

Rachel Gramer
Research Statement

Research Overview

As a feminist researcher, I inquire into a central question: what do people do when so much is new? In particular, I am rooted in studying how multimodal writing activity mediates and makes visible learning and identity learning—and how such practices and other mediational influences shape the stories we tell about who we are and what we (can) do. I have designed and collaborated on research projects that address and redress narratives of deficit for marginalized populations across sites; and support people in the complex activity of learning identities as makers of multimodal texts that do work in the world:

- UofL [Digital Media Academy](#) summer camp for sixth grade girls' media production and identities in relation to STEAM trajectories
- [Art as Memory](#) and [Nothing About Me Without Me](#) documentary projects about community and voice in mixed media workshops for people with developmental disabilities
- [Digital Composition Colloquium](#) 2-day workshop for contingent writing instructors experiencing a programmatic shift toward multimodal digital composition

In these and other research projects, I am committed to enacting feminist research methodologies across sites: valuing people's embodied experiences and perspectives; grounding projects in participant voices; and using research-developed evidence to speak back to cultural narratives of deficit surrounding all learners, particularly those living out multiply marginalized intersectional identities.

Research disseminated from these projects:

- *Co-edited collection, *Radiant Figures: Visual Rhetorics in Everyday Administrative Contexts*, Computers and Composition Digital Press, 2021
- Chapter, "Is Teaching Just a List? Toward Feminist-Humanistic Visual Representations of Teaching Writing," *Radiant Figures*, Computers and Composition Digital Press, 2021
- Chapter, "The Figured Worlds of Digital Mediation in Schools," *Writing for Engagement: Responsive Practice for Social Action*, Lexington Books, 2018
- *Co-authored article, "Mess, Not Mastery: Encouraging Digital Design Dispositions in Girls," *Computers and Composition Online*, 2015

Longitudinal Research

Identities and learning are vital concepts that are particularly challenging to make visible and capture in progress because they are tacitly internalized and unevenly performed in and over time. Many narratives—disciplinary, professional, cultural—about what we do see, too often focus on visible moments of deficit, contributing to entrenched notions of identity as limiting (rather than constraining and enabling) and of people as not-knowers (rather than capable learners). In the field of rhetoric and composition, we have told many stories of deficit and difficulty about new college writing teachers—their resistance to teaching writing, struggles with authority, challenges adjusting to the labors of teaching as graduate students. Unfortunately, we have far fewer stories that explicitly frame their learning and identity learning (i.e., how they learn to *be* writing teachers over time) as generative and agentic. In part, we tell such stories because they do matter to institutions, administrators, and teachers. However, we also tell them in part because we have learned to study new college writing teachers in sedimented ways (e.g., similar methods and kinds of research and interview questions). My longitudinal research project takes a storied approach to identity learning, illuminating how new college writing teachers' lifelong experiences with teaching and learning mediate their teaching of thousands of undergraduate student writers at US institutions with first-year writing requirements and English graduate programs; and how newcomers *are learning* and developing generative teaching identities over time in ways that precede and exceed the bounds of the authorized training or singular writing program pedagogies that are most often studied in new college writing teacher research.

*As a feminist researcher, writer, and mentor, I support that there is no singular patriarchal standard for authorship in the field of writing studies. I have included notes in my College tenure application on all collaborative publications, explaining the particular authorship situation for each publication.

The longitudinal study started in 2015, and has continued for seven years with final-for-now interviews conducted in 2022. My dissertation, "[Stories at Work: Restorying Narratives of New Teachers' Identity Learning in Writing Studies](#)" (2017), began the semi-structured, artifact-based narrative interview study with five graduate students who were learning new college writing teaching identities. I then continued artifact-based narrative interviews with participants as they continued to teach writing, taught courses beyond first-year writing, and accepted professional positions at other institutions. Currently, I have 35 hours of recorded and transcribed interviews, which have yielded 540 stories and 30 artifacts to study.

Disciplinary Contributions

Drawing on narrative and learning research in writing studies, education, anthropology, and psychology, I use narrative as an object and means of analysis to study what we need to learn: how people *learn how to be* college writing teachers over time. This contribution directly addresses disciplinary calls to study teacher learning and not just teaching (Estrem and Reid, *What New Writing Teachers Talk about When They Talk about Teaching*, 2012) and redresses recognized methodological challenges faced in the body of new college writing teacher research, which often studies people in their first semester of teaching, asking direct questions about writing program practices and being conducted by faculty supervisors. My project builds on narrative researcher Jean Clandinin's four-part framework of living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories (*Engaging in Narrative Inquiry*, 2013) to suggest a key structural addition: to learn to *restory* our assumptions and expectations of new writing teachers in order to re-live better versions of the stories we tell, are told, have told, are telling about "novice" instructors and how we should (and can) support them in research-informed ways. My narrative work begins a restorying process in several ways: (1) by eliciting newcomers' stories about lifelong teaching and learning, rather than assuming composition (or graduate) programs as the primary mediational influence on teaching identities; (2) by using story as a unit of analysis and value; and (3) by tracing identity learning and development through stories told over time, rather than through direct response/self-reporting in synchronous moments or during limited time-bound semester calendars.

Aligning my work with research methods in linguistics and writing studies, I have also expanded the scope of what counts as artifacts that make teaching identities and learning visible in robust ways. This contribution directly intervenes in problematic methodological underpinnings in the body of new college writing teacher research, which often studies academic compulsory genres, collecting institutionally mandated writing that is explicitly taught in graduate writing pedagogy courses (writing course syllabi, writing assignments, comments on student writing). My project instead asks participants to share stories about artifacts that they choose, that they create as teachers and as writers, without limiting them to mandated genres that reveal more about institutions and programs than they do about writing teacher learning and identity. My artifact-based interview work frames teachers as professional writers, and illuminates the complexities of teachers as makers of multimodal texts across genres for particular students as actual audiences that mediate the planning, making, and uptake of teachers' writing.

My longitudinal research has already yielded findings with methodological and pedagogical implications for writing program research and new writing teacher preparation—all of which are salient for the hundreds of newcomers entering teaching writing as a profession every year.

- New college writing teacher research follows some methodological grooves that should be informed by *writing studies approaches* to understanding people as lifelong teachers, learners, and makers whose literate identities and professional practices exceed the bounds of school.
- The questions we historically ask (about academic writing, school genres, graduate writing pedagogy courses, other authorized structures for training and support) reveal disciplinary commitments that do not align with *actual mediational influences* on new writing teachers.

- Writing teacher research and writing program administration has yet to be robustly intersected with disciplinary expertise in Professional Writing in ways that would help us teach, train, mentor, and support all *writing teachers as professional writers*.
- Artifact-based interviews about *teacher-made texts for students* is one valuable way to illuminate the understudied role of actual students in mediating teacher identities and learning.
- Our research and new writing teacher resources would be wise to expand our emphasis on support for *teaching as a multimodal activity* that happens in writing across genres, and in talking about college writing in ways that are ephemeral and seldom studied.

Research disseminated from the longitudinal research project:

- Chapter, "Putting Learning First: Challenges and Possibilities for New Writing Teacher Research," *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition TAsHips*, WAC Clearinghouse, forthcoming
- Invited talk, "Real Talk: Reframing 'Class Discussion' as Situated Talk about Writing and Rhetoric," Virginia Tech University, 2022
- Conference talk, "Supporting Talk in the Writing Classroom: A Call for Strategies that Work," Council of Writing Program Administrators' Conference, 2018
- Conference talk, "The Origins and Travels of New Writing Teacher Identities," Watson Conference, 2016
- Conference talk, "Projecting the Past into Future Practice: New Writing Teachers' Narrative Trajectories," Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2016

Future Research

Currently, I am writing a book proposal using data from my longitudinal research project to submit for open access publication to [WAC Clearinghouse](#) in the [Practices and Possibilities series](#). The book, *Stories at Work: Restorying New Writing Teachers as Learners and Composers*, will have 3 goals: (1) to describe narrative as an interdisciplinary feminist methodology for tracing situated identity learning in disciplinary sites of value; (2) to illuminate how new writing teachers' learning and identities are complexly mediated and motivated, in and over time, in ways that exceed any single course, program, institution, or student population; and (3) to articulate the value of artifact-based interviews as one effective means of framing, mentoring, and supporting new/all college writing teachers as professional writers, as makers of texts for professional purposes for students as real audiences for our work. Each goal will be accomplished in a section of the book, and each section will also feature sets of stories from new writing teachers with guided questions for self, peer, and faculty mentoring in ways that draw feminist attention not only to embodied, evolving identities, but also to structural conditions that mediate how we teach and learn.

In addition to the book project and continuing internal research projects in my role as ISU's Writing Program Director, I also plan to pursue the following projects for publication as Associate Professor:

- Co-authored chapter with PhD student on teachers' email writing as an occluded genre, for submission to an edited collection, proposal submitted May 2022
- Co-authored article with ISU faculty and graduate students on divergent uptake in the ISU Writing Program, for submission to *Comp Forum* online peer-reviewed journal
- Chapter in co-edited, co-authored collection with cross-institutional faculty in writing studies on literate activity in action in sociocultural pedagogical approaches to teaching writing
- Possible future co-edited collection with ISU faculty on feminist administration across sites in writing studies and technical communication