**Writing Sample Jennifer Falcón**

**Summary of Dissertation**

This dissertation examines 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 in order to broaden the scope and understanding of what it means to use digital platforms to mix modes in communication and writing practices.

There exists a gap between a multiliteracies approach to first-year composition curriculum, which often includes a multimodal or multimedia assignment/assignments, and/or writing practices that incorporate elements of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. The gap is a result of privileging one approach or theory over the others in an attempt to incorporate multiliteracies, multimodal composition, or multimedia composition. Often times there is overlap among the different approaches as they each have similar goals. My dissertation concists of five chapters that explore the topic, review lieterature to better understand history of multimodal composition, digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy. Later chapters provide methodology used to conduct the research study, findings and recommendations.

Chapter 1 - Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the topic of my research, and the specific focus of my dissertation. This will include any and all scholarship that will help establish the gap in research, and subsequent need to fill it based on findings in my dissertation.  
Chapter 2 - Chapter 2 provides the necessary review of literature 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.

Chapter 3 - In chapter 3 I discuss in detail my methodology, which includes but is not limited to data collection and subject participants, and how grounded theory will be used to code and analyze data.

Chapter 4 - In this chapter I present and analyze the data collected from survey responses and interviews. A thematic analysis is used to identify patterns in the implementation and teaching of multimodal assignments in first-year composition curriculums.

Chapter 5 - In chapter 5 I provide recommendations for implementing and teaching multimodal composition assignments that reflect more of the theories and practices of digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, and electracy that are not part of current first-year composition curriculums.

Provided for you below are excerpts from two chapters of my dissertation.

**Sample of Chapter 1** 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 NCTE and WPA statements point to the necessity of incorporating multimodality as part of an expanding and developing digital multiliteracies.

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 as part of broadening 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 has led to a limiting number of scholarly works in application, and 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. 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 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, which includes addressing 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, in addition to introducing the assignment. This also coincides with attempting to achieve 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.

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 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?

There is no single agreed upon definition of multimodal composition, because depending on one’s approach, multimodal composition can mean or refer to different aspects of meaning-making. 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 digital practices. If a first-year composition curriculum or instructor concerns itself more with mixing modes and not using multimodal composition as a means to develop students’ digital multiliteracies, I felt it was necessary to use a term that does not exclude those practices and assignments. The focus of this dissertation is how these 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 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. In *Theorizing Digital Rhetoric* (2018) Aaron Hess and Amber Davisson 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). The importance of this definition is the inclusion of how information is created, circulated or delivered, and the experiences of those using digital technology. This definition places the experience of using digital technology as equal importance as the creation and delivery of information. Digital composition, which can also fall under the umbrella of digital rhetoric, 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 (<http://guides.library.stonybrook.edu/digital-storytelling/home>). 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.

Multimodal composition can fall under digital composition when the modes mixed are done so in digital environments based on the definition provided by Hess and Davidson because to mix modes digitally is to make use of available technologies to deliver a message to an audience. The definition of digital composition above also positions digital composition as part of digital rhetoric. For this reason I view multimodal composition as a practice of digital rhetoric, which is why theories and concepts 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.

**Sample of Chapter 4**

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which first-year composition programs implement multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition curriculum.

At the start of this research study it was believed that there existed a general agreement regarding first-year composition curriculum including multimodal assignments in an effort to build 21st century literacies as a result of new and/or newer technology used in the process of composing and communicating. The NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies published in 2005 defines multimodal literacies, and provides an overview of the benefits of multimodal assignments as an integral part of developing literacies when it states “the use of different modes of expression in student work should be integrated into the overall literacy goals of the curriculum and appropriate for time and resources invested” (NCTE, 2005). Identifying the mixing of modes as an important part of developing literacies, and clearly stating it should part of a student’s literacy goals helped to put an end to the discussion regarding the inclusion of composing by mixing modes in composition curriculum. The WPA Outcomes State for First-Year Composition (v3.0) released in 2014 presents the practices, research, and theory of composition teachers in postsecondary education. The statement identifies rhetorical knowledge as “the basis of composing” (WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0 ). It specifically addresses the use of technology and multiple modes under Rhetorical Knowledge, and Process, whereby students should be able to “understand and use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences,” and “adapt composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities” (WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0). The specificity of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (V3.0) give credence to the notion that it is accepted among composition instructors and WPAs that multimodal composition and therefore multimodal assignments should not only be part of first-year composition curriculum, but that they should also be a regular practice in first-year composition classrooms. The WPA does not provide specific information about types of assignments; rather they give an overview of desired outcomes for the students after completion of a composition course.

To research and evaluate multimodal composition assignments in first-year composition an online survey was distributed to Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) and first-year composition instructors.

**Table 1 Summary of Survey Participants**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Number of Survey**  **Participants** | **Number Agreeing to Participate in Survey** | **Number of Surveys**  **Started** | **Number of Surveys Completed** | **Survey Completion %** |
| 83 | 82 | 76 | 58 | 76.31% |

The online survey drew 83 unique users; meaning 83 participants successfully began the survey, and 82 participants agreed to continue the survey, while only 76 of the 82 participants that agreed to participate successfully started the survey. In total 58 surveys were completed, for a completion percentage of 76.31. The demographic of the 76 participants is made up of WPAs, professors, lecturers and graduate student instructors.

**Table 2 Summary of Survey Participant Demographic**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **#** | **Answer** | **%** | **Count** |
| 1 | Writing Program Administrator | 34.21 | 26 |
| 2 | Graduate Instructor | 27.63% | 21 |
| 3 | Professor | 21.05 | 16 |
| 4 | Lecturer | 17.11% | 13 |
|  | Total | 100% | 76 |

Question 11 of the online survey asks participants “How many, if any, assignments require students to create multimodal compositions are part of the FYC curriculum you teach?”

**Table 3 Summary of Responses to Survey Question 11**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Number of Multimodal Assignments in FYC Curriculum** | **Participant Response to Question 11** | **Percentage of Participant Response to Question 11** | **Percentage of FYC Curriculum with 1 or More Multimodal Assignments in FYC Curriculum** |
| 0 | 12 | 20% | 0% |
| 1 | 21 | 35.00% | 35% |
| 2 | 13 | 21.67% | 21.67% |
| 3 | 6 | 10.00% | 10% |
| 4 or more | 8 | 13.33% | 13.33% |
| Total | 60 | 100% | 80% |

Responses indicate that 80% of participants teach a first-year composition curriculum that includes at least one multimodal assignment. Of the 48 survey participants with a first-year curriculum that includes at least one multimodal assignment, 27 (45%) teach a first-year composition curriculum that includes two or more multimodal assignments. The survey participants are small in sample size, but the high percentage of first-year composition curriculums with at least one multimodal assignment indicates multimodal composition is common in first-year composition curriculums.  
**Table 4 Types of Multimodal Composition Assignments**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Types of Multimodal Composition Assignments Taught in FYC Curriculum of Survey Participants** | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Website based assignments | 45 | 27.78% |
| Graphic based assignments | 40 | 24.69% |
| Video based assignments | 36 | 22.22% |
| Audio based assignments | 35 | 21.60% |
| None | 6 | 3.70% |
| Total | 162 | 100 |

Survey responses from the 48 participants that stated the first-year composition curriculum at their institution included at least one multimodal assignment identified a variety of types of assignments that are taught as multimodal. Participants could select more than type of multimodal assignment, which accounts for the number of total responses (162), which is higher than the actual number of survey participants. Website based assignments made up 27.8% of responses, with graphic based assignments as second most common multimodal practice with 24.69%, video based assignments made up 22.22%, and audio based multimodal assignments made up 21.60% of responses. The multimodal composition assignments as part of their first-year composition curriculum are both major and minor assignments. 21 of 56 total (37.5%) participants answered that the multimodal assignments in their curriculum are major assignments. 6, (10.71%) answered that the multimodal assignments in their curriculum are minor assignments. 20 (51.79%) participants answered that the multimodal composition assignments in their curriculum are a mix of major and minor assignments.

**Table 4 Summary of How Instructors Provide Feedback**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of Feedback** | **Count** | **Percentage** |
| Written comments | 44 | 20.09% |
| Conference outside of class | 39 | 17.81% |
| In class discussion | 36 | 16.44% |
| Rubric | 34 | 15.53% |
| Comments delivered via course management system | 33 | 15.07% |
| Audio comments | 14 | 6.39% |
| Video Comments | 12 | 5.48% |
| Other | 7 | 3.2% |
| Total | 219 | 100% |

Instructor feedback on the multimodal composition assignments provided to students varied. The most common way feedback was given to students was in the form of written comments. Conferences outside of class and in class discussion followed. 15.07% of responses recorded delivering comments through a course management. Audio comments, and video comments were the lowest used method of providing feedback to students. Participants were allowed to check the different methods they use to deliver feedback to students on multimodal composition assignments.

To better understand how multimodal composition is implemented and taught in first-year composition classes survey participants were interviewed. Of the 58 participants that completed the online survey 27 indicated they would continue participating in the study if contacted for a follow-up interview. Of these 27 participants, 10 were selected to participate in a follow-up interview. A total of 9 survey participants accepted interview requests. Interviews took place in September and October of 2017. Interviews were conducted over the phone, and lasted approximately twenty minutes. Interview participants answered seven to eight questions depending on their survey responses. Each participant answered questions about when they last taught first-year composition, scholars and practices that influence their pedagogy, how they assess multimodal assignments, and follow-up questions to their individual survey responses. Due to survey responses demonstrating a high number of first-year composition curriculums including at least one multimodal assignment 8 of the 9 survey participants interviewed taught at least one multimodal composition assignment. A total of 8 out of 9 interview participants taught a first-year composition course within the last year. 7 of the WPAs and instructors interviewed were teaching a first-year composition during the Fall 2017 semester/quarter. The only survey participant interviewed that did not recently teach a first-year composition course is participant #2, a WPA at a Midwestern university who has not taught a first-year composition course in five years. Interviewing WPAs and first-year composition instructors that recently taught a first-year composition course benefits this study because any multimodal assignments or practices they assign to their students reflect their most recent or current approach to multimodality.

**Table 5 Interview Table**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Position** | **Last Taught FYC** | **University** | **Location** |
| Interview Participant #1 | WPA | Fall 2017 | Baccalaureate College | Pacific Coast University |
| Interview Participant #2 | WPA | 5 years ago | R1/Doctoral Granting | Midwestern University |
| Interview Participant #3 | Associate Professor | Spring 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Northeast University |
| Interview Participant #4 | Teaching Professor | Fall Quarter 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Pacific/West Coast University |
| Interview Participant #5 | Assistant Professor | Spring 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Texas University |
| Interview Participant #6 | Associate Professor | Spring 2016 | Doctoral Granting | Pacific/West Coast University |
| Interview Participant #7 | Professor | Fall 2017 | Associate College | Southern Community College |
| Interview Participant #8 | Assistant Professor | Fall 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Midwest University |
| Interview Participant #9 | Lecturer | Fall 2017 | Doctoral Granting | Pacific/West Coast University |

**Standard Curriculum in** **First-Year Composition**

In order to understand the extent to which the participants could integrate their own assignments the survey includes a question that prompts survey participants to identify if they teach in a standard curriculum, and what elements of their curriculum are standard. I wanted to find out how much control they had over the curriculum, and how they worked within the parameters of a standard curriculum, or standard elements in their curriculum. The survey responses of 6 of the interview participants indicated in their survey r they teach in a curriculum they described as standard, but the elements of the curriculum that are standard vary. Interview participant #1 is a WPA whose program uses a standard syllabus and learning outcomes that are specific to the needs of their student population. Similarly, interview participant #6 also teaches in a first-year composition program that uses standard learning outcomes. This suggests instructors have freedom to teach assignments they feel will meet the learning outcomes as set by the program. The instructors at the university interview participant #8 teaches at use the same handbook, but no other element of their curriculum is identified as standard.

Interview participant #2 is a WPA of a program with a curriculum where assignment prompts for textbooks and the syllabus are standard, but these are primarily intended for graduate instructors. Veteran faculty have more freedom and are not expected to follow the assignment prompts.#3 teaches in a first-year composition program where the only standard component is the e-portfolio, which is also part of a university-wide initiative. Students at this university use the same software to publish their work online. The standard element of the curriculum of the program #9 teaches in is also an end of semester portfolio, which is under the process of becoming an e-portfolio. The standard elements of first-year composition curriculum these six interview participants teach vary, but within their programs exist an opportunity for instructors to implement their own approaches and ideas as to how to achieve their learning outcomes, the e-portfolio, or prompts. This freedom suggests that the standard elements in their program or curriculum do not hinder their approach to multimodality in their classroom.

**Table 6**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Interview Participant** | **Standard FYC** |
| Interview Participant #1 | Syllabus and Learning Outcomes |
| Interview Participant #2 | Handbook and Assignment Prompts |
| Interview Participant #3 | E-Portfolio |
| Interview Participant #6 | Learning Outcomes |
| Interview Participant #8 | Handbook |
| Interview Participant #9 | Portfolio/E-Portfolio |

**Multimodal Composition Assignments in First-Year Composition Curriculum**

Every interview participant teaches a multimodal composition assignment. The type of assignment varies by instructor, but 8 of the 9 interview participants teach a first-year composition curriculum that features the multimodal composition as a major assignment. The first-year composition curriculum of participant #7 includes a multimodal assignment that is not a major assignment, but a minor assignment in terms of points that is part of a larger assignment. This indicates that students spend a significant amount of time composing by mixing modes.

The first-year composition curriculum of 7 of the interview participants includes a multimodal assignment that is first a text heavy written work, which requires students to take that work and make it multimodal.

Students in the first-year composition program at the midwestern university where #2 serves as WPA write an analytical research paper throughout the semester. At the end of the semester students must participate in a symposium where they present their research. Students present their research by giving a scripted talk about their research while images move behind them on a screen, similar to a TED Talk. This is the multimodal assignment in their curriculum.

Interview participant #2 describes the analytical research assignment as a“ major assignment that is a scaffolded analytical research essay that works through several stages over the course of the semester,” which includes a “secondary related assignment that's multimodal” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017). The presentation of their research at the symposium accounts for 30% of the student’s grade, making it a major assignment, but it is not an assignment every student in their program completes.

Interview participant #2 explains this by stating the first-year composition program does follow a standard curriculum, but “we also allow instructors with significant teaching experiences, or instructors who are faculty members or instructors who are lecturers to make informed changes to the way they teach the class. Almost every section follows through with an assignment, either exactly or much like the symposium. A few don't do it at all, and that's ok with me,” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017).

Students presenting their research is important to this program, as evidenced by the total percentage points that assignment is worth, but the multimodal element of this assignment is not mandatory in every composition class. By pointing out that full-time faculty members or lecturers, essentially any instructor with a lot of experience is not forced to participate and/or include a multimodal assignment in their curriculum suggests that multimodal composition assignments are likely taught by graduate instructors that are also new instructors, because they would not have the freedom to change the curriculum in this first-year composition program. The description of the assignment as alphabetic text first, and then repackaged as a script to be recited with moving images playing in the background makes this a multimodal assignment that is limited to two modes of communication, images and text, assuming text appears on the images on screen behind the student. This format does not support video images, and so this multimodal assignment is similar to a slideshow. More important, since veteran instructors have freedom to not teach a multimodal assignment it is highly likely a number of students in their composition program may take a composition course where they are not required to compose by mixing modes. The WPA at this university understands that this is a possibility, but does not view it as problematic because “it's a very small number of sections where this might happen” and while “they're probably doing something that I would not identify as multimodal” their experience affords them “the kind of discretion to design the course the way they like” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017).

The community college instructor interviewed (#7) approaches multimodality in a similar way. This instructor’s students must present their research, but they do not present in a symposium. Rather, they create a slideshow using PowerPoint or other similar software and present their work to the class. However, they must create a poster using their slides to be placed on campus where their fellow students and other instructors are encouraged to leave feedback.

Rather than spending class time learning about how to make a PowerPoint presentation students “work on layout,” and think about“how do you organize a poster board” in terms of “from left to right, top to bottom, how do you read them, how do you emphasize one infographic over another, where does the works cited page go”(J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017).This instructor goes on to explain that the end result is students preparing boards to be put up for a week on campus and “the idea is that they're getting feedback from me” and “then they get feedback from the audience -- people who walk by and who put up sticky notes on their boards”(J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017)

This approach to multimodality is based on audience with a focus on showing “the students how wide and varied their audiences is, and how different people have different reactions to what they say” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017). This instructor understands that this approach to multimodality is dependent on audience participation, but he explicitly uses it to “make the point that if you get no feedback on your board, that's going to tell you something. That you picked a topic that your audience isn't really interested in or your topic is presented in a way that doesn't engage the audience. In the absence of feedback is feedback” *(*J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017). This multimodal assignment may not allow for the use of sound or video, but it does require students to think about arrangement, and audience.

The first-year composition curriculum of interview participant #9 requires students to turn their research paper into something multimodal. In this first-year composition course students write a research paper with an intended audience of people in their discipline, and then they do what this instructor refers to as a “popularization of that project, in which they put together some sort of either poster, or usually an actual presentation some elements there, adapted tones that they present them to a more popular audience” *(*J. Falcon, personal communication, September 21, 2017). Students share their work as part of a first-year composition research festival. This instructor does not dictate which modes students must use, but instead allows students to choose which they feel most comfortable with based on previous knowledge or experience. In this major assignment more attention is given to the process of students rethinking their project by presenting it using different modes. The instructor explains that students often “have a project and then they move on from that project and never think about it again, and they think of the work as kind of fixed and it kind of having to take a project and transmit it to another mode I think makes them rethink it and use different parts of their brain” *(*J. Falcon, personal communication, September 21, 2017).

Interview participant #8 teaches in a program that uses the same handbook, but does not have any other standard requirements. This instructor follows a similar pattern of requiring students to remediate a text heavy paper. Students in part one of a first-year composition courses write a persuasive essay and upon completion of the text heavy assignment they create a video or infographic based on their work. In the second composition class students “write a research paper and then in the last week” and turn that into “either a poster or a video or any other kind of visual representation of their topic” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 28, 2017). Students choose the type visual they’d like to create and to create this visual based on their audience. The research paper is for an academic audience, but the visual is to be presented to the class and so the audience is now their peers. Framing the multimodal assignment around audience requires this instructor’s to think about “the best way to present your information that would be appealing to your audience,” and after students make the decision about the best way to present their information they must explain to their instructor why they chose the mode they did in an effort to justify their rhetorical choices.

Interview participant #4 teaches in a first-year composition program with no standard elements. This instructor teaches two major multimodal assignments and developed assignments as part of a WPA grant with other scholars at different institutions.

“Students create their own theory of writing which means that they think about which key terms and concepts have been most influential to their writing practice and writing caveats and they talk about why these particular terms and how they are going to take them up in their future writing classes. So, we have some informal writing that takes the place of what I call discovery. They also do some word mapping. They also do some digital illustrations of their key words. So, they have total choice there. And then they sort of brainstorm and write a draft that is sort of text heavy and then they transform it into whatever genre that they want. And the multimodality in that assignment is optional” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017).

The other multimodal assignment in this first-year composition class is one part of a three part assignment. Students write a 8 to 10 page inquiry based research paper, and then they “create this composition in three genres. And one of them has to be print based, or text based as opposed to print based. Their second one has to be multimodal and their 3rd one, has to be audio or visual or audio/visual” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017). This assignment was born out of the instructor’s desire to see students compose in different genres in addition to learning about them, and using multiple modes to achieve this.

The first-year composition program of interview participant #5 has a set of learning outcomes that need to be met, but no other element of the curriculum is standard. This instructor follows the trend of basing the multimodal composition assignment on research paper students write. In this instructor’s class students create a public document based on their research paper and choose modes to use based on the best way to reach the audience. This instructor approaches this multimodal assignment“in terms of a very broadly defined rhetorical situation that they're entering to and then make their decisions based on the context, audience, constraints, whatever they have available to them, and sometimes that involves writing something that isn't strictly like an academic text” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017). The public document element to this multimodal assignment makes it similar to the symposium of interview participant #2, but with the added goal of their work serving the public.

Interview participant #6 last taught first-year composition in the Spring of 2016. The first-year composition program at this university is currently undergoing changes in curriculum and learning outcomes. This department also teaches public speaking and combines writing and public speaking in those classes. The first-year composition courses do not follow a standard curriculum, and the current learning outcomes do not include multimodal composition. The new learning outcomes include digital composition, which is understood to include multimodal composition, but does not specifically multimodal composition. This instructor provides multimodal options for students in the public speaking class. Specifically, this instructor allows students to compose by mixing modes to help them present arguments if they are not yet succeeding in their writing classes at the level they should be, and/or they have prior knowledge or skill in mixing modes. This instructor has always suggested to students that they have “multimodal options and I try to support them and designing something that would match their interests and skills rather than having it be an assignment they have to produce” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 12, 2017). In the Spring 2016 first-year composition course this instructor taught a shareable assignment, where students had to “translate their sort of research essay work into something that would be more easily shared,” with a goal to have students compose something “that somebody would share as if they could on social media” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 12, 2017). Again there is the approach that students write a more traditional research paper, and then repurpose it to meet the specific assignment guidelines and goals.

Interview participant #3 last taught first-year composition in the Spring of 2017. The first-year composition program at this university has one standard element. Each student must create an e-portfolio, and this is the multimodal aspect of their first-year composition curriculum. This is part of a university wide program that encourages students to upload their work. Students use Digication, a platform designed by an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). This platform is described as a “bit more friendly to visuals and video than it is to text,” and “in order for it to look like a website” students must “post pictures, and videos” so that “their E-portfolio does begin to look like more than just a kind of archive” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). As students post more one their e-portfolio “it begins to look more like multimedia website over time,” which should also include a section for each course they are enrolled. However, not every section of a course is included. The e-portfolio “tends to fill up with their essays, and those essays are often entirely text,” which the program would like to change in the future, so that if students post in their e-portfolio the posts would “be multimodal compositions and so we're moving more and more in that direction” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). There are no specific requirements for students to make their E-porftolio multimodal by adding multimedia to it, or remediating their text heavy assignments to something more multimodal. The e-portfolio itself does not have specific learning outcomes or guidelines, rather it acts as a “showcase for work that has its own learning outcomes” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). It’s unclear how much, if at all, students compose by mixing modes.

**Assessment**

In order to gain a well rounded view of each instructor’s approach to multimodality a question was asked about how they assess multimodal projects in first-year composition. The focus on either process or product provides insight on what the instructors value when teaching multimodal assignments. A total of 7 out of 9 interview participants use a rubric to assess multimodal composition assignments. Four instructors that use a rubric for assessment teach a multimodal composition assignment that requires students to write a reflection. The reflection assignment serves as a guide for instructors when grading. Interview participant #5 uses the student reflection as a way for students to “explain or explain to me how to assess it. So in a lot of ways they're reflection on that project tells me a lot more about the project than the product itself” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017). Interview participant #6 used a similar approach by assessing the metacognitive piece of writing and and if students “made a good faith effort” on the multimodal piece they received full credit. The general approach to grading the multimodal projects appears to center around the understanding that a student may not have the skills or knowledge to compose by mixing modes, therefore emphasis is placed on what they tried compose and why that was the best rhetorical choice as opposed to only assessing the final product. Interview participant #1 assigns points for the process and product with 70% of the final grade on the final product, and 30% of their grade is their process. This instructor’s main focus is for students to produce a multimodal composition that honors the “practices inside that genre convention” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). Other interview participants grade for completion, as is the case with the e-portfolio that students at the university interview participant #3 teaches at, where students receive 5% of the course grade for posting their assignments to their e-portfolio. Other instructors focus on only the final product as a means to assess the elements of the multimodal composition students created they feel are most important. Interview participant #7 assesses “organization,” “content,” and “if it's visually appealing, that's nice, but it's not the primary function,” because as this instructor explains students “have to think about ways to draw your audience in” (*(*J. Falcon, personal communication, September 27, 2017).

**Introducing Multimodal Practices** I wanted to understand more than what was assigned as a multimodal project, and how it was assessed, but also how multimodal projects were introduced to students. How the multimodal assignments are introduced to students tells us how instructors prioritize elements of the assignment. It also provides additional information about which theories or practices are used when students first encounter multimodal assignments in first-year composition classes. When introducing multimodal assignments the instructors interviewed often use prompts, multimodal guides or handbooks, assignment sheets (guidelines), examples of multimodal compositions, software instruction, genre theory, or a discussion of the rhetorical situation.   
 Interview participant #1 introduces multimodal composition through the study of genre, audience, and “rhetorical agility.” Interview participant #5 introduces multimodal composition when discussing the rhetorical situation in his first-year composition class. Interview participant #7 focuses on arrangement and audience, by asking his students to address the best way to present their content in a way that is engaging for their audience. The examples and assignment sheets are used by other instructors interviewed as a means to both introduce the specific guidelines of the assignment and provide students with multimodal texts to analyze so a discussion can occur on what works and doesn’t work for specific purposes and audiences. A majority of instructors intend for the multimodal projects their students compose to be shared or made public either through presenting their work or posting a hard or digital copy publically. One instructor was not clear about whether the multimodal project was shared, or composed with the idea that it would function as a shareable piece. This component of the multimodal assignments included in their curriculum speaks to their desire to have students view the project as attempting to achieve a goal, whatever goal the student sets, and not something that is only submitted for a grade.  
 The most commonly used texts are *Understand and Composing Multimodal Projects* (2013**)** by Dánielle Nicole DeVoss and *Writer/Designer A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* (2014)by Kristin L. Arola, Jennifer Sheppard, Cheryl E. Ball. DeVoss’ *Understanding and Composing Multimodal Projects* briefly defines multimodal composition in the introduction. More attention is given to how to “read” a text, before moving on to sections based on each mode of communication. Each section begins with a brief discussion of genre related to specific modes. For example, the sections on text, sound, static images, moving images and multimodal texts all begin with a quick run through of guiding questions for discussion, before diving deeper into the features, purpose, audience and meaning of each mode in specific genres. The design of the multimodal composition project is presented as deciding the information that need be the emphasis of the and arranging modes in a way that best does achieves this. *Writer/Designer* takes a different approach by beginning with an introduction to multimodal projects by defining modes and using the NLG’s modes of communication to create their own diagram. This guide provides more information for the student about multimodal projects, and makes use of technical communication practices, such as creating a team contract, writing a project proposal, and evaluating the multimodal project as a stakeholder. This is not a surprise considering the title links the practices of a writer and a document designer. Both the guide and handbook provide important information for the instructor and student about multimodal composition. Using one over the other would likely be a decision based on preference and/or how the instructor wishes to introduce multimodal composition.

Interview participant #4 uses the DeVoss handbook, and #9 uses *Writer/Designer*, which demonstrates that their approach to teaching multimodality plays a factor in which text they use in their first-year composition class. Students in interview participant #4’s class read DeVoss book, and then look at examples of multimodal compositions, such as an infographic “because I think they're really easy in class genre analysis text that students can understand, absorb, think about and it's complex about for us to have a deep rhetorical discussion about it,” which when comparing that model of instruction to the arrangement of the DeVoss book it is logical that this instructor would introduce a multimodal assignment in this way. Interview participant #9 uses *Writer/Designer* in her class. Students in this class first look at examples of multimodal texts, and collectively analyze these examples before they “come up with criteria for what we think the different modes works for them.” Reviewing the affordances of specific modes could easily follow reading *Writer/Designer* as this guide includes a section on the “Analyzing Multimodal Projects,” which addresses audience, purpose, design choices, writing and designing rhetorically. There is obvious overlap between the two texts, which is understandable given they address the same topic.

**Pedagogy and Practices**

The WPAs and instructors interviewed provided information about pedagogical practices that influence what they teach, but also how they teach. Each interview participant discussed several different practices and pedagogies and while there are similarities in their approach and learning goals for their students they each approach multimodality differently. The learning outcomes for their multimodal assignments, how they assess these assignments, and their reasoning for teaching the multimodal assignments the way they do are all related to their approach to rhetoric and writing. For this reason the answers provided by interview participants what practices and scholars or specific scholarship that influence their pedagogy for first-year composition gave insight on how they view, and ultimately implement multimodal practices within the first-year composition curriculum they teach.

For example, interview participant #1 stated that she uses basic rhetorical theory to try and “make sure that students understand of the different kinds of speech, of audience adaptation, purpose going back to the Sophists” in addition to “Bitzer and the rhetorical situation,” because the focus is always on having students develop rhetorical skills for transfer” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 19, 2017). When this WPA teaches a first-year composition course her approach to multimodality is a direct result of the attempt she makes to try and help students “understand the best and most effective kinds of writing depending on situation, the audience and the purpose that you're currently in,” and this is evident in the multimodal assignments she teaches. The multimodal assignment in her first-year composition course require students to use genre theory to think about different modes and what each mode does for their audience and purpose.

Interview participant #5 wants students to reflect on the writing they do outside of the classroom so that they will “identify what are their rhetorical moves they're doing well, and then use that to sculpt a framework for their own academic writing” with the ultimate goal of students seeing “the potential areas of strength and transfer” (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017). This instructor also uses social justice pedagogy, which is evident in how this instructor wants to students to learn to “think about how they can impact a positive change on that real world event through their emerging disciplinary expertise” through their writing, and understanding of rhetorical situations (J. Falcon, personal communication, October 16, 2017), This instructor wants students to “approach this in terms of a very broadly defined rhetorical situation that they want to that they're entering to and then make their decisions based on the context, audience, constraints, whatever they have available to them, and sometimes that involves writing something that isn't strictly like an academic text,” and this is evident in the public document students create in this first-year composition course, which is the multimodal assignment in the curriculum.

Interview participant #4 also teaches with a focus on transfer in addition to network theory, genre, creating an “orientation of equity in student learning outcomes” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017) by teaching students how to use rubric. To promote metacognition this instructor wants students to “spend time thinking about how they made their choices and why they made their choices” (J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017). By thinking about genre this instructor states that students have an advantage when they begin discussing multimodality because “it's not something necessarily foreign to them. They've started thinking about it and learned some key terms to analyze text and understand them,” so much so that when students begin to view “categories of genre, features, purpose and audience, and meaning” where students can then“directly apply them to multimodal text”(J. Falcon, personal communication, September 22, 2017). Students will then use what they learned through analyzing multimodal compositions to guide their choices when they begin to compose by mixing modes. This instructor places importance on metacognition and using a rubric as a teaching tool, which is evident in how multimodal composition is introduced in this first-year composition class.

The interviews with the WPAs and instructors revealed that their approach to teaching first-year composition as influenced by practices and scholarship in the field influences how they teach multimodal composition. Each had a favorable view of multimodal composition, and while how they introduce, teach, and grade it differ no WPA or first-year composition instructor viewed multimodal assignments as a means to introduce concepts and practices in digital rhetoric, procedural rhetoric, or electracy. Students in their classes don’t have to create a digital only multimodal composition, because some instructors want students to use what will best help them be effective in reaching their audience. However, most of the multimodal assignments included in their first-year composition curriculum are digital. The elements of their curriculum that are standard may influence the types of multimodal assignments they teach, but they possess the freedom to introduce multimodality in any way they choose. Ultimately, how they introduce these assignments and what they assess provides insight into the current state of multimodality in first-year composition. While a small sample size the survey responses and interviews reveal that multimodal assignments are common in first-year composition courses, but that they may not have evolved at the same rate as related scholarship.

It is understood that scholarship in digital rhetoric and procedural rhetoric may not address multimodality. However, practices in these subfields of rhetoric can be applied to multimodal composition. The WPAs and instructors did not directly link multimodality to a specific technology, but each multimodal assignment uses digital platforms or software to mix modes. For this reason electracy also can fit within their curriculums because it “creates a need for new theories about writing, reading, and thinking about subjectivity, community and representation” (p. 5).