The intersection of literacy and technology represents a vast expanse of study where many scholars address, and critique areas of concern in digital rhetoric and how these issues may or may not impact writing. Much like rhetoric, digital rhetoric has no clear and generally agreed upon definition. With many different definitions there are various similar and conflicting approaches to digital rhetoric studies. Current scholarship provides a large amount of attention to defining digital rhetoric, understanding what it means, and developing theories based on these definitions and understandings. This also includes building upon preexisting work in digital rhetoric to form subfields under digital rhetoric, such as procedural rhetoric, and the concept of electracy. The abundance of scholarship focused on theories has led to a limiting number of scholarly works in application. There exist numerous appeals to scholars to critically address and think about the role of technology in the classroom, its social use and the implications of both in our daily lives and writing. There are various pedagogical practices and assignments that aim to incorporate elements of digital rhetoric and build digital literacies of students in composition classrooms.

Continuing work that focuses on theory and not application can lead to what Wysocki, and Johnson-Eilola refer to as an attempt to use literacy to “give others some basic, neutral, context-less set of skills whose acquisition will bring the bearer economic and social goods and privileges” (p. 352). In their article “Blinded by the Letter: Why Are We Using Literacy as a Metaphor for Everything Else?” they criticize the approach to literacy as a skill that equals the playing field for all. Doing so does not address systemic issues, as it is an assumption that to be literate in any area is to have a set of skills that are both desirable and beneficial. Without applying digital rhetoric theories, or devoting more scholarship to the application of these theories there is a high likelihood that curriculum in composition will approach digital rhetoric as an area for students to become literate in working in digital spaces without exploring the relationship between the user and the technology.

The best method to closely research and examine the various factors that inform and influence first-year composition curriculum I will conduct a case study. The purpose of this case study is to research how theories and specific scholarship in digital rhetoric that informs and influences first-year composition curriculum. Beginning in January of 2017 I will send out surveys to Writing Program Administrators, and first-year composition instructors (WPA) at twenty universities in the U.S. Based on survey responses I will select give to seven universities and request interviews with WPAs, and instructors. If available, during this stage I will ask for the following documents: first-year composition syllabus, assignment guidelines, and rubrics. If rubrics or assignment guidelines are not available, then I during interviews I will ask questions specific to the information I hoped to gain in reviewing these documents. These questions may be, but are not limited to: How are assignments explained? Did the instructors modify the guidelines or do instructors all follow the same curriculum? What are the expected outcomes? What parts of the assignments are graded? Which sections of the rubric are worth the most points? Which sections of the rubrics are worth the least amount of points?

The analysis of the data collected and interviews conducted will be grounded in three categories that I will create and use as a lens for analysis based on all relevant scholarship to the dissertation topic. This will include works in pedagogy, multimodal composition, electracy, procedural rhetoric, and digital rhetoric. My goal is to be able to trace, or link, the writing theory in digital composition to current pedagogical practices in first-year composition curriculums, in an effort to research which theories are practiced and which are not, and how or why there is a gap between theory and practice.