

# Master of Arts in English Graduate Handbook

2018-2019



Department of English,  
Foreign Languages & Cultural Studies  
**Northwestern State University of Louisiana**

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## Welcome!

The Graduate Program in English at Northwestern State University of Louisiana is delighted that you chose our academic program to pursue your educational and career goals. We will do our very best to support your efforts to meet them.

The NSU English graduate faculty actively advances and shares knowledge not only in courses but also at professional meetings and through publication.

Recent faculty achievements include the July 2018 publication of **Dr. J. Andrew Briseño's** novel *Down and Out* by Gold Wake Press. **Dr. Sarah McFarland's** essay "The Beingness of Animality in Wallace Stevens' 'The Lastest Freed Man'" appeared in the May 2018 issue of *The Explicator*, and her article "Just Meat on Legs': The Last Stragglers of Climate Apocalypse" is forthcoming in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. **Dr. Thomas Reynolds** delivered his presentation, "Authentic, Accessible Audio: Public Radio and Composing in FYC" at the 2018 Conference on College Composition and Communication. He also contributed "Becoming 'a Tolerable English Writer': Franklin's Autobiography as a Model for Composition" at a recent meeting of the South Central MLA.

**Dr. Allison Rittmayer** and Khirstan Doolan (M.A. '17) coauthored the book chapter "It Takes Three to Tango: Reading, Teaching, and Challenging Queer Literature in the South," published in the 2018 *Queering Education in the Deep South*, edited by Kamden K. Strunk. In March 2018, Dr. Rittmayer presented her paper, "Reflections on Mur-tality: Time and Death in the works of Agnès Varda" in Toronto at the annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. **Dr. Rebecca Macijeski's** poetry has appeared in numerous recent publications, including two poems in the 2017 Porkbelly Press anthology *Bramble & Thorn* and the publication of three poems in *Rappahannock Review* in July 2018.

**Dr. Shane Rasmussen** directed the annual Louisiana Studies Conference and recently presented "He felt himself suddenly a mere man no longer': Man, Socialism, and Naturalism in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*" at The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies Third Annual Conference. **Dr. Helaine Razovsky** presented her paper, "Imposing Philomel on Every Songbird: When Is a Nightingale Just a Nightingale?" at the 2017 Exploring the Renaissance conference. **Dr. Lisa Abney** traveled to Mainz, Germany to deliver "Dialect, Social Class, Ethnicity and Folklife in Kate Chopin's 'Maid of Saint Phillipe,' 'Croque-Mitaine,' 'A No-Account Creole,' and 'In Sabine'" to the American Literature Association. She also presented "Linguistic Sub-Regions and Boundaries of North Louisiana: Contemporary, Historical, and Literary Data" at the Southeastern Conference on Linguistics.

**Dr. J. Ereck Jarvis** published his essay, "The Royal Society, Collective Vision, and Samuel Butler's 'The Elephant in the Moon'" in the 2017 *Literature in the Age of Celestial Discovery: From Copernicus to Herschel* edited by Judy Hayden, and he contributed to *The Cambridge Guide to the English Novel, 1660-1820*, edited by April London and forthcoming from Cambridge UP. I, **Dr. Jim Mischler**, presented "(E)motion and INTENSITY: A Historical Study of Conceptual Metaphor" at the 2017 International Cognitive Linguistics Association Conference in Tartu, Estonia, and I provided professional consultation regarding *Here's How to Do Accent Modification*, Plural Publishing, Inc.'s forthcoming textbook for speech language pathologists and ESL instructors.

The knowledge, skills, and professional stature of our graduate faculty ensure that students in the Graduate Program in English will receive the training, skills, and mentoring needed to be successful in the program and in a career after graduation. We look forward to working with you to pursue your goals!

Best regards,

Dr. Jim Mischler  
 Department Head  
 English, Foreign Languages, and Cultural Studies

## Department of English, Foreign Language, and Cultural Studies

318 Kyser Hall • Natchitoches, LA 71497  
Phone: 318-357-6272 • Fax: 318-357-5942 • [languages@nsula.edu](mailto:languages@nsula.edu)

### Department Head

Dr. James Mischler

Office: 318 Kyser Hall. Appointments and messages 318-357-6272 or [mischlerj@nsula.edu](mailto:mischlerj@nsula.edu).

Duties: Department administrator, TESOL program coordinator, and individual advisor.

### Coordinator of Graduate Studies

Dr. J. Ereck Jarvis

Office: 316-I Kyser Hall. Appointments and messages 318-357-5586 or [jarvisj@nsula.edu](mailto:jarvisj@nsula.edu).

Duties: English graduate program coordinator and individual advisor.

### Administrative Services Coordinator

Scarlett Vasocu

Office: 318 Kyser Hall. Appointments and messages 318-357-6272 or [vasocus@nsula.edu](mailto:vasocus@nsula.edu)

Duties: Department office support coordinator.

### Administrative Assistant

Suzanne Kucera

Office: 318 Kyser Hall. Appointments and messages 318-357-6272 or [kuceras@nsula.edu](mailto:kuceras@nsula.edu)

Duties: Provides administrative support for students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

## OUR MISSION

The Graduate Program of the Department of English, Foreign Languages and Cultural Studies is a dynamic, student-oriented program focused on rigorously preparing students to achieve in diverse fields. The English M.A. degree focuses on developing, providing, and supporting forward thinking, responsive, and accessible graduate education of the highest level. Through concentrations in Folklife and Southern Culture, Literature, TESOL, Writing and Linguistics, and Generalist, the Graduate Program encourages a mastery of discipline-specific literature, thoughtful research, professional development, and cross-curricular innovation as members of an engaged scholarly community. Offering its students access to creative, critical, and compositional skills and experiences, the Graduate Program provides invaluable versatility in a rapidly changing world.

## Graduate Faculty

NSU faculty members who teach and advise graduate students are limited to those who have terminal degrees in their area of specialization, an active research agenda, and current approval of the Graduate Council and administrative officers responsible for graduate programs. The approval is based upon periodic review of the qualifications and performance of the faculty member in accordance with established criteria for graduate faculty membership. Only those faculty who have acquired and retained Graduate Faculty Status can teach graduate courses or direct theses or papers in lieu.

### English Graduate Faculty Profiles

Professor **Lisa Abney** (PhD University of Houston) specializes in linguistics, folklife, and literature of the American South. She conducts research in sociolinguistics, oral narrative, foodways, and language and gender in literature and collected oral narratives. She would be delighted to direct or serve on thesis committees or papers-in-lieu in any of the concentrations. Dr Abney can be reached at 316R Kyser Hall, 318-357-4351 [abney@nsula.edu](mailto:abney@nsula.edu)

Assistant Professor **J. Andrew Briseño** (PhD University of North Texas) specializes in creative writing with an emphasis in fiction; he also studies Chicanx and Latinx literature. He teaches courses in creative writing and Chicanx literature. He would happily direct theses with a creative emphasis or a focus on postcolonial literature; he would serve on committees requiring a diverse knowledge in fiction. Dr Briseño can be reached at 314F Kyser Hall, 401-526-3739 [brisenoj@nsula.edu](mailto:brisenoj@nsula.edu)

Assistant Professor **Amelia Chesley** (PhD Purdue University) studies and teaches professional and technical communication; her research interests also include intellectual property, digital archives and public knowledge collections, online communities, and sonic rhetorics. Dr Chesley has worked in web development, graphic design, and publishing. She would be happy to direct theses and projects related to professional/technical communication, public writing and rhetoric, digital humanities, or digital rhetorics and cultures. Dr Chesley can be reached at 316K Kyser Hall, 318-357-5588 [chesleya@nsula.edu](mailto:chesleya@nsula.edu)

Assistant Professor **J. Ereck Jarvis** (PhD University of Wisconsin-Madison) coordinates the English Graduate Program and teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in research methods and literature, particularly British literature from the eighteenth century to the present. He specializes in British literature of the long eighteenth century (1660 - 1800). He would direct thesis or PIL projects about British literature and is open to other possibilities. Dr Jarvis can be reached at 314I Kyser Hall, 318-357-5586 [jarvisj@nsula.edu](mailto:jarvisj@nsula.edu)

Assistant Professor **Rebecca Macijeski** (PhD University of Nebraska-Lincoln) is a poet and member of the creative writing faculty. Her work is interested in intersections between verbal and nonverbal communication and the ways in which poetry makes and records various kinds of knowledge. Dr Macijeski teaches poetry and literature with particular interests in American poets from Whitman and Dickinson through the present, as well as persona poems. She would happily work with writers at any stage looking to develop their own poetics. Dr Macijeski can be reached at 316Q Kyser Hall, 318-357-5801 [macijeskir@nsula.edu](mailto:macijeskir@nsula.edu)

Professor **Sarah E. McFarland** (PhD University of Oregon) specializes in contemporary literature and literary theory with an emphasis on the environmental humanities and critical animal studies. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in literature and theory. She would happily direct thesis or PIL projects in literary studies that focus on an aspect of race/ class/ gender/ sexuality/ species in literatures or in critical theory. Dr McFarland can be reached at 316O Kyser Hall, 318-357-6700 [mcfarlands@nsula.edu](mailto:mcfarlands@nsula.edu)

Associate Professor **Jim Mischler's** (PhD Oklahoma State University) research focuses on linguistics and the scientific study of language. He teaches courses in syntax and grammar, history of the English language, and language testing, as well as second language learning and teaching methods. He is available to direct thesis or PIL projects in a variety of topics related to the study of language, including linguistic theory; language structure, i.e., speech sounds, syntax, word formation, meaning, and real-world use; language change and development over time; and second language acquisition, teaching methods, and research methodology. Dr Mischler can be reached at 318 Kyser Hall, 318-357-6272 [mischlerj@nsula.edu](mailto:mischlerj@nsula.edu)

Associate Professor **Shane Rasmussen** (PhD University of Louisiana at Lafayette) serves as the Director of the Louisiana Folklife Center. He specializes in folklore (including mythology, legends, ethnography, and urban and contemporary folklife) as well as early American literature (to 1910) and science fiction. He teaches courses in folklore, early American literature, science fiction, and world literature and would happily direct theses and papers-in-lieu in these areas. Dr Rasmussen can be reached at 213 Kyser Hall, 318-357-4332 [rasmussens@nsula.edu](mailto:rasmussens@nsula.edu)

Professor **Helaine Razovsky** (PhD Boston University) specializes in early modern English literature, drama, and feminist approaches to literature. She teaches courses in British literature, world literature, and detective fiction, and would happily direct theses or PIL projects in British literature, detective fiction, and any literature from a feminist perspective. Dr Razovsky can be reached at 314J Kyser Hall, 318-357-6473 [razovsky@nsula.edu](mailto:razovsky@nsula.edu)

Associate Professor **Thomas Reynolds** (PhD University of Louisiana at Lafayette) has worked as a professional writer and editor, an online course designer, and a high school instructor. He teaches courses in writing, rhetoric, and linguistics at the undergraduate and graduate levels and serves as President of the NSU Faculty Senate. Dr. Reynolds has an active program of research related to the multiple intersections between writing, rhetoric, technology, and teaching. He would happily direct theses and projects related to writing, rhetoric, teaching, and technology. Dr Reynolds can be reached at 316M Kyser Hall, 318-357-4236 [reynoldst@nsula.edu](mailto:reynoldst@nsula.edu)

Assistant Professor **Allison Rittmayer** (PhD University of Florida) specializes in film and media studies, Southern literature and culture, critical theory, and modern and contemporary American literature. She teaches graduate courses on Southern literature (early through contemporary) and documentary film. She would happily direct thesis or PIL projects on Southern literature and culture, modern or contemporary American literature, critical theory, or topics related to film, media, or popular culture. Dr Rittmayer can be reached at 316P Kyser Hall, 318-357-6462 [rittmayera@nsula.edu](mailto:rittmayera@nsula.edu)

## Admission to Graduate Programs in English (rev. 5/22/19)

Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis; however, submit all materials by the following deadlines to ensure review and evaluation of your application before the beginning of the semester:

<u>To begin in</u>	<u>Submit all materials by</u>
FALL	AUGUST 1
SPRING	DECEMBER 15
SUMMER	MAY 1

Materials should be submitted to the Graduate School. Their contact information is as follows:

### **The Graduate School**

Caspari Hall, Room 123

Natchitoches, LA 71497

phone: 318-357-5851

fax: 318-357-5019

Grad\_school@nsula.edu

<https://graduateschool.nsula.edu/>

A complete application file for certificate programs in TESOL or Writing for Business, Industry and Technology requires the following:

- Admission to the Graduate School
  - The [online application for admission](#)
  - Receipt of official college transcripts
  - Receipt of two recommendations (form or letter)

A complete application file for the English MA program requires the following:

- Admission to the Graduate School—
  - The [online application for admission](#)
  - Receipt of \$25 Application Fee
  - Receipt of official college transcripts
  - Receipt of [immunization records](#)<sup>1</sup>
  - Receipt of 2 letters of recommendation— and
- a writing sample of not more than 15 pages demonstrating facility in analysis, argument, research, and coherence emailed to **grad\_school@nsula.edu** AND **englishgrad@nsula.edu**; and
- a statement of purpose of about 500 words describing career goals and/or rationale for pursuing graduate study in English. This statement should demonstrate a substantial commitment to graduate study. **Email to grad\_school@nsula.edu** AND **englishgrad@nsula.edu**.

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<sup>1</sup> Can be waived for online-only students: <https://www.nsula.edu/wp-content/uploads/Immunization-Form-WAIVER-ONLY.pdf>

*Successful applicants* to the MA program in English generally meet the following criteria, in addition to admission requirements established by the Graduate School:

- Undergraduate GPA of 3.0 or higher;
- Engaging and lucid writing in both the statement of purpose and writing sample, with the latter demonstrating thoughtful analysis, effective argumentation grounded specific evidence, apt research, and correct citation;
- Statement of purpose articulating professional goals and rationale for graduate study based in critical, intellectual, philosophical or pedagogical commitment to English studies; and
- Two letters of recommendation written by people who have supervised the applicant in an academic or similar setting and providing specific evidence of the applicants' intellectual engagement and potential for success in graduate studies.

### *International applicants*

The Graduate School requires TOEFL scores for international applicants; the Department of English, Foreign Languages, and Cultural Studies will consider an IELTS score of 6.0 in lieu of the TOEFL.

### **TRANSFER CREDITS**

A maximum of nine (9) credit hours with grades of at least B (3.0) may be transferred into the master's program upon admission. Courses taken concurrently (while pursuing the MA at NSU) will not be approved for transfer credit. Transfer credits must be for courses deemed equivalent to courses required for the NSU MA program curriculum. And the credits must be earned within six years of completing the MA at NSU—for instance, transferred credits earned at another institution in Spring 2020 expire for NSU as of 2026. Transfer credits must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies and signed by the Department Head and Dean. A request to approve transfer credits form is available on the Graduate School's web page under "Graduate School Forms" or at the following link: <https://graduateschool.nsula.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/Graduate-School-Form-Application-for-Transfer-of-Graduate-Credit-Rev.-2017.pdf>

### **COURSE LOAD LIMITATIONS**

Students with full academic eligibility status may take between three and twelve hours per 16-week semester. Approval must be obtained for a course load of more than twelve credit hours in a single 16-week term from the Coordinator of Graduate Studies in English, the Department Head, and the Dean of the Graduate School.

### **TUITION AND FEES**

Graduate tuition and student fees are posted by semester on the right side of the Student Accounting page: <https://www.nsula.edu/student-accounting-cashiering/>. See "Internet Only Fees." for Graduate credits. These fees are subject to change without notice. All fees and charges assessed by NSU in connection with registration are due in full on scheduled fee payment dates. Deadlines are posted on the appropriate "Academic Calendars" found on the Registrar's page: <https://www.nsula.edu/registrar/>. Contact the Registrar or Financial Aid Office if you have questions about tuition and fees.



**GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS**

Teaching and research assistantships are available for highly qualified graduate students on our Natchitoches campus. To be eligible for a graduate assistantship, the student must be accepted into the MA degree program and have achieved regular graduate admission status at Northwestern State University. Eligible students must apply for a Graduate Assistantship. A graduate assistant must be full-time (at least 9 hours) of which 6 must be graduate, and no more than 12 (graduate/undergraduate) hours total. To be eligible to retain the assistantship, the student must maintain a 3.0 grade point average in all graduate courses, as well as meet all other stated requirements of the graduate school. Graduate assistants are required to work 20 hours a week. Those granted a graduate assistantship will receive a stipend over a nine-month period. Out-of-state tuition is waived, if applicable, but this is only in effect for those semesters the student is actually employed as a graduate assistant. Additional information and an application are available from the Graduate School office.

## Degree Requirements

Each of the five MA concentrations require 30 hours to complete the degree, including a Degree Completion Option of a Thesis (6 hours) or a Papers-in-Lieu of thesis (3 hours) plus an elective course (3 hours). For titles and brief description of courses listed below, see Appendix A.

Students in the **Writing and Linguistics** concentration (Major Code 529A) must complete:

- ENGL 5800;
- 15 hours of linguistics, rhetoric, composition, or writing courses (including but not limited to: ENGL 5030, 5040, 5090, 5230, 5240, 5260, 5270, 5290, 5540, 5700, 5920, 6210, 6540, 6580, 6590, 6600, 6610, 6620, 6640, 6650, 6890)
- 6 additional hours of any graduate level ENGL course (including 5280 if on assistantship).
- and a Degree Completion option (described below).

Students in the **Literature** concentration (529B) must complete:

- ENGL 5800;
- one 3-hour seminar in a major literary figure;
- at least 15 hours in literature or related courses (including but not limited to: ENGL 5020, 5030, 5090, 5210, 5250, 5300, 5350, 5400, 5450, 5500, 5560, 5570, 5590, 5710, 6010, 6030, 6100, 6110, 6120, 6200, 6210, 6230, 6310, 6373, 6580, 6590, 6630);
- 3 additional hours of any graduate level ENGL course (including 5280 if on assistantship);
- and a Degree Completion option (described below).

Students in the **Folklife/Southern Culture** concentration (529C) must complete:

- ENGL 5800;
- ENGL 6310 or 5590 and 6480 or 5580;
- at least 12 additional hours in the areas of Folklife and Southern literature, or other English courses with approval by advisor and department head. Students may choose to take their remaining courses in the areas of literature (particularly American literature), folklore, grant writing or linguistics. Courses that can be used to fulfill the 12 hours include but are not limited to: ENGL 6890, 6600, 6590, 6580, 6480, 6470, 6373, 6310, 6290, 6200, 6030, 5900, 5721, 5720, 5710, 5600, 5590, 5580, 5570, 5560, 5450, 5400, 5350, 5320, 5290;
- 3 additional hours of any graduate level ENGL course (including 5280 if on assistantship);
- and a Degree Completion option (described below).

Students in the **TESOL** concentration (529E) must complete:

- ENGL 5800;
- ENGL 5240, 6610, 6640, and two TESOL electives courses;
- 6 additional hours of any graduate level ENGL course (including 5280 if on assistantship);
- and a Degree Completion option (described below).

Students enrolled in the **Generalist** (529G) concentration must complete:

- English 5800;
- 6 hours from Literature courses;
- 6 hours from Writing or Linguistics courses;
- 6 hours of Folklife/Southern culture courses;
- 3 additional hours of any graduate level ENGL course (including 5280 if on assistantship);
- and a Degree Completion option (described below).

## DEGREE COMPLETION OPTIONS

Students in the English MA program must select and complete a degree completion option once they have completed 24 hours of coursework in their degree program. The two options for degree completion are (1) a thesis and (2) papers in lieu of thesis (often referred to as PIL). Each student will determine whether they will submit a thesis or two papers-in-lieu of thesis as the final project in their degree program. This decision generally is made in consultation with the students' major professor once 18 credit hours have been successfully earned in the program. The coordinator of graduate studies also is available to advise regarding this decision.

**1. Thesis** - Students choosing the thesis option must contact three appropriate English Graduate Faculty members in consultation with their advisor or the coordinator of graduate studies and request their participation on a thesis committee by sending a brief description of the thesis project. Once faculty agree to serve, the student submits a formal thesis proposal for the committee's input and approval. Once the thesis committee approves a proposal, the thesis director will request a permit for the student to be able to register for English 5980. A fully signed copy of the proposal must be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies before thesis hours may be added to a student's schedule.

For the thesis option, a student completes six credit hours of English 5980. Generally, these hours are distributed over two semesters, with three hours completed in each semester; however, students can complete all six hours of English 5980 in one semester. Students who distribute their thesis project over two semesters will receive a grade of IP (In Progress) for the first semester until the thesis is completed in the second semester, at which point the grade is changed to reflect the thesis director's assessment of the full six hours.

The thesis committee reviews the complete project and— as a committee— approves the completion of the project. All students must successfully pass an oral comprehensive defense of their thesis. In the defense, committee members may stipulate revisions to be completed before the thesis can be considered complete.

**2. Papers-in-Lieu** - Students who choose the PIL option must contact a graduate faculty member in consultation with their advisor or the coordinator of graduate studies and request that professor's participation directing the PIL project by sending a brief description of the two papers. Once the faculty member agrees to direct the PIL, the director of the PIL will request a permit for the student to be able to register for English 6950. A student completes three credit hours of English 6950. Note that PIL students must take an additional elective graduate English course to complete the 30-hour MA program.

For at least one of the two papers, PIL students typically elect to expand and revise a paper submitted as part of their graduate coursework for the English Master's, and both papers may originate from assignments completed during coursework. In such cases, English 6950 requires extensive revision and substantial development of previous work, resulting in two article-length essays of publishable quality. Students who do not fulfill the requirements of the course will receive a grade of IP (In Progress) and must re-enroll in English 6950 for subsequent semesters until the requirements are fulfilled, at which point the IP will be changed to reflect the assessment of the two papers by the directing professor.

Once a Degree Completion option has been selected and a graduate faculty member agrees to serve as director, students should correspond directly with their project director about research and writing methods, goals, deadlines, the project content, formatting, completion expectations, and other matters related to the Thesis or PIL. In other words, that faculty member becomes the student's advisor through the completion of the degree program (although, at present, the Degree Completion project director does not appear as the official advisor in NSU systems such as DegreeWorks). The Graduate School website has template documents for Thesis and PIL prefatory and signature pages; they also provide information here:

<https://graduateschool.nsula.edu/assets/Thesis-Guideline-Manual-9-2016revised.pdf>.

### **TIME TO COMPLETION**

All work applied towards the degree must have been earned in the six years immediately preceding the completion of the graduate program.

### **REVALIDATION**

In special cases, upon approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, expired courses may be revalidated by examination. TRANSFERRED CREDITS MAY NOT BE REVALIDATED. The examination must include a written test or paper that measures those topics currently taught in the course and must be evaluated as if the student had just completed the course. The student's written examination paper, portfolio, or performance document with accompanying instructions, course learning outcomes, and designated activities with completed rubrics must be filed in the Graduate School office.

The creation and valuation of the assessment instrument will be done by the instructor who is currently teaching the course or who has most recently taught the course. Revalidation will be on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. For grade point average purposes, the initial grade will be utilized.

A Request for Revalidation form is available here:

<https://graduateschool.nsula.edu/assets/Uploads/Request-for-Revalidation-of-Expired-Course2.pdf>

Requests for revalidation must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies and Department Head and submitted to the Graduate Dean for final approval. The cost of revalidation must be paid and the receipt on file in the Graduate Dean's office prior to submission of the revalidation examination.

## **FILING FOR DEGREE**

Students must apply to graduate within the first five weeks of their final term (check the Academic Calendar for the precise date; the calendar is available on the NSU Registrar's webpage). To apply for graduation,

1. Access NSUConnect via myNSU at <https://my.nsula.edu>
2. Enter your user name and password to enter myNSU.
3. Click on "Student" or the Student Tab.
4. Click on "Student Records".
5. Click on "Apply to Graduate" and complete the process by following the instructions to complete your application for graduation.

The coordinator of graduate studies then receives notice that a student has applied for graduation from the university. The coordinator verifies eligibility and confirms that all degree requirements have been met, coordinating with the staff in the Graduate School to confirm that the student is approved for graduation.

## Remaining in Good Standing

### GRADES

Students are graded in their studies on the quality of work. Five grades are in use as follows: A (excellent), B (good), C (average), D (below average), and F (failure). A course with a grade of Pass or a grade of D may not be used to satisfy a course requirement for a graduate degree. **Not more than six hours of credit with a grade of C shall be used to fulfil course requirements for the degree.** A third grade of C will lead to dismissal from the graduate program.

A grade of I (Incomplete) means that the course work is incomplete due to circumstances beyond the control of the student and that successful completion of this work could lead to a passing grade. Incomplete grades must be removed within 60 calendar days after the end of the term in which the grade was assigned. If the work is not completed within the allotted time, the grade of I will be changed to F automatically.

Faculty discourage their advisees and students from taking incompletes. During the regular year, time pressures make it difficult to complete course work from previous terms while also doing quality work in the current term, and incompletes held over the summer pose problems as well because many faculty members are away from campus when the deadline for summer extensions occurs.

The “IP” (In Progress) grade is different from the Incomplete (“I”) grade. The IP grade indicates that the student did not complete the research necessary to pass the Thesis or PIL course. The student may request another semester to complete the work; the Completion Project director will then assign the IP grade for the student’s current semester thesis or PIL course section. As described above, under “Degree Completion Options,” students who extend the six required thesis credits over two semesters will receive an IP for the first semester’s three credits until the second semester’s three credits are complete. NOTE: A student with the IP grade must be *continuously enrolled* (except during the summer) in the Thesis or PIL course until the course is given a passing grade. If the student does not enroll in the Thesis or PIL course the semester following the IP grade was given, the student may be dismissed from the graduate program. An exception to this rule must be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

If a student earns more than six hours in thesis, the student's transcript will provide only six hours of grades for thesis. All other “in progress” (IP) grades will remain IP permanently on the student’s NSU transcript. The letter grade given by the thesis director will be assigned to the last six hours when the thesis is satisfactorily completed.

Students may repeat graduate courses; however, if a different grade is earned, it does not replace or delete the previous grade. For example, a student who receives a failing grade for a course may retake and pass the course to fulfil a curricular requirement; however, the initial F remains on record and is calculated as part of the student’s cumulative grade point average.

The W (Withdrawn) grade represents a student’s official withdrawal from a course using MyNSU. If a student stops participating in a course after the final day to resign and drop courses, the earned letter grade for all assigned materials (even if zero/F) and the last date of participation will be

entered for the final course grade. It is the student's responsibility to withdraw by the deadlines to avoid a failing grade on official transcripts.

## **ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY STATUS**

### **Full**

A student whose graduate cumulative grade point average is 3.0 or above on a 4-point scale has full academic eligibility status and enjoys all department privileges attached to that status, including the ability to register for dept. graduate courses and to apply for/continue as a dept. graduate assistant. Note that a cumulative gpa of 3.0 or above is required for successful graduation from the program.

### **Probationary**

A student whose graduate cumulative grade point average or semester grade point average falls below 3.0 on a 4.0 scale will be placed on probationary status. Students who have graduate assistantships and are placed on probation may not be eligible to continue their assistantships (See Graduate Assistantships).

### **Suspended**

A student on probation who fails to make a 3.0 on a 4.0 scale during the next semester or session of enrollment shall be suspended. Upon suspension from graduate studies, a student is ineligible to enroll in graduate courses until the suspension period is completed. However, a student may, after the expiration of one semester, appeal for readmission by submitting to the Director of Graduate Studies a letter addressed to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. The Director of Graduate Studies will forward the appeal to the Dean, who makes the final decision. Upon a second suspension, the university allows the student to use the same procedure after the expiration of one calendar year. *However, the departmental admissions committee will not support readmission into the program after a second probation.*

## **STUDENT CONDUCT**

Each Northwestern State University student is encouraged to help create an environment that promotes learning, dignity, and mutual respect for everyone in the learning environment, whether that is in a traditional seminar room or in an online discussion board. Offensive behavior will not be tolerated and will be subjected to disciplinary action under the Northwestern State University Student Code of Conduct and Sanctions (Article VII., Sanctions).

Northwestern State University students, staff, and faculty are expected to create an environment that promotes academic excellence, personal dignity, mutual respect, and individual responsibility in both face-to-face and electronic educational settings, regardless of the content of the ideas and opinions being shared. Ideas and opinions that are controversial or in opposition to others are welcomed in the NSU environment, and this policy shall not be used to prohibit the sharing of controversial or unpopular ideas or opinions but merely to call for civility when discussing ideas and opinions during class time.

All members of the NSU community have the right to a safe environment free of disturbances and civil in all aspects of human relations. *Whether in a face-to-face or online classroom*, students who engage in disruptive or abusive discourse or actions may be removed from the class and subject to

disciplinary sanctions under the Northwestern State University Student Code of Conduct (Articles IV., Infractions and VII., Sanctions).

Allegations of inappropriate conduct will be investigated by the Graduate English Committee, which is a standing committee of graduate faculty members chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies. If a faculty member serving on the committee is involved in the allegation, she or he will be recused from the committee. The purpose of the committee is to investigate such allegations and impose judgment and appropriate discipline. Such discipline can include removal from the course, suspension from the program for a term, or immediate dismissal from the program. See Academic Appeals, below, for formal procedures to appeal conduct sanctions.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity— honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in academic endeavors— is integral to the mission of Northwestern State University and to the project of scholarship and advanced education more generally. Avoiding even the appearance of academic dishonesty is vital to success in the English graduate program. Any time a student uses a phrase, sentence, paragraph, or idea from any outside source— printed material, lecture, friends, television shows, etc.— without giving that source credit (using proper documentation), the student has plagiarized. Careful and correct documentation of sources is the most effective way to avoid plagiarism. Correct documentation follows the established and up-to-date conventions of a standard style system such as MLA, APA, or Chicago.

Academic dishonesty is defined as the following: 1) acquiring or using a published test bank, 2) copying from another student's test, paper or computer file, 3) using unauthorized materials during a test, 4) collaborating during a test with any other person by giving or receiving information without authority, 5) stealing, buying, or otherwise obtaining non-administered or unauthorized tests, 6) selling or giving away non-administered or unauthorized tests, 7) bribing anyone to obtain information about a test, 8) substituting for another student or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a test, **9) submitting as your own, in fulfillment of academic requirements, any work prepared totally or in part by another, 10) supplying to another student any theme, report, or other work for use in fulfilling academic requirements, 11) plagiarism, defined as the use of another person's work and the unacknowledged incorporations of that work in one's own work that is offered for credit, and 12) duplicity, defined as offering for credit identical or substantially unchanged work in two or more courses without approval.**

In cases where academic dishonesty is established, an F for the assignment and/or course grade (and consequent dismissal from the program) is standard. A student may be referred to Student Conduct and be placed on probation, suspended, expelled or forced to withdraw from Northwestern as a result of academic dishonesty. Refer to the section in the Student Handbook concerning Academic Infractions and Sanctions for Academic Misconduct. See Academic Appeals, below, for formal procedures to appeal academic sanctions.



## ACADEMIC APPEALS

### *Grade Appeal*

Students who receive grades they believe do not reflect the quality of their work may appeal grades within 120 days following the academic period in which the grades were earned. The procedure for grade appeal is as follows:

The student should consult the professor in an effort to reach an understanding. Students are encouraged to communicate with the graduate coordinator regarding the situation. If no understanding is reached, the student should secure a Grade Appeal Form available online from the Graduate School website. The student should submit the written appeal with all signatures to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, with a request for a hearing with the Graduate Council. An appeal to the Graduate Council should be in the form of an explanatory letter, including the signed appeal form, a request for a specific action, and documentation supporting the appeal. Appeals will be reviewed by the Graduate Council at regularly scheduled monthly meetings. Both the student and the professor may be present when the appeal is reviewed. The student and the professor may attend via phone or WebEx. The Graduate Council will rule on the appeal according to standing policy and procedures and submit a recommendation to the Dean. The action of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research on the Council's recommendation will be considered final.

### *Other Appeal – Appeals related to conduct*

Students who disagree with the judgment and/or discipline imposed by the Graduate English Committee can appeal such decision with the following procedures:

The student should submit a written appeal in the form of a signed explanatory letter and a request for a specific action to the Head of the Department of English, Foreign Languages, and Cultural Studies. The Department Head will review the evidence gathered by the Graduate English Committee along with their written response to the student's appeal. The Department Head will then rule on the student's appeal. If the student is not satisfied with the Department Head's decision, a request to forward the appeal to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, with a request for a hearing with the Graduate Council, should be submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies. Appeals will be reviewed by the Graduate Council at regularly scheduled monthly meetings. Both the student and a representative of the Graduate English Committee may be present when the appeal is reviewed. The Graduate Council will rule on the appeal according to standing policy and procedures and submit a recommendation to the Dean. The action of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research on the recommendation will be considered final.

## Appendix A

LEARNING DISABILITIES IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: USING  
SPEECH RECOGNITION SOFTWARE FOR COLLEGE WRITING

by  
Lorna Nelson

A Thesis Proposal  
Submitted to the Graduate School of  
Northwestern State University of Louisiana  
In partial fulfillment of requirements for the  
Master of Arts in English

Approved by:

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Dr. Thomas W. Reynolds, Jr.

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Dr. James J. Mischler III

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Dr. Sarah E. McFarland

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Vickie S. Gentry, Ph.D.                      date  
Dean, The Graduate School

Learning Disabilities in the Composition Classroom:  
Using Speech Recognition Software for College Writing

**Introduction**

Since at least the beginning of the “social turn” in composition studies a few decades ago, teaching college writing has assumed a strong element of social justice. The social turn in composition studies springs from the concept of writing as a collaborative process, or, in the words of Kenneth Bruffee, writing as “internalized social talk made public and social again” (641). Generally, this turn to the social in composition studies points away from behaviorist, cognitive, and expressivist approaches, although many writing teachers do remain willing to embrace an eclectic range of practice (Berlin 478). A large body of diverse and contentious compositionists continue to espouse the concept of writing as a social process, even granting rhetoric an intrinsically political nature. James Berlin, for example, fills the burgeoning arena of “social-epistemic rhetoric” with those who understand “rhetoric as a political act involving dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation” (488). Many college writing teachers who are mindful of this complex dialectic bring to their work certain expressed or implied social justice aims, one of the most compelling of which is to provide special support for marginalized students. In public universities in America, for economic and political reasons, the numbers of students considered marginalized for any reason continuously grows. In explaining the relationship of college composition to the ever-present need for growing enrollments in public universities, Mike Rose admonishes: “Like it or not, the story of American education has been and will in all likelihood continue to be a story of increasing access” (356). He characterizes higher education in the United States as “constantly under pressure to expand, [ . . . ] admitting, in turn, the sons of the

middle class, and later the daughters, and then the American poor, the immigrant poor, veterans, the racially segregated, the disenfranchised” (355). Some see teaching college composition as an act of social justice because it aims to ameliorate the inequality and injustice created by the social and political exclusion of these marginalized groups. Helping students develop writing abilities for success in college and life can be “especially valuable for purposes of social redress if the students come from marginalized groups” (Bizzell 185). This social justice ethic continues to flourish among college writing teachers.

Of the students in college writing classes who may be on the boundaries in one way or another, students with disabilities surely remain the most marginalized. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) recognizes the presence of students “with a wide range of visible and invisible disabilities” and makes clear that “people with disabilities have been oppressed and continue to be relegated to the margins” (NCTE Policy Statement). While definition and measurement issues surrounding the concept of disabilities remain complex, reliable sources indicate that approximately 11 percent of undergraduate students in the U.S. during the 2007-8 academic year reported a disability (U.S. Census Bureau “Table 285”). It is important to note that disclosure of disability at the postsecondary level is voluntary, so there are many more students in college who do have disabilities than are officially counted. Current estimates show that just over half of college students who received disability-based services in secondary school no longer consider themselves to have a disability, and of those who do think of themselves as having one or more disabilities about 10 percent do not report it (Wagner et al., 4-14). In conjunction with this low rate of self-disclosure, people with disabilities remain grossly underrepresented in higher education. While about 40 percent of youth in the general population attend college, fewer than 20 percent of students with disabilities attend college; furthermore,

students with disabilities remain much more likely to attend community colleges than four-year schools (Wagner et al, 4-8). So nearly half of people in the general population attend college, but fewer than one in five people with disabilities do so.

Many factors influence whether those with disabilities attend college, and for students with learning disabilities, the challenges can be extreme. For students with learning disabilities, these challenges include lack of academic preparation and lack of training to self-advocate and, on the institutional side, obstacles presented by a totally different legal framework from high school to college, as well as confusing, expensive, and inconsistent documentation requirements (Cortiella 27). Once students with learning disabilities have enrolled, they often face obstacles getting support and accommodations due to understaffed disability offices, faculty members who are unaware of their needs, and an absence of assistive technology (Cortiella 29). Though it often remains especially difficult for students with any disability to attend college, their numbers are increasing. In summarizing recent educational data for Congress, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) reports that the proportion of college students reporting a disability has increased substantially in the last decade and that the categories of those disabilities have also shifted (GAO 8-11).

Generally, a disability can be considered “a physical or mental condition that causes functional limitations that substantially limit one or more major life activities, including mobility, communication (seeing, hearing, speaking), and learning” (Raue and Lewis 1). Over the past decade, there has been a sharp rise in the number of students reporting both mental illness and attention deficit disorder (GAO 8-12). A widely cited report published by the National Center for Education Statistics summarizes data reported by undergraduates and

provides a current overview (see table 1). While any number of impairments categorized as disabilities can affect the manner in which students learn, read, or write, the presence of invisible, language-based, specific learning disabilities frequently complicates success for

Table 1: Types of Disabilities Reported by College Undergraduates 2007-2008

Type	Any	Visua l	Hearin g	Speec h	Ortho - pedic	Specific learning disabilit y	Atten- tion deficit disorde r	Mental Illness/ Depres -ion	Health Impair - ments	Othe r
Percentag e	10.8 (of all students )	2.7	6.0	.7	15.4	8.8	19.2	24.1	5.8	17.3

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *2007-2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study*, 2008, Web, table 6.1.

college students in composition classes. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disability defines a specific learning disability, in part, as:

a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. (Cortiella 3)

The key characteristic of this definition is “heterogeneous.” People with learning disabilities are a heterogeneous group with regard to how they learn and how they process information.

Heterogeneity not only reigns within the group but also within a single individual, whose abilities in some areas may be outstanding while very weak in others. Approximately 4-6 percent of public school children in the U.S. have learning disabilities, but including a broader range of reading disorders drives that number up much higher (Cortiella 5). Sometimes called learning differences, learning disabilities are referred to by the American Psychiatric Association as

learning disorders, which include disorders of reading, written expression, and mathematics (Morrison 497). The terminology often used to identify various learning disabilities includes *dyslexia* for reading difficulties, *dysgraphia* for writing difficulties, and *dyscalculia* for math difficulties. This is not a comprehensive list as other learning disorders have been identified, including visual and auditory processing disorders and non-verbal learning disorders (Cordiella 6). Dysgraphia is a processing disorder that causes extreme difficulty with “organizing letters, numbers, and words on a line or page” (NCLD “Dysgraphia”). Unfortunately, few educators at any level recognize this extreme inability to organize thoughts on paper, chalking it up to laziness or poor handwriting, yet dysgraphia need not prevent students from becoming able writers. About one-third of those who have learning disabilities also suffer from attention deficit disorder, a neurobiologically based difficulty in staying focused that is not considered a learning disability (Cortiella 6). Learning disabilities are subject to some degree of remediation through education, as well as varying degrees of compensation through individual adaptation. Assistive technology provides some amelioration in many cases. While the effects of having a learning disability vary from one individual to the next, learning disabilities last for a lifetime and have a profound impact.

Due to ongoing progress being made in the field of special education, as well as continuing growth in access to higher education brought about by contemporary legal changes, composition teachers are increasingly likely to encounter students who have a specific learning disability, particularly dyslexia. Dyslexia, a condition affecting as much as fifteen to twenty percent of the population worldwide and in all languages, is considered a specific learning disability. According to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA):



Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. (“Definition”)

Sally Shaywitz, M.D., a groundbreaking researcher in the neurology of dyslexia, created the “sea of strengths model” for dyslexia, which posits an encapsulated weakness in decoding surrounded by intact higher-level cognitive abilities including reasoning, comprehension, vocabulary, and problem-solving (Shaywitz 58). This model helps explain why so many people with dyslexia, for whom traditional reading remains slow and tiring, can communicate so effectively orally and can comprehend and analyze text when it is presented via audio methods. Functional brain imaging studies have clearly demonstrated that, compared with fluent readers, children and adults with dyslexia utilize different neural pathways for reading and word retrieval (Shaywitz 71-89).

Dyslexia can be found across the range of cognitive abilities, but people with dyslexia are frequently highly creative and often have average or above-average intelligence and excellent oral vocabularies. They typically remain slow readers and poor spellers for life (IDA “Basics”). Usually, the primary issue is a difficulty matching letters on a page or screen to sounds; that is, making the phonological connections required to decode or to turn written marks into meaningful units, words, and sentences (Shaywitz 40-4). Although dyslexia causes slow and difficult reading and can make writing challenging for a number of reasons, dyslexics can be gifted writers despite their text disability. Professionally, for example, a small sampling of

contemporary dyslexic writers includes fiction author John Irving, playwright Wendy Wasserstein, and poet Philip Schulz—all recipients of top honors in their fields. Not everyone with dyslexia will become a prize-winning author, yet most, with proper support and fair accommodations including extra time, can do much more than barely survive college reading and writing. For a firsthand introduction, a simulation of a dyslexic reader's experience can be found online at <http://webaim.org/simulations/dyslexia-sim.html> (WebAIM "Simulation").

Dyslexia is only one common human condition that calls for an open-minded approach in teaching college writing. The number of faculty members outraged by the mere presence of those with learning disabilities in their composition classes (see, for example, Dunn's account of "Somnolent Samantha" in Brueggemann et al. 375-82) seems to be declining. Yet some in the humanities continue to question the legitimacy of learning disabilities and to believe that people who learn differently do not belong in college. What can a student with any disability generally, or with dyslexia specifically, expect in a typical first-year composition class? Despite the best intentions of writing teachers to support the success of an increasingly diverse student population, many educators at the college level do not have the time or experience to understand and help students who have disabilities, especially invisible learning disabilities. Instructors may remain unaware of their students' challenges because the choice to disclose one's disability in college (required to request accommodations) is completely within the discretion of the individual student. Institutions vary in their stance toward disabilities, and some offer little training and support for faculty. Because of all of these reasons, a student with a learning disability entering a composition classroom can expect anything from welcoming support to outright hostility, from ready availability of assistive technology to minimal and obligatory granting of accommodations, from celebration of the true diversity of learners to illegal

discrimination. Amendments broadening the definition of disability under the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act took effect in 2009 (specifically citing learning disabilities for inclusion as a disability), and new federal rules prescribing web accessibility standards in higher education are currently being finalized (EEOC “Fact Sheet”; Cummings “Accessibility”). Yet despite recent fortifications to federal legal protections that first came into existence with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the relationship between college composition studies and learning disabilities remains troubled at worst and unexplored at best.

Occasional articles on the intersection of learning disabilities and postsecondary composition can be found in major journals in the field that address struggling students; these journals include *The Journal of Basic Writing* and *The Journal of Developmental Education* (Dunn 56). However, flagship journals such as *College Composition and Communication* and *College English* remain almost entirely devoid of similar literature (Barber-Fendley and Hamel 506). In the articles that do appear, thoughtful writing teachers continue to insist upon increased attention to disabilities in the composition classroom. In 2001, for example, Brueggemann, White, Dunn, Heifferon, and Cheu called for increased visibility of disabilities in the college writing classroom, disputing the belief that “some fixed, unitary quality called ‘intelligence’ is distributed unequally at birth” (375). These authors call on writing teachers themselves to “learn to ‘compose’ without words—visually, graphically, orally, using new strategies that perhaps seriously challenge all our traditional pedagogical practices and our strongly held beliefs about literacy and writing as empowerment” (392). Obviously, the skills needed to produce a text-based essay or research paper differ from those needed to produce a multimedia presentation, and “composition” products and processes differ in power and purpose. Yet this call for

composing via different modes of expression in order to broaden the definition of literacy from a disabilities standpoint intersects decisively with the shifting understanding of literacy brought about by digital technology. This intersection presents an incredibly rich opportunity for college writing teachers to think about and include students with disabilities as they interrogate their working definitions of writing and literacy. The ongoing explosion of technologies commonly available for reading and writing magnifies this opportunity exponentially because of the convergence of assistive technologies with new media technologies.

The history of responses within the field of composition studies to the growing presence of students with learning disabilities cannot be considered without attending to the topic of accommodations, the reasonable assistance or modifications required of postsecondary institutions by federal law for the purpose of equal access. Federal law also requires that postsecondary institutions provide “auxiliary aids and services” for qualified students who have disabilities (OCR “Auxiliary Aids”). For students with learning disabilities including dyslexia, accommodations can typically include extended time for testing, audio books, and handouts to reduce copying from a board or screen. Two divergent approaches to accommodations for those with learning disabilities (and disabilities more generally) can be noted within the field of composition. On one hand, there is a movement among compositionists away from the disabilities label and accommodations altogether. On the other hand, there is a movement for improving the protections and specialized supports for first-year writing students with learning disabilities. Some writing teachers espouse borrowing from the field of disability studies its push for the dissolution of the cultural construct of *disability*, with a corresponding examination of “whether teaching practices that require accommodations are really necessary” (White 728). For example, instructors sometimes reduce the need for accommodations through universal design

approaches that make learning more accessible to *all* students. Universal design for learning is defined as “a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn” (CAST “About UDL”). Examples of universal design include podcasting lectures, reducing the number of timed writings, and allowing extra credit assignments. One recent study shows that non-tenured women faculty are generally more willing to “adopt inclusive instructional principles” and that this willingness does vary from discipline to discipline, but that once faculty do make changes for greater inclusion, they are less willing to work with students on getting accommodations (Lombardi and Murray 51, 50). Increased awareness of the convergence of new media and assistive technologies supports a universal design approach.

On the other hand, at the other end of the spectrum in responding to accommodations questions, there is a growing recognition that more inclusive teaching methods alone will not address the equal-access needs of all students with disabilities. Furthermore, accommodations questions for students with learning disabilities can be divisive. Humanities faculty may have real concerns about what is fair, what is required by law, and how to support students while maintaining academic quality. In fact, this debate often assumes deeply partisan and political overtones. For example, one right-wing think tank recently hired a conservative editorial writer to produce a “study” on this topic that drums up “evidence” that accommodations for those with learning disabilities constitute a burning public policy controversy in higher education (Vickers 2010). Yet many thoughtful scholars and educators recognize that without strong legal protections and continuing legal challenges to interpret and enforce the law, progress for college students with learning disabilities would be (more) seriously obstructed. As with affirmative action, the legal framework for equal access to instruction and instructional materials rests upon

the concept of a level playing field, or getting everyone to the same starting line. Unfortunately, this version of the “accommodational [sic] debate, with its technical jargon and fiery opposition,” often leads to further polarization (Barber-Findley and Hamel 515). Those more cognizant of the need for specialized support for first-year college writers who have learning disabilities question the “level-playing field” concept and argue for equal but different access. Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel, for example, call for active promotion of alternative assistance writing programs based on a “liberal view of distributive justice,” in which basic understandings of fairness are reconsidered by composition theorists (527). Successfully navigating this divergence requires writing instructors to think dualistically. First, we can affirm that legal protections for all students with disabilities, including invisible disabilities, remain critical to student success, and we can support students in acquiring and making use of needed accommodations. Second, we can take a universal design approach when possible and make use of the convergence of new media and assistive technologies by learning and teaching technologies that are available to anyone—with or without a diagnosis.

Assistive technology is “technology used by individuals with disabilities in order to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible” (AccessIT “Assistive Technology”). Consider eyeglasses as a model of assistive technology. Vision problems such as nearsightedness are so widespread and correctable that they are not considered disabilities, but eyeglasses provide for those with myopia a means of performing the function of seeing more clearly. Analogously, assistive technology gives people with disabilities the mechanism to do what they need to do to live, learn, work, and play. For example, text-to-speech reading software and that reads text aloud via speakers in a computer or electronic device provides a means for students with print disabilities to do what they could not otherwise do. As with many assistive

technologies, such software is becoming more widely available. Most operating systems have built-in text-to-speech features now (Narrator in Windows and TTS for Apple operating systems); and more and more text-to-speech apps are becoming available for smart phones and tablets. Historically, many important innovations in communications technology have started as assistive technology, with research initiated in order to find ways to communicate with those who have disabilities. For example, the development of both the internet and the telephone were rooted in searches by Dr. Vinton Cerf and Alexander Graham Bell, respectively, to find means for communicating with loved ones with hearing impairments (Kampel and Williams “Innovations”). The pace of change as technologies move out of the “assistive” arena and into the mainstream use can be stunning: As we make voice commands into our handheld devices today, we may all be “writing by speaking” tomorrow. Text-to-speech technology may be changing rapidly, but it is here to stay. For example, I use a basic program (that can be freely downloaded) in order to hear text aloud when such listening might be helpful for editing or when my eyes become exhausted from overuse. In this way, I am broadening the use of text-to-speech assistive software and using this technology in a universal design manner, pushing the convergence of assistive and everyday technology. Yet in order to exercise the dualistic thinking I espouse for a social justice approach in composition, I strongly affirm the critical nature of access to more robust text-to-speech technologies for students who must use it all the time.

For students who have trouble keyboarding, including many who have learning disabilities, assistive technology for writing has also become more widely available. An especially effective assistive technology for many students is speech recognition software that is built into Windows and Apple operating systems or available as a stand-alone program such as Dragon Naturally Speaking. With this technology, used by medical transcriptionists and some

physicians and attorneys, for example, one dictates words into a microphone, and the words are recorded as text. The user speaks, and the program types. Generally, using speech recognition requires a fairly quiet atmosphere, a stand-alone microphone or a headset, and individual “training” or programming for the user’s voice. While recent improvements have made speech recognition technology easier and more effective to use, it does work best for students who can articulate fairly clearly and who can speak somewhat fluently (regardless of regional accent). As with text-to-speech technology, speech recognition technology can be used both as an assistive technology and as a universal design or even new media application because it is widely available and relatively easy to use. Major parts of this paper’s first draft, for example, were dictated using the speech recognition capability built into the operating system of my desktop computer, in a back-and-forth dance between speaking and typing. Note that I do not currently *need* to use this technology, but I find that speech recognition technology provides a useful alternative, especially for generating new ideas and getting them down quickly. Ideally, students with learning disabilities would begin using such assistive technology by middle school and enter college having long ago mastered their own individual processes of reading and writing. Because only 25 to 35 percent of students with learning disabilities are able to access assistive technology, this ideal remains a long-term goal (Cordiella 2).

In the meantime, college composition practitioners can consider experimenting with the speech recognition capabilities of their own computers, laptops, tablets, and hand-held devices as they interrogate their definitions of literacy. My ultimate goal with this project is to seek evidence to encourage college writing teachers to exercise their social justice impulse by taking the dualistic approach of strongly supporting students with disabilities who need to use this technology while making all students at least minimally aware of its capabilities and ready



availability. The purpose of this grounded theory study will be to discover commonalities in the process of writing by college students who use speech recognition at one community college in the Southeast. Specifically, my project will investigate the process of producing and revising drafts of written compositions using dictation via speech recognition technology. By informally interviewing college students who use speech recognition, observing them as they write, and examining the documents they produce, I will study the methods and strategies they use to create academic texts using speech recognition software and attempt to identify general patterns. I will discuss general differences between writing with speech recognition and writing with word processing and seek to understand the ways students with learning disabilities work through writing assignments using speech recognition. Based on the findings of this research, I will argue that a better understanding of the ways students with learning disabilities use speech recognition can provide direction in supporting these students in college composition classrooms. Also based on my findings, I will argue that speech recognition technology deserves wider recognition as a viable mode of composition in college writing for a wide variety of students.

## **Overview**

*Chapter One: Introduction.* This chapter introduces the topic, establishes the need for the research, and presents the argument. I will review literature pertinent to disability, learning disability, dyslexia, and college composition in relation to disability. The problem my project will address is that there has been little research on using speech recognition technology by college students, and therefore teachers have little understanding of the process of composing with this technology, particularly by students with learning disabilities. In *Writing Technology: Studies on the Materiality of Literacy*, Christina Haas reported on her studies comparing writing with pen and paper and writing using word processing. Among other differences, she found that

writers planned less when word processing (because changes are so easy to make) and “were able to remember significantly more of their work composed with pen and paper than they were when composing similar work with a word processor” (Brooke 32). Haas used her research to contend that “different writing technologies can support very different mental processes,” strongly countering the myth of technology as transparent (Haas *Materiality* xiv). She writes that “[w]riters’ relationships to their texts are embodied in the most intimate of ways, because writers have no other way of either producing text or interacting with it than through their bodies, particularly their hands and eyes” (226). What if the voice is added to this mix? This project will explore the following questions:

1. How do college students with learning disabilities use speech recognition software to write?
2. How do college students without learning disabilities use speech recognition for writing?
3. Based on previous research, do differences in the writing process emerge between speech recognition and word processing?
4. Would a wider range of college students benefit from using speech recognition technology in the writing process?

Based on the work of Haas and others, I hypothesize that specific patterns of use will emerge among students with learning disabilities, that differences between writing with word processing and speech recognition will become apparent, and that speech recognition technology will present a valuable alternative for many students, suggesting a foundation for its wider use as a writing technology.

*Chapter Two: Literature Review.* While the literature review will be woven throughout the paper, this chapter will present a review of literature specifically relevant to the use of assistive technology in composition studies, including theoretical and practical studies. I will also address deficiencies in the literature. In order to establish a basis for the project, I will review research into how technology impacts the writing process . The literature review will include the pertinent work of Christina Haas; Steve Graham; Patricia Barbetta and Linda Spears-Bunton; Ann Chenowith and John Hayes; Ellen Engstrom; Russell Gersten and Joyce Smith-Johnston; Eleanor Higgins and Marshall Raskind; Shirley Jacob, Elizabeth Wadlington, and Sandra Bailey; Susan de la Paz and Steve Graham; Huijun Li and Christine Hamel; Paul Murphy and Steve Graham; Thomas Quinlan; Leslie Ann Rogers and Steve Graham; and Melanie Sperling. The literature review will situate my project within the following contexts: writing challenges and instructional practices for postsecondary students with learning disabilities; the impacts of technologies on writing; the impacts of speech recognition technology on writing; and the intersection of assistive technologies with new media technologies.

*Chapter Three: Procedures.* While I will pose broad explanations as an endpoint of the inductive process of this small research project, it begins with the strategy of grounded theory, which originated in the field of sociology. According to John W. Creswell, grounded theory “is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants” (13). This is an appropriate approach because the experience of the writers and their own understanding of how they use speech recognition should be of value to composition instructors. My role as a researcher will be to interview and observe students and to study documents they produce, analyzing the data collected in order to address the research questions. It should be noted that my personal

philosophical stance regarding this research includes a social justice perspective that seeks to redress the exclusion of people with disabilities from higher education, specifically those with learning disabilities.

I have received permission to invite students at a large community college in central North Carolina to participate, as well as to work with them as they write using Dragon Naturally Speaking speech recognition software. This institution, a rapidly growing community college that serves 15,000 to 20,000 students, has a well-staffed, comprehensive disabilities support office, as well as a strong college transfer program. Because of my training and experience as a teacher and tutor of college writing and as a learning specialist for college students with learning disabilities, the administration at this institution is allowing me access to students who volunteer for participation in exchange for my working with students to learn to use Dragon Naturally Speaking software. I have a background in both assistive technology and special education, and I have periodically worked with college students learning to use assistive technology for reading and writing. The institution is interested in having support for students in learning to use and improving their use of this technology, and they are also interested in my research. The school is in the process of installing a networked version of the software which should be available to students during the time of my research. Some students at the college have in the past expressed a reluctance to try this technology while others have used it successfully. A thorough investigation of my background and credentials was done, and I have formally agreed to honor all FERPA and institutional privacy regulations regarding student identity. Neither the students nor their work will be identified in my project. The IRB "Exemption from Review" form for NSULA has also been completed and submitted to my thesis director. I will be working with a learning specialist at the site, who will help identify students for the project, which will take

place during the summer session of 2012. I hope to interview and observe a minimum of six students, at least half of whom should have a language-based specific learning disability, but the final number will depend on the availability of students. Participants will be fully informed about the nature and purpose of my study, and I will ask for their input regarding themes that emerge. The privacy parameters of the project will be fully disclosed to participants, and any issues or questions they have will be thoroughly addressed. They will not be compensated for their time.

Unstructured interviews, observation, and document examination will be undertaken. Interviews will be face-to-face, in-person, one-on-one, and unstructured; they will be recorded with handwritten notes. I will begin with a set of open-ended questions that can be modified based on the students' level of experience with the technology, and the interviews will be allowed to change direction as needed. The interviews will take place at quiet, mutually convenient sites that do not disrupt the site or the students' lives. See the Appendix for sample questions. Observations will consist of my recording in field notes of behaviors of students as they use the technology and questioning them during the observation in order to understand how they use it in composing. The observations will take place at the workstations where students use the assistive technology and will be extensive enough for developing both descriptive (what is happening?) and analytical (why do students say it is happening?) themes for coding. In examining written compositions, I will also seek out patterns among the documents that illuminate the use of speech recognition technology. I will attempt to discover these patterns by following systematic steps of coding in grounded theory inquiry: generating categories of information; positioning the categories within an emergent theoretical model; and then "explicating a story from the interconnection of these categories" (Creswell 185). I will seek guidance as needed during this coding process. Reliability procedures will include careful

checking of transcripts for mistakes in transcription and the use of a codebook to help ensure the integrity of the codes used. Validity strategies will include triangulation of different data sources, presentation of discrepant information, and clarification of researcher bias. While generalizability of results does not typify qualitative research, I hope that this project's findings will provide initial discoveries that can be further studied using quantitative and other research methods (Creswell 192-193).

*Chapter Four: Results.* I will report findings in thick, rich description in a narrative form in order to present a holistic picture of students' experience, processes, and strategies. I will develop descriptions and themes from the data to present multiple perspectives of the writers, as well as commonalities and differences that have emerged, carefully addressing the research questions that guide this project.

*Chapter Five: Conclusions and Discussion.* I will consider the results within the context of the literature review, my initial expectations, and the implications for teaching, learning, and writing in college English classes.

*Chapter Six:* This chapter (or appendix) will justify and provide access to the weblog at Wordpress.com that will accompany the written thesis. The blog will provide electronic resources for each chapter, opportunity for commentary, and multimodal presentations to clarify some concepts. I believe this resource will constitute a vital element for understanding this project, and I will maintain the site for a reasonable length of time after completion of the thesis.

## Appendix: Interview Questions

1. What do you like/dislike about college writing?

How about reading?

2. What are your strengths as a writer?

What kind of writing do you like to do best?

What's the difference for you in writing for different courses?

What's really challenging for you as a writer?

Are you happy with your grades in English? On papers in other courses?

3. How and when did you learn to use this technology?

In learning to use it, what has been challenging?

Would you describe yourself a novice, comfortable, or expert user?

Are you still actively learning to use it, like learning special tricks for commands?

What do you think about having to say the punctuation aloud?

Do you have any likes or dislikes about it?

4. Where do you use this technology?

Do you have it on a laptop, or do you use it only at school?

Do you use it for anything else besides college writing?

Do you have dictation apps for email or texting on your phone?

5. How do you feel about using this technology?

Do you tell people about it?

Do you know anybody who uses it even though they don't really need to?

6. How is the accommodations process for you?

Have you ever used Dragon for a timed exam? So how does that go?

How do you handle in-class writing? Timed writings?

7. How would you describe your entire writing process, from the time you get an assignment until the time you turn in the paper?

Do you have a special system for writing, like with a series of steps you memorized?

Do you get clarification on the assignment?

Do you discuss your ideas before writing?

Do you use the Writing Center? At what points in the writing? How does that go for you?

How do you plan your work? Or do you?

How much do you revise?

How do you know you're finished?

6. In using Dragon, can you describe the steps you take in writing the first draft?

When you are generating ideas for the first draft, do you make an outline using Dragon?

Do you organize your thoughts somehow, or do you just start talking?

How do you decide what to say?

How is the revising process for you?

Do you print out the draft or use the playback feature to listen to your work?

Can you tell me/show me how you decide to and actually do move text around?

How about proofreading?

7. What is the longest paper you've composed using Dragon?

How about a research paper? Did you dictate the bibliography or what?

8. Do you feel like teachers and tutors have been supportive?

Do most of them know about how you write and understand the technology?



If you could tell college writing teachers one thing about your writing process, what would it be?

Who has been your best writing teacher so far in college? (No names) How come?

Worst? How come?

Will you tell me about how you advocate for yourself with professors and college administrators?

9. Anything important you want people to know about you and your journey (educationally)?

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Although the industrial revolution afforded many opportunities in nineteenth-century England, women were in need of their own revolution as their voices, sexuality, and independence continued to be oppressed. Women were squeezed of even the few freedoms they had striven to attain during the eighteenth century, because women's liberties outside of the home posed a great threat to Regency and Victorian England that still primarily favored a male dominated society, causing opinionated and independent women to be viewed as threats to society that needed to be repressed and destroyed. Women's sexuality needed to be suppressed, their "fragile" bodies reserved for domestic affairs, and their voices and genius silenced in order for the patriarchy to retain control. As a response to these social upsets, many scholars began to use science, biology, and psychology to justify the oppression of women, as patriarchal doctrine was no longer enough to confine them to their moral, domestic spheres. Cecilia Feilla cites scholar Denis Diderot in his essay "On Women" written in 1772, in which he "defined female genius in women as something monstrous and unnatural" (163). It was these perceived monstrosities among British society that had to be oppressed no matter the cost to women. Britain's concern about revolting women had to appear justified, therefore, many psychologists and biologists attempted to prove the predisposition of women to weaknesses and natural illnesses. These presumed flaws laid the groundwork for the creation of Gothic monsters who represent the threats that women would pose to nineteenth-century England if women were allowed to have an independent voice both inside and outside of the home.

Perhaps no other form of literature was more effective at demonstrating the essential place for women in society than the Gothic novel. The Gothic novel's popularity throughout the nineteenth century proved to be a strong cathartic source for overcoming, facing, and accepting the social fears of unnatural women. Even though women were not always presented as the

monsters within the novels, the female characters' actions or fear of the females' change in social roles often encourages the male or ambiguously sexed monster's destructive force. Jerrold Hogle describes the ominous pages of the Gothic novel in explaining, "Gothic fictions generally play with and oscillate between the earthly and conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural" (2). The Gothic's toggling between reality and the unreal creates an ominous setting that portrays just enough reality to suggest the possibility that a monster of some form did threaten moral nineteenth-century British society. Gothic fictions introduce the reality of British fears surrounding the empowerment of women both sexually and vocally, while the fictitious monster exists in a world similar to the reader's, forcing the reader to face the fear and chaos imposed by the unnatural creature that must be destroyed. The monster's destruction in literature constitutes a metaphor for the necessary suppression of women whose unnatural freedoms and monstrous sexual and vocal liberties upset an otherwise stable society.

The monster's role in demonstrating British anxieties concerning women of the nineteenth century not only embodied the fears of British citizens, but the text's resolution of the monster's destruction also validated the belief that something must be done about the unnatural women that served as society's degenerate and immoral threat to a presumably virtuous, male dominated society. The monster's role in conveying cultural concerns is presented in the origin word monster itself. Jeffery Weinstock explains, "The word 'monster' derives from the Latin *monstrum*, which is related to the verbs *monstrare* (to show or reveal) and *monere* (to warn or portend). The monster is thus at root, as Stephen Asma observes, a type of omen (13) that indicates something unsettling or threatening about the universe we inhabit" (1). The relationship between the monster and the world in which the author and reader lives reveals the underlying fears from which the monster evolves.

Many of the Gothic, monstrous figures of nineteenth-century literature were used to exploit the weaknesses of women, undermine their social contributions, and express society's prejudices against women within nineteenth-century England. The mad or villainous woman was also something that even female Gothic authors employed in their novels in order to present the misperceptions and injustices that plagued women in nineteenth-century England. As a result of the monster's reflection of society, many of the Gothic novels illustrate the effectiveness of literature in creating a cathartic experience for both reader and author by addressing and confronting their fears through the fictitious and uncanny metaphors. Many of the Gothic texts not only introduced the fears of nineteenth-century England; they also escalated the fears by demonstrating the potential chaos that would be introduced to British society if women were granted the liberties they had begun to seek, therefore enforcing the belief that women's rights and sexual liberties should be stifled for the greater good of society.

### **Thesis Outline**

In Chapter One I will introduce the monster as a creative release and reflection of cultural anxieties within texts over time. This chapter will also draw on the effectiveness of the Gothic novel in using its uncanny and supernatural elements to demonstrate fears within nineteenth-century English literature. In order to present how the fictional monster serves as a metaphor for the terrors of nineteenth-century England, I will elaborate on the many fears that haunted British citizens such as Egyptian commodities, degeneration, social mobility, and women's rights. In order to introduce the use of the fictional monster as a cultural metaphor, I will cite examples from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lot 249*, E. and H. Heron's *The Story of Baelbrow*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. After I have used the first chapter to establish the Gothic novel and its monsters as a means of conveying social anxieties, in the following

chapters, I will focus on the Gothic novel as a means of presenting socially and sexually active women as the cause of monstrous social upheavals, enforcing society's need for the suppression of women.

In Chapter Two I will use Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* to introduce the Gothic monster as a means of spreading the fear of women outside of the domestic sphere. Both texts demonstrate the fears surrounding women's genius and social degeneration. Marryat's work demonstrates not only the injustice practiced against women seeking to be independent both sexually and financially, it also presents the fears and rejection of strong, independent women that enter society from outside of the aristocracy. Both Shelley's and Marryat's works illustrate the fears of women and the restrictions placed on them through the portrayal of women as rejected monsters that have no place in society outside of the domestic sphere. After establishing the role of financially and socially independent women as monstrous, I will use the following chapters to present the many ways that Gothic monsters demonstrated the reasoning for fearing "the new woman" and her effect upon society.

Chapter Three draws on G.J Barker-Benfield's discussion of sensibility, applying it to later Gothic novels. John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla* demonstrate the many ways that the Gothic authors were able to draw from the well-established view of women being of a sensitive nature and turn it against women by presenting sensitivity of the nerves as a weakness. Both Polidori and Lefanu's works present the fragile condition of women's nervous systems, which in turn forces the women to remain dependent upon their male counterparts as well as fall victim to immoral influence as their minds and bodies are not strong enough to overcome temptation. Although Carmilla herself possesses the characteristics of the hysterical and "frail" woman she also serves as a contrast to the dependent female. Carmilla

presents the potential of a masculine society to be undermined by these “fragile” women as she rejects the male’s position as lover and husband. However, it is Carmilla’s lust for women and rejection of being a conventional female that places her in the role as social and literary monster. Carmilla’s portrayal as a sensible and fragile woman who is the victimizer enforces the belief that women’s attempt to overstep social expectations would pose a threat to both men and women in British society.

The final chapter will prove that the perceived evil of women’s uncontained sexuality and mental defects leads to the concern that women’s psychological state could have a negative effect on society, contributing to their portrayal as monsters both metaphorical and literary. If the supposedly weak female body could not dampen the spirit of Victorian women, psychologists had to show the woman’s mind itself to be inferior and dangerous. In this chapter, I will use Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* to demonstrate the subjugation of women based on their perceived mental weaknesses and sexual promiscuity. The understanding of women’s supposed weakness and of the perceived evil of sexual empowerment is crucial in understanding the doctrine on which many nineteenth-century psychologists founded their studies; they assumed that these aspects of women contributed to women’s mental instability and even men’s mental illness. The supposed effect of women on men’s mental state helped justify the depiction of women as the social monster. Both texts solidify the chaos supposedly introduced by the female mind and body within society while demonstrating the use of the monster to perpetuate the fear of women.

The use of the monster within the Gothic novel proved to be a strong means of demonstrating the need to suppress women. The Gothic monsters not only tell the authors’ fictional tales of the unnatural, they also demonstrate the monsters’ portrayal of social anxieties

concerning women. These Gothic texts not only instilled fear for entertainment purposes in their nineteenth-century readers, but they also left the reader with the impression that an active female body and mind within nineteenth-century British society would be just as destructive as the fictional monsters in these Gothic works.



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