

WPA Conference, July 10-13, 2008, Denver Colorado

July 11, 2008, 2:45-4:00

Session D1, Mt. Columbia Room

Roundtable:

**How can we better document, preserve,
protect, and share our learning?**

Available for reading and responding

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<http://comppile.org/comment>

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Initial Proposal for Roundtable:

The question in our title (from the conference CFP) poses problems that deserve innovative solutions. We propose a roundtable session that will depend on active audience participation to explore ways we can more effectively use currently available but underused technology tools to address this problem.

At least until the beginning of this century, the answers to the question in our title assumed a conventional, seemingly "natural" process for producing, distributing, consuming, using, and storing "our learning." In part because of long-established traditions of research and scholarship, and in part because our field / discipline was (is) struggling to earn respect in the "academy" and to earn the associated benefits that come with that respect, we have done what was necessary to fit into the existing, accepted scholarly infrastructure: create scholarly journals, sponsor professional conferences, attempt to assemble a comprehensive bibliography, forge alliances with publishers. To support that infrastructure, we developed degree programs to prepare professionals to produce "our learning." These programs reinforced the dominant, traditional response to the question in our title: conduct "research" and publish the right things in the right places. And do more of it.

The approach seems to have worked, if the primary measure of success depends on how well we have managed to fulfill traditional expectations for an academic field/discipline. However, because of the kinds of work we do—as WPAs, as WAC coordinators, as Writing Center administrators, and as "regular" writing studies faculty—"our learning" is more often different from conventional expectations, and it is expanding in ways and at a rate that our infrastructure can not accommodate. We are not effectively documenting, preserving, protecting, or sharing "our learning."

As an emerging discipline/academic field of study, we have a unique opportunity for productive change without abandoning the core principles and values that make the question in our title worth asking. We have access to new tools, the means to develop innovative, expanded, infrastructures. Perhaps more important, we have the opportunity to learn more about and enact new perspectives and attitudes that promise to expand our understandings of knowledge production, circulation, and consumption (for example, consider ways some of our colleagues are describing various aspects of culture: "participatory," "remix/rewrite," "digital," etc.; or consider the exponential growth of the "open-source" movement).

Roundtable participants will introduce several available resources (including The Research Exchange , CompPile , CompFAQs , WAC Clearinghouse), explore how and why these tools are currently underused, and invite the audience to explore ways to promote more effective uses of these tools to "better document, preserve, protect, and share our learning." Our goal for this session is to begin to identify and make visible in a systematic way the various challenges preventing "change," and to explore possible solutions.

Prepared statements from roundtable participants will be limited to a total of 30 minutes, leaving us 60 minutes for discussion with audience members. Our goal for this session is to begin to identify and make visible in a systematic way the various challenges preventing "change," and to explore possible solutions. We will publish our prepared statements online, before the conference, and we will have several recorders publishing the discussion online during the interactive portion of our session. In other words, we will attempt to model at least one of the ways that we can answer the central question of this session.

A Debate over the Preservation and Accessibility of Scholarship in Composition Studies and Writing Program Administration

Rich Haswell
WPA Conference
Denver, July, 2008

An overload of information, that is, anything much beyond what is truly needed, leads to information blackout. It does not enrich, but impoverishes.

Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (1977)

If we are to take ourselves seriously as an intellectual field—and deserve the respect of those in other fields—then lore must give way to databases!

David R. Russell, WPA-L, 7/30/2002

Resolved

That an ongoing, exhaustive record of scholarship, now made possible by technology, runs counter to the interests and well-being of writing programs and their administration.

	Affirmative	Negative
1.	The local regulations that writing teachers and writing program apply do not need past knowledge to function.	A writing program needs past knowledge since it operates by a constant improvement of regulations so that their application will have better effect, and both the improvement and effect can only be understood through knowledge of the past.
2.	Teachers and administrators don't need knowledge of the past; they need recommendations for action provided through policy statement, textbooks, and other summaries, not a mountain of scholarship.	Teachers and administrators need to appraise the mountain—all the available history and all the available facts—and do so themselves in order to keep from being manipulated by interests other than their own, including the interests of the people who write policy statements, textbooks, and summaries.
3.	Teachers and administrators do not have time to read and apply all the available history and all the available facts; indeed the more of it is available, the less the task is feasible.	The task depends on the kind of scholarship that is available. Teachers and administrators do have the time to read and apply all the scholarly knowledge if summaries, synopses, keywording, and reviews of the research and scholarship are made available in pace with the full record of scholarship now deliverable by technology.
4.	The full record of scholarship can now be delivered by technology, true, but who is	Technology now also provides ways for large groups of people to interconnect, so that the

	going to locate and enter it into the delivery systems? The job of teaching or administering composition does not afford people the time to do that.	task of locating and entering the record can be divided up to the point that one individual's contribution, even a busy teacher's, even a busier WPA's, is doable.
5.	But why should a WPA or a teacher do it? Scholarship in composition does not progress as does research in science; rather it circles back through old emphases, perspectives, and trends. An exhaustive record of the scholarship of the past would contain huge amounts of redundant information.	Scholarship in composition is full of redundancies in part because a full record of it has never been readily accessible. A full and easily consulted record of the past work would help keep teachers, WPAs, and scholars (not that the three are mutually exclusive) from duplicating what has already been done.
6.	Back to the "full record," I see. But why should "record" be a given? The mode of knowledge creation, elaboration, and dissemination most appropriate to composition is lore. Lore is a mode that does not need formal keeping of records for its viability, much less an exhaustive keeping of records.	Lore may be the most common mode of knowledge in the daily enterprise of composition programs but that does not mean it is flawless or can't be bettered. Informal exchange of knowledge—lore—is subject to distortion, distortion that can be critiqued by the past record of formal knowledge. Thus lore grows.
7.	What is the nature of that growth? Formal or informal, new knowledge maintains older knowledge that is relevant and discards old knowledge that is not relevant. A full record would just hinder the natural growth of knowledge.	Time and again in other disciplines, advances in knowledge have been prompted with a return to neglected scholarship. Why not also in composition? To neglect a contribution to the field is one thing; to discard it—block ways back to it—is another.
8.	Yet so much of what has been published in composition is local and situational—that is, designed for a short shelf life. Why preserve it?	Preserve it so it can be used for comparison. The local and the situational are defined as such by comparison with other locales and situations. Out of the comparison are born the local regulations that form a course or a program.

Opportunities of Open Access Scholarship: is the Field of Composition Ready?
Janis Haswell – Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Are literary studies and composition studies distinct in how they preserve and disseminate knowledge in the field?

Think of what is “preserved” on the literature side: published texts, typescripts of drafts, letters from or to famous authors. Hundreds of special collections and archives house such items. As a literary scholar, I’ve worked with archival materials in Harvard, Austin, Tulsa, and Princeton, and marvel at the steps taken to preserve texts and to control distribution, since the value of each single piece of paper stems from its one-of-a-kind status. You need permission from the copyright holder; you need identification from the archive; you cannot bring items into the reading room, so pencils and yellow paper are provided. Laptops are permitted but searched; and you are searched both going in and coming out. You may request the librarians to bring up only a certain number of boxes (usually 5) at a time, and take only one file from a box at a time to your worktable. Your request for materials is made out in triplicate, and a record is kept so that any disruption in the materials can be traced to individual users. Xerox copies belong to the collection and must be surrendered at the library’s request. Scanning originals is, in my experience, not allowed. Trips to the lavatory are duly noted. Precious, invaluable texts.

Does the composition profession have the same interest in first preserving texts, mainly primary but also secondary, and then disseminating them? Obviously so, but our efforts have been haphazard at best, until very recently. Paradoxically, the best way, I believe, to preserve and disseminate publications and research data in composition is through the polar opposite of archival preservation: that is, through open access scholarship for texts produced by writing students and writing teachers – no less valuable than literary collections. Open access means free and unrestricted access to scholarly research and publications, a growing movement recently legitimized by universities like Cal Tech, the UC campuses, Stanford, MIT, and Harvard, where this past February, Faculty of Arts and Sciences adopted a policy that requires faculty members to allow the university to make their scholarly articles available free online.

Increasingly, scholars and legislators are being pressured to make available data resulting from public grants. This year Congress approved the revised Labor Health and Human Services (LHHS) appropriations bill including a directive for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) requiring investigators to deposit their final papers in PubMed Central. Papers will then be available within a year after publication.

On the literature side, there has been little movement toward open access. There are few open-access journals, with fulltexts and bibliographies locked up in the MLA Bibliography, JSTOR, Project MUSE, Academic Search Premier, and so on. I should note that this trend may change soon, since more and more literary texts are becoming digitalized (via Amazon’s Kindle, etc). But on the literature side there still lingers that same mentality of archives – deliberate control and limiting of access. Traditionalists in our English departments avoid Open Access scholarship because of concerns about prestige or promotion / tenure. But the accessibility of knowledge doesn’t diminish its value, in this case.

Wouldn’t it be advantageous for the composition profession to recognize and exploit the potential of Open Access? Think of the benefits: it can make dispersal of publications nearly instantaneous – one of the reasons why the scientific community has been so involved in the Open Access initiative. Open Access makes equal access a reality for all students and professors, not just those connected with libraries wealthy enough to subscribe to increasingly expensive print journals. Open Access often leaves

the copyright in the hands of the author, not the publisher. And finally, Open Access creates an opportunity for innovative classroom research for our graduate students and for ourselves.

Perhaps the first step in composition, in a conscious and strategic approach to the question of how to preserve and disseminate knowledge, is to realize the value of the texts we ask students to produce as well as the value of our own research and publications.

The Directory of Open Access Repositories: <<http://www.openoar.org/>>

The URL for the Open Access Directory is <http://oad.simmons.edu> <<http://oad.simmons.edu/>> .

OA Repositories in North America:

<<http://www.openoar.org/countrylist.php?cContinent=North%20America>>

Facts about Open Access: A Study of the Financial and Non-financial Effects of Alternative Business Models for Scholarly Journals – Sponsored by the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and HighWire Press/Stanford University. Additional data contributed by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Full report available in pdf format at <http://www.alpsp.org/publications/pub11.htm>

See more information at <<http://critical.tamucc.edu/wiki/OpenAccessGroup/>> and see Denise Landry Hyde and Sarah Sutton: “Open Access, Scholarly Communication, and the Millennials.” *Journal of Teaching Writing* 23.3 (2007): 55-63.

How can we better document, preserve, protect, and share our learning?

Mike Palmquist
Colorado State University

The short answer – or, more accurately, MY short answer – to this question is to modify our current approaches to scholarly publishing in a way that shifts the costs of production from publishers (both commercial and university presses) to the programs that generate scholarly work.

The presses that publish the majority of work in our field – NCTE, Utah State University Press, Southern Illinois University Press, Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, and SAGE, to name only a few – are caught between their desire to produce leading scholarly work and their need to generate income sufficient to meet their operating and publishing expenses. It's a difficult situation, one in which high quality manuscripts are often rejected based not on their scholarly merit but on reasonable estimates of the likelihood that enough readers will purchase a book to cover the costs of producing it.

Similarly, the print journals in our field routinely limit their page lengths to stay within their budget, even when it means rejecting articles that are worthy of publication. On top of this, the editors of many smaller print journals spend more time maintaining subscriber lists and working with printers than soliciting articles and working with authors to enhance the quality of their work.

My short answer is to take what's best about our current scholarly publication system – peer review of proposals and manuscripts, editorial leadership from established scholars, and so on – and use it as the basis for an open access publication system that takes advantage of online distribution. This model is already proven, through scholarly ventures such as Kairos and the WAC Clearinghouse, but it will take time to expand it so that it encompasses the field as a whole.

I should note before I go on that I have no interest in putting our current scholarly presses or print journals out of business. Nor do I want to see leaders such as Michael Spooner, the director of Utah State University Press, fired in favor of cheap labor outsourced from the English department. To the contrary, I think a key element of the transformation of our scholarly publishing system is preserving the livelihoods of people who have long played a leading role in supporting and disseminating our scholarship.

But how do we do it if we can't sell books? The core of my approach is what I've called a scholarly publishing collaborative. Those of us familiar with scholarly publishing know that much of the work that goes into publishing a book or article is already done by established scholars – the editors of journals and book series and the reviewers who provide them with their advice about whether a particular book or article should be published. The additional work that is currently added by the scholarly presses and print journals includes copy editing, design, production, distribution, and marketing. I am convinced that much of this work can be accomplished by people in our field as well. The key problem is finding the funding to pay for the work currently done by the scholarly presses and journals – or finding sufficient rewards for the people who do this work to reduce or eliminate the costs of paying them.

Imagine a situation in which copyediting is carried out by graduate students in our doctoral programs. Ideally, they'd be paid to do this and, if not, perhaps we could provide them with credit in the form of internships or practica. And, even more ideally, they'd be trained before we turned them loose on a manuscript. Now imagine a situation in which the complexities of designing and publishing work is

reduced because we have adopted standard publication designs or turned to content management systems to handle much of the work of preparing scholarly books and articles for readers. There will always be effort expended in design – if not by the editors, then certainly by the authors – if only because we want our work to be readable, effective, and distinctive. But much of the work that currently goes into publishing and distributing print books and articles can be reduced by relying on electronic tools. Finally, imagine the uses of tools such as electronic mailing lists, RSS feeds, and book reviews to announce the availability of new work in the field. Oh, wait, we already have those.

For a number of years, I've been involved in a project that has forced me to confront the problems with scholarly publishing. I've lived through the objections of Luddites such as the chair of my department, who blithely told me that the book I was holding in my hand was a "book" while the PDF version available on the Web was not – as if the essence of a book were the pulp, ink, and glue that made up its physical form and not the words, ideas, and arguments of its author. I've lived through the foolishness of senior scholars, typically acting in their roles as the arbiters of tenure and promotion for younger colleagues, who argued that anything published "online" was suspect (an attitude that is changing only recently – as they retire and as mainstream journals go online). And I've lived through the attempts – mostly successful – of mainstream publishers such as Elsevier and SAGE to charge extraordinary amount of money for database and Web access to articles published in "their" journals. As I've lived through these events, I've had the good fortune to be able to work with scholars who had a clearer vision than most, people who saw value in exploring new strategies for providing access to scholarly work. That project, the WAC Clearinghouse, had a rocky start but has since developed into a successful project. Our work has resulted in an approximation of the model I've outlined already, but it falls short in several areas. We are relying, currently, on either sweat equity from our editors or donations to fund our efforts to copy edit and develop our articles and books. And we have a long way to go before we are seen as anything remotely like a "scholarly press" – and that in spite of publishing two journals (soon three) and more than a dozen books.

More recently, I've become involved in a related project, the Research Exchange, that extends the idea of sharing our scholarly work using a similar collaborative manner. This project, which builds on Wiki and database technologies, and which links the CompPile and WAC Clearinghouse initiatives, has the potential to create a valuable resource for writers who are not yet ready to publish their work but who nonetheless wish to share it with colleagues.

Along with CompPile, the two projects I've described provide some concrete examples of how we might move toward more collaborative, "commercial" free strategies for ensuring access to our scholarly work. I welcome suggestions about how we might work toward developing more project like these and, ultimately, developing the scholarly publishing cooperatives that I believe should be the home of most scholarly work in our field. I hope that those attending this panel, as well as those who view it online, might consider how they might get involved in such ventures.

Roundtable: How can we better document, preserve, protect, and share our learning?

Who will come and what will they do if/when we build it?

Glenn Blalock | WPA 2008, July 2008

In the beginning (or post-"listserves are cool"):

- WAC Clearinghouse
- Kairos
- CompPile
- CompFAQs
- New and Recent Books @ CompPile
- CompReviews @ CompPile
- The Research Exchange
- WPA/NMA
- WPA / National Conversation on Writing (NCoW)
- Wikis, Blogs, Social Networks, Web 1.0/2.0/3.0, and more.

Consider this:

Three years ago, as the result of a conversation on WPA-L, we opened CompFAQs, a wiki environment open to all, as a way to provide research- and practice-based responses to questions that repeatedly appeared in our online forums. Though the site has grown in important ways, and colleagues continue to contribute, I can't say that contributions are straining the server in ways we might have desired.

Or this:

One year ago, during this same conference in Tempe, WPA-L was abuzz with talk of "book reviews in comp journals," a discussion that led to the creation of two new features @ CompPile: "New/Recent Books @ CompPile and CompReviews. CompPile now lists hundreds of recently published books, from over 30 publishers, with easy access to an interface that invites "reviews" of these books. And the new CompPile interface now has a "review" link for every one of the nearly 95,000 entries in CompPile. How many reviews in one year? 14.

What do these few examples have in common?

They represent the various ways our profession attempts to use new tools to enact theoretical principles we espouse in our scholarship and at our conferences: how we are all part of various kinds of communities (of knowledge and practice), of various activity systems. And how we value participation, open access, non-proprietary spaces where we can share and build our knowledge production and improve our practices. We have unprecedented means now to share, collaborate, cooperate, communicate.

But the tools listed above also represent a surprising? disappointing? lack of active participation by members of our professional community. Or to revert to a riff on a cliché: *we've built them, but who is coming, and what are they doing? Or why aren't they doing what we hoped?*

How long before more of us, a critical mass, use these tools in innovative ways?

I've puzzled over this issue for years, and I continue to be stymied by what seems to me to be an insurmountable obstacle: We are workers in a system that prevents, inhibits, discourages the kind of "work" that would help fulfill the promise / potential of these new ways of "working." Any work we contribute to these online ventures represents time and energy that "could" / "should" be invested in the production of peer-reviewed, print-based scholarly articles (but only in top-tier journals) or monographs (but only those published by respected publishers).

If we are graduate students, earning the Ph.D. or M.A. and hoping to find a first position, we fret about our *c.v.*, and especially about our "publications" and how they will be valued by search committees. If we find the first tenure-track position and expect to earn tenure, the promised land of academia, we must follow established guidelines and fulfill long-established criteria, usually not at all amenable to the kind of work we might do in the new online, open access sources now available to us. When we earn tenure, our advance through the ranks—in title and in salary—depends on similar guidelines and criteria.

How to break this cycle, or if not "break" begin to redirect it noticeably? Position and Guideline statements from professional organizations (WPA, CCCC, NCTE, for example) are necessary, but not even close to sufficient. The scholarly equivalent of "early adopters" is also necessary, because those who create, maintain, and promote these various tools and calls for change are necessary, but not sufficient. Where's the "crowd" (a la Shirky)? How many ways can we make the "crowd" possible? What might be a short list of actions that are part of an intentional and sustained plan to change the ways we engage our work in our communities of knowledge and practice?

At this stage of my career, run aground in Waco, Texas, I've decided to commit myself to CompPile and the various associated projects that complement and supplement CompPile and that attempt to fulfill the same vision or our professional potentials—or what might be more accurate, to the professional principles that inform CompPile-like work. And to me, that means more than techno-wizardry. New servers, new interfaces, new programs, new widgets, new functionalities—all of this kind of stuff is important. And I will continue to devote more than my share of time to keeping the doors open and exploring the use of the latest techno-innovation. But none of the tools I listed above will be sustained if we don't find a way to make it possible, even preferable, for more members of our profession to join in this work, and to know it will be valued and rewarded in all the various ways that matters.

If we share the vision, if we have the tools, if we have the motivation, how do we enable?

Wilhoit

WPA 2008

Roundtable: How can we better document, preserve, protect, and share our learning?

Roundtable participants will introduce several available resources (including The Research Exchange, CompPile, CompFAQs, WAC Clearinghouse), explore how and why these tools are currently underused, and invite the audience to explore ways to promote more effective uses of these tools to "better document, preserve, protect, and share our learning"

Our goal for this session is to begin to identify and make visible in a systematic way the various challenges preventing "change," and to explore possible solutions.

2008 WPA Roundtable Proposal

As the roundtable proposal and these panelists make clear, the venues available to scholars for sharing their work and the tools available for researchers to find it seem to be expanding as quickly as technology makes possible. Why, then, are these sites and tools underused? Why aren't they overwhelmed with submissions and hits? Though no account can be comprehensive, I'd like to offer 17 possibilities we might discuss.

Unfamiliarity

- Scholars and researchers simply do not know about the sites or tools. They may not even know that such resources exist.

Accessibility

- Scholars and researchers have heard about the sites or tools, but do not know how to access them. They don't know where to find them online.

Usability

- Once they find the site or locate the tool, they don't know how to use them. The site or tool is too confusing or intimidating.

Insecurity

- Scholars and researchers are simply scared of or uncomfortable with technology. If resources are not available in paper, they are unlikely to use them.

Confusion

- A rapid proliferation of sites and tools has caused confusion. Sites and tools—many sharing similar names—seem overlapping and redundant.

Volume

- There is simply too much information to sift through effectively. Even a cursory search of a topic or perusal of a site can be overwhelming.

Definition

- The purpose of a site or tool is not immediately transparent. Scholars and researchers can't determine the site's aim or purpose.

Focus

- Sites or tools may not focus on the type of work that interests particular scholars and researchers. For example, a site or tool focusing on the scholarship of discovery may not attract those interested in the scholarship of application.

Interest

- The material covered on the site simply does not interest particular scholars and researchers. How large and varied an audience can a single site serve?

Utility

- Scholars and researchers believe the sites or tools have nothing to offer them. They do not see what the site or tool has to do with their professional lives.

Tradition

- Change does not come easily in any field. Tradition ("that's not the way it's been done") is a powerful counterforce to change.

Habit

- Every scholar and researcher has established habits of practice. These habits often do not include the use of these sites or tools.

Training and Education

- Scholars and researchers may not have been trained in the use of sites and tools like these during graduate school and have not participated in professional development programs or educated themselves in their use.

Effort

- It is simply easier not to post material to a web site and not to spend time searching them. The more effort required to use them, the less they will be used.

Tenure/Promotion

- Scholars and researchers may fear that they will somehow be penalized when it comes to tenure and/or promotion decisions if they have posted material online.

Audience

- Scholars and researchers may feel that certain sites or tools were not designed or intended for them. How a site or tool defines "scholarship" or "research" will influence the audience it invokes.

Philosophical Orientation

- Some may simply reject any notion of scholarship and research as a collaborative activity—they are not interested in sharing their work in these venues.