

Editor's Introduction

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Published in early January 2011, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* offers a disturbing portrait of lackadaisical undergraduate students and neglectful professors who are less interested in engaging with their students than in advancing their own research agendas. *Academically Adrift* brings together an impressive range of prior studies from economists, sociologists, historians, and educational researchers as well as Arum and Roksa's own analysis of a longitudinal dataset that tracked over two thousand students "through a large and representative sample of higher-education institutions with objective measures of their learning as well as of their coursework, social background, and experience of life on today's college campuses" (19). The assembled data suggests that college students in the twenty-first century on average spend just twelve hours a week studying and that 50% of college seniors graduate without having encountered a professor who requires them to write more than twenty pages. Arum and Roksa ultimately conclude that "[a]n astounding proportion of students are progressing through higher education today without measurable gains in . . . critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing" (36).

On the last day of January 2011, the submission window for volume 9 of *Young Scholars in Writing* opened. While Arum and Roksa were being interviewed on National Public Radio and ABC Nightly News and their work was featured in venues as diverse as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *New Yorker*, the *Huffington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, my e-mail inbox was beginning to fill with intriguingly conceived and powerfully argued articles from undergraduate researchers in the field of rhetoric and writing studies. These smart, energetic authors were exploring challenging issues such as how new technologies create new rhetorical opportunities; how writing center consultants can collaborate more effectively with their clients; and how rhetorical theories from ancient Greece can illuminate contemporary geo-political conflicts. Undergraduate researchers were investing hours in archival research in order to understand the rhetorical traditions of their faith and of their local communities, and they were investigating their own educational experiences, including the consequences of a decade of high-stakes, standardized testing in secondary schools and debates about the sometimes conflicted relationships between the languages of school and one's home community. These undergraduate authors—over fifty of them from some thirty-four post-secondary institutions across the United States—certainly seemed to have spent more than twelve hours a week studying and were composing and revising more than twenty pages in order to produce work they could submit to *Young Scholars in Writing*. Moreover, the quality of their work suggested to me that they had been expertly mentored by faculty who had found ways to share their own passion for research in writing studies with their students. While other critics have challenged *Academically Adrift* based on the assumptions underlying the structure of the study, the instrument used to measure students' learning, and the broad conclusions drawn from the data, I find that the work of undergraduate researchers offers its own powerful counternarrative to Arum and Roksa's vision of "limited

learning on college campuses.” Indeed, the ten full-length articles as well as the essays included in the Spotlight on First-Year Writing and the Comment and Response section that make up this volume of *Young Scholars in Writing* have been authored by purposeful undergraduate students who are on target to achieve their own lofty academic goals.

This volume opens with Mark Ulrich’s foray into our rhetorical future: virtual reality. Drawing upon his own experiences at the Stanford Virtual Human Interaction Lab as well as a range of other studies, Ulrich cogently argues that interactive computer simulations can have powerful persuasive effects on participants, offering them emotional, embodied experiences rather than analytic arguments. Ulrich’s essay, “Seeing Is Believing,” sounds an important cautionary note about the potential dangers of manipulation that are inherent in these exciting new technologies while also remaining optimistic about the potential of virtual rhetorics to be deployed in reflective, ethical ways that can help improve people’s lives and sustain our planet.

The next three articles—Jackie Hoermann’s “Speaking without Words,” Sarah Ashlock’s “Literacy as Independence,” and Jennifer E.M. Hill’s “Reframing the Victim”—remind readers of the valuable lessons to be gleaned from our rhetorical past. Hoermann illuminates how both Sister Catherine Spalding and St. Rose Duchesne eloquently “punctuat[ed] silence with epistolary rhetoric” in order to counter anti-Catholic sentiment in the nineteenth century. Ashlock offers an in-depth analysis of the life and literacies of Hattie Reynolds, a young woman who composed and signed an “Old Maids Contract” in 1870 and went on to become a local game warden, thus challenging the “parlor rhetoric” that circumscribed the discursive activities of many nineteenth-century women. Hill focuses on more recent history—the 1960s and the civil rights movement. Rather, though, than attend to the rhetorical tactics of activists seeking racial and economic justice, she turns her attention to the rhetorical bulwarks segregationists constructed to preserve the status quo. Hill offers a nuanced reading of how the editor of the *Greenville News*, Wayne C. Freeman, deployed a language of “victimage” on behalf of white citizens as he advocated for the continuance of racist practices and policies. All three of these engaging glimpses into our rhetorical past testify that there are a vast number of archives yet to be explored and that undergraduate researchers can play a significant role in helping to construct richer, more dynamic historical narratives of the field of writing studies and rhetoric.

Marc Hummel, Allie Oosta and Rori-Leigh Hoatlin, and Skyler Konicki demonstrate that undergraduate researchers also have much to contribute to conversations about contemporary communities of writers. As a former volunteer and intern at Mighty Writers, a community writing center in Philadelphia, Hummel shares a glimpse into the extracurricular literacy lives of young authors as they experiment with various genres—newspaper articles, movie reviews, and comic books. Oosta and Hoatlin have investigated how peer response functions in undergraduate creative writing workshops. Based on interviews with faculty, student surveys, classroom observations, and a textual analysis of over three hundred peer feedback letters, Oosta and Hoatlin contend that faculty and students should become more attuned to the value of specific, positive, technique-based forms of response. Konicki also has an important message to share with faculty and undergraduate students: As “insider-outsiders,” writing center tutors are “doubly authorized” to participate in the curricular design and assessment of university writing programs. In “De-Centering Peer Tutors,” Konicki reflects upon how her position as a tutor allowed her to engage in unique ways with fellow students as she conducted surveys and focus groups to assess how first-year writing courses were achieving the writing program’s objectives. Konicki eloquently

concludes with a call for undergraduates to pursue research opportunities in post-secondary writing programs and for writing program administrators to embrace opportunities to work with peer tutors as undergraduate researchers. Through such collaborations, the literacy landscapes of our colleges and universities can be transformed.

With their contributions to volume 9 of *Young Scholars in Writing*, Jason A. Sharier, Chiara Corso, and Chelsey Bartlett establish that undergraduate researchers are fully capable of taking up some of the thorniest and most urgent issues in the field of rhetoric and writing studies—issues surrounding the roles that language can play in creating unity and division. Sharier’s “Redefining Interfaith Discourse” explores the value of Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin’s notions of “invitational rhetoric” for engaging in religious dialogue. Corso’s “Modifying Masculinity, Forging Femininity” focuses on men’s voices in discussions of sexual violence and traces how femininity remains an untenable, disempowered subject position in such conversations, even when masculine voices seek to create safe spaces for women. Drawing upon the insights of Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and bell hooks, Corso posits a “feminist femininity” with the potential to interrupt patriarchal constructions of gender. In “When Writing Cuts Deep,” Bartlett defines the rhetorical features and functions of surgical short stories. Using narratives by Richard Selzer, Margaret Atwood, Robert Hass, William Carlos Williams, and Atul Gawande as exemplars, Bartlett focuses on the suturing of narrative gaps and how such surgical stories have the communicative potential to bridge the chasm between health care professionals and patients.

In addition to these ten very fine articles, *Young Scholars in Writing* is also pleased to feature the work of four students enrolled in first-year writing courses. This year’s Spotlight on First-Year Writing includes essays on a range of intriguing topics—students’ perceptions of first-year writing pedagogies; a feminist critique of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series; and rhetorical analyses of two very different forms of political discourse, Valerie Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto* and Newt Gingrich’s “Contract with America.” Spotlight co-editors Patti Hanlon-Baker and Holly Ryan have more to say about these specific essays and their authors later in this volume.

David Elder has ably edited this year’s Comment and Response section, which demonstrates the vitality of the discussion engendered by the work of authors published in the journal. Andrianna Lee Lawrence, Stephen Howard, Nicole Passa, and Savannah Ray offer their engaged and engaging responses to previously published essays, including Shannon Baldo’s work on the radical environmental movement (volume 7); Monique Shetayh’s work on the value of social media and blogs in the classroom (volume 7); Robin Martin’s work on teacher commentary on student writing (volume 8); and Karen Anton’s work on the role of musical rhetoric in the abolitionist movement (volume 7).

All the authors published in this volume offer an inspiring vision of what is possible when undergraduates become knowledge producers, not just consumers, and take an active role in shaping their own academic trajectories. There are also a number of undergraduate peer reviewers whose commitment to high standards and intellectual inquiry are essential to the journal. The members of the editorial board are deeply grateful to these reviewers: Matthew Allen, Sarah Ashlock, David Bennett, Maria Carvajal-Regidor, Amanda Clark, Kate Claus, Angina Deleon, Barry Foster, Rachel Furman, Victoria Heckenlaible, Andrianna Lee Lawrence, Travis Maynard, Donna McDonald, Elaina Newton, Bernice Olivas, Alli Owens, Ondrej Pazdirek, Jonathan Pearson, Lauren Petrillo, Jon Rivera, Marc Rubendall, Margaret Schmidt, Ryan Shellenberger, Harleen Sohi, Kate Stuart, Jessica Troncoso, Blaine Turner, and Alyssa Williams. Kathryn Byrne

at Johnson County Community College, Thomas Ferrel at UMKC, Sean O'Rourke at Furman University, and Rachel Riedner at George Washington University have served as important mentors to several of this year's peer reviewers. Thanks as well go to Patti Hanlon-Baker at Stanford University and Christian Weisser at Pennsylvania State University, Berks for incorporating the *YSW* peer review process into their classes.

Several members of the editorial board used the peer reviews to determine which authors would be invited to revise/resubmit their manuscripts for publication in volume 9. These scholars and teachers have creatively combined their teaching and research, and in doing so, they are helping to create the next generation of intellectuals capable of deploying their knowledge of rhetoric and writing studies both within and beyond the academy. A huge thanks goes to Shannon Carter, Doug Downs, Abby M. Dubisar, David Elder, John Gravener, Patti Hanlon-Baker, Jonathan Hunt, Joe Janangelo, Clyde Moneyhun, Sean O'Rourke, Rachel Riedner, Holly Ryan, Carlos Salinas, Susan Thomas, Annette Vee, and Leah Zuidema. Robin Dublanc serves as *YSW*'s copyeditor and brings both a keen editorial eye and considerable patience to working with authors who are often working through the publication process for the first time.

I would also like to thank several members of the UMKC community for supporting *Young Scholars in Writing*. Karen Vorst, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Wayne Vaught, Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have been steadfast in their commitment to helping undergraduate students achieve their full potential, and they have made scarce institutional and financial resources available to support the journal through volumes 8, 9, and 10. English Department chairs Virginia Blanton, Jeff Rydberg-Cox, and Jennifer Phegley continue to provide wise counsel, and their support for *Young Scholars in Writing* is greatly appreciated. With calm competence and a generous spirit, Sherry Neuerburg has handled more than one administrative crisis and smoothly negotiated crucial logistics for the journal. Cyndi Mahoney brings her considerable talents in Web design and maintenance to *YSW*. Thanks as well to Anna Toms for assisting with proofreading.

On behalf of all those whose academic commitments have led to the production of this volume of *Young Scholars in Writing*, I now invite you, the reader, to enjoy your travels with these undergraduate researchers who are certainly not adrift. They are instead pursuing their own purposeful, marvelous voyages of intellectual discovery.

Works Cited

Arum, Richard, and Josipa Roksa. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011. Print.