

## **Research Statement**

### **Aubrey Schiavone**

I conduct research in the field of composition and rhetoric, with a focus on literacy studies, digital and multimodal composing, and higher education. Overall, my research projects are motivated by an interest in diversity and inclusion—by an interest in expanding what gets valued in academic spaces. From first-generation college students, to working class teachers and students, to multimodal composition, to blogging: I am interested in more fully including people and practices that might traditionally be excluded or devalued in academic spaces.

My dissertation project combines my interests in composition, rhetoric, and literacy with my interests in diversity and inclusion in higher education. Through a series of three qualitative interviews with a racially diverse group of fifteen working class first-generation college students conducted during the Fall 2015 semester at University of Michigan, my dissertation study analyzes potential connections between the literacies working class first-generation college students practice in first-year writing (FYW) courses and the literacies they practice outside of FYW. Interviews prompt students to reflect on their pathways to college, their literacy learning in first-year writing including discussing a paper composed there, and their speaking and writing experiences outside of first-year writing in home, work, and extracurricular contexts. With these qualitative research methods that emphasize students' voices, I seek to better acknowledge and celebrate the strengths first-gens bring with them to college. As a first-generation college student myself, I developed research interests in first-gen students' identities, literacies, and strengths from reading a body of literature about these students that often overlooks their successes and focuses instead on the challenges they face. This prevalent deficit model of understanding first-gens does not mesh with my own experiences of attending college or with my observation of current first-gens thriving in college. Deficit model positioning of first-gens also conspicuously lacks representation of these students' voices, and so I designed a qualitative interview study that would allow for these students to speak for themselves and thus to illuminate their literacies and strengths more accurately and in more detail.

From this data, rich with students' voices, I assert that first-gens' unique positionality prepares them to make transformative contributions to FYW. For example, these students are adept at a variety of transformative literacies including rhetorical listening, invitational rhetoric, code-switching, and self-advocacy. First-gens cultivate these literacies in part through their experiences of boundary crossing before and during college. Because they have made their ways to and through college contexts that are vastly different from their home contexts, these students have had to learn to communicate with many different kinds of people and have thus adopted complex literacies in response to these varying communicative situations. In short, my interview data offers a better understanding of this student population and the ways in which their literacies enrich learning in FYW classrooms.

This dissertation project has sparked for me a number of questions that will guide future research projects. Following this study, I am interested in analyzing the experiences of first-gen students at different types of institutions. Only 13% of undergraduates at the University of Michigan are first-generation college students, a figure much lower than percentages for first-gen students at public universities nationwide. Working class first-generation college students' experiences of exclusion from campus culture tend to be intensified or heightened at elite, more

selective institutions like the University of Michigan, and so I am interested in conducting similar research at a different institution type in order to compare the effects of institutional climate on first-gens' literacies in college. Additionally, all fifteen students in my dissertation study have worked and held jobs before or during college, and their experiences as workers in a range of blue- and white-collar jobs set them apart from their middle class peers. Based on these findings, I am interested in further studying the experiences of student-workers. These students practice writing and speaking for particular real world audiences like bosses, coworkers, clients, and customers; I would investigate how these experiences might sharpen student-workers' rhetorical awareness and skills outside the classroom. Overall, this dissertation study has motivated me to continue supporting first-generation college students and to ground that support in qualitative research that honors student voices.

My consideration of first-gen students intersects with my interest in the role of social class stratification in higher education, specifically in first-year writing classrooms. In our collaboratively composed chapter, "Pedagogy at the Crossroads: Intersections Between Instructor and Student Identities Across Institutional Contexts," Anna Knutson and I explore intersections between instructors' and students' social class identities in first-year writing classrooms at three different institutions. Through an analysis of institutional mission statements, student demographics, and individual student essays, we assert the importance of reflective teaching practice. Specifically, we encourage writing instructors to reflect on the effects of their own pedagogies in varying institutional contexts in order to adapt their pedagogies to teaching different student populations. With our analyses of institutional data and student writing, this project offers a useful demonstration of reflective teaching practice and promotes awareness of social class differences in the writing classroom.

I am also interested in the role of digital and multimodal composition in college writing courses. This interest has motivated two of my research projects. The first, a forthcoming *College English* article titled "Consumption, Production, and Rhetorical Knowledge in Visual and Multimodal Textbooks," analyzes 1,629 assignment prompts across four different commonly used composition textbooks. My analysis identifies a disparity between theories that call for more production of multimodal compositions and practices encapsulated in textbooks, which largely promote the consumption of multimodal compositions more so than their production. From these findings, I argue that textbooks ought to be taken up carefully and mindfully in classroom instruction in order to promote more student production of visual and multimodal compositions. The second project, a collaboration with colleagues at University of Michigan, analyzes the use of a shared course blog in three disciplines: Education, English, and Nursing. By collecting and analyzing a variety of qualitative data—including classroom observations, pre- and post-observation interviews with course instructors, and student and instructor posts published on the course blogs—this project shows that shared course blogs can be used to support undergraduate student professionalization as students work in their chosen disciplines and prepare for work in their professional fields. Specifically, shared course blogs allow undergraduate students to share in a community of like-minded emerging practitioners, connect to major issues in their disciplines or fields, and practice professional representation of self. This project contributes a more detailed understanding of the affordances of this commonly used instructional tool of shared course blogs. In sum, each of my research projects seeks to expand who or what gets included and valued in academic contexts, especially in writing instruction.