



HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

Department of Writing Studies and Rhetoric

October 1, 2018

Dear Dean Kenneth Womack:

Following is my evaluation of Dr. Courtney Werner's recent scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition as it relates to digital literacy. I find her work important and excellent in all respects, as you will see in my assessment.

I am encouraged by Dr. Werner's careful investigation of the field of rhetoric and composition with respect to its relationship to digital pedagogy. In particular, her ideas about what counts in composition – especially in its unpacking of fit subjects for the writing classroom – strikes me as crucial and *spot on* for the field's moving forward. For instance, in "Speaking of Composing (Frameworks): New Media Discussions, 2000 – 2010" (*Computers and Composition* 2015), Dr. Werner acknowledges the adoption of the term *new media* by Writing Studies, concluding that the term in our fluid discipline has "no stable disciplinary definition," but that this constantly shifting definition makes the study of *new media* "an appropriate site for studying the fluctuating knowledge of the discourse community (56)." This judgment strikes me as particularly astute, leading as it does to her productive resolution that such scholarly discussions reveal the field's identity struggle. By investigating ten years' of scholarship on new media in four key, representative disciplinary journals, Dr. Werner is able to categorize three types of scholarly conversations, consisting of (i) composing in contemporary society, (ii) composing in the university, and (iii) composing in the discipline. Via this organization system, Dr. Werner evaluates the prevalence the first, *composing in contemporary society*, and claims its crucial role in the relevancy of composition and writing studies for twenty-first century-citizens. In this way, this article becomes a kind of creed establishing a way to define the discipline through composing frameworks using archives from the field. I find that its argument is particularly engaging and well done.

This theorizing is continued by Dr. Werner in her article "How Rhetoric and Composition Described and Defined New Media at the Start of the Twenty-First Century" (CCC 2017). In this work, she explains her motive for her study of published research on new media which offer scholars "new ways of defining and knowing text" (714). I appreciate this premise, because it succinctly demonstrates what is (and has been) happening to writing and to the discipline. Teachers and researchers of writing must authentically understand the kinds of writing they do and that their students do. New media is, after all, writing. Dr. Werner's study recognizes the vast digital array of new genres of writing by highlighting the work of exemplary scholars of new media. This piece is of a different nature than "Speaking of," in that she offers a tour of the work that has been done by her predecessors. These articles can be read in tandem, one a companion to the other, as research to analysis. I can imagine the CCCs article very neatly being used in instructor training courses. It might also be employed to

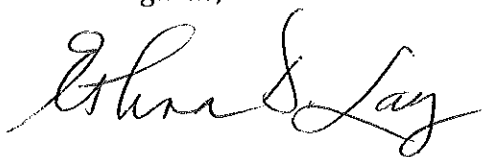
advantage by courses training undergraduate writing center fellows, because it is so logically and so lucidly presented.

Her work theorizing our basic understanding of the impactfulness of the term new media is equally significant. Appropriate definitions of terms add to the community of disciplinary practice. In "Defining New Media: Making Arguments about Literacy Events and Sponsors (*Journal of Literacy and Technology* 2018)," Dr. Werner takes on the various ways scholars view and define digital literacies. She reminds the reader that even definitions are likewise rhetorical, and this distinction funds her discussion quite effectively. She surmises: "Scholars' definitions of new media at the start of the 21st Century are arguments about what the field values (69)," a point that reinforces that such definitions powerfully impact our "digitally-saturated society" (70). I very much appreciate this argument.

Dr. Werner, in her letter to me, advises that the arc of her research is to explore epistemological issues in Rhetoric and Composition, and she has clearly achieved the first stage of her goal. She announces her desire to inspire the field to theorize the impact of including new media in our courses and in our writing centers. Indeed, the evidence of her published work evinces that she is committed to her research agenda which, in her words, "focus[es] on how the discipline enacts its ideologies." On a more immediate note, Dr. Werner is equally committed to her students and to their mentoring as seen in her work on writing centers and writing center pedagogy.

Thank you for sharing Dr. Courtney Werner's scholarship with me. I look forward to reading more in the years ahead.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ethna Dempsey Lay". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'E' and 'L'.

Ethna Dempsey Lay, PhD
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Associate Director of Digital Research Center