Our past, our story, has been a long one, and now time demands we reflect on and rewrite our present and future. No one can better tell the story of our passion, dedication, and commitment to our profession and to our students than we ourselves. It is we who prepare students to live, think, and make meaning long after the last school door is closed. It is we on whom our students depend to prepare them with lifelong literacy. NCTE’s 2017 Convention, The First Chapter, and our series of Town Halls allow us and our students to begin an ongoing conversation about who we are, where we are going, why, and how we will continue on our mission together. Come join us. Learn more at ncte.org/annual.
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Patrick Sullivan, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau, editors

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Contributors to this collection offer an antidote to the current reductive understanding of reading that views readers as passive recipients of information. These authors (1) define the challenges to integrating reading into the writing classroom, (2) develop a theory of reading as a specific type of inquiry and meaning-making activity, and (3) offer practical approaches to teaching deep reading in writing courses that can be put immediately to use in the classroom.
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THE MA IN ENGLISH STUDIES

Edited by Margaret M. Strain and Rebecca C. Potter

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Looking primarily at stand-alone master’s programs, this volume examines the design, delivery, and value of a master’s degree in English in the twenty-first century and challenges the characterization that MA programs in English serve primarily as stepping-stones to the PhD. Rather, contributors reveal how central the MA is to shaping the purpose and identity of contemporary English studies, through descriptions of a variety of specific MA programs.

Gathering perspectives from faculty, program directors, and students from across the country, Strain and Potter showcase not only the diversity of such programs, but also the ways in which program identity and mission are richly interwoven with concerns about local needs, graduate student career trajectories, and the effects of a market-driven educational climate. This collection provides a substantive discussion that goes beyond questioning the state of English studies—it points to curricular, programmatic, and professional innovations that are transforming the field, calling for new dialogue in higher education about the pivotal role of the MA in English.

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From the Editor

Kelly Ritter

In this, my final issue as editor of College English, I want to first preview the fine scholarship we’ve gathered here, as always, and second, reflect on some lingering thoughts and questions about my time as editor and about the work we’ve done over the past five years with College English as a whole. Being editor has been an eye-opening and valuable experience for me, both personally and professionally, and so now it’s time to piece together what worked well, what could have been better, and what I hope is next for this journal and our field.

First, let me give you an overview of the fantastic featured pieces brought together for July 2017, starting with not an article, but a policy statement from NCTE—specifically TYCA (Two-Year College Association)—on “Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College.” This set of guidelines, authored by TYCA/NCTE task force members Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt, Darin L. Jensen, Sarah Z. Johnson, Howard Tinberg, and Christie Toth, sets out to align the CCCC Position Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing and TYCA’s own Characteristics of a Highly Effective Two-Year College English Instructor. The guidelines assert we make visible to graduate students the “millions of students whose first experiences with postsecondary writing are in two-year college English classrooms” who further “deserve to learn with engaged professionals who employ context-appropriate best practices in our field” (550). Calhoon-Dillahunt and her collaborators argue that this can happen through collaboration with two-year colleges plus the offering of relevant curricula and professional training in our graduate programs. The Guidelines outline history and data regarding two-year college enrollments and faculty and provide more detailed suggestions for how future faculty members might come to two-year colleges prepared, informed, and motivated to serve this important student population.
This work by TYCA is incredibly important, and I hope that you will recommend it to graduate students in your own program and who are colleagues at other institutions. When I was first approached about publishing these guidelines for our CE audience, I did not hesitate; they cross sub-field boundaries within English studies and are highly appropriate for inclusion in a journal with as broad a readership as this. Further, I was pleased to hear that the conversation started here regarding two-year college teaching will continue into September 2017 in the pages of TETYC, in a special issue on this same topic. I hope you all will read that work as well.

Not only did we have the opportunity to debut these guidelines for a broad CE audience, we also are fortunate enough to publish them alongside Christie Toth and Darin L. Jensen’s “Unknown Knowns: The Past, Present, and Future of Graduate Preparation for Two-Year College English Faculty,” two of the authors of the statement itself. This article, designed to accompany the guidelines and provide broader context for the points raised therein, offers an “overview” (including a deeper history) of graduate teacher training as relevant to two-year colleges over the past several decades through relevant scholarship, surveys, interviews, and analyses of other discussions (such as listserv posts), asserting that “all English studies graduate programs have an obligation to examine their assumptions and their curricula” (564) in response to the TYCA guidelines.

Toth and Jensen’s history and analysis include details on the original 1971 document, the advent and subsequent near-demise of the DA degree as a teaching credential, the shift in the typical scholarly (literary studies) preparation of community college faculty corresponding to the emergence and rise of Rhetoric and Composition graduate programs, and the more recent spate of specific training programs or certificates in teaching at the two-year college, which consist of “twenty-one programs, only seven of which are housed in English studies departments; most are located in schools or colleges of education” (574) and are often a post-graduate credential. Toth and Jensen opine that these types of programs ultimately reflect an “outsourcing model [that] may also perpetuate the near-invisibility of two-year colleges in their knowledge-making and teaching,” (575) contrasting these with a few more hands-on and English studies-centered programs on two-year teaching that also operate within the United States. Ultimately Toth and Jensen conclude that they “are not persuaded that most English studies graduate curricula offer adequate professionalization for two-year college teacher-scholar-activists,” (578) and thus frame their piece here as a clear call to action for graduate programs nationwide. I believe their call has merit for graduate programs and students; I
also believe that the history and data presented here should be of value to any reader who wishes to expand his or her knowledge of the broad landscape of English studies at institutional types typically not discussed or deeply considered (or dialogued with) in graduate programs, but also not always fully regarded in journals such as this one—a situation that I hope will soon be a thing of the past.

Our next featured article takes us away from teacher training and into the moment of teaching itself—with the connecting thread of honoring expertise. Just as Toth and Jensen (and the TYCA statement) argue for prioritizing two-year college faculty knowledge and experience in the training of graduate students and other future two-year colleagues, so too does Beth Godbee in “Writing Up: How Assertions of Epistemic Rights Counter Epistemic Injustice,” in that she contends how “efforts toward countering epistemic injustice—which is wound up with writing and English education—involves asserting and affirming epistemic rights, or the rights to knowledge, experience, and earned expertise” (595). Opening her article with three “scenes” of writers and their tutors or instructors, Godbee asserts that in each, epistemic injustice—“harm done to people in their capacities as knowers” (594)—is at work, a harm that ultimately pervades many corners of academia in the form of “writers [who] are stripped of language, experience, or expertise and their attendant agency, confidence, and even personhood” (595). Using the extended case analysis of subjects Christine and Theodore, Godbee illustrates how in cases such as Christine’s, “[a]symmetrical power is too often abused and writers too often dismissed when their contributions are not invited, preferred, taken up, or listened for as others’ might be” (597).

Godbee’s article is an important one for the past and present of our writing classrooms, writing centers, and other one-to-one teaching moments, as she discusses. But the article further spotlights the broader concept of testimonial injustice, which “helps us see the links among seemingly innocuous feedback, linguistic privilege and prejudice, wider systems of power and oppression, and the marginalization and dehumanization of writers” (598) in our daily professional interactions beyond teaching. Godbee’s central example cases come from videotaped writing conferences and conversational analysis (as well as additional written documents that provide fuller context, such as Christine’s medical history and correspondence with insurance agents), wherein she concludes that “the act of ‘writing up’ makes a strong assertion of epistemic rights” and that “when writers (re)claim their epistemic rights, they can more easily achieve or expand their writing goals” (612). While Godbee calls for a greater attention to “writing up” in educational settings, I can’t help but think of how this call also resonates with our current political climate both inside and outside academia. While we accepted this article for publication long before the recent presidential election of 2016—and while Godbee makes no such explicit mention of writing up in
relation to today’s political landscape—I think, as Godbee herself considers in her conclusion, that asking, “Might we shift from cautions and concerns about directive teaching into research that considers the conditions in which directive feedback co-opts, rather than affirms, writers’ rights? Might scholarship on audience address matters of asymmetrical power and the epistemic demands placed on writers?” (614) would be useful, indeed, for the world of negligible “truth” and lowered responsibility for accountability in speech in relation to action which, by the time this issue of CE is published, we will have experienced as a nation.

Our final featured article in this issue represents another group to whom Godbee’s concept of testimonial injustice surely applies, namely Black queer male college students and their writerly lives inside and outside our classrooms. As Collin Craig asserts in “Courting the Abject: A Taxonomy of Black Queer Rhetoric,” responding to and extending the work of Jonathan Alexander, Eric Pritchard, Elaine Richardson, Vershawn Young, and others, “paying attention to multiple subject positions can reveal how orientations to knowledge-making are layered and informed by intersecting elements shaping the daily lives of Black LGBTQ students” (620). More specifically, Craig explores “Black queer male college writers who factor their sexual identities into their embodied language experiences” (620) through the extended examples of student writers Damon and Leslie, whom Craig says “offer examples of how Black queer college men can use gender performance as a way of looking back and as a way to queer masculinist vernaculars” since “[q]ueering the vernacular creates spaces where Black men imagine themselves differently as Black and queer without negation” (633).

Ultimately, though Craig’s work aims to highlight how “Black queer rhetoric as a practice provides models for how students and teachers can use language for nuancing rhetorical approaches in and between the language of homophobia, university mission statements and policies that discursively and materially displace sexual minorities” (636), he further proposes that analyzing the work of students like Damon and Leslie can be put to use with any students in our collective classrooms, as it “call[s] for us to revisit the project of composition” (634) in light of how “institutional constraints create conditions for subjectivity that overlook and undermine sexual identity as vital for exploring language, literacy, and rhetoric” (635). In turning his lens outward, Craig’s focus on specific students in his own classroom rightfully privileges Damon’s and Leslie’s voices through the telling of their own lives as individuals defined by marginalizing language practices both in school and in home communities, arguing for an approach to “research writing as a cultural rhetorical practice” (622) in our classrooms. Craig additionally brings a student-focused study to our pages that has been all too rare during my editorship, while joining an ongoing conversation about language, literacy, and queer studies that has occurred in our pages in recent years (see
Geiger, January 2013; Fox, March 2014; Coles, May 2016, and Pruitt, September 2016), but heretofore absent a discussion of an explicit connection to Black (or other minority) writers’ identities. Craig’s work thus provides a model for how I hope future CE authors might think further about theories of intersectionality and our writing classrooms. I’m grateful that we were able to publish this article and the others in this issue. This is a fine sampling of scholarship with which to end our 79th volume.

* * * * * *

As we close this volume, I also close out my editorship. When I started my transitional year as editor of College English, in October 2011, I had been out of graduate school for fourteen years and was an associate professor of English and Director of Composition at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I had published two books, had a third one on the way, and was also completing my second coedited collection following several articles and chapters and, of course, dutiful attendance at the CCCC and other field conferences for more than fifteen years running. You would think that this aggregate experience would have allowed me keen insight into what we call “the profession” and what we further distinguish as “our field.” Yet as I now write this final editor’s note, in December 2016—as a full professor (and still a WPA) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, with four books and two collections and a couple more articles and chapters under my belt—I can say that my understanding of terms like profession and field and even scholarship have not grown simply because I’ve published more, gotten older, or moved up in the ranks of the faculty. My knowledge is greater—and forever changed for the better—because of being editor of this journal.

When I say “changed for the better,” musical theatre fans in our readership might recall the wistful duet between Elphaba and Glinda that comes near the close of the wildly popular Broadway show Wicked. In that song, the teen “good” witch Glinda and “wicked” witch Elphaba come to a (tearful) reckoning about their fitful friendship, including the sacrifices and triumphs that have resulted from it. Glinda knows that Elphaba is doomed to be an outcast—to be “wicked”—as a result of her choices; in contrast, Elphaba feels privileged to have been able to choose her life’s course, to have the freedom to be wicked. They assert to each other, as they come to terms with how different they desire their lives to be, that “because I knew you” they have each been “changed for good,” the double meaning of that critical word thick in the lyric.

It’s impossible to do editorial work on the scale of a flagship journal such as College English and not be changed by it, both for good and for good. Elphaba declared that “something has changed within me/something is not the same.” I’ll
sparing singing to you (note this is not a podcast), but something has also changed in me. I used to read articles as individual pieces of scholarship, each its own construction and its own distinct accomplishment. Now I cannot see an article without seeing its architecture first—and the similarities in its build to others of its kind. This has changed the way I approach my own writing and the way I teach writing to graduate students. I also used to believe that a journal was first and foremost a reflection of the editor’s likes and interests (oh, that editor’s an ethnographer? I’ll never get my historical stuff published in HIS journal). Now I know that a journal is not an extension of the editor, but the other way around: the editor simply extends the presence of good work in the field by publishing it in the journal she edits. Her desires and her interests are not what is important; it is what the field is doing, what the readership wants, and, importantly, what the scholars are writing that rules the day, determining the tables of contents. One thing, however, has not changed about me throughout these six eventful years, and that is the belief that authors (and readers and reviewers) value honesty and transparency above all things. Good scholarship cannot emerge without trust in individuals and in the process. And trust is not built by one person (or one publication, for that matter) alone.

All these ideas about change were—and are—a lot to organize in a coherent piece of writing. Indeed, in the process of writing this introduction, I churned out draft after draft after draft, none of which suited me, and each of which went in the trash. So, for some help, I turned to a place that has become a bigger part of my life than I might have imagined back in October 2011: social media. Now, I still refuse to “tweet” because I don’t think 140 characters can do much more than noisy evil in the world (and here I should probably apologize to the eager young graduate student who approached me at the 2012 CWPA conference and offered to run the journal’s Twitter account—to which I replied, no thanks, we don’t have one of those. You might be right, even as I do not think I was wrong). But the journal does have a Facebook page (with 1,221 likes as of this writing), and I have for several years had my own personal page, where I have something like 500 “friends,” at least 350 of whom likely know me as a friend not at all. Because of my feelings about honesty, transparency, and trust, noted above, I asked that friendly Facebook group: What do you still want to know from me, about this journal or matters related, as I exit this editor position? What would you have me say in a venue such as this one?

In that thread of subsequent responses to my post, several thought-provoking questions emerged—and I’ll try to tackle some of those here, if only indirectly. But two that stood out initially, from very wise (and real) friends, were these: How do you see the field (or publishing, or the profession) differently now? And what has this job cost you? These two very big-picture questions seem
intimately connected, which led to still more thinking and more drafting and a little nerve-steadying Netflix binge-watching. Coming out the other side of all of that, I have this to say: In October 2011, as I took over this position, the field (and here I speak mainly of rhetoric and composition/writing studies, but I think this is applicable to English studies as I know it) was, to me, an integrated machine. It had connected parts that worked together—even relied upon each other—with a common center and users who had things in common, relationships, affections. In metaphorical terms, it was a carousel. As with a carousel, sometimes it got a little boring (because after all, you are going in a circle) and a little self-referential (when you are moving so fast, it’s hard to see except what’s very near). But it also was beautiful and brightly lit, and if you got on early enough, you could secure one of the pretty high horses. Of course, if you got on too late, or were too indecisive, you had to sit on the weird low bunny rabbit. But as you got older, and less picky and less adventurous, there was also always the bench seat, from which you could watch the rest of the excitement whizz by as you patiently just waited to dismount, listening to the music and the conversation emanating from within.

In December 2016, I no longer see the carousel. Instead, I see the carnival (and this with no particular allusion to Susan Miller but also no lack of affection for her, let alone Mr. Bakhtin, though my pedestrian vision is surely less exhilarating than his). In the carnival, there are multiple rides—if usually just one carousel, which is typically poorly attended and patronized only by the very young and the highly nostalgic. Instead, there are many amusements—many machines—and while they do not look the same, some of them use the same gears and levers and contraptions to turn, spin, race, shake, and stir their riders. Yet, they compete with one another—they are each controlled by a separate barker who wants a bit of our wages. And they are all rides, but they operate very differently. Some go upside-down. Some shoot into the air and drop dramatically, nauseatingly. And others, like the carousel, just rotate, day after day. There are rides for thrill seekers and rides for scaredy-cats and rides for riding while mentally engaged in other thoughts altogether. But no matter the ride, these machines do not work together. They do not depend upon each other, except insofar as together, they create a unique place to go and to be. The machines compete, with clear winners and losers.

You may find my vision unoriginal—after all, the bread-and-circus idea isn’t exactly a new one in this (post?) postmodern world. But where I originally saw fierce unity (if love-hate) of theories and concepts and pedagogies, I now see fierce fragmentation and segregation. Where I once saw integrated conversations with a common language, I now see pockets of knowledge—silos, if you will. Where I once saw some pretty horses and odd rabbits moving side-by-side,
I now see . . . well, you get the idea. I think I have earned the right to make this personal declaration not just because I’m an aging scholar and outgoing editor and I’m charged, at this stage of my life, with being reflective. But also because I’m also a historian of writing by trade, and I believe I know our histories pretty well. They don’t always look pretty, and they aren’t ever archived logically. We fight and we make up and we fight again. New methods emerge, others fade away, along with theories and pedagogies. The Angel of History haunts us all.

So, don’t get me wrong—there’s no utopian vision that I have of what “we” are or used to be. I surely sat on that weird low rabbit for a good long time, never fast enough or deliberate enough to trade it out. And then, one day, I got a pretty high horse. But I was still in the same circle—I could still talk to people and feel like we had a shared vocabulary as we went round and round. Increasingly, I’m passing through a series of rooms as a journal editor, eavesdropping on those conversations (and yes, it’s multiple Burkean parlors for me) and then exiting, knowing that some doors remain open for others, and some remain closed. I see similar divisions in academic job ads, constructions of graduate concentrations, major curricula revision, writing program philosophies. And here, I make no declarations of hierarchies or assignments of weighted blame; there isn’t a sub-field or an area of specialty that I would call out for bad behavior or, comparatively, hold up as a model. Further, I believe that the recognition of scholarly specializations is vitally important to the diversity of our approaches and methods and arguments. We cannot, nor should we attempt to, all do the same work. But still, we all are equally clinging to our favorite rides.

As an editor, this comes out as one cost I’ve borne: I have the (un?) enviable position of being able to see the “whole” field and its genuinely tremendous, exciting scholarship and being able to select the best of that scholarship for inclusion in the pages of this journal—especially when it’s a never-published author, an opportunity realized through our Emerging Voices feature eight wonderful times. But I also see the pockets where the field is choosing to divide and live and the ways in which the areas of interest don’t connect. I see it in submissions—where conversations are usually conscripted to sub-field knowledge and must, except in rare cases, be coaxed (by reviewers and by myself) into an article that can be read and appreciated in a generalist journal of English studies such as this one, for readers who aren’t privy to the talk in those rooms. I see it at conferences, as I travel between CCCC and NCTE and Watson and RSA and CWPA, and MLA, representing the journal and also representing my own scholarly work, and hear this isn’t my conference as much or more than I hear this is where I belong.¹

It’s doubtful that all of us care equally about writing instruction or literacy or rhetoric or canon or any other broad concept that can serve to flatten rather than punctuate. There is no one “general” readership or audience in our field
who can understand all scholarly positions equally; our subfields do matter. Such are, I'm very sure, the pains of growth—and also a conundrum, if you agree with me that it is one—better sorted through at one of those conferences or meetings or in a journal that itself doesn't want to be, in a way, all things to all people, as College English admittedly does. But as the editor of this very “big tent” journal—which receives, at present, viable submissions in the broadly defined field of rhetoric and composition at a rate at least three times that of submissions in literary studies, likely because a journal invariably becomes identified with her editor at some point, to go back to my earlier view of the field—I lament this fragmentation, this division. For me—and I only speak for myself—it is a great loss. Being able to see it now, and probably never un-see it, is one of the costs and privileges of being editor.

I could go on about other costs, such as: needing to prioritize the work of this publication over all other professional (and sometimes) personal things, because you can go ahead and check out and feel tired or uninspired or just plain frustrated, but this publication comes out six times annually with or without you, so you pick yourself up and let other things disappear. Or saying no to the review requests from other journals that you respect, because you feel a conflict of interest, being unable to say no for me and no for them and then wonder, who now will say yes? Or telling your own graduate students no when they want to submit work to the journal, because even though you want more than anything for them to succeed and you realize that going on the job market without a publication is a liability, you also want everyone to know and believe that the students got all their publications on their own—no coattails, as my students know the term. Or, going to conferences and other professional events and being introduced as “The Editor of College English,” as if that encompassed your whole identity, and recognizing that the sun shines the brightest on you in those moments, not when you are just, and only, you. Because truly, you are never just you now. That identity is forever gone. These are costs, some more bracing than others.

But the costs that probably matter most to our readers—to all of you patiently reading this rather long introduction, many of whom perhaps have submitted work to us and did not have that work accepted, given the math of our approximately 10 percent acceptance rate—are those that relate to the other words I’ve come to know differently: space and fit. While the consequences of refusals based on those words is not often visible to me (though, angry emails? I’ve got ’em), I know it is differently invisible to many of you. So let me reflect a little on our editorial process and how it, too, produces those inevitable winners and losers, other tangible (human) costs.

When I first took over as editor, a wise fellow editor in the field told me, “There’s not enough good scholarship out there to fill issues—sometimes, you
will just barely make it before the production deadline.” Needless to say, ever-hopeful me, faced with a pretty substantial number of initial submissions in our Editorial Manager online tracking system, didn’t believe this person’s warning. But, they were right. Let me rephrase that: there is a lot of very good, publishable scholarship out there. But it doesn’t always get to the journals. It often languishes on computers and in files for fear—of rejection, of misunderstanding, of facing a reading public and no longer being the piece of writing you previously loved.

Instead of being flooded with all this good work, much of what makes it to our doors (or at least mine) is only some of that scholarship, which usually needs a little or a lot more revision—revision that sometimes works out and sometimes doesn’t. Alongside this is other scholarship that would be great for someone else’s journal, but not this one. It’s the latter that goes to “fit.” There is a world of journals out there, especially if we take English studies as a whole. Not all pieces work for all publications, even with some very sincere trying.

Scanning my CV, I see that I’ve spoken publicly about editing and publishing—either in the abstract or about working with College English specifically—on twelve different occasions, usually at national conferences, and in one published chapter (in Bruce McComiskey’s collection Microhistories of Composition). That doesn’t count, of course, the numerous private conversations, elevator exchanges, one-on-one sessions with prospective authors at venues like CCCC’s Research Network Forum, graduate class visits, and other Q-and-As that pop up when I’m ostensibly presenting work on other research of my own. In each of these settings, I have tried to explain what College English does and does not do, what it can and cannot publish, and—at least for the duration of my editorship—the reasons behind much of this. But perhaps because ours is a journal that brings together voices not usually in conversation, or are even seat mates, while the field becomes more and more specialized (which I see also in articles worked from larger bodies of work, especially when “in this chapter...” and/or “in my dissertation” wasn’t properly edited out of the submission), “fit” is still a hard one to determine for many authors.

So, about 60 percent of what we have received over these past five years has not been sent out for review. Some of that might have been really off base (a two-page piece diagramming a short poem, or a limerick—both real examples, I’m afraid); some of that might have been in our wheelhouse, but lacking a clear argument, a declaration of exigence to the field or some part of it, the “so what?,” enough research or evidence, a clear methodology, or more than one of the above. If I sent something out for review—for me, about 40 percent of all submissions, encompassing 527 reviews completed by 521 reviewers—it was because I genuinely wanted to try to make it work (or collect valuable feedback from reviewers that would help the author in ways my assessment alone could not). Ultimately,
between outright rejections, revise-and-resubmissions (occasionally with two rounds of revision), and the rare-but-real conditional acceptances, we ultimately published about 10 percent of all submissions during my time as editor, plus three symposia that I organized and/or solicited, and fourteen solicited review essays. On top of that, we published five special, guest-edited issues, or about one per year, which I do not count in our acceptance rates, and the occasional Comment and Response piece, also not counted (nor peer-reviewed). That left us room to publish 72 full-length articles from our general submissions, or 14 to 15 articles per year, across the six issues we publish annually.

That number—which looks frighteningly small when I isolate it this way—is of course very much about space. Our journal publishes a lot of issues per year compared to others (and hey, not so very long ago, *CE* used to publish eight issues per year, so there’s that). *CCC* publishes four, *Rhetoric Review* also four, *Composition Studies* and *WPA: Writing Program Administration* only two. And that’s just a few from the field I know best. There are plenty of annuals and semi-annuals in the field of literary studies (and, for that matter, in literary journals publishing fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction—all outside our publication scope but relevant to a discussion of frequency of opportunity), with *PMLA* being a notable exception in its four annual issues. As for NCTE journals, we at *CE* are allotted a certain number of pages total per year, which amounts to about 40,000 words per issue, give or take, exclusive of ads, front matter, and announcements.

So, there is a hard limit on what kind of space we have. This has, on a regular basis, required that I ask authors to cut down their texts to a shorter length or suggest that their 50-page manuscript, which actually works as a 50-page manuscript, would do better in a journal that is not so space-limited. What would the landscape of the journal look like if we had more latitude to publish longer works? I can’t answer that question at present, but I do know going all-digital wouldn’t change it much, since our budget is about production costs, not an idealized notion of how big or small a journal should be (for example, even though its issues are chunkier, *CCC* has a similar page/word budget, simply divided over four issues instead of six annually). This isn’t a great place to argue for or against online journals (to be distinguished from open access, yet another step in publishing that many rightfully herald), nor am I the best person to lead that debate. But I can say that going digital alone wouldn’t dramatically change the number of works we can publish, if alter it visibly at all. And our role as a “Tier 1” publication would still stand—making the criterion of selectivity a primary one, still, for editors and reviewers.

I’ve gone fairly deep into the nitty-gritty, so for the data nerds among our readers, here are some more process-based statistics: Our reviewers—who work for free, and who are the lifeblood of scholarly publishing—returned manuscript
reviews in an average of 25.9 days (from invitation to read to submission of the review). These reviewers completed an average of 2.2 reviews each during the course of my editorship. Often, they disagreed, which led to the assignment of a third reviewer. In each case, I felt it my responsibility to offer a decision that synthesized the reviews as best I could for the author, rather than let him or her decipher what I (or the reviewers) wanted on his or her own. This, too, reflected my investment in honesty and transparency. If I felt the reviewers were off base or that one reviewer made more sense than the other, I’d (gently) say so. If I saw clear connections in theme between the reviews—or competing ones—I’d explain why. Only once did I decline to show a completed review to an author because there, too, honesty comes into play. Sometimes it’s good to hear tough criticism, especially where I could mitigate it with some encouragement and specific guidance.

Throughout this process, I learned a lot about how writers respond to other writers (reviewers to authors and vice-versa), and I found that it is usually with great generosity and, usually, similar motives; even when reviewers disagreed, I almost always felt they were reading the same manuscript, if occasionally with differing motivations or lenses. This generosity and my desire to not keep authors in the lurch—especially those in vulnerable positions such as pre-tenure or ABD status—meant our turnaround time from initial submission to initial decision (reject, revise-and-resubmit, accept conditionally) was an average of 24.9 days. This was surely also aided by some reviewers who were light years past the average turnaround stated above (you know who you are). Our turnaround time for final publication decisions (those based on revise-and-resubmit or accept conditionally judgments) was 19.3 days—partially motivated by my desire to lock down good work and plan my issues as far ahead as possible (through a very nontechnical system called a “Microsoft Word file”). This time-to-decision was greatly aided by the average of only 57.3 days taken by our authors who chose to revise their work, from an author pool that numbered 96 of the 107 total invited to do so. And then there’s the final big number, which is the basis, I guess, for everything: the number of unique manuscripts submitted in total between October 2011 (when I started reading as incoming editor) and March 2016 (when I stopped reading because all our remaining issues were full). According to Editorial Manager, which I also trust, that number is 545.

So, why after talk of carousels and carnivals and Broadway musicals, with a side of American, Russian, and German theorists in allusion form, do I lay all this data on you? Well, first because I can: our Editorial Manager tracking system not only saved my life in especially heavy submission times (which are August, December/January, and May, in case you are curious—the first because it marks the start of the job season, and everyone wants to legitimately say in
application packets that they have a piece “under consideration” somewhere; the latter two corresponding to the start and end of the semesters, when authors have more time to write). It also gave me a tremendous database—an archive, if you will—of information that can be passed from editor to editor and will be: our incoming CE editor, Melissa Ianetta, is using it as we speak to screen and assign her incoming manuscripts.

But more than this, the allure of an archive—with apologies to Farge—or the efficiency and reliability of a tracking system over a filing cabinet, a stack of folders, and my own not-always-outstanding memory, I appreciate Editorial Manager’s ability to allow me to share these facts and figures with you, secondary to very those terms—honesty, transparency, and trust—about which I’ve never changed my views. EM gave me a template for every decision letter so that I could concentrate on what I would say, not the creation of the message or the saving of it. It gave me a record of where, when, and how I had responded to authors, so I could go back and improve upon the way I communicated decisions or structured recommendations (especially valuable, since many of those decision letters, truthfully, took multiple hours to write). Even better, perhaps, the EM system allowed me to automatically share all my decision letters with the reviewers of the manuscripts—a feature that numerous reviewers praised. Even though we are still an “old school” print-based journal (with an electronic version of all issues online at www.ncte.org, I’m quick to add!), we have employed some great technology to make sure our processes and communications are as open and expedient as possible.

It seems that I’ve been writing this introduction for so long, it’s nearly the new year already. I’m worried about 2017, on both a personal and political level (and I suppose those are never distinguishable anyway), but I’m not at all worried about College English in 2017 as I hand over the reins to the extremely capable (and already on the job!) Melissa Ianetta. Though I do not pretend that even the best academic journal can relieve or erase the kind of worries we all might face otherwise in our lives, I hope what we have published these last few years has brought you insight and perspective, called you to action, inspired you to respond, rebut, or extend a line of inquiry, or just given you some joy.

I’m grateful to have had this truly amazing opportunity to serve you, one that comes along really once in a lifetime. I hope others reading this missive of mine will take the opportunity to be an editor if they have the chance; I think you’ll find it worth the trip.

I’m certain there are many more questions about what we’ve done at the journal, and why, that I didn’t answer or only partially answered, despite all those great suggestions on Facebook—primarily for those reasons of space and fit. But I wanted to leave this last bit of space to give thanks to all of those people who
made this editorial opportunity all that it was, keeping in mind that this journal
does not belong to any one person, but to many. I therefore cannot leave this
page, or this position, without thanking all the people who made my work pos-
sible and who continue to make College English a vital and valuable presence on
the scholarly landscape. I thank my family, and good friends, who have been
ever-patient as I sometimes (likely more than I should) put “the work” first (see
“costs,” above). I want to thank my many assistant editors, whom I list here in
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individuals as they completed their graduate degrees has made editorial work,
which is more than not very difficult—as you may have gathered from what I’ve
said elsewhere in this introduction—also a treasured experience of mentoring,
learning, and collegiality. You seven have taught me way more than I could ever
teach you. So, have a jellybean or two on me.

I also want to thank Kurt Austin, Director of Publications at NCTE, and
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Finally, I thank both the current subscribers of College English—including
libraries and institutions—especially since I know it’s not always easy to justify
another professional expense on our currently budget-strapped campuses, and
the more than 150 authors (and respondents) who have appeared in our pages
since my first issue went to press. There is no journal, surely, without your fine
work to populate it. I look forward to seeing you all continue to bring your
energy, ideas, and insight to this and other publications in the years to come.
Happy writing.
NOTE

1. This division—or unity—can be played out in the IPEDS Classification of Instructional Programs. Are we in Rhet-Comp, for example, CIP 23 or 23.13? one colleague recently asked. I won’t speak for the field, but I think this question illustrates my metaphor—or perhaps the other way around.