

Meg Morgan Interview Transcript

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<http://english3.fsu.edu/~mdavis/MegMorganInterview.mp3>

Matt: These are them [the questions]...if you want. These are sort of a template. We kind of go off on whatever is interesting. But first thanks for coming to visit with us.

Meg Morgan: Oh, you're very welcome.

Matt: And agreeing to chat with me. The first question is sort of how did you get into the field or, you were WPA, is that right? Or, still are?

Meg Morgan: I was, I was.

Matt: Ok. So maybe not only how did you get in the field in terms of Rhetoric and Composition or composition. But, how did you decide to become a WPA or become a WPA? Where are your roots?

Meg Morgan: How did I get into the field? Well, in 1980 we moved—my husband and I moved from California—San Francisco—back to Indiana, which was his home state, home city, as a matter of fact Lafayette. And the condition on which I would move is that I could go back to graduate school, which is what I wanted to do. I was in a couple of classes at Berkeley when we were in San Francisco. And I had a child and I didn't go back into those classes, so I said I would move to Lafayette if could take classes at Purdue. So, I started taking classes at Purdue in like 1980, fall of '80 and Janice Lauer, who had started the program, just came. So she and I kind of connected over just "I want to go back to graduate school," not rhetoric and comp necessarily. Then, I had my second child in the winter of '81 ...yeah...And by the summer of '81, I decided I *really* want to go back to graduate school. And, so I applied for the program. I got into the first year of the rhet/comp program and Janice was my mentor. So, it's really an issue of the right time and the right place. Not even an issue of "I wanna be in rhetoric and composition" so much as "well, here is a new program, I love teaching writing because I taught it for years, and I think I'll follow my instincts on this." So, it wasn't like a planned thing necessarily. It was a great fortuitous unplanned thing, but it was

Matt: Gotcha.

Meg Morgan: yeah...

Matt: So, you were already teaching writing. I know the story for a lot of first and second generation rhet/comp folks is that they were literature or they were doing something else and their, either their love for writing or they happen to teach writing at one point and

that changed their perspective and changed their trajectory. You were teaching writing before—

Meg Morgan: Well, I had gotten my master's at the University of Maryland in literature, but like most places you teach writing. And then I got a job immediately after that teaching at George Mason University to teach composition, which is most people who have their master's to teach. And in the process of those four or five years teaching at George Mason, I taught literature and I taught drama...I taught I think Irish drama or something. And, I also taught advanced literature, advanced writing classes, ok and I decided what I really like to do is to teach writing, having a choice as to whether I was going to teach literature or teach writing. I like teaching writing. So I left that dept became an administrator in continuing education, left that school, went to San Fran became an administrator of a continuing education program at a small college in Oakland and missed teaching and decided that if I were going to do it all over again, I would get a Ph.D., not in literature, because there were no jobs and I didn't like it that much,

Matt: Right!

Meg Morgan: ...and so what could I do? And so, like I said it was a miracle that I went to Purdue the same time that they started that program. So, I had taught writing for quite a while, I'd say a total of five or six years on and off and so it was great. So, I did have that experience. As a matter of fact, I think I became a grad student at Purdue I was one of the few people who actually was mature enough to have had a pretty good history of teaching writing. Now, I had never taught writing the way I taught it at Purdue. You know, there's a whole different way of thinking about writing, but I had at least been in writing classrooms. So, yeah—

Matt: So, that was your first experience with different kind of writing programs—

Meg Morgan: Different kind of writing programs, writing that was much more process oriented. When I first taught writing at Maryland, which they did not have a writing program there, what you did is you gave a student something to read, okay, you talked about the thing that you gave them to read, which was usually something like a novel or play or something, and then you talked very briefly about something in writing. And then you assigned them the piece of writing, which was due in two weeks or so. And then the rest of the two weeks you spent talking about the reading. So there was no—it was almost expected that they would know how to write this. And so you really didn't talk about writing as writing; you just gave the assignment.

Matt: And check back in two weeks to see if—

Meg Morgan: That's right, that's right. They hand them in—no revision—they hand them in. They got a grade on them, and then you handed them back. So, it was very perfunctory kind of stuff. And, no one knew any different. It was like 1969. And I think the first process stuff was really in the very late 1960s so . . . we were right at the cutting edge of it. At this point, Maryland was not.

Matt: So, I guess, talk about what you did at Purdue while you were there, how that--

Meg Morgan: Oh, that was wonderful.

Matt: I mean, you sort of described stumbling upon it, obviously altered the course of—

Meg Morgan: Oh, it was wonderful. I got there in 1980 and Janice was working on the program but had not opened it up. But, I got to know her, and I don't even remember how because I probably had indicated an interest in working with writing and she was out there casting about for graduate students, so it worked. It was perfect. So I worked with her in a cohort group with other students that first year 1980, fall of '80. Then I had my child in '81, winter of '81. And then I went back as a grad, accepted grad student in the program in the fall of '81 and we worked together for, what, six years or so. She was my mentor. One of the questions is "who influenced you?" and I would say she probably was the biggest influence on me during that period of time. I remember—she would deny this—is this going to go on something, published?

Matt: Yeah, well it's hard to find. Don't worry.

Meg Morgan: No, I don't think she would deny this story. But, she was having some trouble as the brand new director of the program at a big school like this kind of getting to know her students. And the students were having equally difficult times getting to know her because she's pretty shy in some ways. So, they came to me because I already had a year working Janice. And they said, "See what you could do to get Janice to relate to us more." So, I went to Janice and I said, "We, They really want to relate"—because I was already relating to her—"they really want to relate to you. And it's the first year rhet/comp people." And she was so, I think she was really pleased to hear that because she didn't know what her role was in that program in terms of relating to students. She didn't know if they wanted to be able to have access to her or did they want her to be more distant, more of an advisor type. So, after that she got the sense that her role was really as a very strong mentor and that she could get to know these students. And they welcomed her kind of knowing about them both personally and as scholars, future scholars. So that was my role was to bring [indecipherable] people together. [laughter]. But anyway, I'm only kidding. It was a great program. She, um, she did mentor us. She was more than simply the director of the program. She mentored us. She encouraged us, gave us ideas. We gave her ideas; that was what was so great. We started meeting when we had finished our course work, finished our prelims, and were working on our dissertation, a bunch of us, maybe five or six of us, got together and said, "we're going to get through this. We're going to get through this together!" So, we sat down, and we talked about our research and we talked about our plans. And we said, "We're gonna hang on to each other. We're going to get through this." Well, Janice found out about this. And she said, "This is a great idea! Let's have a little class. We'll call it the 'Post-Oppression'—post-oppression: that's probably what it was.

Matt: Post-Prelim.

Meg Morgan: A prelim group, so we did that. And, so we had a post prelim group and a post dissertation group. And that group, in its early years at Purdue, were never competitive, never. We always worked together and tried to help each other out. It was a wonderful experience. At the Ph.D. level, there often is a lot of competition, but we did not compete. We just worked with each other. That was great.

Matt: Yeah, that's something that we talk a lot about here. On one hand keeping it [the program] small enough that it could form as a community, a sort of tight-knit group, and on the other hand fostering more of an apprenticeship model than a sort of "dog-eat-dog" competitive model.

Meg Morgan: That's right. That's right. We've created more of a collaborative model. You know, if I had an idea, I would throw it out to a bunch of people and say, "If I worked with you on that..." one of the first articles I ever got published-- I got published with five people including me from Purdue on collaboration. And they were all graduate students. We got the article published and we were still graduate students and we worked together on it. And I'm still, I'm working with one of the women from that group on this ATTW workshop that I'm doing next week or in two weeks or so.

Matt: We've tried some of the same things here as well. Kathi just offered to head an article with, I think, eleven or twelve of us.

Meg Morgan: But, she has a lot of experience with this.

Matt: she mentioned that

Meg Morgan: She was on an article that came out on WAC programs from Clemson. And the people who were her co-writers were untenured faculty, maybe even some grad students. But people who needed her influence and her energy to get things done. So, she's really good at working with people. That's really good.

Matt: I'd agree. And we're on . . . it's at the beginning stages now, but just that kind of opportunity and the fact that more than a few groups here have either paired up or in groups of three, presented at conferences as sort of an FSU panel with Kathi or Kristie chairing or moderating

Meg Morgan: that's right. That's right.

Matt: It's really an enjoyable experience and it's enjoyable when you go and see other programs doing the same thing. As a group, going to see Syracuse on a panel or Michigan State on a panel or another school.

Meg Morgan: No, it's great. And you're helping each other get through, which is very difficult experience, getting a Ph.D., but knowing you have buddies that have your back you know you're okay.

Matt: Misery loves company!

Meg Morgan: That's the other side of it.

Matt: So you talked a little bit about Janice being sort of a mentor. Who else along the way, either personally or in terms of their work, you know, a text that you've read—

Meg Morgan: Well, when I started at George Mason, there was a guy there by the name of Don Gallehr. And he, at that point, this would have been '71, he was the only person who knew anything about a writing process stuff. Do you want me to spell his name for you? G-a-l-l-e-h-r, first name Don. And, he's still there. He's still at Mason. '71. He was there several years by the time I got there in '71 and he was the first person to talk to me about process. He was an Expressivist because they were in the majority in the early '70s. And I never got into that. I'm kind of too much like my father to but it was such an enlightening to experience another way to teach writing. And he was the WPA at the time, and it was a very small school. Now, it's probably 30,000; back then it was 3,000. And really kind of turned me around about teaching writing. It wasn't a burden any more; it was something exciting to do. And I called him maybe about three or four months ago because he got a teaching award, maybe I emailed him and he called me, about teaching and about knowing each other for all these years and kind of following similar trajectories in terms of writing, in terms of teaching writing and loving the university and stuff like that. So, I would say he is a real influence on me, too. So, I'd say Janice and he, and probably a couple of undergraduate professors I had, but I don't remember their names and I know loved them at the time and I saw that they loved what they did. So, it wasn't a real stretch to get me to apply to graduate school and teach at the college level. So, I think those are mainly the two big people. Andrea Lunsford was a colleague of Janice because they worked on the same textbook together. And, I remember, now that you've asked the question, I've got all these people now. But, I remember Andrea and Lisa Ede around 1985 or '86 or so were working collaboration. And the first article they wrote was on how they collaborated together. And that CCCCs '84, '85 CCCCs, a couple of graduate students at Purdue went to CCCCs and saw panels on collaboration. And we came back and said, "We should look into this. This is a really interesting topic." And, so we looked into it, we did some research on it, on professional writing and collaboration, and then, and then saw and talked with Andrea-- I can't remember. Maybe she came to Purdue or something? And she was saying, you know, go for this. This is a really interesting, open field. And, actually, I think, she lent us her manuscript, which wasn't published yet for the book she and Lisa were doing on collaboration. And that was a great impetus. It was very small. I mean it was only over a period of a couple of months or so. But, to let us know that the work we were doing was legitimate, not just legitimate—

Matt: It was not just an exercise—

Meg Morgan: Right, it was not empty. It was something that was exciting, something that was real research involved in it. And, it was not much known about it in terms of writing, some theories of collaboration and stuff, but not in our field. And to urge us forward, that was really good. So, that's probably, those are probably--

Matt: That's a good list.

Meg Morgan: Yeah. They are probably the three, early in my career, the three most important people, I would say.

Matt: Gotcha. And it sounds like teaching has also been an influence sort of in and of itself. That on one hand you sort of enjoy doing it; on the other hand, it's enjoying doing, teaching writing in the beginning influenced the path that your career took. So, I wondered if you might talk about the classes you taught back then, the classes you taught later on, ones that you most like to teach.

Meg Morgan: Well, I moved from rhetoric and composition. At Purdue, I taught composition for probably two years. And then I moved into the business writing program and I taught that for the next five or so, four or five years. And then when I interviewed for a job at Charlotte, they wanted somebody in journalism and technical communication and I had no scholarly experience in journalism, but I had been on my high school newspaper; I had been on my college newspaper. I had an internship one summer in Washington, D.C. as a journalist, so I had the practical experience in journalism that they wanted or they would be satisfied with. So, I got the job really as a technical writing, a technical communication teacher at Charlotte. So, my area of professional development has been more in the area of technical communication than it really has been in the area of rhetoric and composition. Although I identify as a rhet./comp person, what I do is more technical writing. And, so I really moved from master's level teaching to just writing in the classroom with some literature, or really more literature which is some writing, which is really what it was—to some writing which is what I teach now which is technical writing several courses in that, and I teach, we call it expository writing, but it's really almost like a topics in writing course. And then I teach an undergraduate course for English majors called Writing about Literature. So, it's kind of a circle, you know? But, years ago, when I was using literature in the classroom, 90% of the time and barely talking about writing; in this class, I barely talk about the literature and talk all about how to write about literature. So, that's kind of an interesting shift and can be kind of a circle in some ways. Does that answer your question?

Matt: Yeah, yeah. Let me make sure I got this right. So, after Purdue, did you go straight to UNC Charlotte?

Meg Morgan: Yes, I did.

Matt: Okay, and you stayed there happily forever and a day—

Meg Morgan: I stayed there for twenty three years. Happily? 95% of the time, yes. Some not so happy times, but mostly pretty happy times, you know? It was a great place to raise my girls, my daughters. I got tenure. I was able to do WPA work for nine years; for one year, I was the administrator of the WAC program. I, for some reason, I don't know how, developed this reputation as a leader. So, you don't know how these things happen. But, you know, somebody asked me a few years ago if I would be faculty president, or

run for it, and I said sure, but little do I know that the person who is asking me to run is not asking anybody else so I got it by affirmation, right? And I stayed pretty active in faculty government at the local level, the university level, and the state level. So, I feel I know something about what's happening in a higher education in North Carolina. I have run the, like I said I was a WPA for nine years, I've run the technical writing program, let's see, five out of the last eleven years. So, I've always kind of combined research, a little bit of research, teaching, faculty service, uh, government service, and a bit of administration—that's kind of what my career has kind of been.

Matt: Okay. So we had Chuck Bazerman just a few short weeks ago, and he is very much in the administrative role at the moment. And he talked a little bit about—and research is another big component of what he does—a little bit about the tension between enjoying his administrative position, but the time that that took and the tension that that created between liking to be in the classroom and liking to do research. Did you find the same thing or were you able to strike a balance?

Meg Morgan: I was not able to strike a balance between administration and research. And, if you look at my research career, and research is a habit. You have to get into it. You have to stay in it; you have to keep at it. If you are put in a position where that disappears, it's really hard to get back, ok? So, for nine years I did the first year writing program, and I would say that I worked sixty-hour a week-- for lots of reasons and there's no time to do research. Now, one could say I was just using that as an excuse not to do research, and I wouldn't totally object to that, either, because I found that, that running a first year writing program is teaching in a different way. And I love teaching, and I did teach when I was doing the program. But, the teaching that involved, as the head of the program was working with lecturers, full time lecturers who were taking courses who didn't know how to teach very well or they wanted to learn how to teach better. Ok. so I worked a lot with lecturers; I worked a lot with the university community, trying to let them know what happened in first year writing. I worked a lot with faculty to redesign the curriculum. And I worked with Kathi a lot to actually put in a place an assessment before anybody was doing assessment. And, so there were a lot of things that we did before other people were doing [them]. I worked with the TAs; we only had seventy at the time that taught in that program. So, I worked a lot with them. I taught a course for them, and I worked with them the whole second year of teaching. So, it really was an administrative position in terms of doing, in terms of setting up schedule, and putting people in sections, but it was also very heavily teaching in that kind of unorthodox way. I loved it. I loved doing it, and I did not see a split between administration and teaching in that position. Now, the position I have now, which is the coordinating the tech writing program, is not that much teaching. At all. It's a little of advising the students, um, it is mostly trying to get students into sections, it is looking at admissions stuff. So, I can admit or not admit people. So, it's a little more bureaucratic than the first year writing program administration was.

Matt: Okay. To go back just a second, before I came here, I was at NC State. I got my master's there—

Meg Morgan: Oh! Were you? Oh, good.

Matt: So, Susan Miller Cochran, Chris Anson, Michael Carter—that's how I got into rhet/comp. They, Michael Carter ran the teacher training course one semester. Chris Anson the next. And, Susan was our WPA—

Meg Morgan: You want me to tell you a Michael Carter story?

Matt: Sure! Yeah.

Meg Morgan: Michael Carter was, of course, at Purdue

Matt: Yeah, that's right!.

Meg Morgan: I was the first year; he was the second year. And, I told you I had young children at Purdue. So, one summer—Janice always did the summer institute because rhet/comp people didn't know about it for years. So, she always did this summer institute, and people like Ross Winterowd would come and Andrea Lunsford and all these big names. And the image I have of them is sitting in Janice's hot tub in her backyard, so there are some things you don't want to publish. But, anyway, Michael and I had to go around because we were running this together. He was the director and I was the assistant director. And, so we had to go around campus to find spaces for the different activities of this institute. So one day we, when my daughter was like two, one day, we're walking around campus, and here it is me, Michael Carter, and Shavon (sp?) on his shoulders. So, the three of us are going all over campus with my daughter, who's like a year and a half or two years old on his shoulders. And that's how I think of Michael Carter.

Meg Morgan: I got to know Chris a little bit because he's working in North Carolina. But he's done a lot of WAC work. We have a WPA— a Carolina's WPA—Group and he's been involved with that. And I can actually say this--I started that group, but he, he *has* been involved in it. He has come to retreats—Kathi (Yancey) and he came to a retreat a few years ago—very involved. And then Susan Miller-Cochran, who I didn't know a couple years ago— because she's pretty new, she is the most wonderful person.

Matt: Yeah, she's pretty new.

Meg: She is the most wonderful person. I mean, they're just great people in WPA jobs.

Matt: Yeah and that was a really, really nice place to start and you can imagine what it took to leave the place.

Meg Morgan: ...leave there.

Matt: It's not easy

Meg Morgan: But they have a PhD.

Meg Morgan: but it's in the like digital literacies or something.

Matt: They do. It's in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media. So it's a little bit different. But the reason that I mention it is that a lot of my friends who graduated there have become contingent faculty in teaching writing-- some as far as Elon or down in Wilmington-- and having been in the North Carolina system, which is a very large one. What are your thoughts on that? Because there are—sort of on the WPA list and at conferences every year—discussions of the contingent faculty situation; so I wondered, given your experience, what you thought.

Meg Morgan: Are they part-time faculty?

Matt: Most of them are, yeah.

Meg: Yeah? Well, it's an abomination. That's really what it is. But there's very little—and I say this with all honesty—and I tell my students this: There is very little for somebody in English with a Master's degree to do—except... unless you have a degree in technical writing or something that is professional writing and you can go out, okay? To do, other than perhaps get a publishing job, okay, with a publishing company; teach at the public schools, okay; or teach at the university level. The problem with teaching both at the public school level and the university level is the economy, and so many schools are cutting back on their programs which means they're cutting back on their faculty. So my guess is that part-time, actually, *part-time* positions may decrease. So, if they have a part-time position now, it may not be around in a year or two. The fact that English Departments would hire part-time faculty and pay them less than minimum wage--if you calculate the hours-- offer them no benefits—no retirement benefits, no health benefits—is something out of the 19th Century. So, if we are going to continue to use contingent, part-time—however you want to call them—adjunct faculty, we are going to have to create a model that is going to not harm them. Because basically they are out there being harmed. Now, a lot of people, I suppose, take on part-time teaching because they have a spouse who has a full-time [job]. I have a friend who's been a part-time teacher for ten years at Charlotte. Her husband is a doctor and so she doesn't have to worry about healthcare. She doesn't have to worry about having an income or anything. But I also have people, part timers at [UNC] Charlotte, who want income—and that is teaching three courses at two thousand dollars a course. And that's it. And that has got to change. It doesn't have to stop, but it has to change. And in 2002, and hardly anyone knew about this, because I think people want to keep it buried-- the system—the North Carolina system-- actually put out a report researched and written by a woman in the general administration. She worked not in the university but at the university level in which they advocated that anyone who's part time should get benefits based on their part-time work. So if you were a three-quarter time, as a part-timer, then you could get three-quarter benefits or half-time, half-time benefits. I don't think they had something for one-quarter time. But in that sense you would have at least something to fall back on. And that has never been put in place as far I know—at least not at UNC Charlotte. It's not been put in place. And I keep mentioning it to people and people [say], 'oh that's interesting', and then it disappears. You know? So I do think it's a real problem to put people out with an

MA where getting a job is going to be impossible. Now at the same time—you probably think, ‘God, she’s so practical, she’s so practical.’

Matt: No, I’m fairly practical as well (*laughs*).

Meg: You know? and I think I would love to say that getting a Master’s degree is wonderful because you learn to really fall in love with your profession and to really love what you’re doing and get a higher level of knowledge and understanding and reflect on it and do all this kind of great stuff, well that’s true, but eventually you have to eat and eventually you have to feed a family for some of them. And often you can’t automatically do that with a Master’s in English. Not that I want you to automatically do anything. But I think there ought to be some route that you can take.

Matt: Right. The constraints that are put on someone in that position are a bit too strict, or constricting.

Meg: That’s right. Well, I tell my Master’s kids-- who want to get a Master’s in English-- who are undergraduates. I say, ‘Think about this. Because what do you want to do when you get out of it, and are you going to be you be able to do that with a Master’s degree in English?’ And sometimes they will and sometimes they won’t. So a Master’s in English Literature is an intermediary degree that leads you on to a PhD. It’s *not* an end degree.

Matt: That’s right.

Meg: It is really just a bridge between undergraduate and graduate school and PhD school.

Matt: Yeah, in my case it led me to discover—I didn’t know that rhetoric and composition
existed (*laughs*).

Meg: Existed? Of course not! (*laughs*) What was your undergraduate degree in?

Matt: It was in English and German.

Meg: Yeah.

Matt: And actually a funny story is that--I don’t know if you know Amy Devitt but she’s at Kansas.

Meg: The name is familiar.

Matt: And I had her— it was an undergraduate course on language history— and I was doing literature at the time and I asked her a few questions in her office one day and she said, “You know, the questions you’re asking me are very—” She was doing research in genre theory—“The questions you’re asking me are very rhetorical in nature, is there a chance that you would be interested in rhetoric?” and I said, “No, no, I appreciate it, but no, no. Literature is my thing.” After I started the program here I saw her at C’s one year and I said, “I don’t know...”

Meg: Guess what? (*laughs*)

Matt: You probably don't remember me in your office, but you were right (*laughs*). It took me another 6 years to figure that out."

Meg: Well I didn't know it either. I mean, I knew writing. I didn't know that there was a field called rhetoric and writing or rhetoric and composition. I mean, that was really when I got to Purdue, they were starting their program and before that, maybe there were three or four programs in the whole country, and that was it. And it wasn't a discipline. It was just something—writing was something you taught because you couldn't teach literature, basically. You know? It was never something one chose to do. And if you chose to do it, you were considered a little weird. You know? "What [do] you want to do *that* for?" (*laughs*).

Matt: Right? (*Laughter*) You had to go to Berkley in the late 60's, right? (*laughs*) To teach, writing?

Meg: (*Laughs*) That's right! That's right! And that was for writing project kinda influenced stuff, I think. So—so, yeah—and so it was a career that I chose kind of accidentally, but it's not one that I have ever regretted choosing. Even the tech writing piece of it which I kinda took, kinda took—are we running out of time?

Matt: No, not at all.

Meg: Oh. I kinda took because it was the place I wanted to be, but with hardly any experience in technical writing—because it was more business writing that I was doing—even that has turned out to be wonderful. I mean, people in technical writing are remarkable. They're wonderful. I walked into a restaurant once and I don't even know where it was. And I hadn't seen this woman—she was, um, I can't remember her name, but she was in tech writing and I knew her because I was on public committees, and she leapt out of the table and the two of us hugged right in the restaurant. I mean, it was that ki-- it was almost like a reunion to come back and see people I hadn't seen—might've been at 4C's—in a year or something. But they're just a wonderful group of people that come from rhet/comp and tech writing.

Matt: Well, I'm glad. Alright. So, to take a step back—or sort of a step back— given what you said about contingent faculty and the fact that the economy is a big factor now in how things are going to be reconfigured--or *if* things going to be reconfigured for that matter-- I wondered how, on one hand, where do you hope – and I say the field but if you mean writing studies or tech writing or rhetoric and comp, you know, sort of however you like it—on one hand where do you think things are headed and on another hand, where do you hope things are headed—if those things are different?

Meg: I have no idea where things are headed.

Matt: (*laughs*) Okay...

Meg: I have *no* idea. Um, in North Carolina, in terms of programmatic stuff, there are one, two, three universities out of 16 who have moved from a two-semester writing requirement—first year writing requirement—to a one-semester. I think Wilmington did it, but I may be wrong. And I'm thinking, okay, is that what we wanna do? Do we want to actually in some ways diminish our influence on students as teachers of writing—and not just teachers of writing, but thinkers and critical thinkers, and looking at the world from different points of view, you know? So, what does that diminishment—and I say it is—to one semester, what's that actually saying about the field of rhetoric and composition? So, the other side of it is that we are looking at—in Charlotte—at a PhD program. And in fact, we're not looking at a Literature PhD; not in a million years would we do that. So, we're really looking at a rhetoric and composition kind of language linguistics PhD program. So, on the one hand, we're reducing the presence and the influence of rhetoric and comp in the first year, and the other hand we're growing it in graduate programs.

Matt: Right. Right.

Meg: So, I don't know where we're going. I have no idea. I think the economy is going to have some effect on it. I think that states will not have money to put into new graduate programs because they're very expensive. Maybe that will force some schools to cut back on programs where there are no jobs, i.e., literature programs. So does that mean that if you're cutting back on a PhD program in literature—I'm not saying that's gonna happen but it could—does that mean that rhetoric and composition will become more visible, or are they going to cut back across the board? Or does the legislature think of English as literature and not as rhetoric and composition, so they'll slash everything? I mean, it is like a cesspool out there, I really think it is. I think if we want to develop—that's the political answer, I guess—if we want to develop the intellectual areas of rhetoric and composition, I think we have to look a lot at towards cultural studies and how does writing function in a culture, especially one that is changing so dramatically. So it's not enough to just read Aristotle. We have to read Aristotle within the 21st Century culture or we have to think about how texts get, not only created, but reinforced or recreated with all this technology. It's not the same world it was twenty-five years ago. So, I think if we stay in the 1980's we're doing our students a disservice. And then we—you didn't expect such long answers, did you?

Matt: No, it's comforting (*laughs*) I'm enjoying it very much, actually.

Meg: No? (*laughs*) No, no, no, I know! Okay. But also, I don't know how—I don't know what students are going to be like. I mean I have a grandson who at age two could turn the computer on, okay? Couldn't turn it off. So, one day he said, "Nana, turn off the computer." I said, "Well, you turn it off." He says, "I don't know how to do it." So, I said, "Here," so I showed him where to press and the next time, maybe a couple hours later he turned it on and he turned it off! I mean one time, showing him what to do! And so his mind, I can't imagine is the same kind of mind I had when I was two, or the same kind of mind my daughters had in the eighties when they were two. It's a whole different way of reconnecting and connecting information and technology and machines and what it's going to turn out to be, I have no idea.

Matt: There's an interesting book. Have you ever heard of *Born Digital*?

Meg: Yes, yes!

Matt: Have you read it?

Meg: No. I haven't read it. Yes, but I've heard of it.

Matt: I started it over our last break. It's about that very thing, the way that—it's not quite the way that perception is reconfigured, but something along those lines—that orientations towards things like privacy, towards things like information and how it's organized, towards things like knowledge and how it's produced, that for the generation that was born after, I think they use about 1982 or '81, that they have a fundamentally different orientation towards the world because of the way things have been reconfigured by digital technology. So, it's pretty interesting. I don't think it's across the board. The broad thesis is a little too broad. But I do think there are some things that my generation, as they're sort of hitting their stride, and that the younger generation coming up is prepared to do, that in previous generations were unimaginable.

Meg: Well this was a conversation that I had recently with a large group at Charlotte. Very recently. I won't say anymore on that because I don't want to identify the people. But we were talking about using Ning in the classroom and about how Ning actually encourages students to write and they don't even know they're writing in some ways because they are writing in this [web]site. And that's what they do: they write in these sites. And somebody from the back of the room, who was many years younger than me, said, I don't think this is a good idea. I think that students should learn to write with a pen or a pencil and paper. Because if they're writing with a pencil and paper, they have to take the time to put the words on the page and as they're putting the words on the page, they're thinking about the next thing they're going to write. And therefore, they become more critical thinkers and more thoughtful and introspective. And it was all I could do to keep from standing up and screaming. You know? But somebody, actually a young person, said—she said, “We can't impose”—but she meant “*you*”, because she was young, right – can't impose the way you learned to think and to write on a generation of students who haven't done that. And you're assuming that they can't think and write and type at the same time on a computer, but they can and the other thing they can do is go back and erase what they've written in ways that you could not do when you're writing on a paper. So there's this whole different process of creating information that we have access to—meaning *her*—that we should not impose this paper/pencil model. And I don't know if she convinced the person that said that, but I turned around to this woman and I said, “Thank you, for saying that. Thank you, thank you.” Because in fact, I don't prefer pencil and paper anymore. I prefer composing on the computer. And I grew up with—before ball point pens almost, you know?

Matt: I was just going to say, the extension of that logic would be, I think you should have to compose with a quill.

Meg: That's right!

Matt: Or, I think you should have to compose with a stylus, right so that it's--

Meg: That's right!

Matt: more effort and you have to think a lot before you can write.

Meg: That's right!

Matt: I do see. I do understand that different ways of doing things have different advantages, and I think that's right.

Meg: Yes, that's right.

Matt: And Kathi always says it's a both/and logic not an either/or logic.

Meg: That's right. Not an either/or, that's right.

Matt: The other thing is, I think that sentiment comes from a place that sees the majority if not all of what happens online in the digital world as intellectually inferior or bankrupt—if not bankrupt, right?

Meg: That's right.

Matt: And—

Meg: But it also comes out, I think—to interrupt you—

Matt: No, go ahead.

Meg: It comes out of the sentiment of the romantic notion of writing. The single wri--

Matt: The way Emerson did it...

Meg: The single writer writing in the garret and getting his inspiration from God or someplace, right? Not from internally; not from other people—even though as you look at history you see they got a lot of inspiration from other people. But the myth was: This is the solitary writer, writing. And I think that person probably doesn't believe that, but is articulating something that he or she never has questioned:

Matt: [It] comes from that tradition

Meg: That this is the way to do it, and the way the students do it today, is ineffective. The whole Ning thing, the whole conversation was, interactive writing. That you write and someone looks at it and responds to it and you write some more and someone looks at it and responds to it. And nothing is private; everything is social; everything is out there; and you are responsible for what you write. Oh, gee. That's—

Matt: Imagine that.

Meg: That's incredible! (*laughter*) I think that's the way things have changed so much is that technology is just doing things that maybe we have always done but in maybe more—and I'm saying maybe— hear maybe—in maybe more visible ways, in more public ways, in more acceptable ways. Because it wasn't acceptable for Wordsworth's sister to critique his writing. He had to do it himself. So, poor Dorothy gets put in the background, even though she did most of the work and old William gets, you know, into the anthology.

Matt: And gets taught to freshman and sophomores today (*laughter*).

Meg: You might have to cut some of this stuff.

Matt: No, no worries. Although we are, unfortunately, out of time.

Meg: Okay!

Matt: So, thank you for coming.

Meg: Did we get to all the questions?

Matt: It doesn't matter; we got to some important things so it doesn't matter.