

Michael: Okay, we're live.

Kendra: Okay, I want to officially welcome you, Professor Gaillet. My name is Kendra, and I am a second-year Ph.D. student in the rhet/comp program.

Michael: And, my name is Michael Sullivan, and I am also a second-year Ph.D. student.

Kendra: Don't think of this as an "interview;" it's more of an informal . . . discussion. We just want to know a little more about you. And, as upcoming scholars, it's really an honor and privilege to be able to discuss such topics as your research just to get a feel for how you got started and what your perspective is—where you see yourself going . . . so without further ado, we have directed questions: So, how did you get into the field of rhetoric?

Gaillet: My academic generation didn't say, "I think I'll go into rhet/comp!" because there really just wasn't such a thing. So, my undergrad is in English Education, but I did that just in case I didn't get into law school. That was my backup. I got into law school but decided I didn't want to do that and thought, "Now what am I going to do?" So, I called my undergraduate school, and I said, "Look, I don't know; I'm at loose ends." He said, "Well—the director said—come on, you can teach. We've got an 8:00 [a.m.] and 9:00 [a.m.] that nobody wants. [laughter] You can come get the textbooks and get a master's in English. And so I did. I wasn't crazy about that, but I liked literature. I liked to read. We all do; that's why we're in the field, in some ways. So, my M.A. was interesting. The teaching was fabulous: I loved it from the minute I walked in the classroom—1101, two sections, eight and nine o'clock, but I loved it. And so I thought, "This, I like." So, I went on and moved to Texas, got into TCU, and, again, was going to do eighteenth century literature, which I always have liked. I took this class called Composition Theory . . . I took it with Gary Tate who had written the textbook *Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, and from the minute I walked in, I was hooked. Back then, TCU had five people who came in, I think, three literature and two—well, maybe we all were declared literature, I'm not sure—but everybody took comp theory: lit and composition. Everybody took a two semester history course, which I think is fabulous because if you're literature, you're probably going to be teaching composition without much training, usually. And, if you're rhet/comp, it's so easy for you to get focused that you don't see the big picture that taking a literature course was not a bad idea. That was kind of a segue, also it was nice because we were all in the classes together and took those same classes together . . . so, I just kind of backed into it [rhet/comp] like many people, again, my academic generation. And also, I think eighteenth century, at the time, was a really nice jump into rhet/comp: the essay, the documents that we have about culture at the time, the kinds of things going on in eighteenth century, for me, in America and Scotland . . . the literature made a nice stepping stone. It really was not a big jump to land in eighteenth century rhetoric.

Michael: Yeah, I was looking at that, and I was trying to remember . . . I was reading something over the summer, and I can't remember where. But, somebody was exploring the difference between the forms of Standard English and Scottish forms and the imposition of the Queen's English on the Scottish people and what the forms were saying and how the people were talking and writing in their regular lives. Was that you?

Gaillet: Yeah. That probably was me [laughter]. That sounds really familiar . . . That could have been me because . . . I look at the Scottish—they were called classes in moral philosophy. They became classes— required classes—for entering students in communicative competence. So, if you look at boys going to school at fourteen from the clans, you get students in class where it's very difficult to jump into the curriculum when they speak—

Michael: The Queen's English—

Gaillet: That's right . . . writing rusticisms . . . sometimes, even difficulty talking to each other. So, for me, I think I'm really interested in the history of writing instruction, looking at Scotland—it's not the composition classes; it's these moral philosophy classes that Adam Smith taught, that Alexander Bain taught, that George Jardine [uncertain] who's the guy that I have been researching taught. And what they did was really look at language, not just in a subject-verb agreement kind of [way], but language is a part of communicative competence. So, training these students to study, but also training these students to go to London and get a job because it's a big deal. It kind of equaled the playing field—for them to look for jobs.

Kendra: That's interesting. So, how do you see that . . . it seems like history repeats itself, right? It seems like we're at these crossroads again: "What do you put more emphasis on? Trying to secure a job or [developing effective communication]? So what is your stance? Do you maintain your research or have you had to alter or look at it differently based on current events, current research?"

Gaillet: I guess at the end of the day, there's nothing really new under the sun. We think so sometimes because of all the lovely technological advances, but that doesn't mean that prior times weren't faced with the same thing. It was just as eye-opening—maybe not quite as the internet—but, pretty life-changing. I teach history of rhetoric classes and I teach composition theory classes, and the composition theory classes always have that history. I think so often we do something and say, "oh, voila! Look." I'll give you an example. Jardine, as early as late seventeen hundreds, was using collaborative learning in his classroom. It was a very detailed plan. The examiners work[ed] together, and there are these very detailed rules about participation in this classroom community. And, if you [didn't] follow the rules, you [didn't] get to stay . . . prizes for the best essays . . . rewriting and sequences assignments. He very much talks about some basic writing issues. And then, we flash forward 200 years and say, "Oh, look! Let's try this out!" And so, enlightened teachers have always met their students' needs. And, sometimes it's the same need and the same fix if not the same technology or the same venue. And so, for me, it was very easy for me to blend my interest in the history with my interest in teaching at every level.

Kendra: So, I noticed you mention some of the scholars, but which scholars in the field would you say have influenced you the most? At least, your thinking and your stance . . .

Gaillet: I was just lucky enough to be at tcu when winifred horner was there. I took a couple of classes with her and then ended up working as her research assistant and she directed my dissertation. And she was looking at primary documents in Scotland from this same period that I was talking about that were about teaching, that weren't about philosophy, which were Blair,

Campbell, and Whately, that we know about. But she was looking at teachers, and finding teaching documents that really opened up a window for me—that I can blend the rhetoric and the composition, the history of rhetoric and composition. And then I have been a long time member of the women and the history of rhetoric and composition and those women had a profound affect: Nan Johnson, Kathleen Welch, and if I start naming names, I'll leave out [someone]! Sorry. Katherine Adams and I'll just keep throwing names out there. Susan Jarrett and Jan Swarigon . . . all these were women who were doing—Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede—all these women were doing fascinating kinds of work that wasn't the mainstream necessarily. They were doing recovery work, recovering figures. They were doing revision work, taking . . . here is a history and looking at it as an onion, complicating history. And so that had a profound affect on my research.

Michael: So now you mention a couple times scholars from your generation, so I'm interested in how your life experiences shaped your research interest as you're being influenced by these people, but then you're also experience change not only in academia but also just in society.

Gaillet: Yeah. A couple of things: One, I came from TCU, which was very *TCU* [accent added] and I went to Georgia State, which had a really strong graduate program, but a commuter school undergraduate in '92, which has changed drastically now as well . . . and urban. But, the kinds of students that I taught affected what I was interested in researching. So, for example, I became very interested in service learning and very interested in civic rhetoric and civic ideas of participation, which so much of that is eighteenth century. So I could take what I knew about the history and apply it for these students who in many cases, and maybe not just for those students, most of us need some sort of real-world connection, some kind of click between town and gown. And, I was in downtown Atlanta—I could look out the window and there was all these internship opportunities for students and so I think being there, that life experience, changed where I landed teaching changed the trajectory of my research a bit. I also found myself directing a first year writing program and I didn't want to stop researching and we all know, honestly, that sometimes in rhet-comp that service gets in the way of the research agenda and so I really started branching out a little and researching metropolitan universities and metropolitan education and I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. *CityComp*, a collection of essays about teaching in the city came out then, again service-learning played into that. We had lots of places to serve and learn and so I moved the freshman classes a little bit towards fieldworking and ethnography which was a nice first step before jumping into the pool of service learning so I think those jobs that I was given affected my research agenda. And I ended up producing as much as I could have just looking at the history of it

Michael: A little bit broader.

Gaillet: Yeah, I don't know that I would have come out of grad school and said "yes, urban composition instruction." Yeah, but, actually, the serendipity of life-- the communicative competence that I was talking about that was being taught in Scotland was being taught in Edinburgh and Glasgow, so thriving urban places. So, I could pull on that as well.

Kendra: I never really thought about 18th, 19th Century studies-- wow, that's very interesting. I'm just fascinated about how you were able to bridge and you continuously bridge that history, I

mean, it's one thing to say an immediate history like rhetoric & composition, you know, being of a particular academic era, but to reach far, farther than that and say "hey, this is applicable in these ways..." -- I'm pretty fascinated by that.

Gaillet: But I think that is one of the things we just don't do. We think history is our parents generation. I mean, if we look back..and we... the field has not particularly valued pedagogy. I mean, we know that. We don't have those archives, those records. Do we keep your students for how long? You know, it's not practical in some ways. And so researching that history of pedagogy connected very easily with researching the history of philosophy because for me, at least in Scotland, there wasn't a disconnect.

Kendra: That's interesting. You kind of hit on a few of our questions already, but could you say, could you pinpoint one of those experiences and say that one of them, I guess, stands out more for any particular reason or actually had a greater impact than maybe others or was there a pivotal point for you where you saw the direction you were going on?

Gaillet: Yeah, I think maybe the best way to answer that is-- I don't know if you're familiar with the Boyer (?) Commission Report that was sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation that came out in 1990 about basically the future of education

Kendra: Yeah, I glossed it...

Gaillet: OK, go read it. [laughter] One of the recommendations that came out of that just hit me where I lived. And that was that faculty need to blend that triumvirate of service, teaching, and research... that the future of the university-- and this really looked at undergraduate education-- this commission. But that the future for both students and faculty resided in that blending. And for me, that was an "A-ha" epiphany, because I think teachers burn out when they've got that same stack of yellow notes that they just... when they teach one thing and research another. When service only means serving on departmental committees. Let's face it, that takes its toll.

Michael: It gets old quick.

Gaillet: Yeah, and so, I think was already doing that-- in a way for self-preservation-- and especially as an untenured faculty member, that was a way to get publications. I thought, OK, I'm serving in the writing program-- what can I do, then, to get something on my vita file? Where can I get that? And so I'll start writing about this and researching about this. And because we had a very new program, there was a lot of reading and writing to be done about that, but then I had also been teaching writing workshops at my kids' schools and that sort of thing. So, for me Boyer really, really is a turning point and it fits in with service-learning so that we're not just going out-- students aren't just going out and getting credit for working in the community but that they are learning at the same time that they are serving the community. They are figuring out what the community needs and wants and that's just good old audience awareness and so that...

Michael: that sounds like recent WPA threads...

Gaillet: yeah, I've been reading that one, whew. But it really, that, for me, I thought, I don't know that my department would necessarily embrace that or the university at large, but that's a way that at the end of hopefully a long career, I won't have stagnated, I will feel like I gave back. I research what I'm teaching, I take that into the communities, I just did a therapeutic writing presentation for an SOS breast cancer survivor group, so-- but that-- they were polite and they maybe got something out of it. I walked away with much more knowledge than I walked in with. Because I had to do the research. I couldn't just go in and "wah-wah-wah" -- you know, talk to them about expressive writing. They don't care. (Peter) Elbow's great, but they don't, maybe, care about that. So, I really did some looking about how to bring that into-- and, you know, it was really great for me. And it gave me some other areas to think about doing some work.

Kendra: Wow. So what about, maybe the assignments you said you would start with. Maybe ethnography, but have any of your students gone off and done any of those projects like that and...

Gaillet: Well I hope you're going to come to my talk this afternoon and I was going to tell you about my students [laughter]. They are doing fabulous work. They are looking at archives and looking at primary documents. That means they are interested in what they are looking at. It's not just me saying "go read *Once More to the Lake* and tell me about a childhood experience." They are picking familial archives, they are picking things at the workplace that they are interested in and really doing that primary kind of research connected to a community and that's the ethnography part-- figuring out the community. So maybe they are learning things about their family they didn't know or didn't want to know.

Michael: That can be very interesting.

Gaillet: Always. I mean, they've had some "A-ha" moments. Or the workplace. And they are finding out that they aren't just the guy who makes minimum wage but that they can give back to that community and it really has been a-- we've developed a new community in the classroom. We are all working together as researchers. And that's been really interesting at the undergraduate and the graduate level.

Kendra: That's pretty awesome, because that's something that I actually am very interested in, you know...

Gaillet: Well I'll see you at 4 o'clock (the time of her talk) and I'll tell you all about it. [laughter]

Michael: So that's the idea of the ethnographic, uh, whatever it is-- the idea of giving back. So, are there particular questions that you think the rhet/comp students should be looking at as they are going into the field? Should they be looking at something broader? Any particular issue-- is there an area they should be considering or is there something a little bit broader? Sometimes it seems like we get focused in so quickly...

Gaillet: I think we do. And I think graduate students really get focused in too quickly. And part of that I completely understand-- you've got to get through in 4 or 5 years. You pick a topic

early, you write all your papers about that. Most of us do that. But then you-- I think you need to back away, step back and look. Community is a big one for me. For whom does this material hold true? To look at multiple versions of things. And I think to bring your own personal interest. I don't think we stress that enough. I think we say, "OK, here are three or four tracks. Pick one." But maybe, a track-and-a-half and borrowing from three. A little like ordering Chinese food-- I'll take a column A and a B. Not, and I don't mean just interdisciplinary degrees, but putting together degrees within a department in ways that make the most sense for us to stay in the profession. I don't know if that answers your question, but I think we get tracked very easily. We say "I'm a theorist" or we say "I'm a teacher" or we say "I'm a critic"-- but a blending of those things. We play different roles at different times. I'm a critic when I'm reviewing. But for the most part I'm not a theorist without thinking about practical application. I like to think I don't teach something without having some sort of undergirding theory for doing that, but I think it's very easy to get tracked like that-- to have a divide.

Michael: Yeah, I've noticed that.

Gaillet: And it happens institutionally. You've got a teacher track and a professor track and again, I'm going back to Boyer. If we blend all o those things...

Kendra: You made a very good point though. You were thinking about it, so-- it forced you to think about it differently. I think even in different institutional types the service and, you know, ideally post-1990, the Boyer Report-- but then I don't know, and I guess it's a very individual thing-- I don't know, you can let me know, but there is still that disconnect. You know, still considering service as only going to this committee. Not for everybody, of course, but I've seen it, you know, with faculty members at different institutional types where I just listen to them like "Oh yeah, service...check, check, check. I sat in that meeting, I did this, or I wrote a letter of recommendation and that was service. But then the learning is something completely different and then, you know, your scholarship is way over here. It's like-- how could you, I guess-- what advice would you give us to avoid that trap if you can? And is there something we can avoid? You know?

Gaillet: Yeah, I think some fields lend themselves to blending better than others, but I think, quite honestly, rhet/comp lends itself very, very well. Look in your own department. I suspect there are faculty members running programs, directing programs, running writing centers, running the digital aquarium. We tend to serve because it is essential to what we do. It's not separate. Now, making other people recognize that may be different. Now, there's a kind of intellectual inquiry that happens. If I direct a first-year writing program compared to maybe somebody in literature who's not vested in it—I'm vested in it—so every journal I subscribe to talks about theory and practice and administration in some ways, so it's very easy to put those things together. Now, you have to say, "I'm not going to just read this and publish this." But then, it also connects to teaching [indecipherable] . . . seven of us started way back the ethnography class. [The] seven of us met and taught each how to do it, so those things were very easily integrated where maybe if I were just looking at Chaucer that would difficult [laughter] to find a service component. Well, I don't know; I would just have to think about it.

Kendra: So then my question would be, “Have you, in your experience, been in a situation where you were the only rhet/comp person in your program?”

Gaillet: George Pullman and I together were hired to start a rhet/comp program at Georgia State. So, I think there are nine of us now. At the beginning it was great. Nobody really knew in the early days what rhet/comp did, but it was kind of politically correct to have rhet/comp, so we were hired. And then we said, “Well, let’s teach graduate classes.” So, we did the first semester, and we built this program—we, of course, looked up other programs in the country. We knew we wanted a history component and we knew we needed a comp theory. Of course, technology came a little later. We hired people—some very, very smart people—from Purdue to do that kind of work, so I haven’t myself the only one though I’m approaching that as I stay in my department longer. There aren’t full professors in rhetoric and composition. And, so that is interesting. We need to change that. We’re working on that. And that’s interesting because sometimes I have to do a little educating along the way, in annual reports and that sort of thing. For example, that we value collaboration; that we value digital publishing; that the monograph is not still reigning king; that we look, in some ways, like the social sciences. That’s a difficult uphill [battle]. And, I’m in a fabulous department that will listen, but I have to still make those arguments.

Michael: [indecipherable]

Gaillet: And I teach a publication class, and I have to say, “Yes, we value collaboration. Our field says we do, but our hiring, promotion, and tenure committee may not.” So, choose. Pick and choose. Blend. Do some single authored work.

Kendra: Know when to do what.

Gaillet: Right.

Michael: Single author work. [laughter]

Kendra: That was the other thing we were talking about before you came. We were like, “Man, did she publish a lot! And, I was just wondering—

Gaillet: There’s no book on Shakespeare or any of that. We’ll see what that does for my career...And, a lot of that’s collaborative. After tenure, I value collaboration—the kind of collaboration that Eodiche and Dade describe as “first person squared” in parenthesis. Not where you take half and I take half, but we both sit down and write all of this together. And, so if a committee were to say, “How much of this did you do?” I did 100 percent. Plus, it’s a lot harder than if I had done it by myself. But, definitely, two heads are better than one. So, I’m a firm believer in collaboration. Not that it always goes well, but I strongly support that. And, we’re in a field that hasn’t historically. They value the single author that produces the tone—

Michael: ...which has its time and its place—

Gaillet: Right

Michael: Well, I think we've covered everything . . . the idea of collaboration, where you see the field going, and how we need to educate the people around us because this is what we really do. So, this is what we need to take into consideration.

Gaillet: And I think we need to teach that way because I think we all about undergraduate and graduate collaborations that just don't go well. But, then if we don't prepare students for that, they get to the work place, which is by and large collaborative; they won't have a skill set to produce that.

Kendra: Well, do you have any last tips or words of wisdom. I know I tried to get you talk about your talk early [laughter], so none of that.

Gaillet: Let me think. I think the field is changing. I think we're standing in a stream that's drastically changing. I think the Profession's 2007 that MLA produced, and came from MLA and not CCC, that says, "let's consider collaboration; let's consider digital publishing". . . that we should, for heaven's sakes, value a book review—that one was a shocker. I think even when MLA is recognizing that, we are moving. I think rhet/comp's way ahead of that curve, but I think it's very easy to look at that in terms of our own scholarship. We need to look at it in terms of training scholars: training undergraduates, training graduates, giving them the skills I know you're certainly doing here. You're so technologically savvy. But, in a lot of places that aren't, we can't teach writing in a blue book where they wrote and cut and paste from other sources. Or even where documentation—MLA—is the focus in undergraduate classes. They can go to computer programs and punch that in. I don't want to sound like the old foagie, but I think we're losing some of that problem solving skills because students can go Google anything they want—"ask Cha Cha the answer"—in class. So, that kind of "Here's some original material. What do you make of this?" is a skill—it's not the student's fault—it's just changes in technology, changes in access, changes in how we teach that we need to shift our teaching, and we need to shift our comp theory training for graduate students. To do the same old [thing] is already passé to most students. The skills that we learned—

Michael: I started my undergraduate work fourteen years ago [indecipherable], and so what I was doing ten years ago in first-year composition is completely different than what they're doing now [indecipherable].

Gaillet: That's right. And, some of it is not teaching new technological skills but teaching thinking skills.

Michael: Yeah, there are different ways of thinking...

Kendra: And, how to process...

Gaillet: And, for me, this is just where I am today. Maybe I will rethink it in a year. But, looking at archives and primary materials, going back to the original documents—

Kendra: And smelling it, and feeling it—

Gaillet: And smelling it, and maybe looking at it digitally, but coming up with something original to say. It's difficult; students don't know where to start. But, once they do get started and they connect that with their own ethos in relationship to the material, the result is that I love to read student writing. And, I don't always say that. [laughter]

Michael: Yes, because once they become invested in their writing, their writing improves.

Gaillet: And, it's nothing different than for us. If you give me an assigned topic, I can produce it. I can churn it out. I meet deadlines. I can do that, but if you let me put my fingerprint on the material, if you let me channel it through what I'm already interested in and what I know, it's going to be much better. Meaning, there's not a divide so much between us and students.

Kendra: Yeah, we know. [laughter]

Michael: Yeah, we know. [laughter]

Gaillet: And we all ought to be doing the same kind of work just in different venues.

Kendra: That was great! That was wonderful . . . thank you so much for your time and [for] sharing with us.

Gaillet: Thank you!

Kendra: We feel very honored, and we're excited about your talk . . . We really are interested in what you have to say.

Gaillet: And, I hope you realize what a great program you're in. Since I love having lunch with graduate students . . . and your faculty, who just get along beautifully and work well together and like each other and care about you—this really is a fabulous program.

Kendra: No, we are—

Gaillet: I'm going to start sending my master's students this way!

Michael: No, I came from a different—I did my master's at a different school, and it's night and day. It's night and day. You didn't realize it when you were in it, but when you got out it was like, "Wow. That was really an unhealthy environment to be in."

Gaillet: Which brings us back to collaboration because I know you all do that. You collaborate with your professors on the publications . . . there are lots of ways to do that. They are just ushering you in the profession in a way that's painless.

Kendra: Yeah, we do get a lot insight and a lot of tips and tools, strategies, you know: "This worked for me. This didn't work for me."

Gaillet: And just the social.

Kendra: We do that a lot.

Gaillet: I can tell. I looked at the website. [laughter] That's good.

Kendra: That was one of the selling points for me, I will say, because I am very much a "community" person. I love to be a part of community, and we foster good community—healthy community.

Gaillet: I can tell. I'm impressed.