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An Irresistible Invitation: Enhancing Academic Publication in Rhetoric and Composition by Inviting Online Peer Commentary

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“AN IRRESISTIBLE INVITATION”:
ENHANCING ACADEMIC PUBLICATION IN RHETORIC AND
COMPOSITION BY INVITING ONLINE PEER COMMENTARY

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University

Master of Arts

Department of English
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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Sarah L. Cutler in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

“AN IRRESISTIBLE INVITATION”:
ENHANCING ACADEMIC PUBLICATION IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION
BY INVITING ONLINE PEER COMMENTARY

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Master of Art

In many ways the current publishing system in rhetoric and composition, which centers on the peer-reviewed journal, undermines core values we hold for ideal scholarly communication. These values include collaboration, dialogue, participation, and public engagement. Though the current system’s methods of preserving, distributing, and maintaining quality control of scholarly work contradict our values, technological developments have made possible alternative publishing models that could better uphold our values. Developing a preprint archive where scholars develop and share ideas before submitting them for publication in traditional peer-reviewed journals would bring our publishing process closer to our ideals.

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Introduction

In 2002 the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing published its final report in which it observed—as had many before—that pressures on libraries, scholars, and university presses had led to a crisis in scholarly publishing: too many manuscripts, too much expense, too few publications. The committee offered a number of suggestions to mitigate the problem; touching briefly on electronic alternatives to the current-traditional publishing system, they noted that while “members of the committee expressed different degrees of enthusiasm about the prospects offered by electronic journals . . . they agreed in general on the importance of the phenomenon and the need to examine it carefully, rather than simply to propose it as a panacea for a crisis that has complex causes” (180).

In spite of the committee’s clear call for a critical examination of electronic publishing options, and despite the many articles on the topic already published in physics, biology, computer science—even our sister-fields in the humanities—no comparable discussion has surfaced among scholars of rhetoric and composition.¹ We’ve written about peer review (Arrington; Berkenkotter; Fontaine; Hunter), book reviews (Mortensen; North “On Book Reviews”), and journals (Goggin; Olson and Taylor; Vandenberg), about how we create knowledge (North *Making*), but not about the publishing upheavals taking place in disciplines all around us. Our reluctance to join this conversation seems uncharacteristic: as rhetoricians and compositionists we are experts in communication and can provide a valuable critique—MLA’s requested careful examination—of electronic publishing.

Examining electronic publishing requires that we evaluate its premises. Any process of creating a text expresses the values on which that process is built. For example, the process by which the ad hoc committee created its report reveals the committee's belief in the importance of collaboration, dialogue, participation, and public engagement—values we share in rhetoric and composition. From its beginning, the committee's approach was collaborative, with eight committee members collaborating directly and many others contributing. Committee members demonstrated their commitment to widespread participation as they sought feedback from “department chairs, editors of specialized scholarly journals, younger scholars seeking tenure, and graduate students” (MLA 182). The committee claims that this dialogue “added depth and detail to [their] understanding of the issues involved, heightening [their] awareness of the complexity of this situation” (182). What's more, the committee's democratic gestures did not end with the writing phase: once printed, the report was disseminated through both *Profession* and MLA's publicly accessible website.

These collaborative, social values demonstrated in the ad hoc committee's writing and publishing process are also prominent in John Dewey's ideals for how knowledge generated by scholars ought to circulate for the good of all. While Dewey's interest was primarily in making information available to a decision-making public (rather than in experts' dialectic negotiations), his insistence that knowledge is social is relevant to any type of communication. According to Dewey, knowledge can only become such through communication: “a thing is fully known only when it is published, shared, socially accessible. Record and communication are indispensable to knowledge. Knowledge cooped up in a private consciousness is a myth, and knowledge of social phenomena is

peculiarly dependent upon dissemination” (176). In academia in particular, and especially in rhetoric and composition, communal acceptance of ideas is required to make those ideas knowledge. Stephen M. North writes that “until a claim is both written down and subsequently certified by the relevant authorities (a dissertation committee, journal referees, and the like), it simply is not ‘knowledge,’ is not ‘known’” (“Death” 200). Given these premises, we in rhetoric and composition prefer systems that foster community knowledge-making and reject those that do not.

Has our discipline institutionalized such a community approach? While we may commend the democratic values revealed in the MLA ad hoc committee’s writing process, we must also acknowledge that such a process is actually quite rare in English studies. Rather than co-authored, most articles in our field are single-authored; rather than informed by feedback from many sources, most are vetted by a peer reviewer or two; rather than publicly available, most appear in subscription-based journals with limited circulation. Despite the social values we hold for ideal scholarly discussion, our field has institutionalized a publishing system that contradicts those values.

It is time to consider other publishing models, and this examination must begin with the proposed system’s underlying values: we must evaluate any publishing system—online or otherwise—in terms of how it will either support or contradict our ideals for scholarly exchange. Since the entire purpose of rhetoric and composition is to study and improve communication, we have both important ideas about what makes good communication and a responsibility to uphold those ideals. In his chapter on electronic publishing, Todd Taylor argues that while other disciplines may be pressured by technological developments to consider electronic publishing, “the field of rhetoric and

composition has the added onus of needing to reexamine the way it values electronic scholarship in light of the pedagogies it supports and the theories of literacy for which it argues” (Taylor in Olson 198). Doing so requires that we better clarify our own goals for publishing and the structures that will best carry out those goals.

After more closely addressing some basic values of rhetoric and composition and how those values are undermined by our current publishing system, I will show that a preprint archive that supplements our traditional journals would better enact our communication values than the print system does now. By establishing a publishing program that involves scholarly discussion of publicly available electronic drafts, we will create a system that supports better scholarship with clearer writing and deeper thought, one that builds stronger communities of scholars who share specialties and converse directly with each other about ideas, and one that fosters better interactions with those who are not currently involved in our scholarly work, from students to those outside academia altogether.

Values of Rhetoric and Composition

Because communication is so important, Dewey argues that we must improve “the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public” (208). If we are to perfect the debate, discussion, and persuasion that occur within our community, we must have some standards against which to hold our conversation. What do we really value in quality communication? It would be hard to come up with a single answer for a field as diverse as ours. But I have selected four core values, emphasized in rhetorical theories and composition classrooms, that act as guiding

ideals for much of the work we do. These basic values are collaboration, dialogue, participation, and public engagement.

Collaboration

While the definition of collaboration is disputed in rhetoric and composition (ranging from co-authorship to Kenneth Bruffee's understanding of everything we do, including thinking, being collaborative), its importance is not. Numerous articles and books extol the advantages of collaboration and criticize those literary-studies-administrators who don't properly reward it. McNenny and Roen's feelings on the subject are typical: "For those of us who teach writing, the benefits of collaborative scholarship seem obvious. Coauthorship enriches the exchange of ideas within the university while encouraging an openness and a spirit of collegiality" (292).

But though we've agreed that collaboration is important, that doesn't seem to have driven us to collaborate very much. Nearly every article about collaboration in rhetoric and composition demonstrates that it does not happen often enough in our field. Reither and Vipond aptly observe: "Collaborative writing has not been implemented as much as it has been heralded in the literature" (856). Though we praise the advantages of collaboration and require it of our students, we have no institutionalized setting devoted specifically to fostering it. Rather, rhetoric and composition scholars are scattered among English and other departments across the country, connected only by quarterly publications and occasional conferences.

Dialogue

As scholars of rhetoric and composition, we value conversation: both the cooperative dialogue of people communicating and the more stringent dialectic of people

constructing reality together (G. Clark, *Dialogue* 19). We don't just want collaborators to help us prove our points, we want other voices—those who directly disagree, who suggest wholly different perspectives, who respond even only tangentially—to respond to our own and to deepen the quality of our thought.

The publication that constitutes academic conversation is meant to be just that: a conversation. Stevan Harnad reminds us that for all of academia, “reports of [scholarship’s] findings—informal and formal, unrefereed and refereed—are milestones, not gravestones” and are meant to perpetuate, not end, discussion. (in Shatz 240). Speaking for our field, Linda Flower agrees: “publishing in rhetoric and composition is an extension of [research] inquiry—not just a report of its results” (in Olson and Taylor 163). North expresses the belief of rhetoric and compositions scholars when he writes that “while all of us have opinions, some of them very strongly held, we are seldom so sure of them, or (to our credit) so certain of our individual wisdom, that we really want to have the last or only word” (“On Book Reviews” 358).

Yet while we claim to value dialogue, the methods by which we currently report on our scholarship do not support successful dialogue. Several scholars have recently noted our failure to engage each other’s arguments in more than a passing citation. Peter Mortensen observes that once books are published, reviewed, even cited, they are seldom truly engaged: “should we expect more than description when colleagues in rhetoric and composition cite one another’s new scholarship? We might, but if we do, we may be disappointed” (218). North puts book reviews on the list of publications that are too seldom responded to, having been granted no official space for dialogue (“On Book Reviews” 354). Brian Jackson and Jon Wallin’s article on what they call “back and

forthness” extends a similar critique to our composition pedagogies. Too often, they write, we teach our students to make arguments rather to argue, to listen “to the Burkean parlor talk in professional or public discourse, analyz[e] that discourse, and then writ[e] their own arguments directed to either the teacher or to Walter Ong’s fictional audience—not, generally, to the actual writers of the original arguments they respond to. In this process ‘dialogue’ or ‘conversation’ tends to be more metaphorical than actual” (6, 2).

Likewise, the back and forthness of our own articles is often pretty metaphorical. We cite each other in formal ways, and occasionally respond directly to a published article, but often the delays of print and our own scholarly interests keep us from engaging each other’s work in dialogue. As a result, our journal articles may better be described, in Jackson and Wallin’s terms, as “intersecting monologues of opinions” than dialogue.

Participation

As scholars of rhetoric and composition, we value participation. We prefer the democratic hubbub of countless voices to the sterile order of a single speaker. Joe Cain calls universal participation one of the “core principles of the Academy” (187). We believe that the scholarly discussion in our field will be better if a variety of members participate: those expert in prevailing philosophies as well as those willing to challenge them. In particular, many scholars have advocated inviting less-established members of the community to participate. For example, McNenny and Roen write that “collaboration with graduate students, as with other professionals, is an affirmation of the rich potential of our community in actively constructing a discipline that is multivoiced” (298). Our

dedication to giving voices to the voiceless is apparent in the discourses we analyze. I found, for example, from my own brief survey of the articles printed in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, that in 2008 more than a third dealt with what could be considered marginalized speakers.

Yet despite our professed commitment to participation, currently a majority of the research work in our field is conducted by a relatively small proportion of those working in rhetoric and composition. Reading, authoring, refereeing, editing—nearly all is performed by a distinct group of research professors. In contrast, most composition courses are taught by graduate students and part-time instructors, who, North has written, “are generally not enfranchised as official knowledge-makers” (*Making* 366). Though North warned in the 1980s that this structure needed to change, much has stayed the same. According to Peter Vandenberg, “to ‘work in rhetoric and composition’ means *either to publish or to teach*” (20, emphasis added). The increasing professionalization of our field has not meant just that more research is being published—it has also meant that teachers are becoming increasingly absent from the scholarly conversation (Goggin). Maureen Daly Goggin calculates that of the articles published in rhetoric and composition between 1950 and 1990, only about 6 percent were submitted by lecturers, instructors, and adjuncts (169–70). Vandenberg stresses the unfairness of this split, which elevates the work of researchers by dismissing the work of teachers, and which makes “the publishing industry in composition . . . a mechanism for the maintenance of social distances,” keeping researchers privileged and practitioners excluded (27).

Surely those who do the majority of the teaching in our field have something to contribute to our theories of teaching. Yet the traditional journal privileges a single,

highly specialized form of writing that excludes many who could add valuable perspectives to our academic conversation. The intense time and research required to contribute to peer-reviewed journals in our field makes it nearly impossible for those with heavy teaching loads or other constraints to participate. And so our scholarly discussions remain the domain of the privileged with little contribution from other experts who might also reasonably chime in were they not limited by our field's highly specialized discourse and elaborate publishing process.

Public Engagement

Our journals are directed to a highly specialized audience of fellow academics, but as scholars of rhetoric and composition we also have a special interest in benefiting the larger communities in which we live. Gideon Burton's assertion, "I don't want to be a private intellectual. Too much is real, too much at stake, in the public sphere," speaks to the obligation we share as a discipline. We hope to build democracy by helping those outside our discipline be responsible communicators. Flower describes rhetoric and composition research as having important bearing on the outside world: "standing the real world of literate practice, acknowledging the educational tradition of rhetoric and the social role of composition, we need to look at our work in the spirit of Deweyan pragmatism" (in Olson and Taylor 164–65).

Dewey himself repeatedly insists that it is essential for the research of experts to reach the general population. He writes that although some have argued that "the mass of the reading public is not interested in learning and assimilating the results of accurate investigation," nonetheless, unless the findings of scholars "are read, they cannot seriously affect the thought and action of members of the public; they remain in secluded

library alcoves, and are studied and understood only by a few intellectuals” (182–83). Even though, Dewey admits, many readers may not be clamoring to hear the latest academic discovery, if it were just made publicly available—Dewey recommends the best dissemination technology of his day, the daily newspaper—“the mere existence and accessibility of such material would have some regulative effect” (183). We would never want to dilute the quality or detail of our scholarly discussions in order to make them palatable to the mass market, but simply making available the articles we are already writing would surely have a positive impact on our communities.

Despite our hopes of effecting change, our academic discourse, which we believe can help people communicate, read, vote, govern, interact—even live—better, may not be reaching those we study, write about, and want to help. Perhaps Brian Jackson captures this problem best:

deep down in our academic souls we believe that rhetorical theory has profound practical value for the personal, professional, and public life of everyone. . . . Yet outside teaching—and let’s not underestimate the power of teaching!—we have not been very successful getting the Good News out to every creature that rhetoric can provide what Kenneth Burke called “equipment for living,” the tools of communication necessary to make good things happen. . . . There are several reasons for this, not the least of which is our investment in academic publishing, the process by which trees are killed and ink is spilled and tenure assured, and the slow wheel of rhetorical knowledge grinds on ad infinitum. (Jackson 440)

Rather than making our scholarship available to a reading public, the current scholarly publishing system has instead sequestered our works into the narrow realm of academia, where we simply remind those who have already devoted their careers to rhetoric and composition that it is important.

Values of Our Publications

Academic journals are the primary place that scholarly discussion occurs in rhetoric and composition (McNenny and Roen 295). It's common knowledge that journals are used across disciplines for sharing scholarship, but that historical accident can have significant consequences for us in rhetoric and composition since the journal is an imported form that we happen to use rather than a form intended to carry out our ideals for effective communication. Consequently, because of the means by which traditional journals reach their purposes, they sometimes clash with our values for ideal communication.

This is not to say journals were originally a poor fit for rhetoric and composition: for a century they have been the medium through which we shared our research. But as our field has grown and technologies around us have developed, traditional peer-reviewed journals have become increasingly inadequate for meeting the demands of our discipline and are approaching a day when, instead of enabling our scholarly conversation, they may instead obstruct its progress.

Sociologist Ingemar Bohlin identifies three purposes, widely noted, that publication serves for academia: it distributes, archives, and maintains quality control of scholarly work. Yet peer-reviewed journals in rhetoric and composition are in many instances failing to fulfill these functions. There are some failings in the system that are

common to all academic disciplines: prejudice, expense, unfair hierarchies, kludge organization, and limited readership. But in rhetoric and composition we face the added challenge that even when the system doesn't fail, it can undermine our values—collaboration, dialogue, participation, and public engagement. As I will discuss in the following paragraphs, the aims of journals in many ways prevent us from accomplishing our goals for communication in rhetoric and composition.

Distribution

In their distribution function academic print journals have been a huge improvement over previous technologies. As compared to lectures, personal correspondence, and books, journals can be produced relatively cheaply and quickly, can reach far more people, and can be more readily evaluated by the academic community.

However, as technologies have developed, traditional print journals have become badly outdated: compared to other current technologies' potential for reaching readers, journals are extremely limited in their distribution function. The limited readership of academic articles is proverbial. A friend of mine once told us she was trying to choose between entering a doctoral program and starting her family. Another friend said, "That's an easy choice. Think about it: if you have three children, you'll have three people who listen to you, which is three times as many people as will ever read what you write as an academic." Though we could perhaps also toss in a joke about how well children listen, the problem is clear: academic journals just don't get read by very many people. Our most widely distributed journals have a circulation around ten thousand, while the subscribers of most others may be counted in the hundreds.² The number of readers is even fewer. Mortensen's challenge of the book industry may be equally applied to our

journals. He writes that we have “more potential books. More series in which these books might be published. But more readers? And, crucially, more readers spurred to write with reference to the books they are reading, thereby weaving new interpretive strands into the field’s intellectual fabric?” (Mortensen 195). Though we continue to produce scholarship, we do not seem to have a corresponding increase in readership.

So what is keeping readers from getting to our articles? Part of it is the price. Although journals in language and literature are among the most affordable of periodicals with an average cost of \$221 per title in 2008,³ any price is inherently limiting. What’s more, there may be something fundamentally wrong with setting a price on scholarly information. Dewey warns against “the gathering and sale of subject-matter having a public import” as a serious danger to democracy (182). We cannot know, until scholarly subject matter is in the hands of the public, what an impact it may have on them.

Fees also naturally create a hierarchy that we would never choose to support. Those with access to all the journals of the discipline can, in turn, join in the scholarly conversation by reading, citing, and writing for the same journals. In such a climate, it becomes far more difficult for the less-privileged to enter the conversation.

Such circumstances have real effects. In a study of the social networks that exist among education scholars, Biao Cheng found that nearly half the published scholars in that field belonged to a single, tightly knit network. This means, he writes, that “there is a large subgroup of institutions that may be more connected to or focused on the research and conversations within the field, while other institutions (and their authors) may be contributing more tangentially” (100). If this is also true for our field (no comparable study has been conducted), then the academic conversation of our field is being carried

on by only a small proportion of those who could be contributing, while other scholars remain “isolated and disconnected actors in the author network” (Cheng 118).

The obstacle of price is now being compounded by a changing research environment that is affecting readers’ habits. Articles available only for a fee may be less read, not because readers cannot afford to pay the price to view them, but because readers’ research habits have changed with the growth of the Internet. Readers today may make do with articles available for free on the Internet rather than spend the time, money, or effort to read an article enclosed within a journal or a subscription-based site. Lyman Ross and Pongracz Sennyey observe that accessibility has become the determining factor in many users’ research choices: “ease of access is often considered more important than quality. Thus users eschew authoritative print reference sources for Internet ones of lower quality. . . . most patrons favor digital formats over print for many of their information needs. For patrons, the main concern is access to the information, which they want now” (146–47, 149). Reading habits today focus primarily on availability, which in some cases can lead readers to accept information of poor quality when that is all that is available. As scholars we may feel disgusted by the idea of accepting shoddy ideas just because they’re easy and cheap to get to, but John Willinsky reminds us that the publishing structure we endorse is complicit in the problem: “how fair is it for the academic community to complain about information quality online, when most of what the university produces in the name of rigorous scholarship is essentially sealed off from the public sphere?” (Willinsky, “Rethinking” 1).

If we believe that what we write about has value—so much so that we donate it, without charge, to those who will print it (an anomaly in the world of publishing)—then

why do we leave ourselves bound to a form of *publication* that fails to make our research public? Journals' distribution interests, being tied up with economic models, betray our interest in sharing our research with all.

Preservation

In addition to distributing research, journals also seek to preserve it. Archiving the knowledge we've created is essential to our work as scholars. As Reither and Vipond have written, "the on-going conversation that exists over time" is what constitutes a field of study; consequently, any such "field exists solely because writers have made public their thinking" (860). Research published in an academic journal gains some degree of permanence. Academic journals sent around the world to scholars and libraries build a physical archive of knowledge in rhetoric and composition studies.

Though academic journals do build admirable archives of research, all too often that research is preserved but never retrieved. Mortensen has lamented that once books are published, even reviewed, they are too seldom cited (217). He sees whole sections of our scholarship being lost as it is carefully noted, catalogued, and shelved, never again to be touched.

While electronic databases may spare journal articles from a similar fate (Craig Howes estimates that an article published in a book collection will have about 5 percent the readership of an article printed in a digitally available journal), some believe that putting articles in an online archive may also be a step backward in their preservation because while the article is preserved, its context often isn't (in Howard). The 2006 report of the American Council of Learned Societies Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for Humanities and Social Sciences notes: "The emergence of the Internet has transformed

the practice of the humanities and social sciences—more slowly than some may have hoped, but more profoundly than others may have expected” (Unsworth et al. 1). With an increasing number of researchers accessing articles through databases rather than within the journal context in which the articles originally appeared, the purposes of journals themselves have been called into question. When readers find articles through a string of search queries and hyperlinks, they are likely to see articles as individual entities, rather than part of a larger conversation. Bonnie Wheeler, president of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals, explains that in this climate, “the journal itself becomes invisible to the end-user” (qtd. in Howard). A single article preserved in isolation without its contextualizing conversation risks becoming instead a pronouncement with a finality we would balk at as scholars who advocate “the negotiation of multiple strong arguments, alternative truths, competing perspectives, perplexing observations” (Flower in Olson and Taylor 164–65). Whether or not the journal format is discarded, we want to preserve the surrounding conversation that gives every article its meaning.

Quality Control

Quality control may be the most commonly cited function of academic journals. Within the journal publishing structure, it is primarily peer review—whether open, blind, or double-blind—that acts out this control. Bohlin argues that by enforcing quality control, peer review maintains “the boundary between formal and informal communication” (367). When an article appears in the pages of a peer-reviewed journal, we know it has been formally recognized by our discipline as part of its official communication: peer review identifies papers worth reading, marking, and citing.

Peer review is so important in certifying knowledge among academics that it is one of the key means of identifying the professionalization of a field. Goggin, in her book tracing the twentieth-century history of rhetoric and composition studies, uses the state of its journals to identify growth, maturation, and trends within the field. It was not until peer-reviewed journals became prevalent that rhetoric and composition came into its own as a legitimate field of study (137).

Carol Berkenkotter calls peer review the “social mechanism through which a discipline’s ‘experts’ maintain quality control over new knowledge entering the field” (245). The referees who review submissions hold an incredibly important position since they determine what counts as new knowledge. But how often do reviewers actually ensure that the highest quality knowledge is entering rhetoric and composition through the pages of its journals? There are doubts as to whether our current peer review process is accomplishing this goal (see Rowland, Fontaine). In fact, a special issue of *Rhetoric Review*, printed in 1995, dealt exclusively with issues of peer review. Many have cited examples of abuses to the system, ranging from reviewer prejudice to plagiarism. More disconcerting than cases of failed peer review, though, are criticisms leveled at peer review when it operates as it is designed to.

Among the articles in the 1995 peer review issue of *Rhetoric Review* was Sheryl Fontaine’s critique, in which she drew on thirty-four writers’ responses to a questionnaire about their experiences with peer review. In her article, Fontaine explores the writers’ concerns and offers four major critiques of the current peer review system: there is no formal means for authors to respond to reviewers; anonymity of referees can remove accountability for producing quality and courteous reviews; the idea that review can be

“blind” is illusory; and a lack of unity within the field means that writers are often being reviewed by those who do not share their assumptions. Each of these objections points to tensions within the peer review process that many scholars have noted.

Condemnation or Collaboration? Fontaine’s first objection to peer review is that it is one-directional: referees pass judgment without opportunity for authors to respond. Most writers she surveyed felt that their relationship with reviewers was antagonistic (Fontaine 259). This criticism about the judgment function of peer review is one of the most prominent objections to rhetoric and composition’s current peer review process. Berkenkotter describes peer review as fundamentally “adversarial,” and Brian Martin writes that since “the whole idea of quality control via peer review is to weed out inadequate work . . . finding shortcomings can be taken up as a challenge” (248; 302).

This isn’t just a matter of authors getting their feelings hurt by an occasional nasty review. Rather, these objections reflect the collision of two conflicting ideals in our field. On the one hand, we value collaboration, individual growth, and process over product, leading some to protest that “while collaboration underlies our research and pedagogy, it does not describe the review process for journals in composition” (Hunter 266). Peer review should be, they believe, more collaborative, a formative judgment since it “is not about sorting the acceptable from the rejectable but rather about improving what is published” (Williamson 15–16).

On the other hand, journals value quick judgment passed on any article that does not meet the demands of quality control. In this view, peer review is a summative judgment that sorts out the good from the bad and prints only the best. Phillip Arrington writes that authors themselves often know it is in their best interest to face even harsh

judgment, knowing that anonymous reviewers, without pressure to be deceitfully kind, will offer better critiques (252).

Not surprisingly given these two conflicting ideals of peer review, many referees feel some conflict about their role. Reviewers may be led to ask, in Arrington's words, "Should [I] be collaborative and helpful or stick to [my] prescribed role, make [my] judgments, explain [my] reasons, and be done with it?" (250). Or, as Hunter asks, "Is a manuscript submitted for blind review a 'fixed' text or a work in progress?" (266).

The answer may be "both." Since peer review is the only institutionalized place of sharing writing with one's peers, it is the only formal place to accommodate the two separate roles of development and judgment. Reviewers are consequently forced to individually negotiate this conflict while reviewees bear the consequences of inconsistent methods and split reviews—all because our peer review system itself generates tension between collaboration and criticism.

Conservative or Innovative? Fontaine's second concern—that anonymous reviewers, facelessly representing the institution, may produce lower-quality reviews—reflects a larger argument, repeatedly voiced, that peer review risks squelching unconventional (but valuable) ideas. McNenny and Roen call established publications "the sanctioned and often most conservative avenues of exchange" (298). In maintaining quality control, journals may give up the quest for quality in favor of the power of control. In so doing, peer review undermines our disciplinary commitment to the belief that every voice must be allowed to speak. Shatz writes: "Much of Western thinking has displayed a commitment to the 'liberal' idea that truth is most likely to emerge when ideas proliferate and come into clash with one another in the 'marketplace' of ideas. But

peer review, far from seeking to proliferate ideas, seeks to limit the number and range of ideas that reach the public” (10).

Critics have argued that the pressures of peer review can strip writing of its brilliance, both in style and in thought. Fontaine writes that “some of the most jargon-filled, abstract academic writing may result, in part, from authors writing for a reviewer-audience that they imagine as authoritarian and unkind” (260). Shatz agrees that “while it is difficult to define ‘innovation’ . . . scholars across several fields have the perception that old ideas fare well and new ideas fare badly in the publishing game” (83). Armstrong captures the conservative nature of publishing when he advises that authors who wish to be published should “(1) not pick an important problem, (2) not challenge existing beliefs, (3) not obtain surprising results, (4) not use simple methods, (5) not provide full disclosure, and (6) not write clearly” (197).

Though most of the belief that peer review makes writing timid is based on hunches, Fontaine finds that “untenured and associate-level professors were nearly twice as likely as full professors to have experienced loss of control or reviewers’ ideological interference” (264). Often these new professors conform to the demands of their reviewers, which could be a serious problem since “writers of lower academic rank are more likely to submit riskier, more innovative, and, therefore, less ‘publishable’ manuscripts” (264). Risky manuscripts may be less like what we’re used to hearing, but that can be very good. Dewey writes that “all valuable as well as new ideas begin with minorities, perhaps a minority of one. The important consideration is that opportunity be given that idea to spread and to become the possession of the multitude” (208).

Peer review, especially because it is so often conducted by senior scholars in the field, is inherently conservative and therefore unlikely to allow innovative ideas to reach the multitude. This tendency can bring peer review into conflict with our field's preference for dialogue and participation. Drawing on the work of Richard Rorty, Greg Clark argues that to perpetuate dialogue and to remind participants "of the contingency of social knowledge," communities must privilege "the kind of discourse that continually challenges what its members think they know" (*Dialogue* 7–8). Peer review may prevent this sort of discourse from occurring in the field.

Blind or Open? Fontaine's third attack on peer review is that blind review is more a charade than an effective way of meting justice. Both blind review and open review face serious criticisms. Open review, it is claimed, is at risk of bias, whether positive or negative, since when reviewers know the identity of authors they may make judgments about the person rather than the paper. In contrast, blind review is considered "fair," being less likely to be inhibited by bias and "less embarrassing for those who face critical reviews" (Shatz 48–49).

However, many question whether blind review is even blind since referees can usually figure out who the author is. For example, in a survey of chemistry journal editors, Richard Brown found that most respondents shared the concern that "the process was pointless because the content and references give away the authors' identity" (136). Fontaine argues that "the impartiality of blind review becomes even more suspect when we consider how illusory it may actually be. . . . It is very difficult to conceal authorship" (261). While instances in which a reviewer can identify an author by name may not be widespread, reviewers often can determine something about the reviewer—gender, age,

rank, institution, etc. A case study of how voice is conveyed through writing revealed that two reviewers, who did not know the identity of a paper's author, both shaped their responses based on their (correct) assumptions about the writer (Matusda and Tardy 242). Even when reviewers cannot identify the author, the journal's editor knows the writer's identity and may select reviewers based on either positive or negative bias (Fontaine 262).

Whether or not blind review is an illusion, "some argue that [it] . . . is perforce impersonal" and so at odds with humanistic values (Shatz 49). If, in rhetoric and composition, we believe with Dewey that "ideas belong to human beings who have bodies" (8), that knowledge is not an absolute "out there" but something negotiated by living individuals, then a peer review system that turns ideas into products and people into credentials contradicts our own beliefs about what knowledge is.

Few or Many? Fontaine's fourth objection to peer review is that the diversity of interests within rhetoric and composition results in writers being reviewed by those who do not share their assumptions (Fontaine). Berkenkotter agrees that for scholars in the humanities, and particularly in composition studies, there are so "many discourse communities, methodologies, epistemologies, and discursive practices" that the referees "represent diverse constituencies with vastly different disciplinary roots and allegiances" (246). Consequently, she writes, when a paper of hers goes in for review, she knows she is "facing the luck of the draw" (246).

This concern touches on the widespread criticism that judgments passed by referees do not accurately represent beliefs throughout the discipline. In the current peer review model, a paper is read by often one, maybe two—perhaps three—referees,

depending on the publication. Such a limited number of judges may put judgment at risk of being capricious.

Some consider this an advantage: Arrington, for example, writes that the odds are so against a paper's success that "if, given all this, a submission is recommended for publication by two or more blind reviewers, chances are it's because it succeeds in spite of these complications and may stand a better chance of being considered important and valuable by other interested and knowledgeable readers" (252). Yet something is wrong about a system that considers its ability to obstruct progress an advantage.

Not only are there a very small number of reviewers examining each article, but these reviewers, in turn, represent only a very small portion of those who constitute our field. Referees are generally experienced professors, who are considered experts in the field. This makes them good candidates for judges, but also means they come from an extremely small pool. Perhaps more than in other fields, rhetoric and composition is often staffed by faculty who are not full professors. Adjuncts and graduate students teach a majority of composition courses. These members of our discourse community do not enjoy the same status as their colleagues and are generally excluded from having a voice in what gets printed. With few rewards for writing and little opportunity for participating in the publishing process, the majority of these practitioners have small vested interest in participating in the academic journals of our field.

Publishing Possibilities

The processes used by academic journals to meet their values often fail to align with our community values for making knowledge. Even so, for a long time we've been stuck with journals as they are: Berkenkotter concluded in 1995 that although peer-

reviewed publishing has serious drawbacks, “at present it’s the only game in town for scholars and researchers attempting to extend new knowledge claims beyond local contexts into a field’s literature” (248). While a decade ago the traditional journal structure may have been the only game in town, since then other publishing possibilities, driven by technological innovations, have been moving into the neighborhood.

Other disciplines have been driven to write about and experiment extensively with alternate publishing systems. For example, “workers in the biomedical field,” Fytton Rowland observes, “have made a particular study of the peer-review process, not surprisingly since in their field dependable quality-controlled information can be literally a matter of life and death” (249). The hard sciences, too, have faced heavy pressures to re-examine their academic journals: the cost of the highly specialized journals in science is astronomical, while rapid developments in their field mean that the delays inherent in peer review and publication make their research far out of date by the time it reaches print.

Some disciplines in the humanities, while slower to respond to proposals for change, have also begun to discuss other publishing methods. What discussion there has been has emphasized the reluctance of those in the humanities to make valuable and necessary changes in response to technological advancements. In 2005, for example, Martha L. Brogan and Daphnée Rentfrow published a report on the state and future of digital resources in American literature. They note in the introduction to their report the cultural resistance that electronic forms face in the humanities: “American literary scholars engaged in applying new media to their teaching and research” are “viewed by

their peers with a combination of skepticism and bemusement, tinged by awe, if only at their colleagues' quixotic daring" (31).

In 2006, the American Council of Learned Societies published its report calling for active scholarly efforts to shape the inevitable changes coming to the humanities and social sciences as a result of changing technology. The report notes that the humanities and social sciences are far behind other disciplines in accepting these innovations and insists that the most important changes to be made are cultural rather than technological. Also in 2006, the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion reported for most English department tenure and review committees, scholarly monographs count for too much while valid scholarship published in other venues—including electronic—counts for too little. The task force noted the resistance to digital forms ("refereed articles in digital media count for tenure and promotion in less than half as many departments as refereed articles in print") and insisted that despite resistance to it, "digital scholarship is becoming pervasive in the humanities and must be recognized as a legitimate scholarly endeavor" (*Report* 43, 41). Many other scholars have drawn similar conclusions (see Rosenzweig, Unsworth et al.).

While on a large-scale level our field has been reluctant to adopt electronic forms, individuals and smaller groups have developed a strong, forward-looking tradition of experimenting with alternative forms of publishing possible with technological innovations. Listservs, electronic newsletters, email exchanges, online forums and discussion boards, and other ways of sharing knowledge outside traditional peer-reviewed journals have played an important, if unofficial, role in making knowledge in

rhetoric and composition. Many of these alternate forms have also more closely supported our democratic values for knowledge than have the traditional journals.

For example, academic blogs, one of the newest of these alternate forms, has been embraced by a small but enthusiastic group of scholars who advocate the value of blogging. They claim that blogging is important because it helps scholars collaboratively share projects with other scholars: blogs “can be a source for others interested in language-related sites. . . . a place to discuss language-related topics” (B. Clark). Bloggers argue that blogs create a sense of community: though many scholars perceive “a lack of daily community in the academic disciplines that encourage single-author projects and little daily interaction with graduate students,” by connecting through blogs, scholars overcome isolation (Earhart). In online discussion, bloggers claim, participation is better, especially for the less-enfranchised, since a blog’s “fluidity . . . not marked by the physical presence of a person, allows a different and more inclusive community” in which “race, gender, sexual orientation, and class become both highlighted and hidden. . . . [and] bloggers may move across subjectivities within their blog, one day emphasizing their difference, another day emphasizing their sameness” (Earhart).

Of course, there are also opponents of blogs. Some challenge blogging as undermining community by creating a false sense of empowerment:

By becoming a blogger, you become an administrator (although *dictator* is always an option). You make administrative decisions about the design and content of your blog. You make decisions about who can and cannot comment on your posts, and you retain the power to erase comments you

deem inappropriate (and you retain, of course, the ability to define *inappropriate*). (Mason)

Others reject the idea that scholars should consider blogging as part of their academic work, since it is self-published work done on the blogger's own terms and without the "principles of collaboration and accountability that come together in peer-review" (G. Clark, "I Think").

Whatever the advantages or disadvantages of blogs, the healthy but informal debate about their value as an alternative place to discuss academic projects indicates our field's willingness to look closely at the principles inherent in any publishing model we adopt and our dedication to choose models that further our discipline's values.

An ideal publishing model in rhetoric and composition would facilitate collaboration and dialogue, would invite participation from all members of the field, and would be fully public. At the same time, as we move to a new system we would not want to lose the benefits of quality control, distribution, and preservation we have enjoyed with our traditional journal system. One way to enjoy the advantages of both sets of values is to adopt a publishing method that incorporates both traditional journals and a publicly visible online forum.

Models for such publishing arrangements that couple traditional publishing with more innovative forms exist in other disciplines. One particularly successful model is arXiv, the preprint archive for high-energy physics and related disciplines. An online database started in 1991, arXiv has been called "an automated distribution system" (Ginsparg) and a "scholarly e-print library" (arXiv). On arXiv, scientists post their research as soon as they have written it, before submitting it to journals. The articles,

therefore, are preprints, or “e-prints.” The system, currently maintained by Cornell University, offers free and public access (you could log onto the Internet right now and read about advanced physics to your heart’s content), possible partly because it “operates at a factor of 100 to 1000 times lower in cost than a conventionally peer-reviewed system” (Ginsparg).

Articles don’t stop at arXiv, though. After posting, scientists then send these same articles to traditional, peer-reviewed journals for formal publication. In this system, the electronic site “supplements rather than supplants periodical publication” (Bohlin 374). The two systems of publication are able to peacefully coexist largely because they fulfill different purposes for publications. Bohlin observes that arXiv covers distribution, the journals take care of quality control, and both systems support archiving.

In this way, the two systems support each other. Though proponents of traditional print and of online publishing have both argued that one must succeed at the expense of the other, the experience of arXiv supports Taylor’s belief that the worlds of print and digital are not fundamentally antithetical (in Olson and Taylor 199). In quality control and preservation, the long-established journals in fields served by arXiv have retained their traditional function. In both distribution and preservation, arXiv has proven extremely effective: not only does the archive host over half a million articles, but people are reading the articles. Between 1996 and 2002, the full text of each article was downloaded more than three hundred times, and the articles were far more likely to be accessed through arXiv than they were through the journals in which they later appeared (Ginsparg). The fact that we can electronically track the number of times an article is

viewed or downloaded also creates the possibility that electronic sites could offer an additional evaluation of an article's readership and impact (see Davis).

Like those in physics, we in rhetoric and composition could similarly adopt a two-part publishing system that involves both the journals we already have in place and an online site for posting articles as we write them.⁴ Perhaps ironically, perhaps prophetically, Dewey suggested something along the same lines nearly a century ago. Dewey argued that the scholars in his day most concerned with human activities—whom he called “social scientists”—were locked into an old-fashioned way of thinking about scholarship. Consequently, they were unable to reach the public that so concerned Dewey. To fix the problem, Dewey recommended a two-part system: one in which scholarship appeared both in traditional, conservative scholarly forms and in an accessible, public forum. He writes: “a genuine social science would manifest its reality in the daily press, while learned books and articles supply and polish tools of inquiry” (180). Translating Dewey's suggestion into modern technology, we could, similarly, manifest our research in a single, free, online forum while still polishing our research to appear in learned books and articles.

Our goal, based on Dewey's ideals, of making our scholarship publicly available as we write it is related to the goals of Open Access, which some have argued is the solution to the problems in our publishing system. The Open Access movement, which has risen to prominence in the last two decades, is an attempt to make scholarship freely available. Proponents of Open Access call knowledge created in academia a “public good” that must be freely and widely distributed; they define Open Access as “the worldwide electronic distribution of . . . peer-reviewed journal literature and completely free

and unrestricted access to it by all scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds” (Chan, et al.).

Certainly the fundamental values of Open Access are closely aligned with those of rhetoric and composition. Open Access advocates believe that their publishing model “will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge” (Chan, et al.). These goals are similar to our own: the Open Access desire to improve communication between rich and poor represents one instance of our goal to encourage the widespread participation of experts, even (or especially) of those who are marginalized. As for our interest in public engagement, few groups are stronger advocates of making knowledge available to the public than are those who advocate Open Access. John Willinsky, one of the foremost spokesmen for the movement, could be mistaken for a rhetorician when he writes that

universal public access to the broad range of social science and humanities research could contribute much to the deliberative qualities of democracy, providing people with the basis of greater engagement and participation in matters affecting their lives, not only in the voting booth, but in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplace, as well as globally. (Willinsky, “Proposing”)

In striving for universal availability, Open Access seeks to “provide specialized knowledge to professionals and the public at large” (Willinsky, “Proposing”).

However, an online forum could do much more than simply make our finished scholarship available to other professionals and the general public. An archive of scholarship that is still being developed and that invites feedback would also better enact our values of collaboration and dialogue.

For this reason, though it would have a web address, an online preprint archive would fill a very different role than the solely electronic journals we already have in rhetoric and composition, such as *Kairos* and *Computers and Composition Online*. Though online journals may differ from traditional journals in having widespread availability and unique formats for their articles, like traditional journals, they publish articles as completed products that have already been developed and peer reviewed. In contrast, an online preprint archive would be a place for articles still in progress. Here, scholars could give and receive feedback on texts before they are finished and sent to a traditional journal for peer review. As a result, the most important function of an online archive would not be its distribution or preservation capacities, but rather its new relationship to the quality control process as a place for peer commentary.

Stevan Harnad, one of the strongest supporters of online publishing, distinguishes between both types of peer input: reports written by peer reviewers “are written for authors, editors, and possibly other referees; open peer commentaries are written for the entire learned community” (in Shatz 152). In this way, peer commentary becomes wider discussion, allowing commenters to share ideas and respond to each other and enabling us to entertain the lively dispute that we value: “we live in disagreement; dispute is the animating force of the profession” (Shatz 6). The interplay of peer commenters’ shared ideas may give authors a more reliable indication of the quality of their thought and help

them to shape it before submitting it for judgment by referees. Precedents for a peer commentary site already exist. The Social Science Research Network (<http://www.srn.com>), for example, which publishes abstracts of papers in progress, specifically encourages readers and authors to contact each other and communicate about their work.

Paul Ginsparg has suggested that a two-part publication model would reduce the load on peer reviewers, as articles would likely be shaped and improved by peer comments before being submitted for review. As a result, referees could focus their energies, not just on fewer articles, but on those more likely to be accepted (Ginsparg). In rhetoric and composition studies, where our top journals have between about a 5 and 20 percent acceptance rate, this could save significantly in labor.

Building Publications on Our Values

Creating an online forum for articles in rhetoric and composition would enable us to bring our process of academic publication closer to our democratic values of communication. An online forum would support our preference for collaboration, dialogue, participation, and public impact.

Collaboration

An online forum would undoubtedly increase collaboration in our field by creating a specific space dedicated to peer commentary. Online peer commenters could engage in lively discussion, building knowledge with authors.

The archive would also answer the question of whether a referee is a mentor or a judge, since an online forum would allow us to separate out these two roles of collaborating and judging, currently mashed into a single job. With the existence of an

online forum, anonymous journal reviewers could unreservedly accept their responsibility to maintain quality control over the discipline's formal publications, knowing that authors were also receiving constructive guidance in other places. Authors would also benefit as they would have an institutionalized place to receive feedback without losing the opportunity for critical judgment offered by journal referees.

Shatz observes that online, open peer commentary demonstrates adherence to the value of community, while closed peer review represents preference for quality control and fairness (49). By developing both systems side-by-side, we could enjoy both collaboration and quality control in our scholarly community. Interest in building community through technology is apparent in the Conference on College Composition and Communication's recent announcement of its forthcoming MemberWeb Editor, which, it appears, will focus on improving scholars' ability to connect with each other through "new community spaces" ("CCCC").

The benefit of peer commentary available through an online forum is not limited to improved individual papers. As scholars read each other's work online, they will more easily locate other scholars with similar research interests and so build groups of researchers who discuss their work together, thus increasing the proportion of collaborative work within our field. Shatz notes that with peer-reviewed journals, "blinding referee's identities diminishes the potential for further personal communication between two individuals who are working in the same specialty" (50). However, an open peer-commentary system would do the opposite: encourage people working in the same specialty to collaborate on the same projects. Through an online forum, scholars would be able to "establish and maintain immediate communities which function within the

larger, ‘disciplinary’ communities where their knowledge claims might find a fit” (Reither and Vipond 859).

Dialogue

With an online forum, dialogue within the field would also surely increase. In contrast to the laborious process required to respond in print to another scholar’s writing, an online forum would facilitate instant communication that far better approximates spoken interaction than do other written forms. Dewey emphasizes that spoken conversation has a special quality absent from written language: “the wingèd words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. . . . Logic in its fulfillment recurs to the primitive sense of the word: dialogue” (218). An online forum, as something of a hybrid between speaking and writing, between the permanence of print and the real-time of speech, would allow for more direct, living dialogue among scholars. The ease of, and opportunity to post commentary in an online medium would likely increase the response to articles (Taylor in Olson and Taylor; see also Jackson and Wallin). What’s more, these comments would become multi-voiced discussion as those who comment respond to each other.

Participation

Creating an online forum would not only increase interaction among those who are already participating in the scholarly discussions taking place in our journals, but it could also increase participation from those who are not yet active speakers in the conversation. In addition to inviting the voices of those who are primarily teachers, an online forum may encourage the participation of new scholars who may lack the expertise required of formal publication but who could bring a fresh perspective to the

scholarly conversation. Permitting the participation of less-established members of the community would allow them to contribute to the conversation without diminishing the professional quality of our formal publications.

In this way, an online forum could be a much more formal, standardized version of the peer groups that naturally spring up within our institutions. A group of graduate students, who described their experience in one such setting, write that their peer groups became “relatively ‘safe’ places from which [they] could critique the policies and curriculum of the writing program. . . . [and] prevent potentially productive dissensus from going completely underground” (Duffey et al. 85). Likewise, while the quality controls enacted by peer review may keep the official publications of rhetoric and composition from including more radical or innovative ideas, a self-posting forum would provide an appropriate venue for these sorts of ideas to prove themselves. Providing a place for such ideas to circulate would enable us to more democratically test a wider variety of claims, choosing “to engage rather than to erase difference” (Duffey et al. 81). By creating a space in which we can hear out any idea, even one that contradicts our traditional thought, we will increase the liberty of thought in our academic discussions.

Though some (see Rowland) fear that opening the scholarly conversation to a variety of voices would result in endless worthless posts, experience with other similar sites indicates that the quality of posts would likely be high; online forums—particularly those that allow comments only from members of the community—tend to be self-regulatory. The regulation comes from both directions: readers keep an eye on authors, and authors who know their work will be read (especially in connection with their name) tend to write more responsibly. On arXiv, for example, even though the moderators are

relatively hands-off, “worldwide readership discovers errors quickly and reduces duplication” (Shatz 9). In some cases, writing for a public forum may drive authors to post even higher quality writing than they currently submit to journals since, if “authors lose the privacy and confidentiality they enjoy under the conventional system . . . they [may] strive to make the original submission as good as possible rather than merely submit mediocre work to test the waters in a relatively private fashion” (Shatz 150).

Public Engagement

Perhaps the greatest advantage of an online forum would be its ability to communicate our research to those outside our immediate discussion. In so doing, we may hope that our writings could contribute to the democratic nature of our society even as awareness of an outside public helps improve the quality of our writing.

Brogan and Rentfrow write that “few would argue about” the “democratizing impact” of “digital resources” (21). Jackson and Wallin agree that there is “little doubt that the Web has made possible democratic activity, even radical democratic activity, in ways unimaginable ten or more years ago” (10). Others have argued in favor of open access because “digital information has an inherently democratizing power—but that power can be unleashed only if access to the cultural record is as open as possible, in both intellectual and economic terms, to the public” (Unsworth et al. 27–28). By creating an online forum for rhetoric and composition that has free and universal access, we will better meet our democratic and intellectual aims.

There can be no question that online availability increases readership. One journal editor has written that since making past issues available online, “use of our website has vastly exceeded expectations; we now receive about 100,000 visits a month from every

corner of the world; probably more people now consult the journal in a single month than have done so throughout the first half century of its existence” (qtd. in Haluska-Rausch and Wheeler). Certainly the mere existence of our research on the Internet would make it more likely that those outside our discipline would find it.

Although, as we noted before, Dewey believes that just offering people scholarly writings as they are will have at least some “regulative effect,” he further insists that we need not stop with the hope that people will try to understand scholarly writing when it becomes available; instead, “we can look much further than that. The material would have such an enormous and widespread human bearing that its bare existence would be an irresistible invitation to a presentation of it which would have direct popular appeal” (183). In other words, if we present our scholarship in a forum that is freely and publicly available, just knowing that outside readers could see our writings would pressure us to present our research in a more appealing and accessible way. Robert A. Schneider states in a similar vein that the increasing accessibility of our work should motivate us to write “articles that are more synthetic, that are more interpretive, that can be assigned to students” (qtd. in Howard). Perhaps an online window into our ivory tower would make us more conscious of another, larger audience outside the academy and encourage us to produce more of the materials that can directly aid society.

Already, the Internet is helping scholars and nonscholars connect. *Our Cultural Commonwealth* notes that the Internet’s

remarkable connectivity has brought scholars into broader communication with nonscholarly audiences, as well. Humanists and social scientists now routinely hear from students and members of the general public who have

found their e-mail addresses and have questions. Scholars who have created Web sites based on their work are often pleasantly surprised that their work has found entirely new audiences—or, rather, that new audiences have found that work. (Unsworth et al. 14)

This is, of course, exactly what we want: to be able to share ideas with those we think it can help. An online forum would help public audiences find our work.

Conclusion

Though journals may once have been an ideal place to carry on scholarly conversation, as our field has grown and as technologies have evolved, journals have become an increasingly inadequate means of having scholarly discussion. To maintain the journal publishing system in its current form would be to sacrifice our disciplinary values for a form that has become outdated. Dewey noted a similar problem in democratic governments: too often people associate the trappings of democracy (“universal suffrage, frequent elections, majority rule, congressional and cabinet government”) with democracy itself, when in fact these procedures are no more than forms developed to meet a transitory need (145). So while these forms “served a particular local pragmatic need,” Dewey writes, “often their very adaptation to immediate circumstances unfitted them, pragmatically, to meet more enduring and more extensive needs. They lived to cumber the political ground, obstructing progress” (145). Similarly in rhetoric and composition, if we do not closely examine the purposes of our academic journals, we may find ourselves clinging solely to forms that fit a now-past need and that, instead of enabling our scholarly conversation, obstruct its progress.

Adding an online, open-access archive to our traditional journal system will bring our publishing process closer to our ideals. The technology is already in place to support such an archive. Creating a forum for peer commentary prior to traditional peer review would help us be more collaborative, engage in more dialogue, invite more scholars to participate, and reach more of the people outside our discipline.

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Notes

¹ I can hardly give even a representative sample of the vast discussion taking place in other disciplines about electronic publishing models. Stevan J. Harnad, Paul Ginsparg, and John Willinsky, in particular, have written extensively on the topic. Many others have either addressed the subject head-on or dealt with it in larger arguments. A particularly influential document on the subject is the “Atkin’s Report,” prepared by the National Science Foundation. See Daniel E. Atkins, et al. *Revolutionizing Science and Engineering through Cyberinfrastructure: Report of the National Science Foundation Blue-Ribbon Advisory Panel on Cyberinfrastructure* (January 2003) <http://www.nsf.gov/cise/sci/reports/atkins.pdf>. The cyberinfrastructure report for the humanities is John Unsworth, et al. *Our Cultural Commonwealth: The Report of the American Council of Learned Societies Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for Humanities and Social Sciences*. New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 2006. Those in rhetoric and composition who have discussed electronic publishing as it pertains to our field have focused primarily on the classroom or on the academic reward system.

² As of April 2009, *CCCC*, with a circulation of 10,000 (followed by *College English* with 8,000) may be the most widely distributed journal in rhetoric and composition. Others go down from there. To name a few: *Research in the Teaching of English* has a circulation of 4,100; *Rhetoric Review* 1,000; *RSQ* 700; *Pre/Text* 600; and *Philosophy and Rhetoric* fewer than 400 (*Ulrich’s*).

³ In 2008, language and literature journals ranked third-cheapest for average cost per title. General works and music were the cheapest, at \$161 and \$158, respectively. In contrast, science journals, notorious for their high prices, top the charts with physics journals averaging \$3,103 and chemistry journals \$3,490 per title (Van Orsdel and Born).

⁴ Many object to free online publishing on the grounds that it would drive journals out of business. Although these fears seem significant, in practice, online publishing does not seem to be negatively affecting sales. For example, in the world of scholarly books, since the National Academies Press made its publications freely available online (including its contemporary publications), its print sales have risen “dramatically” (Unsworth et al. 23; see also Michael Jensen, “Presses Have Little to Fear From Google”; Michael Jensen, “Evolution, Intelligent Design, Climate Change, and the Scholarly Ecosystem”). Rosenzweig explains that “people now order books that they have browsed online but want to own in a hardcopy. Moreover, the book itself—indexed by Web search engines—becomes its best advertisement” (par. 54).