

Spotlight on First-Year Writing

Editors' Introduction

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You might think that editing the Spotlight on First-Year Writing is time-consuming work. You might imagine that working with talented first-year writers means several drafts of fifteen-plus-page papers going back and forth between writer and reader multiple times. You might also guess that this work happens in a short time frame during the summer months when most people are at the beach. And if you guessed any of those things, you'd be right! But hopefully, you also surmised that all that work is worth it because mentoring these four writers has been an amazing experience. In our jobs as writing teachers, both of us have the opportunity to work with first-year writers almost every day. However, working with the authors of these pieces is unlike the teaching we do on our respective campuses because we are able to move beyond the confines of a particular assignment or classroom setting, and encourage the students to write for an authentic audience of interested readers.

This year, we received an impressive twenty-four submissions and accepted four for publication. While some authors worked with human subjects and others with important historical or social texts, all offered interesting and thoughtful discussions of challenging questions. The paper topics submitted included:

- the impact of teacher comments on student writing
- the effects of social constructs of community colleges
- the different power hierarchies in the soccer community
- the relationship between literacy and mass media

The sheer number of submissions we received and the broad scope of the articles suggest that faculty are using a writing and rhetoric framework for teaching first-year composition courses and are encouraging students to publish their work for the benefit of the larger scholarly community. Also, given the number of submissions, we have to believe that students also value the publishing process. After all, the writers revise through the summer, a task that probably wouldn't be enticing if they did not see the significance of the work.

The revision student writers complete after being accepted is rigorous; they do amazing work, especially considering they started off with such strong research projects to begin with. Student reviewers from Stanford University, Montana State University, and Marywood University read each essay twice and provided impressively thoughtful written responses. We, the faculty editors, rely on their insightful readings of submissions to make difficult publication decisions. We can't thank them enough for their efforts.

It was these peer reviewers' insights that encouraged us to invite four writers to submit revi-

sions for publication. From there, student writers received a detailed response from us on draft after draft. As writing teachers, we regularly face criticism and response—thus we know how difficult it can be to come back to a text over and over. These writers showed a level of energy and enthusiasm for the process that was impressive.

In “Where Teachers and Students Meet: Exploring Perceptions in First-Year Composition,” Angelica Nava uses qualitative research and interviews to better understand different pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning composition. Nava’s piece started out as a reflective analysis of her experiences and has undergone significant changes, particularly to her introduction. She has now situated her argument in a larger conversation about Writing about Writing pedagogies and contextualized her site of analysis for her reader.

Zoë Snider’s essay “Vampires, Werewolves, and Oppression: *Twilight* and Female Gender Stereotypes” started as a strong rhetorical analysis of a literary text. Snider’s attention to detail and close textual analysis of the series’ prose made her piece a pleasure to read. As Snider worked to revise her paper, she fleshed out more of her analysis to deal with the audience more substantially. Once Snider addressed the young female audience for the *Twilight* series, her argument shined a provocative light on the problematic gender roles in the books.

Angela Acampora’s essay “*SCUM Manifesto*: The Argument for a ‘Male Misogyny’” offers feminists and rhetoricians an alternative interpretation of a text many scholars have deemed merely the work of an unstable, radical feminist. Acampora’s original submission was too long for the Spotlight section, but shortening it seemed risky, as all parts were interesting and vital to her argument; after carefully trimming and rearranging sections, she maintained the integrity of the paper and strengthened the focus. It was impressive revision work—leading to an argument that asks readers to consider how Valerie Solanas’s radical claims force an alternative view of the limitations of gender roles.

Demirae Dunn’s essay “Propaganda vs. Political Persuasion in Politics: Public Beware” offers a discussion of Newt Gingrich’s campaign rhetoric from some of his earliest campaigns to his current one. She situates his use of propaganda in the historical and current approaches to campaigning, demonstrating the importance of understanding how politicians speak in order to get our votes. The paper was submitted before Gingrich announced his decision to run for president; thus, during the revision process, Dunn was able to incorporate more information about his current rhetorical choices, making her observations not only insightful but also timely.

We are grateful to be able to work with students like Nava, Snider, Acampora, and Dunn. These writers show what even new scholars are capable of when they’re highly engaged, well taught, and focused on contributing to knowledge-making rather than just transmitting existing knowledge. As such, they’re a model for us all.