Professional Statement for Carrie Leverenz

As a specialist in Rhetoric and Composition with extensive experience in writing program administration, I have devoted my career to creating space for difference in educational institutions, which, if left unchallenged, can function to maintain existing hierarchies and power relations that exclude or marginalize many. Because challenging educational norms is a long-term enterprise, I have sought to do this work on multiple fronts—in my teaching, research, and program administration. These strands of my academic career are thus intimately connected. As a result, my scholarly projects typically grow out of problems that emerge from my teaching or administrative work and fall into three broad categories: feminist approaches to teaching and administration, the challenge of new media composing and teaching, and disciplinary or institutional critique. In addressing these problems, I draw on a variety of methods including critical reflection on experience, surveys and interviews, and the application of theory and research from outside rhetoric and composition. Below, I summarize the work I’ve done in each of these areas since I was awarded tenure. (Items in bold can be accessed on the research page of my website.)

Feminist Approaches to Teaching and Administration
My work on feminist teaching and administration exemplifies my interest in fostering difference and disrupting hierarchies in academic institutions. Following the trajectory of articles written early in my career such as “Feminist Writing Program Administration: Resisting the Bureaucrat Within” (co-authored with Amy Goodburn), I’ve continued investigating the difference that feminist academic leadership can make. For example, in “Mentor, May I Mother?” (Stories of Mentoring, eds. Lynee Lewis Gaillet and Michelle Eble, Parlor Press, 2008) written with my former PhD students Stacia Neeley (now Campbell) and Catherine Gabor, we explore the importance of mentoring for women academics who want to have children. Using our personal stories as well as research on childbearing in academe and on mentoring that supports difference, we argue for the importance of being willing to disrupt the status quo as well as make one’s “difference” visible and thus more “normal,” emboldening others to choose similar less-traveled paths. This piece also demonstrates my continued commitment to collaboration as an opportunity to learn with and from others (See also “Agents of Change” in Research Writing Revisited: A Sourcebook for Teachers, eds. Pavel Zemliansky and Wendy Bishop, Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 2004, co-authored with Catherine Gabor, a piece that reflects on our experience teaching primary research in TCU’s required intermediate composition class.) Building and maintaining productive, non-hierarchical relationships is important to my concept of professional success more generally, as I explore in “What’s Ethics Got to Do with It? Feminist Ethics and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition” (the lead chapter in Performing Feminist Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, eds. Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly. Hampton Press, 2010). There, I argue that feminist writing program administrators should adopt key concepts from feminist ethics—standpoint theory (Sandra Harding), the concrete other (Seyla Benhabib), care (Nel Noddings) and attention to process (Margaret Urban Walker). In this chapter, I provide theoretically informed, action-oriented analyses of common WPA experiences and offer strategies for feminist response.

I continue to explore feminist approaches to academic work in my current research on writing about teaching. Specifically, I am investigating the degree to which renaming teaching narratives (coded as feminine) as human subjects research (coded as masculine) limits knowledge making in the field. Reporting on a national survey I conducted of CCCCs members regarding the effects of IRB policies on writing about teaching (first reported in a CCCCs presentation, “Lore the IRB, and other Problems with Writing about Teaching”) and drawing on subsequent research on narrative inquiry, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and the cognitive and cultural effects of narrative, I consider how and why the field of rhetoric and composition might re-invest in teacher stories. I will share this work at the WPA conference in July (“Sustaining Writing about Teaching”) and the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference in October (“Recovering the Lost Art of Telling [Teaching] Stories”) and submit the article-length version to CCC by the end of 2015. I offered my own version of a teaching story in a 2013 Feminisms and Rhetorics presentation, “Teaching the Dixie Chicks,” in which I consider the importance of both teacher and student standpoints when teaching women’s rhetoric. At the suggestion of several audience members, I will extend the presentation into an article for the journal Peitho.

The Challenge of New Media Composing and Teaching
Digital technologies have changed and will continue to change how we read, write, and make meaning in the world, and as a writer, teacher, and writing program administrator, I believe I have a responsibility to stay apprised of these changes and to make informed decisions about how to change my practice accordingly. Just as important, I have tried to lead and support others in making such changes as well. As Director of Composition at TCU from 2000-2007, I advocated for a computer classroom devoted to teaching writing classes, developed syllabi for our required first and second-year composition courses that included digital projects, and supported teachers interested in teaching technology-rich classes. Those experiences made me acutely aware of the difficulties of institutionalizing innovation, especially in writing programs, which are often expected to maintain a limited focus on preparing students for academic writing. Teachers and writing program administrators may also feel limited in the kinds of writing they are able to produce, making it difficult for them to fully advocate for the affordances of digital composing. I take up this problem directly in “Remediating Writing Program Administration” (WPA: Writing Program Administration, 2008), where I argue for a richer exchange between the sub-fields of computers and writing and writing program administration, highlighting especially the need for WPAs to become digital composers. (See my own modest attempts, a video I created, “Presentation Design: Be Like TED” for a flipping-the-classroom workshop and my assignments for an Adobe MOOC on Digital Creativity for teachers https://www.behance.net/cleverenz)

With the launch of TCU’s New Media Writing Studio in Fall 2006 (http://newmedia.tcu.edu/), a program for which I wrote the initial proposal, my work has come to focus even more on the challenges of composing and teaching new media in traditional academic settings. Initially funded by a TCU Vision in Action grant aimed at launching projects deemed potentially transformative, the NMWS now operates within AddRan College of Liberal Arts, under the umbrella of the Institute for Critical and Creative Expression (ICCE), which I direct. The NMWS/ICCE offers professional development in new media composing and teaching to faculty and graduate students across the university (including a Graduate Certificate), as well as hands-on support to undergraduates, the only lab at TCU to do so. The NMWS/ICCE also serves the community by offering workshops on teaching new media composing for area K-12 teachers and short courses through TCU’s Continuing Ed on such subjects as making videos and using social media. Recently, we’ve expanded offerings to include summer creative writing workshops for middle school students. These for-fee workshops enable us to offer no-fee programming such as writing workshops with area youth programs, most recently, Hope Farms.

Designing, developing, and sustaining writing programs like the New Media Writing Studio/ICCE is itself a worthy academic endeavor, informed by current research and theory and able to serve as an incubator for new pedagogical approaches. But for such programs to have maximum impact, it is also important to analyze, theorize, and share writing program work with a larger audience through publication. For example, in “‘Growing Smarter over Time’: An Emergence Model of Administering a New Media Writing Studio” (Computers and Composition, 2012), I theorize the development of the NMWS, drawing on the complexity theory of philosopher Mark Taylor to argue for the efficacy of administrative structures that foster bottom-up, emergent learning as a means of addressing new, “fuzzy,” or “wicked” problems. Given the speed with which writing tools, genres, and audiences continue to change, writing programs need to develop strategies for responding to the unanticipated. Thus, in addition to theorizing about creating new media writing programs, I offer key insights from my experience intended to help others develop such programs in their own institutional settings.

Increasingly, I’ve begun to turn to design theory for models of how to teach writing in ways that foster innovation and problem solving. For example, in “Design Thinking and the Wicked Problem of Teaching Writing” (Computers and Composition, 2012), I argue for teaching writing as a creative process as conceptualized by theorists of design thinking such as Richard Buchanan, Nigel Cross, Tim Brown, and Lucy Kimbell. Teaching writing as design thinking invites audience-oriented innovation by focusing on problem definition, teamwork, prototyping, and risk-taking. In a related piece, “Redesigning Writing Outcomes,” I respond to the recently revised WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition by arguing that writing programs should name as an outcome not just multimodal composing but “design” in the sense of “designing social futures,” a phrase coined by the New London Group in their 1996 manifesto, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures.” Like the New London Group, I believe that writing programs bear a responsibility to prepare all students to communicate effectively in a world defined by differences in cultures, languages, and communication modes. This piece was originally presented at the 2014 Watson
Conference and is currently under revision for *WPA: Writing Program* Administration.

While as a scholar, I am pleased to have published primarily in journals with national audiences, I also believe it is important to share my ideas locally, where the impact I am able to make can perhaps be felt more immediately. “Assessing Multimodal Composing in a Senior Seminar in English,” (*CCTE Studies*, 2012), for example, was written as part of a panel presentation for the CCTE conference in collaboration with two colleagues from Texas Wesleyan University. Based on student interviews and analyses of student websites, this piece describes how TCU English and Writing majors use digital professional portfolios as rhetorical spaces for composing themselves as writers for a public audience. Our presentations were subsequently selected as the best paper(s) on rhetoric and composition. Currently, I’m collaborating with a TCU colleague in business on an article to be submitted to the *International Journal of ePortfolio* in which we argue for a digital storytelling approach to composing ePortfolios, a recent TCU initiative. We have already shared our argument, including a website I created for her students, both locally at TCU and at the national AAEEBL conference in July 2014.

**Disciplinary and Institutional Critique**

To create space for difference—and thus change—within academic institutions, it is important to understand how and why institutions constrain difference. One way is by uncritically replicating existing norms in the preparation of undergraduate and especially graduate students, who come to embrace and then pass on rather than challenge normative values in the academic institutions they subsequently enter. My co-editors Amy Goodburn and Donna LeCourt and I address this concern in *Rewriting Success in Rhetoric and Composition Careers* (Parlor Press, 2012), where we make a case for the benefits of defining success beyond a research-oriented tenure-track job. The collection includes an introduction co-authored by the editors as well as chapters written by Rhet/Comp practitioners teaching at a tribal college, serving as director of an LGBTQ center, and offering writing tutorials for an international law firm. The book also describes ways graduate programs and mentors can better support non-traditional careers by first embracing the goal of difference rather than replication.

I have extended my interest in the purpose and efficacy of graduate training in rhetoric and composition by launching a three-year study of the Rhet/Comp job market that involves an annual national survey of job seekers and an analysis of ads in MLA’s Job Information List for specialists in rhetoric and composition. I will make direct use of this research as I serve a six-year term on the executive committee of the Doctoral Consortium of Rhetoric and Composition, which I will chair during the last two years of my term. I have already presented a preliminary report on the 2013-14 job search, “Tell It Like It Is—But How Is It? The Job Market in Rhetoric and Composition,” at the Doctoral Consortium meeting this year and was subsequently invited to share my next round of results in a panel proposed for the 2016 CCC. One important finding so far is that graduate programs may be over-emphasizing research-oriented career aspirations and under-emphasizing preparation for writing program administration and teaching-focused jobs. Although publication of the final results is several years away, I plan at least one article based on preliminary results that will investigate how graduate programs can provide the administrative experience so many job ads are calling for.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic changes in the field over the last decade has been the growth of undergraduate rhetoric and writing majors. In 2006, TCU began offering a degree in writing, which my TCU colleagues (Brad Lucas, Ann George, Charlotte Hogg, Joddy Murray) and I describe in “They Could Be Our Students: The Writing Major at TCU.” There, we reflect on our experience of creating a writing major designed to “fit” our department and institution, one that includes courses in rhetorical theory, creative writing, and professional writing and design, as well as a required internship, thus mirroring TCU’s commitment both to a liberal arts education and to professional training. Perhaps our most valuable insight has been that while it is important to push for change in educational institutions, it is also important to be sensitive to stakeholders’ interests and work to find common ground. Our hope is that such strategic thinking will benefit others who wish to build majors in their own educational homes.

In closing, let me say only that, while I hope to have made visible in this statement the impact my work has had on the field, I am mindful that much of my contribution to the profession is embodied in the teachers I have trained and the students I have
taught (see my vita and the teaching page of my website). The part of me that I have passed on to them cannot be made visible here but will, I hope, be made visible in the world. I also hope that my commitment to service at every level, including the important service of supporting scholarship through my co-editorship of the journal *Composition Studies* (2003-2007) and as a manuscript reviewer, service that I think of as a natural extension of my work as a writing teacher, has opened the field to the ideas of many.

Thank you for your time and attention.