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Statement of Research Interests

I am researching the relationships between rhetorical theory and research methods instruction in order to develop more effective strategies for teaching successful skills of conducting methodical inquiry in technical and professional writing studies. My dissertation, *From Telling to Transforming: Invention, the Scientific Method, and the Research Paper*, is the first step in this examination. This is a historical and theoretical work that aims to address the problem of the research paper assignment. I argue that research paper instruction should be revised in two critical ways. One is that we should tie the concept of rhetorical invention to the act of research. The other is that we should revisit the humanistic origins of the scientific method and bring that rhetorically based understanding of inquiry forward into current research instruction practices. An essay based on the second chapter of my dissertation will be published in a forthcoming edited collection, *Research on Research: (Exa)Mining Student Writing in the Digital Age* (Randall McClure and Jim Purdy, editors). I intend to develop the third chapter, which discusses rhetorical invention and rhetorical theories of reading, and the fifth chapter, which describes the pedagogical implications of my findings, into two essays for peer reviewed journals such as *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* and *College Composition and Communication*. I plan to continue the work started in the fourth chapter, which explores the humanistic origins of the scientific method, into a book length treatise.

There are two key pedagogical findings I have been especially interested in as a result of my dissertation work. One is the idea of k*nowledge telling* and *knowledge transforming* documents. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1987) describe these two models of composing that demonstrate how knowledge enters the writing process and what happens to it as a result of that process. Knowledge transforming is a complex interaction that happens in the composing process between the writer's content space (what he or she knows) and the rhetorical space (strategies and goals for successful communication). For less experienced writers, producing a knowledge transforming document, one that takes information and ideas from other sources and synthesizes them into new conclusions and ideas, is challenging. It is this challenge that typical research paper projects have failed to help students meet. The other is the recognition that higher order thought processes and attitudes involved in projects like research cannot be taught by lecture. Tishman, Jay, and Perkins (1992) assert that people who they characterize as "good thinkers" have more than a certain skill set; they have a genuine interest in inquiry and for critical and imaginative thinking. They advocate an enculturation model of instruction in order to encourage students to grow into these thinking habits. I am developing three threads of inquiry to build upon and continue the work started in my dissertation and to investigate these pedagogical ideas.

The first thread is an investigation into the ways technical communication programs teach research methods and practices to undergraduate and graduate students. This will involve a survey of the course requirements and descriptions in a large number of technical communication programs. Among the questions to be investigated in this survey are:

- How do technical communication programs define research skills and activities?
- Is the term "information literacy" used in course descriptions?
- To what extent are library and information science departments involved in research methods instruction in these programs?
- What sort of research projects are typically assigned?
- What sort of research projects do students produce in response to these assignments?

The results of this survey will be developed into an article-length publication documenting the findings and making recommendations for potential pedagogical processes and curricular changes.

The second thread is an examination of the research and publishing habits of non-academic experts who study historical textiles and clothing and publish their work online. A study of this community will be useful for several reasons. These amateur experts use academic writings extensively, so this study can trace the flow and use of academic publishing outside the academy. This in turn would argue for greater accessibility of academic publications. This investigation will also yield information on the habits of mind of people who conduct research as a hobby. Additionally, it will be helpful to study how technical writing (in this case directions for and documentation of how to make historic garments) happens and flourishes outside traditional "technical" environments. Subject to IRB approval, this examination will include interviews with amateur historic clothing experts, as well as analysis of information flow (articles and books, websites, e-lists) throughout the community.

The third thread of my research agenda is a theoretical exploration of the connections between invention, mimesis, methexis, and research practices. I intend to use mimesis, or imitation, as a model for writing that is primarily knowledge telling. Methexis, or participation, is a concept that has not been explored in great detail in recent rhetorical theory. I intend to explore methexis as a way to describe and theorize knowledge transforming writing. The ability to produce knowledge telling documents is still valuable, especially in technical communication. As methexis and mimesis are not binaries, so too are knowledge telling and knowledge transforming. It is my hope that this theoretical investigation will establish methexis more completely in rhetorical theory, and will provide a foundation for additional investigations into research writing and instruction.

If my research agenda is successful, I will have contributed a detailed survey and article documenting the research instruction practices of technical communication programs that program administrators can consider when designing curricula. I will also have performed an analysis of the technical writing and documentation practices of a community of non-academic experts, which will potentially reveal ways to encourage a culture of thinking within technical communication courses. My theoretical project on mimesis and methexis will provide a framework that continues to move research instruction in technical communication closer to helping students become skillful knowledge transformers.