2014 CCC Exemplar Award Acceptance Speech

Collaborative Lives in the Profession

Editor’s note: The Exemplar Award is presented to a person who has served or serves as an exemplar of our organization, representing the highest ideals of scholarship, teaching, and service to the entire profession.

In working together to promote the study of digital media and literacy studies within the larger field of rhetoric and composition, we have a long history going back to the early 1980s. In 1983, at arguably the first conference (University of Minnesota) to take computers and their connection to writing into its field of vision, we met and shortly thereafter began planning a collaborative edited collection (Critical Perspectives on Computers and Composition, which was published in 1989). By 1988 we also had begun our editorship together on the now international journal Computers and Composition. In these endeavors—and the many others we recount below—we sought to provide publication venues for those working on digital media and writing and to promote colleagues’ and graduate students’ scholarly efforts at a time when they were receiving little recognition.

We also sought to create a field within a field that focused on digital media. Our collaborative goals then, as now, were to bring attention to this emerging area of literacy studies and to argue for its importance for the larger field of rhetoric and composition, and beyond. In assuming the coeditorship of the CCCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric, we also sought to institutionalize this critical composition work in a time when online bibliographies were
taking central stage. When we took over the editorship in 1991, the Bibliography was available only in print, and we worked with the MLA to incorporate by 1995 the CCCC body of scholarship within the larger online corpus of English studies, where it still resides and is actively compiled in the MLA International Bibliography. Thus we have attempted through our collaboration to expand the availability of all work in rhetoric and composition by working with a variety of professional organizations and publishing outlets.

As we collaborated, we took note that established disciplines shared certain commonalities that often included not only dedicated bibliographies, conferences, journals, book series, awards for scholarship, listservs, and, as the years progressed, online publishing opportunities peopled by invested scholars whose work elaborated on and extended new directions across sometimes several different fields. Thus, as we published several edited collections together (e.g., Critical Perspectives with Columbia University’s Teachers College Press; Evolving Perspectives on Computers and Composition with NCTE; Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies with Utah State University Press), we also over the years edited three different book series with NCTE, Ablex, and Hampton Press, publishing a total of 35 books, several of which have won awards connected with the discipline. (For a list of awards, see http://computersandcomposition.candcblog.org/awards/distinguishedbook.htm.)

During this time, we tried not to lose sight of our aspiration to enlarge the vision of rhetoric and composition with cutting-edge publications while at the same time supporting the scholars—colleagues and graduate students—who claimed this field as their own. It is important for us to note that all our editorships and ongoing projects have been enhanced with the collaborative efforts of graduate students at Illinois, Michigan Tech, Ohio State, and other universities, including Purdue, Virginia Tech, and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, among them. One of our goals over the years has been to bring graduate students together as colleagues, and we’d like to think we’ve succeeded in this effort. See a partial list of graduate students and also those with whom we’ve worked on our coauthored book Transnational Literate Lives in Digital Times at http://ccdigitalpress.org/transnational/intro1.html.

With the continued rise of new writing technologies, we have moved our efforts increasingly into the digital realm. We had already at Michigan Tech worked with CIWIC (Computers in Writing-Intensive Classrooms), a summer workshop Cindy initiated for colleagues who wished to become adept at integrating computers within writing programs and classrooms. Gail remembers fondly traveling to Michigan Tech each June for some 15 years to help with this
excellent experience that Cindy hosted and has always appreciated Cindy’s willingness to participate in Illinois’s Center for Writing Studies Colloquium series, held since 1990. When Cindy accepted a faculty position at Ohio State in 2005, she continued to host a new version of the CIWIC workshop, appropriately named DMAC or Digital Media and Composition. Through these workshops, we have met and extended our collaboration and research with colleagues around the country and the world. Safia El-Wakil of Cairo (see our chapter in Beth Daniell and Peter Mortensen’s *Women and Literacy*) comes immediately to mind. In this last instance, we were invited to the American University of Cairo, where we continued the rich scholarly collaboration we had begun with Safia at workshops and conferences here in the United States. And this is just one example of how collaborative efforts have contributed to a research agenda that includes innumerable chapters, articles, and books that usually, but not always, embrace the possibilities of digital media in our world of composition.

A description of our collaboration would not be complete without mention of the Computers and Composition Digital Press (CCDP), an imprint of Utah State University Press which we began in 2008. We have now published seven books in this open-access, peer-reviewed online press in collaboration with colleagues and graduate students from around the world. See http://ccdigitalpress.org/ebooks-and-projects.

The goal of the press is to honor the traditional academic values of rigorous peer review and intellectual excellence and to combine such work with a commitment to innovative digital scholarship and expression. For the editors, the press represents an important kind of scholarly activism—an effort to circulate the best work of digital media scholars in a timely fashion and on the global scale made possible by digital distribution. We were delighted that the press won three awards at the 2013 CCCC Annual Convention and are also proud to announce the publication of *Stories That Speak to Us*, published in March 2013. This book extends the collaborative work that Cindy began at Ohio State with the DALN, a digital archive of literacy narratives, which now number over 3,000 video narratives and other artifacts. Gail served on the advisory committee, presenting one of the first literacy narratives with Kris Blair, with Cindy and Louie Ulman going on to make this groundbreaking online archive a fully functioning reality. This research project again underscores the importance of the collaborative research spirit we’ve tried to bring to the field, following in the footsteps of such impressive luminaries as Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford and our good colleagues Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner.

As we write this statement, we realize that it sounds as though we had
a carefully crafted plan of research and collaboration from the start, and we didn’t. But, for whatever reason, our aspirations have taken us in directions that embrace an ever-expanding group of graduate students and colleagues who invariably carry this collaborative spirit forward in their own work as scholars and teachers. We thank them for their many contributions and thank you, most sincerely, for awarding us—together—the 2014 CCCC Exemplar Award.

Here are the informal remarks that we gave in accepting the award:

Hawisher: Our thanks to Dora Ramirez-Dhoore, Chair of the 2014 Exemplar Awards Committee, and to committee members Michael Day, Cecelia Rodriguez Milanes, Sondra Perl, and Duane Roen, who also contribute professionally and personally to our CCCC collaborative lives.

(to Selfe) Can you believe that we’re the recipients of the 2014 CCCC Exemplar Award? We are so grateful, and thank you all—all the members of CCCC—for this huge honor.

When Cindy and I met in 1983, little did we know that we were on our way to a 30-some-year collaboration. And it’s probably not surprising that our working together has also kept pace—or tries to—with the persistent entry of digital media into our writing lives. Historically, we are no strangers to word processing programs like Volkswriter and WordStar, and then Eudora, a beloved email system that enabled our first editing experiences together. In the 1990s, the Web and Netscape, one of the first browsers for the World Wide Web, once again totally changed our scholarly and teacherly work. When the new century began, we increasingly worked on digital presentations and publications, and today are proud to be part of a collaborative team that edits and publishes for the Computers and Composition Digital Press. Our collaboration on journals, books, articles, and digital projects—our work in the profession—has definitely been technologically enabled. But . . . there is a great deal more.

Selfe: One of the things Gail and I are proudest of—in receiving this award—is the way in which it foregrounds the practice of collaboration. In the early 1980s, we worked together because we wanted to accomplish certain things in and for the profession: opening a broader range of publication spaces to a wider range of academic voices; getting the field to think in creative and productive ways about the challenges posed by computers; exploring new approaches and environments for composing and circulating communications that escape the gravity of the printed word.

We couldn’t accomplish these goals individually—there were times when
one of us had access to scarce resources and the other did not, when one of us had the opportunity to write and the other did not, when one of us had the expertise needed for composing a certain kind of text or mastering a new technology and the other did not. We learned, in short, that collaboration was less a choice for us than a necessity, and we learned, like so many of you, that we were much better as a team than we were as individuals, that we could accomplish so much more cooperatively than we could alone. I suppose that’s true of almost everyone in this profession, isn’t it? (Our next big project, by the way, should be to bring to CCCC a podium that will accommodate short people . . . like us.)

Hawisher: But we need to stress that we learned too along the way how crucial feminist perspectives are in shaping our academic life and our work with colleagues and graduate students. As a research strategy, coauthorship for us came to be an increasingly vital and ethical approach. We had come to realize that the projects we had undertaken were really no longer our own—as though they ever were. In this way, the collaborative research in which we participated sought to embrace feminism in such a way that we would learn more from and with study participants rather than just about them. Like many, Cindy and I believe that feminism and its practices have the potential to improve the lives of us all—men as well as women—and this belief has been a grounding force in our everyday collaborative lives.

Selfe: Finally, if we discovered collaboration to be a necessity, we also found digital technologies to be essential to our work. Without the affordances of digital tools and networks, we could not have accomplished what we set out to do. Computers offered new environments and tools for composing; they expanded the reach and scope of our communications with others; they extended our human capacity to interact with others across the world.

Digital tools and networks provided us with the ability to record and report on language activities using video and audio as research tools; to collaborate with friends and colleagues around the globe; to share observations on multiple semiotic channels, thus providing colleagues more access to what we saw and did.

Digital technologies, in short, far from diminishing our humanist capacities, helped make us better scholars and people because they connected us . . .

Hawisher and Selfe: . . .with all of you—the best colleagues we could ever imagine.