With technological advancements that continue to alter and/or create new ways of communicating and writing comes the ability to not only study them, but bring them into the composition classroom. The continuous shift in communication and writing practices as a result of new or improved technology has a long history in the field of rhetoric and composition. Whereas once the typewriter, and word processors changed how we wrote, we now have computers, tablets, smartphones and their software that change how we make meaning and communicate it to others. As more communication devices and software become available, the gap between the kinds of writing people do everyday and kind of writing students do inside the classroom continues to grow. As a result the first-year composition classroom becomes a space where instructors attempt to build on the writing skills students utilize outside of the classroom in addition to the writing practices that aim to help students transfer their skills to other classes and their professional writing. In first-year composition, where students continue to develop their literacies through writing and meaning-making practices, scholars and instructors approach look to multimodal composition as a bridge for developing and building digital multiliteracies. Developing these literacies serves the student both inside and outside the classroom.

The concept of multimodality refers to the notion that multiple modes, where a mode is defined as “a unit of expression and representation” (Roswell, 2013, p. 3). In The New London Group’s “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” the five modes of communication are visual, linguistic, aural, spatial, and gestural (p. 83 ) and each separate mode is capable of communicating a message on its own. However, when combined, they can communicate a more complex or nuanced message that can appeal to an audience more effectively. Some common examples of multimodal compositions are a video that makes use of sound, and text, in addition to the moving images to deliver a message, or an infographic that combines text and an image to relay information. As an audience we are constantly exposed to multimodal compositions, so much so that we may not recognize them as an example of multimodality. The fact that multimodal compositions can go unnoticed points to how prevalent they are in communication and writing practices.

The NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies helps to establish the importance of embracing multimodal literacy practices. The statement points to how the “integration of modes of communication and expression can enhance or transform the meaning of the work beyond illustration or decoration,” (Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies, 2005) which helps frame communicating using all available modes as an important aspect of meaning-making. By drawing attention to the fact that multimodal literacies are “the interplay of meaning-making systems (alphabetic, oral, visual, etc.) that teachers and students should strive to study and produce” the understanding is that this is already something that instructors teach students to evaluate and create in composition courses. Instructors and students work with and make meaning by mixing modes as both composer and audience member, therefore multimodal composition is not new, or another concept to teach. It is ingrained in what we teach.

In 2014, the Council of Writing Program Administrators released an updated version of WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, which also addresses multimodality. The statement connects composition to technology by drawing attention to the notion that composition practices are “shaped by the technologies available to them, and digital technologies are changing writers’ relationships to their texts and audiences” (WPA Outcomes Statement For First-Year Composition 3.0). Again we see the idea that newer technology impacts writing practices, but that this is not a new phenomena because technology has always changed communication and writing practices. The statement pushes teachers to include newer writing practices made available by advances in technology.

Multimodal composition then becomes an integral part of first-year composition curriculum as a means to develop digital multiliteracies and incorporate new or newer technology available to us for communicating, making meaning and writing. This approach to multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum creates an opportunity to also implement scholarship that explores how software, platforms and devices impact communication and writing practices. Scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy can propel multimodal composition beyond simply using the concept of multimodality to broaden the scope of literacy. With embracing multimodal literacies, and therefore multimodal composition, comes the responsibility to incorporate concepts and theories found in scholarship in related subfields of rhetoric. A first-year composition curriculum that makes use of digital platforms means it using the first-year composition classroom as a space to practices theories in subfields of rhetoric, such as digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric and electracy, that can lead to a deeper understanding and/or broaden the scope of multimodality for instructors and students. As digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy grow through the work of scholars, I see what can only be described as a widening gap between theory and practice. The work done in these three subfields of rhetoric contribute to a better understanding on our parts of the relationship between technology and the person using it to communicate, write, and deliver messages to an audience.   
 A first-year composition curriculum with digital multimodal composition assignments make the first-year composition classroom a space to continue to include subfields of rhetoric, and their respective theories. Scholarly work in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and the concept of electracy is abundant, and not only limited to classroom practices. However, the abundance of theories results in 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, but do these assignments reflect current scholarship? Does first-year composition curriculum use multimodal or multimedia composition as a means to apply the majority of theoretical work in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric and electracy? By researching how WPAs implement multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum, and how instructors approach introducing and assessing multimodal composition assignments in their classrooms this dissertation aims to better understand when, or if at all, theories in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, electracy shape multimodal composition.

The intersection of literacy and technology represents a vast expanse of study where many scholars address, and critique areas of concern in rhetoric and composition, specifically how emerging devices and software may or may not impact writing and writing instruction. The increased usage of technology (software, device, and online platform) in the classroom and in our daily lives changed and continues to change how we communicate. The newfound mobility of technological devices, made possible with the availability of Wi-Fi, introduction of smartphones and tablets, in addition to improved desktop computers and laptops, directly impacted our writing practices. Which, make it is easy to view new or improved technology as a more recent concern in rhetoric and composition, but the implementation of more, or newer technology in the composition classroom has long been an important area of study in the field of rhetoric and composition. In the early 1990s to the 2000s concerns rose over technology, and its use in composition classes based on new or different writing practices as a result of developments in technology and its increased integration into our daily lives.

In “The Rhetoric of Technology and the Electronic Writing Class” Hawisher and Selfe (1991) express concern over the “new electronic classrooms” (p. 55) and its impact on how writing instructors teach writing. They warn of over reliance on technology, and integration of technology in the classroom. Their observations of the approaches of instructors teaching in these electronic classrooms leads to a call to “plan carefully and develop the necessary critical perspectives to help us avoid using computers to advance or promote mediocrity in writing instruction” (p. 62). Their warning of over reliance on the ways in which technology is integrated is not uncommon, nor is it only associated with the integration of technology in a classroom. The appeal of a new technology, and/or new approach to a preexisting theory is undeniable. The field must carefully consider the temptation to implement new technology and pedagogy based on specific technological developments without creating a critical eye as to what its impact may be.

The New London Group (1996) in “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures” provide an overview for “the changing social environment facing students and teachers” (p. 60). The social environment they recognize as changing is the result of the rise of globalized societies. They push for literacy pedagogy to include the “burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (p. 61). The effects and importance of both advancements in technology and The NLG’s changing view of literacy are apparent in Stuart Selber’s (2004) *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age,* and Kathleen Blake Yancey’s address “Made not only words: Composition in a new key” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Selber recognizes the need for changes in curriculum

while Yancey draws attention to move away teaching writing practices of alphabetic text only. The connection between teaching multiliteracies, digital multiliteracies, modes that represent communication practices, which became more commonly known as multimodal composition and multimedia composition as will be more thoroughly addressed in chapter 2 (Lit Review).

One way in which multiliteracies, digital multiliteracies, multimodal and multimedia composition come together as a teachable practice in first-year composition curriculum is through the inclusion of an assignment, or series of assignments that aim to develop students’ multiliteracies. These assignments vary from curriculum to curriculum but the goals remain similar. Students use software, a specific platform, device, or website to compose by mixing modes, or by using something other than alphabetic text only. The composition and delivery of a message depends on utilizing the available technological means. An example of this is the E-Portfolio, which Clarke (2009) writes about in “The Digital Imperative: Making the Case for a 21st-Century Pedagogy” presents digital rhetoric as another literacy students must develop. She points to web 2.0 technologies as a means to access and allow for exploring new ways to encourage authorial control of writing (p. 28). Assignments such as the E-Portfolio are highlighted as a means for “discussions of ownership of digital material” (p. 29). Clarke also describes the composition classroom as an “emerging space for digital rhetoric” and views this as one way to develop students’ literacy in digital rhetoric. Building on Clarke’s idea that the composition classroom is a space to incorporate concepts of digital rhetoric, allows for the opportunity for it to also be a space to include procedural rhetoric, and electracy.

As the field moves away from questioning whether it should teach students to compose by mixing modes and not solely relying on alphabetic text to teach writing the issue becomes how to incorporate a multimodal or multimedia assignment. The inclusion of multimodal composition assignments in a first-year composition bring about concerns as to what types of multimodal composition assignments to include in first-year composition curriculum. WPAs and instructors must consider what type of multimodal composition will become part of the curriculum. From how to introduce multimodality as a concept, how to assess the assignment, whether to place emphasis on the process of composing or the final product, introducing the assignment, all with the goal of developing assignments that help to accomplish the learning outcomes of the program, university and/or field of rhetoric and composition.

With all that to consider it is clear that scholarly research on what to teach, how to teach it, and how to assess it are always needed, but can specific assignments be recreated? Are the experiences of one instructor’s classroom enough to answer the call put out by the NLG, Selber, and Yancey? What works in one classroom may not work in another, and if an instructor tries it and is unhappy with the results, does that mean they no longer attempt to incorporate multimodal composition in their curriculum? The large amount of scholarship related to multimodal assignments, and the experiences of instructors as they attempt to implement multimodal composition in their first-year composition courses is vital, but as first-year composition programs become more familiar and at ease with adding multimodal composition to their curriculums WPAs and first-year composition instructors should look beyond the basics of multimodality. Digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy provide a framework to approach the role of technology in the lives of students inside and outside the classroom. Each provides the student with an opportunity to develop multiliteracies, but also question their relationship with technology (digital rhetoric), explore their role as users of technology (procedural rhetoric), and the participatory nature of composition (electracy).

There are numerous theories and scholarship in these three areas that do not always reach the classroom. Without applying theories of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy, or devoting more scholarship to the application of these theories, there is a high likelihood that curriculum in composition will approach digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy as an area for students to become literate in working in digital spaces without exploring the relationship between the user and the technology. Students, as users of technology, need to understand how the technology can change them, but also how they can change it. Knowing how to use a platform, software, and device effectively also includes understanding its role beyond completing a task/assignment. To do this students as users of the technology must be able to think critically about the impact of the technology, how using it changes them, and how they change it, and what that means for their communication and writing practices.

***Purpose of the Study***

Recognizing the gap between theory and application this dissertation will attempt to research what types of multimodal assignments are included in first-year composition curriculum, how they are implemented, and which theories influence their learning outcomes and/or reasoning for their implementation into first-year composition curriculum. To meet the needs of developing digital multiliteracies and integrating more, or newer, technology in the classroom it is understood that multimodal composition assignments are often part of first-year composition curriculum in an attempt to develop digital multiliteracies and implement technology to reflect current writing practices. As scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric and electracy grows their scholarship and theories should be reflected in multimodal composing practices in first-year composition curriculum and classes to broaden the scope and understanding of what it means to use digital platforms to mix modes in communication and writing practices. This dissertation attempts to answer the following research questions:

***Research Questions***

1. How, if at all, do digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and the concept of electracy and participatory composition influence composition curriculum and approaches to digital literacies in the field of rhetoric and composition?

2. What types of assignments and platforms allow for an attempt to combine theory and application in the composition classroom?

***Definition of Terms***

There is no single agreed upon definition of multimodal composition, because multimodal composition can mean or refer to different aspects of meaning-making depending on how you define a mode and if you tie multimodal practices to specific uses of technology to make meaning. If a WPA or instructor view multimodality as a means to implement digital technologies in a curriculum their multimodal assignments would mostly aim to make use of new or newer technology and digital platforms. If their view of multimodality reflects that it isn’t only digital, and therefore it can exist outside digital technologies and still be a useful composing practice then they may encourage students to embrace materiality when mixing modes.

Scholars such as Lutkewitte (2014) in *Multimodal Composition A Critical Sourcebook* defines multimodal composition as “communication using multiple modes that work purposely to create meaning,” which is a broad definition that does not marry itself to a digital technology. This may be a result of the arguments that oppose the ideas that multimodal composition is new, because as Jason Palmeri (2012) wrote in *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy* “past compositionists responded to the new media of their day” (p. 5) by creating multimedia textbooks in 1970s that were “designed to appeal to the multimodal interests of students who had grown up watching television” (p. 5). The idea that composition instructors react to the technology and media that influences communication habits and experiences of our students may not be new as Palmeri suggests. For this reason some in the field prefer to use multimedia composition, or new media composition as it is specific to more current technology and media used to communicate and write. It should also be noted that before multimodal composition was a widely used term in the field of rhetoric and composition, multimedia composition was a commonly used term to describe writing practices using newly available technology. Jim Heid (1991) defined multimedia as “the integration of two or more communications media,” and again we see this type of composition as using more than one type of media or mode to communicate as central focus of the definition. This aspect of the definitions of multimodal composition, multimedial composition, and new media composition point to the process of mixing modes and/or media as the central focus of this type of communication and writing. The field might have long been multimodal or taken into account visual or audio modes used in communication, but the technological developments made in the 1990s and 2000s allowed for more communication mixing modes than ever before.

For this dissertation I chose to use the term multimodal composition, and not multimedia or new media, because multimodal composition is the most often used term in the scholarship. It is commonly used to describe the composition process by which modes are mixed, arranged, and delivered to communicate and write. To effectively research how multimodal composition is implemented in a first-year composition curriculum I felt it was important not to tie multimodal composition to only digital practices. Multimedia composition and new media composition tend to be tied to composition taking place in only digital spaces. It is possible that a first-year composition curriculum or instructor uses multimedia or new media to compose build digital literacies. However, the terms multimedia and new/newer media tend to be associated with digital only platforms. It is possible to build digital literacies through practices other than teaching multimodal composition, but for the purpose of this dissertation it is important to use a term that does not exclude practices and assignments that are not digital only. The focus of this dissertation is how multimodal assignments are implemented and taught, and if theories and practices in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy are part of programmatic discussions and/or instruction and/or if the inclusion of multimodal composition assignments stems from the necessity of building digital multiliteracies.

The definitions of multimodal composition and multimedia composition above can also fall under the umbrella of digital composition which Hess and Davisson in *Theorizing Digital Rhetoric* (2018) define digital rhetoric as “the study of meaning-making, persuasion, or identification as expressed through language, bodies, machines, and texts that are created, circulated, or experiences through or regarding digital technologies” (p. 6) . Digital composition refers to specific practices available to today’s writers through a variety of digital platforms including but not limited to social media networking sites, video and sound editing software, word processor software, and mobile devices (“Digital Composition, Storytelling & Multimodal Literacy: What Is Digital Composition & Digital Literacy?, n.d.”). In using the available technology to compose digitally it becomes important to also understand not only how to use the technology effectively to communicate and write, but also what it means to use specific technology. This definition places the experience of using digital technology as equal importance as the creation and delivery of information.

Based on the definition provided by Hess and Davidson because multimodal composition can fall under digital composition when the modes mixed are done so in digital environments. Mixing modes digitally is to make use of available technologies to deliver a message to an audience. The definition of digital composition above also positions it as part of digital rhetoric.

For this reason I view multimodal composition as both under the umbrella of digital rhetoric and digital composition, which is why theories and practices of digital rhetoric should be more present in multimodal practices. However, like multimodal composition there are numerous definitions of digital rhetoric that have changed over time as communication and writing practices did based on technological advancements and developments. A closer look at the changes in definitions of digital rhetoric from the 1990s to present day will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

In *Persuasive Games* (2007) Ian Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as “a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created (p. 3). Procedural Rhetoric is important to conversations and research centered on digital multimodal composition because of the use of computers, software, and digital platforms in composing by mixing modes. For Bogost “procedural rhetoric is the practice of using processes persuasively,” which makes it a good source for WPAs and instructors when developing, implementing, and informing digital multimodal practices.

According to Sarah Arroyo in *Participatory Composition Video Culture, Writing, and Electracy* (2013) the concept of electracy, which she views as an apparatus, and it is this apparatus that “impacts all areas of our lives,” because it is “creating a need to invent new practices for living in an electrate world (p. 5). Electracy “creates a need for new theories about writing, reading, and thinking about subjectivity, community and representation” because it is a worldview, as much as it is an aspect of digital literacy. The importance of these terms and concepts will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

***Procedures***

To better understand how first-year composition programs and instructors integrate multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum I conducted a qualitative survey. The survey responses yielded a small data set that provided insight as to how each participating university and community college implement multimodal composition in first-year composition curriculum. In March of 2017 an online survey was created using Qualtrics Survey Software. The survey link was emailed to WPAs at universities and to the WPA listserv. The survey via Qualtrics was administered for a duration of five months. Potential participants were WPAs, and first-year composition instructors at Research 1 (R1) universities, R2 higher research activity universities, R3 moderate research universities, and community colleges. Surveys were distributed to universities and community college of different research levels in attempt to pull from a diverse group in order to compare and contrast first-year curriculum at different types of research universities. The surveys provided context and background for each university and first-year composition program.The survey questions attempted to gain knowledge about the ratio of text only assignments to multimodal or multimedia assignments, what types of multimodal assignments are taught, if curricula are standard and how that impacts a WPA or instructor’s approach to implementing and teaching multimodal composition assignments, and how instructor feedback is provided to the student.

Participants who indicated they would like to continue to be part of the study were considered for an interview based on their responses. Interviews were conducted via telephone, Skype, or email, and in person. Nine interviews were completed, and each lasted a minimum of thirty minutes.The interview questions allowed me to collect information that will assist in helping me attempt to trace the link between specific theories of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy and what is practiced and included in first-year composition curriculum.

During the interview cycle, participants were asked to provide the following documents: first-year composition syllabus, assignment guidelines for first-year composition assignments, and grading rubrics. Grounded theory was used to code and analyze data collected from survey responses and interviews conducted. This lens allows me to analyze assignment guidelines, rubrics, survey and interview responses in an effort to determine which theories influence the multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition courses at participating universities.

***Significance of the Study***

The significance of this study is the need to approach first-year composition curriculum inclusion of digital multimodal composition assignments under lens of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, or electracy to continue building digital literacies and multiliteracies based on more current scholarship. To use the wealth of knowledge of scholarship in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy to improve composition practices in the classroom can only benefit the field of rhetoric and composition and its students.

***Limitations of the Study***

The limitations of the study are the small sample size of WPAs and first-year composition instructors. 58 survey participants do not represent every first-year composition program at universities and community colleges. However, this small sample size and follow-up interviews can draw attention to trends in implementing multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculum. A more in depth explanation of my methodology will be discussed in Chapter 3.

***Organization of the Study***

This dissertation study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 will serve as an introduction to the topic of my research, and the specific focus of my research. This will include any and all scholarship that will help establish the gap in research. Chapter 2 will include the literature review of relevant scholarship on pedagogy, multimodal composition, electracy, procedural rhetoric, and digital rhetoric.. This will include a brief trace of the different definitions and understandings of digital rhetoric since the term was first discussed by Richard Lanham in 1992. This review of literature will be essential to the creation of the three categories that I will use as a lens for analyzing my data in later chapters. Chapter 3 will discuss in detail my methodology, which includes but is not limited to data collection and subject participants. Chapter 4 will be an analysis of data collected grounded in three categories discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 will contain recommendations for the field moving forward based on my research findings. Recommendations will be in the form of assignments that may be representative of theories digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy that are not part of current first-year composition curriculums.

Great start on this! The right ideas are here, just keep refining and developing. Good start for “notes.” :)

Looking better and better. You are on the right track. Continue filling in and revising for clarity--it will be there soon!