problem may be in the small size of her activist group this year, as well as the general attitude of the campus's student population.

When asked about advice she would give to writing teachers who want to help students succeed in their activist goals, she said "you just gotta make them question, question everything." She also suggested that visits by student groups like her own to classrooms, as described earlier, might be helpful to get more uninvolved students interested in certain groups or forms of activist work. Liz went on to discuss her own experience in freshman writing classes at the university, saying:

I followed my teacher for both semesters, because that's what he did, he was one of the first [to make us question everything]. I got to [the university] and I was like, bright-eyed, like 'school's going to be amazing,' and then we got to [campus] and it was like high school, and I was like 'what am I doing here?' But [my instructor] was so great on just being the first person to say 'no, do whatever you want, write whatever you want, of course you can write that, and why do you think that I think that's bullshit'....He was the first person to really make me start questioning things and encourage participating, I thought it was great. Half the class didn't like him but half of us did, it was fun.

It is obvious that Liz had certain expectations about coming to college, and was initially let down when she first arrived at the university, though she found something to admire in her writing instructor for allowing freedom in the classroom, both through writing assignments and through class discussion. It seems that he encouraged students to think critically and deeply, and even to question his own opinions, which may have been surprising and new for the students. Of course, Liz's last sentence is also interesting to consider. Not every student is going to have the same opinions about any class or any instructor. However, it is also important to note that some students, especially freshmen who are coming right out of high school, can be uncomfortable in nontraditional classrooms that challenge conventional schooling methods, the traditional pathways by which they have succeeded academically in the past, and notions of the teacher as the locus of knowledge and authority (Shor 157-161).

Other thoughts that Liz revealed and which I have discussed above illustrate that the sponsorship that student activists receive from faculty should be something for compositionists

to consider. Finally, our conversation about gender and class, and the influence of Liz's background on her activist literacy, also reveals a few of the issues that other participants deal with in their activist work. That is, it points to some ways in which they must negotiate their own identities and backgrounds in working with people who have different perspectives and who often are from very different backgrounds, and thus provides another reason for addressing such issues in the classroom.

Conclusion

In summary, each case study has revealed some key threads. I have pointed out factors that are an important part of activist literacy, as well as those that if developed with the help of teachers, could enhance activist literacy. For example, it is clear that sponsorship is integral to activist literacy. Case study participants have reported receiving sponsorship that has supported their composing work, critical awareness, and technological literacy through avenues that include parents, teachers, friends, organizations, schools, computer networks and software, books, personal experiences, and other activists. Of course, material access to technology has been primary to some of these forms of sponsorship. I have also pointed out the ways that these three particular student activists, John, Emma, and Liz, understand rhetoric, and the ways that it is essential to their activist work. These students seem to have both explicit and implicit understandings of how they rhetorically use communication and persuasion in their work. That is, student activists tend to rely heavily on ethos and positive representations of themselves and their activist groups in order to gain audience support for their work. Because they tend to view emotional appeals with suspicion, associating them with forms of marketing, they can distrust or disregard such appeals in their creation of persuasive texts and arguments. This aspect of the case studies reveals that the roles emotional appeals can play in persuasion and argument could be better theorized with students within the classroom.

In addition, the case studies have shown that technological literacy is vital to much of the work that student activists engage in. Many literacy practices such as networking, collaboration, and digital writing are central to activist work and require some amount of technological literacy. In particular, the case studies have also shown that delivery becomes an essential factor in the digital texts activists compose. Because student activists usually want to reach an audience,

ranging from specific to wide, with their texts to gain support for their issues or agendas, it is important to consider distribution and circulation from the very beginning of the composing process. Due to the obstacles that students such as John and Liz faced in this area, the case studies have shown that students can benefit from more attention to the rhetorical canon of delivery within the composition classroom. Finally, the case studies have each pointed to some advice that student activists have given to teachers. Taken together, this advice calls generally for critical classrooms with writing projects that are not merely assignments relevant within the classroom, but that can be relevant to students' interests or work outside of the classroom as well. The next and final chapter will explore these findings and others in more detail and depth.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT WRITING INSTRUCTORS CAN LEARN FROM STUDENT ACTIVISTS

In the previous chapters I have defined activism from the participants' perspectives and situated activist literacy in the context in which I am studying it at Miami University. By talking to participants about their activist work, I have found that, as stated in chapter three, the practices that comprise an activist literacy include: analyzing audience and adapting messages to them; choosing the appropriate medium and modalities for communicating a message; enabling the circulation of activist texts in digital and non-digital spaces; finding, analyzing, and effectively utilizing information; critically reading the world (Freire); and networking and collaborating with others through speaking and writing in both face-to-face and digital spaces. For example, it is clear from the data discussed in chapter four, particularly Emma's case, that successfully literate activists understand the delivery and circulation of their activist texts as these issues interrelate with medium, modality, and audience, as well as other factors. They also understand the types of information that are most effective to include or provide, in relation to these choices, in activist texts they create. The cases of John, Emma, and Liz together show that successfully literate activists have also developed critical consciousness through various forms of sponsorship and experience. This critical consciousness is related to critical literacy, through which students, such as those featured, understand how to sift through various forms of media for reliable sources and information beyond the mainstream. Finally, each case participant interacts and collaborates often with a group (or groups) that shares their activist goals. Much of their interaction, organizing, and work also occurs through online networks, revealing their ability to network, as well as collaborate, effectively.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the implications that the concept of activist literacy and the bulk of data I have collected has for teachers of composition and rhetoric courses, as well as for the implications that it has for future research in the field. First, I draw implications for teachers to consider that fall within a few categories. The first category involves participant's understandings of rhetoric and how they rely upon and understand specific appeals, namely ethos and pathos—appeals teachers can better theorize with students. The second category involves technological literacy and digital writing, including issues of delivery writing teachers and students need to consider. Subsequent categories include classroom practices that may aid in supporting students' activist literacy, including negotiations between collaboration

and debate or conflict within the classroom; connections that can be made between coursework and campus or activist events and issues; and teacher support for students, including possible actions through which they may begin to fulfill the role of a “public intellectual.” Considering the implications of my work that fall within these categories can ultimately begin to help narrow the gap that students see as existing between their activist and academic work. Afterwards, I discuss implications for future research. In this section I include calls for similar research with more diverse participants in various settings, and ethnographic research that employs activist methodologies with student activists, student activist groups, and critical and/or activist teachers.

Implications for Writing Instructors

My work offers writing instructors some implications for consideration, which stem from two sources. The first source is the explicit advice that students gave in response to the interview question “what advice would you give to writing teachers who want to help students succeed in their activist goals or goals for social participation?” In addition to drawing on students’ responses to this question, I also analyzed the rest of the interview data in order to identify key themes that may be of interest to writing teachers. Together, this data reveals some of the issues that student activists struggle with in their work, as well as preferences and recommendations student activists have for writing courses and instructors. Writing instructors can begin to understand how we might better support such students and their activist literacy by considering each of these aspects, while realizing that literacy itself is always situated within a “cultural ecology” (Hawisher and Selfe 5) and does not stem from a single source.

The first implication that I will discuss is the emphasis that student activists place on ethos. This comes across perhaps most apparently in the case study of John, though other participants also conceive of effective rhetorical persuasion mainly in terms of appeals of ethos—as well as logos. These appeals are obviously important in argument and persuasion, and especially important to student activists who want to represent themselves and be viewed as upstanding and credible. In addition, in situations where student activists and their groups face potentially hostile audiences—such as John’s group, who explicitly advocates against certain university policies—they tend to rely on these appeals to an even greater extent. To address the ways that composition instructors might help students understand how to construct ethos well in

relation to audience, I turn to the work of Zan Meyer Gonçalves, who has worked with student activists against homophobia and heterosexism. She explains that those student activists seek to create compassionate audiences through their use of ethos, and she provides pedagogical practices based on what she has learned through working with them. Gonçalves writes, “we use ethos to create roles for our audiences, inviting audience members to become who we want them to be rather than castigating them for who they are or are not” (125-126). Similar practices can be useful for all student activists whose work and campaigns often rely heavily on how they represent themselves to audiences. For example, Gonçalves explains that she establishes activities for students “to produce writing that invites an indifferent or hostile audience into a conversation about the values important to us. Dialogue becomes central. I use exercises that assist students in taking up and trying on a variety of viewpoints in order to incorporate and speak from multiple perspectives as they write” (126). The idea of creating roles for audiences and inviting students to experiment with multiple perspectives can be valuable for student activists who view ethos as an important persuasive factor in their work, and may ultimately support their persuasive efforts more effectively.

However, the fact that student activists rely most fully on ethos and logos in persuasion reveals the need to review how we theorize and teach emotion and its role in argument. The data I discussed earlier revealed that students are confused about this appeal and may tend to associate pathos with marketing and business practices. Because student activists do not want to be seen as corporate salespeople, naïve “hippies,” or angry activists, they tend to rely on logical appeals and on building their ethos, rather than on emotional appeals. I also discussed earlier, though, how the worker testimony videos on John’s group’s living wage website are persuasive in large part due to the pathetic appeals they make. While the traditional emphasis on “reason” in academia reinforces and perhaps demands reliance on logic, writing instructors can attempt to balance this by better theorizing emotion with students and highlighting the efficacy of pathos and ways it can be used ethically within argument.

Gretchen Flesher Moon, who studied twenty-five composition textbooks published after 1998, has concluded that “pathos as a rhetorical appeal gets very short shrift in textbooks and, even then, often suffers the ignominy of identification as or association with the fallacies” (33). Even if instructors do not use textbooks, this study nevertheless reveals a tendency to disregard or undervalue pathos in many composition classrooms. To continue to teach—or ignore—pathos

in these ways, Moon says, “feeds the sense that formal writing is a detached, personally meaningless academic exercise...[it] denies emotion a place in public life and thereby separates the individual from the citizen” (41). Incidentally, these results are exactly what teachers who support building an activist literacy for students should seek to counter. Interestingly, George E. Marcus argues similarly in *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics* that “the solution to good citizenship is located in our capacity to feel” (8). Marcus provides an example from the civil rights movement where “images of southern police setting dogs and water hoses against marchers” were persuasive because of the “incongruity, images of violence conflicting with a strong belief in the United States as a country of promise, justice, and opportunity” (140). These emotional images and the resulting feelings they produced, Marcus argues, catalyzed citizen action. Similar historical examples could also be used to help students see the role pathos can play in persuasion, specifically in public discourse for social change. In addition, Mathieu and Welch both discuss various imaginative public writing projects that utilize pathos, and the ways they have been historically relevant to activist groups and social movements in drawing attention to certain issues. For instance, Mathieu draws on the example of an activist whose poem “Jesus Christ Froze to Death” was sent to lawmakers and the press to advocate funding and affordable heat for poor and elderly Chicago residents (29). This poem relies on emotional and perhaps ethical appeals to attempt to influence public policy. As instructors, taking a more contextual and perhaps historical approach to teaching pathos could help students to better understand how it can function in specific rhetorical situations. Doing so can also perhaps lead to more creative public writing projects that may take a variety of forms, such as the poem described above. Attempting to work through common assumptions about emotion and its role in argument with students can help them to understand the power it can have in terms of persuasion and argument, and the ways it can be used ethically along with other appeals³².

Similarly, the data has also clearly pointed out that digital writing promotes an activist literacy because actual writing for public audiences takes a variety of forms. The variety of texts participants have created for their activist work (websites, blogs, videos, among others) demonstrate that digital writing is central to it, which highlights the relevance of technological literacy. For this reason, composition instructors should take notice and work to expand

³² Of course, pathos is not always used in strictly ethical ways, examples of which can also be discussed in class to understand the different ways it is employed.

acceptable genres for student compositions. Emma, as a first time instructor, realized this when she was teaching a class for her thesis project, as I discussed earlier. She found that allowing students to write in online blog or journal formats rather than in traditional paper formats resulted in more students completing assignments and enabled their writing to become more engaging and interesting.

Other student participants also described the relevance of digital writing to their activist work. For instance, Jane, who was at one point the acting president of the student group for peace and justice, said that “writing is really important, but how often in your life outside of academic work do you write a paper? But, it may be really common in your life to make posters or make some more practical uses of your abilities.” Jane said that she didn’t want to discount the importance of formal papers, but suggested that “you can still do the research and still do your writing, but present it more in a creative way than just a 20-page paper. [Instead, one might say] ‘here’s my research on a website, or as a poster’ ...[we need] just some way of tapping into those other forms of media.” This suggestion shows that Jane desires more of a connection, or alignment, between work students are being asked to compose in the classroom and projects or writing practices that will still be important to them after the class. Allowing students to compose multimodal texts on topics or issues they are interested in, or that are perhaps connected to work they may be involved in outside of the classroom³³, can help support such a connection. In addition, Sonia, who worked on community campaigns through an academic program, said that a rhetoric class she took spent a lot of time focusing on art, and from that course she learned that rhetoric is not just verbal, or relevant to text. Through her experience analyzing art, she understood that with visual rhetoric “you can really get a message across, and a strong message,” and she recognized it as an important component of composing various persuasive texts. Thus, such data points to the fact that composition teachers need to make space for multimodal composing if they are interested in public writing and in helping students in their work outside of the classroom.

In the book *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*, Anne Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc also provide rationale for teaching digital writing in composition classrooms, as well as practical

³³ Christian Weisser also argues that students should be able to address issues of their choice in a public writing course; this way, their writing will be more meaningful (115). This is also one of the central tenets of Ira Shor’s concept of empowering (critical, democratic, and participatory) education.

activities and assignments instructors can draw from. For example, Wysocki offers one activity that asks students to observe the design of web pages for a specific audience and purpose, and then “develop their own lists of design guidelines for Web pages” for the same audience and purpose (194). This activity could help students understand and evaluate digital rhetoric and design, and prepare them for the next logical step, which would be to compose web pages for their own purposes and corresponding audiences. In addition, Cynthia Selfe offers an assignment for which students revise and re-design a print essay for the Web (101). Such an assignment could help students like Jane who seek to present their research in “more creative” and more authentically applicable ways.

The participant data concerning technological literacy and digital writing has also shown that, in terms of delivery, composition instructors need to help students pay attention to how choice of medium and techniques for increasing the circulation of texts are important considerations. The data shows that student activists struggle with these issues of delivery, sometimes succeeding (as in Emma’s case) and sometimes not (remember John and Liz). John and Liz, for instance, did not have the knowledge or experience to deliver their digital texts to their intended audiences. These examples reveal the need to better theorize and discuss the practical issues of medium and circulation in writing classrooms (Porter), as delivery is central in the composition and distribution of activist texts and public writing.

For example, Porter, in regards to digital delivery, writes that “the question about genre should follow from, not precede, the question about audience” (16). Focusing on delivery, he explains, “means starting the writing process with audience and working backwards to made object” (16). That is, a pedagogy that places emphasis on delivery would help students compose more effective and “authentic” persuasive texts because they would be more aligned with the needs of the audience and considerations of how the audience will access a particular text. Students will not, even before starting a project, be limited to composing in a specific genre or medium that may or may not align with their purpose or their audience’s needs. More attention to the ways that audience, medium, delivery, and circulation are intertwined—and how technological literacy factors in regarding these issues—within the classroom could help students like John and Liz to consider more effective ways to deliver their websites, and other current or future activist texts, to their audiences.

Another implication the data leads to for classroom practices that would better align academic writing with writing that takes place outside of the classroom involves allowing students to compose through collaboration. That is, interview participants and scholars have made clear that most activist writing and activist literacy practices rely upon collaboration at some point along the way—working in conjunction with other writers, activists, community members, and even faculty members (Welch; Mathieu; Gonçalves). Providing students with opportunities within the classroom to compose texts in collaboration with each other can familiarize them with more “authentic” composing experiences, as well as with abilities they will need to work with each other in other contexts, particularly in activist groups or public writing projects. However, as I mentioned earlier in the section about Emma, group writing projects can be problematic, and (in her case) can ensure that each student does not receive the full benefits of the purpose of such assignments. In a group video project, for example, Emma did not work with the technology involved at all. Perhaps discussing group dynamics and the full purpose of such assignments with students before they begin can better ensure that all members of a group will each play more active roles in all aspects of their projects³⁴.

Collaboration can also be important in terms of general classroom practices and atmosphere. bell hooks is just one scholar who sees collaboration as central to a progressive education and to a classroom that transgresses traditional boundaries. She states, “[a]s a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (8). Recognizing the importance of all people in the classroom, and viewing them each as contributors to the class—as collaborators who help to form and to shape it—can not only work to help empower students, but it can also help students gain the skills they need in working collaboratively outside the classroom with others.

I have found that students, however, also value engaging in debate or conflict within the classroom, which scholars like Susan Jarratt have understood can be done in productive ways. For example, Kim, who is an environmental activist, said that her biggest “pet peeve” is when teachers are afraid of letting students bring up “a controversial subject” in class. She recommended “letting your students talk shit,” saying that it is:

³⁴ Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford have outlined some characteristics of successful collaborative writing assignments, but do not offer specific pedagogical advice for such projects, preferring not to “risk premature closure” in their study on the topic (123).

the best way to get them talking. I think it's great when you leave a class and you're pissed off, or you leave a class and you're like, 'I want to do something,' you know. Or, have [students] write or research controversial subjects, like don't fear controversy, it's the worst thing you can do for your students is to let them be passive and let them be afraid of confrontation and controversial subjects. And make them challenge the authority they see in their lives, because that's what activism really is.

'Making students challenge authority' can seem difficult or forced, but perhaps not as much when it is considered in terms of critical thinking and asking students to inquire beyond the surface of issues or texts. Allowing students to voice a variety of perspectives in a constructive manner within the classroom can aid in this process. In fact, John recommended that teachers make it explicit to students that they are trying to empower them to write about their world and change it, and to do this students need to have a (hopefully informed and nuanced) perspective of their own, which debate could help to formulate. It would perhaps make sense for instructors to position this as a goal especially in a course involved with public writing that allows room for students to express and debate their views.

The participants' stories have shown that writing teachers can also work to draw connections between coursework and activist work on campus in order to discuss the considerations and persuasive tactics relevant to specific rhetorical situations. This would also help to show students that school life and extracurricular life can value each other and overlap in significant ways. Andrew, the graduate student who has been involved in School of the Americas protests, said that because "the basis of any kind of activism or political involvement is noticing discrepancy in the world and in yourself, and that motivates you to change, [for teachers] the most fundamental thing to do is to pose questions that make everyday life a little bit more problematic [for students]." Andrew said that teachers should start "with something that has to do with the students," and recommended looking at issues that are likely to be personally meaningful to them, such as college funding or models of education, and, I would add, local or campus issues. This, he believed, would help students interrogate their present situations and better understand—and perhaps become more interested in—how certain issues may directly affect them. In addition, Martin, who works on the living wage campaign and participates in online activism, also teaches writing classes as a graduate student in English. He too recommended that teachers tie their classes into student life. Martin said, "there's tremendous

things going on on campus, and there's incredible uncapped potential for students who would love to join organizations on campus," so he tries to let students know about such opportunities and advised other instructors to do the same. For example, he said that he lets students know about various campus film screenings, so that they "could go and see films about an important social topic." In some ways, his ideas also go along with advice Liz gave to instructors, as discussed earlier, about inviting student groups to speak in classes. This, she believed, would allow students to realize that if, on campus, their peers are taking part in significant work surrounding social and political issues, they could do the same. Of course, instructors would need to make it clear why such a presentation is relevant to course material. They would also probably want to discuss it and/or the group's work in terms of rhetoric, and try to contextualize and tie any such issues or work into their wider (perhaps global) implications or manifestations as much as possible.

The experiences of the student activists I interviewed also point to the necessity for teachers to be willing to support students both in and out of class. Kate, the student who began the language exchange between Miami students and Spanish-speaking immigrants in surrounding towns, said that the civic engagement initiatives of students need more support from faculty. Such support includes "providing resources for students, even just articles that they can read about what they're interested in to help them start their engagement more, or making more calls to administrators saying 'ok, people are interested [in civic engagement work], but they have to have the resources to start these projects or to go out in their communities and be engaged'" (Kate Interview). This year, Kate said, there was a 30% cutback on funding student groups requested, and that perhaps it would help if more supportive faculty were willing to argue that the work students want to accomplish is valuable and deserves funding. Although Kate may be overestimating the power of faculty to help groups secure funding, it could nevertheless be helpful for student activist groups to know they have strong faculty support.

In addition, students I have interviewed have named certain teachers as important sponsors of their activist literacy because of what they learned in working with them inside the classroom. They have also pointed out how that sponsorship can extend beyond one class. For instance, Liz liked the way her first-year writing teacher taught, as discussed earlier, and she said that she still keeps in touch with him; his support of the activist work she takes part in is meaningful to her. Other participants have also discussed the importance of faculty support for

the work they take on outside of the classroom. This points to perhaps one way that composition instructors can begin to fill the role of the “public intellectual” that scholars such as Peter Mortensen, Ellen Cushman, Paula Mathieu, and Christian Weisser have theorized. In this vein, Martin, when discussing advice for teachers, said that they share the responsibilities that students have for thinking about how they are “participating in potentially a democratic structure, or at least something that can make a difference in their own lives and the immediate environment around them, and of course to think globally as well, as part of that...so we should be talking to [students] as equals when it comes to those responsibilities.” Such support for students can perhaps range from simple encouragement and letting students know that they are ‘on the right track,’ as Liz has requested, to assisting students with writing projects and taking an active role in their campaigns or simply showing up at their activist events. For instance, the students in John’s living wage campaign group value the faculty endorsements they have received on their website, as it works to support their ethos, and they value faculty attendance at their events. Supporting student groups can perhaps require some risk for faculty members (and even for community members they may try to work with, both of which Mathieu has pointed out), though overall faculty who ‘practice what they preach’ will probably improve their ethos with students while engaging in and supporting students in democratic forms of participation.

Because issues of rhetorical appeals and audience, technological literacy, delivery and circulation, classroom practices, and instructor support are so integral for student activists and public writing, focusing pedagogically on them would help to align the work students are involved in outside of the classroom with work they are asked to complete inside it, thus helping to bridge the gap that many of student activists see as existing between academia and activism. That is, many students, like Emma, Liz, and John, see a gap between their activist and academic work, one that often leaves them feeling stuck between or juggling two worlds. Similarly, Nancy Welch discusses the same gap that she sees between “activism school and the academy” (72). In her opinion, writing teachers need to practice and teach students the “art of practical discourse,” or “rhetoric as a practical art” (72). She advocates that instead of only teaching “rhetoric from above,” teachers should demonstrate to students how ordinary people have historically used writing and persuasion to insert their voices in public discourse and to create, and even succeed in, social movements for change (99). The implications I have just discussed, if considered fully by composition instructors, can perhaps help to ensure that students understand this and can thus

build their activist literacy. If composition is a site in which instructors are working to educate students for their roles as active citizens, writing teachers should be working to narrow the gap between academia and activism.

Implications for Future Research

In addition to considerations for writing instructors, my work also points to some implications regarding future research focused on student activists and their literacy practices. The interviews I've conducted with student activists and analyzed here are clearly not definitive or all encompassing. Rather, they reveal the need for more research with student activists, their literacy practices, and their rhetorical situations. As I have said earlier, my subject pool was somewhat small (ten participants), was not very diverse, and was conducted at a rural midwestern four-year university. Though this research provides implications for instructors in similar contexts, more research needs to be conducted in order to provide information about activist literacies in other contexts. This research needs to be carried out, for example, in different settings, such as in city universities, two-year colleges, private universities, and in other specific areas of the country. More research also needs to be conducted with larger and more diverse populations of students in terms of race, age, gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality. Expanding what have been limitations in this study in future research has the potential to reveal much more about the work and literacy practices all types of student activists are engaging in, from various perspectives and in a variety of places and spaces.

In addition, more long-term ethnographic research should be conducted with specific student activists or student activist groups in order to better understand the day-to-day work they are involved in, the literacy practices such work requires, and students' composition processes in creating activist texts. This would provide a more in depth and holistic account of the aspects I just listed. Such work could also shed light on common problems student activists may face in their ongoing work. Such problems may include potential lack of access to materials or resources (perhaps ranging from funding to knowledgeable group members whose areas of expertise are useful or necessary to them, as I pointed out in the case study of John). They may also include issues of negative representation activists or groups have to contend with, perhaps from other student groups, the administration, or other students. Problems may also arise

through collaborative tensions or other obstacles or setbacks they may commonly face, which would become clearer through long-term study. Along the same lines, more long-term ethnographic research could also reveal the progress student activists and their groups may be making, and, perhaps more importantly, allow us to better understand how they may judge their own successes and failures. Finally, such ethnographic work would also allow researchers to more fully embrace activist research methodologies, because ethnographic studies allow the researcher more time, a larger role, and more reciprocity with participants. In such a position, researchers can employ more activist ethnographic methods, such as those Ellen Cushman advocates, to ensure reciprocity, respect, and common purposes between the researcher and participants.

Finally, my initial work reveals that it could be helpful for more ethnographic research to be conducted with teachers who consider their pedagogies to be critical or activist, and/or invested in public writing, work similar to that David Seitz and Russel Durst have done. Such research has the potential to reveal more about the coursework, assignments, instructor ethos and positioning within the class, classroom practices, student attitudes toward the course, and texts that may be created (for public audiences) within it. By studying the experiences of activist students (and critical teachers) in critical classrooms, we may gain a better sense of what pedagogical practices can best assist student activists in meeting their own goals. When we become more aware of whether or not classroom practices and pedagogies are aligned with public writing work needed and already being accomplished, we can better prepare students for their roles as active citizens.

APPENDIX

General Interview Questions for Research Study

1. What kinds of work have you done for activist purposes and/or for the organization(s) to which you belong? Do they have any online presence (facebook, etc)?
2. How do you define activism and what kinds of skills and/or knowledge do you think are required for activist work?
3. What skills that you have do you find to be most useful in your work? Are there skills that you do not have that would often help you to do work that you cannot now do, or that would help you to do your current work better?
4. Where/how did you develop the skills that you find to be most useful in your work? Where/how might you best develop new necessary skills?
5. What learning experiences in your past (in and/or out of school) have been useful to the activist work that you are participating in today? How exactly have these past experiences been useful?
6. How have these past experiences helped you with your activist goals? What are these goals?
7. What kinds of problems, or gaps in your knowledge or capabilities, have you run into when trying to participate in activist work?
8. What do you wish that you had learned more about or had more experience with in the past in order to help you overcome such problems and/or to better succeed in your goals? Would more instruction in digital technologies or another specific area have helped you today? How so?
9. What has been your past experience with computer technology or digital media, in school or out of school?
10. How does the internet figure into your activist work, or how do you use it in that work?
11. Have you ever produced a print or digital text in support of your activist goals? (a film, blog, website, a document, a flyer, etc). If so, why did you choose that particular medium?
12. How do you think your college career, thus far, could have been improved to help you accomplish the composing work you do (or would like to do) outside of the classroom?
13. What advice would you give to writing teachers who want to help students succeed in their activist goals or goals for social participation?
14. Has your family influenced, encouraged, or discouraged your activist work at all? Has anyone in particular been a role model for you in your activist work?
15. How has your own identity/cultural background (race, family, class, etc) influenced your activist work?

Interview Questions about a Particular Text Participants Showed

1. Can you please explain what you are showing me?
2. What was the original purpose of this project?
3. What was the writing/producing process like when you created this project? Or, how did you come up with the idea, where did it stem from, did you collaborate with others, where and how did you work on the project, how long did it take?
4. How did you choose the format that your project would take and why? (i.e., why a short film, specifically?)
5. How did you choose the way the project would be presented, and why? (i.e., why published on YouTube?)
6. If published on the internet, what specific concerns, if any, did you have about publishing this project in a public space?
7. Have you received any specific training in making such a text, or in using the specific technology to create it?
8. Who did you consider your audience to be when creating this project? How did this affect any decisions you made? (i.e., do you believe that any specific elements of the project speak specifically or directly to this audience?)
9. How did you decide on what images and text to use? Was this an important decision or not?
10. If your project contains multiple modalities (audio, visual, and textual elements), how do you envision each of these elements working together to create meaning? Have you considered this before, or while creating the project? How so?
11. What do you consider to be the best, or most effective, aspect of this project in relation to your goals for it?
12. What do you consider to be the least effective aspect of this project in relation to your goals for it? How could this have been changed?

WORKS CITED

- “About Indymedia.” *Independent Media Center*. 16 May 2009.
< <http://www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml>>.
- Abrams, Stephanie. “A History of Feminist Activism at Miami University, Oxford Campus, 1969-1993.” May 1993. Miami University Library. 19 May 2009.
< <http://www.lib.muohio.edu/epub/abrams/index.html>>.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.
- Alexander, Jonathan. *Digital Youth: Emerging Literacies on the World Wide Web*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2006.
- Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals*. New York, NY: Random House, 1971.
- Allen, Patricia and Martin Kovach. “The Capitalist Composition of Organic: The Potential of Markets in Fulfilling the Promise of Organic Agriculture.” *Agriculture and Human Values* 17.3 (2000): 221-232.
- Anderson, Alonzo B., William B. Teale, and Elette Estrada. “Low-Income Children’s Preschool Literacy Experiences: Some Naturalistic Observations.” *The Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition* 2.3 (1980): 59-65.
- Bennet, W. Lance. “New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism.” *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*. Ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. 17-38.
- Berlin, James. *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1996.
- Bizzell, Patricia. “Paulo Freire and What Education Can Do.” *Journal of Advanced Composition* 17.3 (1997): 319-322.
- Blackburn, Mollie. “Exploring Literacy Performances and Power Dynamics at The Loft: Queer Youth Reading the World and the Word.” *Research in the Teaching of English* 37 (May 2003): 467-490.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.
- Boardman, Kathleen and Ritchie, Joy. “Feminism in Composition: Inclusion, Metonymy, and Disruption.” *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Victor Villanueva. IL: NCTE, 2003. 587-610.

- Bok, Derek. *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- “Campus Progress.” Center for American Progress. 19 May 2009.
< <http://www.campusprogress.org/>>.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 1984. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.
- “Chicago Independent Media Center.” Independent Media Center. 19 May 2009.
<<http://chicago.indymedia.org/>>.
- Conference on College Composition and Communication. “CCCC Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments.” Feb. 2004. 16 May 2009 <<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/123773.htm>>.
- Couzin, Gradiva and Jennifer Grappone. *Search Engine Optimization: An Hour a Day*. Indianapolis, IN: Wiley, 2006.
- Cushman, Ellen. “The Public Intellectual, Service Learning, and Activist Research.” *College English* 61.3 (1999): 328-336.
- . “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change.” *College Composition and Communication* 47.1 (1996): 7-28.
- . *The Struggle and the Tools: Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner City Community*. NY: State University of New York Press, 1998.
- Crowley, Sharon and Debra Hawhee. *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*. 4th ed. New York: Pearson Education, 2009.
- Dean, Michael W. and Alan Lastufka. *YouTube: An Insider's Guide to Climbing the Charts*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media, 2008.
- DeVoss, Dànielle Nicole and James Porter. “Why Napster Matters to Writing: Filesharing as a New Ethic of Digital Delivery.” *Computers and Composition* 23 (2006): 178-210.
- DeVoss, Dànielle Nicole and Jim Ridolfo. “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery.” *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 13.2 (2009). 19 May 2009
<http://www.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo_devoss/references.html>.

- Dey, Eric L. "Themes Identified in the Miami University Climate Study: An Executive Summary." 2003. Miami University. 19 May 2009
<<http://www.ucm.muohio.edu/provost/reports/campusclimate.pdf>>.
- Dimitroff, Alexandra and Jin Zhang. "The Impact of Webpage Content Characteristics on Webpage Visibility in Search Engine Results (Part I)." *Information Processing and Management* 41.3 (2005): 665-690.
- "Diversity Update 2006—Student Edition." Dec. 2006. Miami University. 19 May 2009
<http://www.miami.muohio.edu/documents_and_policies/diversity_facts/pdfs/Diversity_Update_2006_Student.pdf>.
- Durst, Russel K. *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999.
- Eagleton, Mary. "Who's Who and Where's Where: Constructing Feminist Literary Studies." *Feminist Review* 53 (1996): 1-23.
- Ede, Lisa and Andrea Lunsford. *Singular Text/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992.
- Edwards, Andres R. *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift*. BC, Canada: New Society, 2005.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York, NY: Holt, 2001.
- Fernheimer, Janis and Tom Nelson. "Bridging the Composition Divide: Blog Pedagogy and the Potential for Agonistic Classrooms." *Currents in Electronic Literacy* 9 (2005). 19 May 2009 <<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/currents/fall05/fernheimernelson.html>>
- Fontana, Andrea and James H. Frey. "The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 3rd ed. CA: Sage, 2005. 695-727.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 20th anniversary ed. Trans. Myra Ramos. NY: Continuum, 1993.
- Gee, James Paul. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1996.
- Goldblatt, Eli, Mark Lyons, and Manuel Portillo. "Story to Action: A Conversation about Literacy and Organizing." *Community Literacy Journal* 2.2 (2008): 45-66.

- Gonçalves, Zan Meyer. *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005.
- Gould, Eric. *The University in a Corporate Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Grabill, Jeffrey T. and W. Michele Simmons. "Toward a Civic Rhetoric for Technologically and Scientifically Complex Places: Invention, Performance, and Participation." *College Composition and Communication* 58.3 (2007): 419-448.
- Grabill, Jeffrey T. "On Divides and Interfaces: Access, Class, and Computers." *Computers and Composition* 20.4 (2003): 455-472.
- . *Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007.
- Graff, Harvey. *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Hawisher, Gail E. and Cynthia L. Selfe. *Literate Lives in the Information Age: Narratives of Literacy from the United States*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. "Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-Shifting Oral and Literate Traditions." *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Ellen Cushman et al. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 443-466.
- . *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Horton, Myles. *The Myles Horton Reader: Education for Social Change*. Ed. Dale Jacobs. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003.
- Jacobs, Dale and Laura R. Micciche, ed. *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2003.
- Jarratt, Susan C. "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict." *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Gesa E. Kirsch et al. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 263-280.
- Kates, Susan. *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001.

- Kerr, Tom. "The Feeling of What Happens in Departments of English." *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies*. Ed. Dale Jacobs and Laura R. Micciche. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2003. 23-32.
- Lehr, Audrey. "Old Miami, New Miami: Reconsidering the Miami University Student Community." Unpublished paper, 2009.
- Lenard, Thomas M. and Randolph J. May, eds. *Net Neutrality or Net Neutering: Should Broadband Internet Services be Regulated?* New York, NY: Springer Science and Business Media, 2006.
- Lowe, Charles and Terra Williams. "Moving to the Public: Weblogs in the Writing Classroom." *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*. Ed. Laura J. Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff, and Jessica Reyman. June 2004. 19 May 2009
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/visual_blogs.html>.
- Marcus, George E. *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.
- Mathieu, Paula. *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2005.
- McComisky, Bruce. *Teaching Composition as a Social Process*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000.
- Michael, Alex and Ben Salter. *Marketing Through Search Optimization: How to be Found on the Web*. Burlington, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003.
- Moon, Gretchen Flesher. "The Pathos of *Pathos*: The Treatment of Emotion in Contemporary Composition Textbooks." *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies*. Ed. Dale Jacobs and Laura R. Micciche. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2003. 33-42.
- Moran, Charles. "Access: The A-Word in Technology Studies." *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies*. Ed. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999. 205-220.
- Mortensen, Peter. "Going Public." *College Composition and Communication*. 50.2 (Dec. 1998): 182-205.
- Murugesan, San. "Understanding Web 2.0." *IT Professional* 9.4 (2007): 34-41.
- New London Group. *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. Ed. Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis. New York: Routledge, 2000.

- “Noam Chomsky.” 1991. Major Twentieth Century Writers. 19 May 2009
<<http://www.chomsky.info/bios/1991----.htm>>.
- Odell, Lee, Dixie Goswami, and Anne Herrington. “The Discourse-Based Interview: A Procedure for Exploring the Tacit Knowledge of Writers in Nonacademic Settings.” *Research on Writing: Principles and Methods*. Ed. Peter Mosenthal et al. New York: Longman, 1983. 221-236.
- Pandey, Iswari P. “Literate Lives Across the Digital Divide.” *Computers and Composition* 23 (2006): 246-257.
- Peña, Jon M. “The Benefits and Risks of Mandating Network Neutrality, and the Quest for a Balanced Policy.” *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007): 644-688.
<<http://www.ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/154/90>>.
- Porter, James E. “Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric and Human-Computer Interaction.” *Genre* 27 (2008).
- Princeton Review. *The Best 368 Colleges*. 2009. Princeton University.
<<http://www.princetonreview.com/MiamiUniversity.aspx>>.
- Prior, Paul and Jody Shipka. “Chronotopic Lamination: Tracing the Contours of Literate Activity.” *Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives*. Ed. Charles Bazerman and David R. Russell. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse, 2002.
- “Quick Facts.” 2009. Miami University. 19 May 2009
<<http://www.miami.muohio.edu/>>.
- Sanders, Jo. “Gender and Technology: What the Research Tells Us.” *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Education*. Ed. Christine Skelton, Becky Francis, and Lisa Smulyan. CA: Sage Publications, 2006. 307-322.
- “School of the Americas Watch.” 19 May 2009 <<http://www.soaw.org/>>.
- Seitz, David. *Who Can Afford Critical Consciousness? Practicing a Pedagogy of Humility*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2004.
- Selber, Stuart. *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004.
- Selge, Cynthia L. *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.
- Shor, Ira. *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

- Smith, Jackie et al. "From Protest to Agenda Building: Description Bias in Media Coverage of Protest Events in Washington, DC." *Social Forces* 79.4 (2001): 1397-1423.
- Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York, NY: Viking Press, 1939.
- Street, Brian. "The Meanings of Literacy." *Literacy: An International Handbook*. Ed. Brian Street, Richard L. Venezky, and Daniel A. Wagner. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999. 34-40.
- . "The New Literacy Studies." *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Ellen Cushman et al. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 430-442.
- Thurrow, Shari. *Search Engine Visibility*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2008.
- Verbick, Tabatha. "Women, Technology, and Gender Bias." *Journal of Computing Sciences in Colleges* 17.3 (2002): 240-250.
- Washburn, Jennifer. *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006.
- Weisser, Christian R. *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.
- Welch, Nancy. *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2008.
- "Western Program." 2009. Miami University. 19 May 2009
<<http://www.cas.muohio.edu/western/>>.
- WIDE Research Center Collective. "Why Teach Digital Writing?" *Kairos* 10.1 (2005). 19 May 2009
<<http://english.ttu.edu/Kairos/10.1/coverweb/wide/index.html>>.
- Wysocki, Anne, et al. *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2004.
- Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key." *College Composition and Communication* 56.2 (2004): 297-328.