Computers and Composition: An International Journal

Abstract

This review of the print journal Computers and Composition: An International Journal explores the history and content of a distinguished source of scholarship situated within the field of Rhetoric and Composition. The review focuses on current research trends published in the journal as well as recommendations for graduate students interested in submitting or utilizing this publication for research purposes.

History

All historical information regarding this journal has been excerpted or summarized from the journal’s official website.

Computers and Composition, a “professional journal devoted to exploring the use of computers in composition classes, programs, and scholarly projects” got its start in November 1983 as a newsletter that was co-edited by Kathleen Keifer of Colorado State University and Cynthia L. Selfe who, at the time, was working at Michigan Technical University. Between 1983 and 1985, the newsletter—approximately 13 pages each issue—appeared eight times, publishing short articles, announcements, and software descriptions. An interesting note is that both of these original co-editors are both still involved with the journal as it exists today, Selfe still co-edits the journal and Keifer remains on the editorial review board.

In 1985 the newsletter was converted to a professional journal printed at Michigan Technical University. This shift from newsletter to journal completely changed the goals of the publication and saw a shift away from “narratives about classroom experiences using technology, descriptions of working with drill-and-skill programs, and software reviews” and towards article-length pieces that “more fully incorporated pedagogical and rhetorical theories and boldly confronted the complexities of merging computer technologies with classroom practices.”

The journal saw another important development in 1988 when Gail E. Hawisher of the University of Illinois joined Cynthia Selfe as co-editor. Together, the two co-editors worked to establish Computers and Composition “among other well-known publishing venues in rhetoric and composition.” Under the direction of Hawisher and Selfe “the journal began to feature special-edited issues that focused on such diverse areas as writing centers, synchronous CMC, computer programming, intellectual property rights and professional concerns such as tenure and promotion,” a trend that continues under their guidance to this day. Excluding a shift in ownership and a move from Michigan Technical University to Ohio State University along with Cynthia Selfe in 2005 (the publication has been co-housed by the University of Illinois since Hawisher joined in 1988 and remains here to this day), the journal continues to be a publishing venue for scholars interested in emergent computer technologies and rhetorical and pedagogical theories.

Other Significant Dates:

- 1990: The journal began announcing annual awards for dissertations, articles, books,
contributions to the field, and, most recently, digital scholarship.

- 1994: Ablex Publishing Corporation assumed ownership of the journal. This included a name change from *Computers and Composition* to *Computers and Composition: An International Journal for Teachers of Writing*.
- 1996: An online edition was launched (see discussion by Susanna for more information).
- 2001: The journal moved from tri-annual to quarterly publication.
- 2005: The journal underwent another name change to the *Computers and Composition: An International Journal* moniker it is known under today.
- 2006: After Ablex Publishing moved to Elsevier in 1999 the journal officially adopted Elsevier's E-Submission digital content management system (EES) as its primary means of manuscript submission, review, approval, and copyediting.

**Journal Focus**

*Articles and Book Reviews*

The scholarship that exists within the pages of *Computers and Composition: An International Journal* is in many ways focused around education. The original research found in articles and books reviewed here think through the use of technology in one of three domains: writing classrooms, writing programs, and writing research. If you read through any of the issues over the past few years it is easy to see that this journal still holds on to its early roots in the concerns of teachers incorporating technology into their classrooms. Being an important venue for publication within the field of rhetoric and composition, this journal publishes articles that relate to most of the sub-fields found within this discipline. Articles discussing original research in the effects of computer technology on the politics of education, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), self-sponsored literacies, the shaping effects of class and economic formations on digital instruction, learning, and social practices, the application of rhetorical principles to digital discourse, and the use of social media in first year composition instruction are some of the recent topics discussed in this journal. The important thing here is that the scholarship here examines computer technologies in the broadest sense possible. Authors utilize research about specific sites, software, and users in order to inform their understanding of these tools in education from a programmatic level down to the individual learner.

The large range of usually qualitative research that is present in this journal reflects the emerging and ever-expanding ways that computer technologies are influencing scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. What we currently see in this journal is a nexus of topics that play a role in the way scholars are trying to understand the place of technology in education. It would be wrong to say that the work that appears in this journal is purely theoretical in nature, but most articles do analyze computer technologies via pedagogical and rhetorical theories. Often, this work is situated within the classroom and meant to inform pedagogy as can be seen in Jonathan Alexander’s article “Out of the Closet and Into the Classroom: Sexual Orientation and the Computerized Classroom” which discusses ways of teaching issues of sexual orientation in computer mediated classrooms (14.2). However, we also see scholars trying to make rhetorical sense of technologies and the communities that utilize them as can be seen in James Porter’s recent, and award winning article, “Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric” (26.4).
Recent Special Issues

Over the past few years the journal has adopted a publishing schedule that alternates between regular issues and special issues with guest editors. Typically, with one exception over the past 6 years, the first and third issues are special topics issues. Here are some of the recent topics covered:

27.3 “Copyright, Culture, Creativity, and the Commons” Edited by Martine Courant Rife, Steve Westbrook, Dânielle Nicole DeVoss and John Logie

27.1 “Composition 2.0” Edited by Michael Day, Randall McClure and Mike Palmquist

26.3 “A Thousand Pictures: Interfaces and Composition” Edited by Joel Haefner

26.1 “The Future of Graduate Education in Computers and Writing” Edited by Patricia Webb Boyd and Peter Goggin

Book Series

Along with the journal’s charter to publish article length scholarship and book reviews centered around the way computer technologies are changing the discipline of rhetoric and composition, the journal’s editors have also recently begun a book series in conjunction with the journal. Scholarship in this journal has discussed the potential effects computer technologies will have on book length publication in the field and the journal has responded to this by beginning one of the first digital presses in the field. The Computers and Composition Digital Press (CCDP), in conjunction with the Utah State University Press (important to situate this within a University press for purposes of recognition and tenure) have now released two books. The second book John Scanters-Zapico’s Generaciones: The Pursuit and Practice of Traditional and Electronic Literacies on the U.S., Mexico Borderlands, is available for free download at <http://ccdigitalpress.org/ebooks-and-projects/generaciones>.

Submission Guidelines and Review

This journal utilizes blind peer review in order to determine publication.

Being that it is a journal centered around technology, it should be no surprise that all submissions for Computers and Composition are received electronically. Submissions should be submitted through Elsevier site and should include the following:

“Authors will need to submit at least three separate files: the manuscript in a Word document or RTF file that includes a 200-word abstract, 5-10 relevant key words, and no author identifiers; a cover letter; and a title page with a short (50-100 words) biographical statement. Manuscripts should be between 15 and 30 pages in length, double-spaced, and formatted for an 8 ½ x 11-inch document with 1-inch margins on all sides.”

For a full list of publication guidelines please visit the full breakdown on journal’s website.
A Note for Graduate Students

All publications are available in full-text format online in some manner. The first two volumes (1983-1985) of the journal are available through the website’s journal archive only, although this archive does also include all issues printed in the first ten volumes (1983-1993).

All other issues (1985-present) are available in full-text online or in pdf format via ScienceDirect, a database subscribed to by most collegiate libraries including the University of Illinois. If you are interested in reviewing printed versions of this journal on this campus most issues are available in The Center for Writing Studies located at 288 English Building.

Possible Graduate Student Involvement

Since Gail Hawisher joined the editorial staff in 1988 Computers and Composition has been dedicated to being a resource and site of publication for graduate students in rhetoric and composition: “The two coeditors also made sure that even as they were encouraging cutting-edge research, they were also helping graduate students and newcomers make their mark on this newly emerging field.”

It is indeed possible to publish articles discussing the original research done by graduate students. Most of this research seems to be submitted by Phd candidates looking to publish a chapter of their dissertation. An example of these can be seen in James Meese’s article, “Resistance or Negotiation: An Australian Perspective on Copyright Law's Cultural Agenda” published in the most recent issue (27.3).

Book reviews also provide a unique opportunity for graduate student publication. Unlike other journals that do request only reviews, Computers and Composition encourages graduate students to submit book reviews for publication. Book reviews seem to only come out during non-special topic issues. In fact, graduate students wrote the last two book reviews.

As students at the University of Illinois we also have a unique opportunity to get involved with this journal because of its current home here at the University of Illinois. Two PhD candidates in Writing Studies currently serve on the editorial review board for this journal. However, Gail Hawisher is retiring at the end of this semester and I am not sure how that will effect the potential involvement for students here at UIUC.