

Spring 2016 Interview—Dr. Matt DAVIS, Dr. Liane ROBERTSON, Dr. Kara TACZAK, Erin WORKMAN

Interview Team—TM Travis Maynard, JN Jeffrey Naftzinger, AW Anna Worm

JN: Um, so, I'll get us started. Uh, and the first question is, uh, how did you all get into Literacy Studies or Rhetoric and Composition?

ROBERTSON: I'll start if you want. Quite by accident. Um, so I was in the corporate world for like 15 years and I wanted a change, and I decided...I'd always wanted to go back to grad school in English and probably like Lit was where I would have gone. And I went to...I happened to go to Eastern Michigan University and I met Linda Adler Kassner and she got me interested in Rhet/Comp. I took a class in...actually it was teaching basic writing, which I thought was interesting. And then I learned about Rhet/Comp from her, just sort of casually, and then I was like "Oh, hello! That's where I belong." Um, and it was really relevant to corporate work that I had done in marketing and public relations. So, it was just a nice fit and I had sort of accidentally slid into it and it was perfect.

DAVIS: Mine was kind of accidental as well. So I went to NC State for my, uh, MA, but it was in Lit--American and British. And then I took the required TA training stuff, um, and I had Michael Carter for Comp--I can't even remember if it was comp pedagogy or comp theory--but, um, the course itself was a little of both. And then just sort of got interested in it. Uh, I went to CCCCs, um...I don't even remember why, exactly.

TACZAK: Which one?

DAVIS: New Orleans.

TACZAK: That was your first one?

DAVIS: Um, yeah, that was my first one.

ROBERTSON: Me too.

DAVIS: Um, I feel like I...I might have presented something or... I can't remember why exactly. But! I went. Um, and Susan Miller Cochran was the WPA at the time. And she made a point to sort of introduce all of her graduate students to people and have...you know, ask them how their panels were, and have them attend things that were, um, in their interest. And I... by that time I had applied for PhDs because that's where I like met with Kathi and Kristie to talk about the program here. Um, so it was pretty similar to Liane's. I backed into it and then...

ROBERTSON: That's right. You showed up at the dinner. We're like "Who is this guy coming to our party?"

TACZAK: Yeah! And Kim was there too, wasn't she?

DAVIS: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

TACZAK: So I have wanted to be a professor since I was like 15. Um, cause I had to write like a "What do you wanna be when you grow up?" kind of thing. And I always thought it would be in like psychology or some social science. But then I met...my undergraduate degree is in creative writing and I had a... kind of like them, I had a chance job at the University of Akron as an adjunct in composition. And Bill Thelan

was the WPA, and he so just guided me right into composition. And I applied, and Florida State was the number one choice. And, I feel like the rest is history...haven't looked back since.

WORKMAN: My story's kind of similar, I guess, to Matt and Liane. I was, uh, I went into a masters program for Lit at the University of Maine, and I met Dylan Dryer and did two courses with him: Rhetorical Production of the Everyday and Theories of Comp. And I was really taken with the idea of doing something that could have like a productive... it could be productive for other people...it could help other people (Inaudible). And I'll just stop there...

(Laughter)

DAVIS: Wait so...

TACZAK: And other disciplines cannot?

(Laughter)

DAVIS: Were you, um...were you in Lit? And you were teaching comp, and you knew you wanted to teach comp?

TACZAK: No I was in composition. Um, so the writing program at the University of Akron is... I started teaching in an embedded college with provisional students. So he... he made me, because I didn't have a comp background, take like the teaching pedagogy class. And so that was like...

DAVIS: So we all got poached?

TACZAK: We totally like...yeah, cause I always wanted to be like a creative writer. You know, I'm a rhymer...diva.

(Laughter)

TACZAK: Thank goodness it didn't work out.

ROBERTSON: Yeah.

TACZAK: Hey that's pretty: Saturday Night Fev-a and Diva? That was pretty good.

ROBERTSON: Yeah (Laughter).

TM: So then I think, you guys already sort of indicated a little bit of this in your first answers, but which scholars in the field, uh, have most influenced your thinking?

TACZAK: Definitely not Yancey.

ROBERTSON: Noooo, definitely not Kathi Yancey. No.

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: So other than Yancey...um, for me definitely Linda Adler-Kassner, um, in terms of composition. And, um, also I would say Ann Blakeslee in professional writing. I did my masters work in looking at, um, starting to look at transfer between college and the workplace, and she does a lot of

workplace writing and writing for engineering and that kind of thing. So, um, that... Anne Blakeslee and Dorothy Windsor, actually, I read a lot of that kind of thing. And later on, I became more comp focused. And, you know, Kathi and, uh, other people.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: Yeah, so I think mine probably cluster a little bit by school early on. So I was at NC State, and Michael Carter obviously for the course...um, Susan Miller Cochran who was the WPA and Nancy Penrose as well. And then I had two courses: one, kind of a TA training thing and, uh, one literacy course with Chris Anson. And so, um, those folks were sort of my introduction to the field. Um, and then, when I was here, I think, um, certainly Kathi. Probably a cluster of folks in literacy. So, um, folks like Deborah Brandt, um, Brian Street, um, and the Graffs, probably. Like Harvey Graff and Gerald Graff. Um, and then, uh... and then Gunther Kress. So, when his book came out on multimodality, um, it was one of the...I mean I was sort of, you know, like "Damn it! I wanted to write that book!" It was one of things where you sort of like have all these things and you're like "Oh, I also thought all of this! And I didn't articulate it very...to myself or to anyone else, which is why it's his book and not my book."

(Laughter)

DAVIS: But, um...

TACZAK: And he's kind of got a career that's bit older than yours.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: Yeah, cause he was also doing it before I thought of it, really. But he actually came here as well. So when I was...right around the time I was choosing a dissertation and I read the book, he came here and I thought like "Yeah, yeah, these are sort of my interests as well." So, probably those three clusters of...

TACZAK: He's such a fun guy too.

DAVIS: He is! We actually went out drinking. So here's a good story I'll tell very quickly. So he came here, and I asked if I could, um, drive him around. And so I drove him back to the hotel, um, to the Doubletree after his visit. And he...we had been talking about his book and his next project or whatever, and he was like "I would invite you to join me for a beer at the hotel lobby. But I know that Americans are really uptight about drinking and driving." And I was like "Noooo! It's fine."

(Laughter)

DAVIS: So we actually ended up sitting there for like 3 hours and like drinking beers in the lobby of the Doubletree hotel and like chatting. And he actually asked me at one point...he had to write a letter to David Cameron, uh, the prime minister, um, because of some award he had gotten...it was kind of a thank you letter, but also "Here's what I think about education in the UK." And that was one of his like ice breaker questions: he's like "What would you write to David Cameron?"

(Laughter)

DAVIS: I was like "I have no idea!"

ROBERTSON: What would you write to David Cameron?

DAVIS: Leave me alone. I don't know.

(Laughter)

JN: That's our eighth question, so...

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: Remember when Gunter was here and he, um--"Gunter," like he's my pal--um, Kara was coughing up a storm, and he tossed her some cough drops. He was speaking to us...

JN: I remember that. I was there.

ROBERTSON: Tosses out cough drops

TACZAK: Do you really? That's so embarrassing.

ROBERTSON: Yes, he was great.

TACZAK: But, I kept those cough drops forever.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: You got them signed?

(Laughter)

JN: I remember he made a joke cause they were Ricolos...

ROBERTSON: That's right!

TACZAK: Yes!

ROBERTSON: You were there.

(Laughter)

TACZAK: That's so embarrassing!

ROBERTSON: That's funny!

TACZAK: I hope that's not how he remembers me too. Um, so for me, I... I feel like I've been influenced outside of Rhet/Comp a lot, because of my way in. Um, and just in terms of my pedagogy, my teaching, like, when I... so I always knew that I wanted to be a professor, and I was trying figure out like what in, and when I applied for my masters program, I had had this one major professor who was a horrible teacher. And so, I made a decision when I was gonna go to grad school for my masters to be an education...for it to be in education...cause I never wanted to be a bad teacher. And this person was like so bad, it was like really influential in like how I teach now. Um, and I won't say his or her name (Laughter) so if they ever listen to it, they're like "Oh, I had such a good impact on you." But then, honestly, like Bill Thelan was a huge impact on me, because he taught me about critical pedagogy and that was like my first big research interest; it was my first research project. My first article was on, um,

well kind of like a response to critical pedagogy, but a little more complicated than that. But, so definitely Thelan, and then honestly I would be lying if I didn't say Kathi's been probably the biggest influence on... my life. (Laughter) Don't tell her I said that.

ROBERTSON: I know, that's why I didn't say it.

(Laughter)

TACZAK: I'd like to retract that. No, yeah, Kathi's been really influential on just like everything from teaching to, like, how I create assignments. She's like such a smart person you wanna try and emulate, like, what helps make her such a successful scholar, and such a successful teacher, so... um, she's probably my top... top one. But the other thing is, like, education has influenced me so much, so there's just a lot of people that I look to and...like Dewey. Like I feel like I read Dewey when I was like 22 and that was like *it*. I started like thinking about reflection then. And Donald Schon is not like... he's from education too, so, um... yeah. Those people.

WORKMAN: So, it's similar a similar answer in terms of Yancey. That's sort of the first thing that I... that like clicked with me, I think, when I was studying comp was her... a chapter from her book on reflection, and... I guess from there I sort of found Kara, so I guess can list her as one of my influences.

TACZAK: Awwww! You all heard that, right?!?

ROBERTSON: I didn't hear that at all. I heard nothing.

(Laughter)

TACZAK: I feel like the Grinch, but my head just grew.

(Laughter)

WORKMAN: The librarian at U Maine...I was like "I need to see this dissertation", and he like wrote you and then wrote me back and I was like "Oh my god! This is so exciting!" Um, so, that I mean, and Dylan in the sense of working with him. He really introduced me to a lot of the work in composition and helped me to understand how disciplines work and that was like a critical... not a critical incident, but...

ROBERTSON: Well, it would have been...

WORKMAN: Yeah, I wasn't like...no I was on (inaudible).

(Laughter)

TACZAK: Thank goodness for Dylan!

WORKMAN: And then too Elizabeth Wardle's work on transfer and writing assessment, I think was really...that was another one. Like the article that she did with Kevin Roozen on ecological models of assessment...that was the place where I saw sort of transfer and reflection and writing assessment coming together, um, and that made me super excited to start working here.

DAVIS: I wonder, did you guys have similar situations where you contacted somebody in the field, and their, like, openness sort of drew you in?

ROBERTSON: This is funny. So, in my masters program we had to study a scholar in the field in a class, right, and so we picked out of a hat and I got Yancey.

TACZAK: No you didn't!

ROBERTSON: I did!

TACZAK: I didn't know this!

ROBERTSON: So... I emailed her...this is my first year...it was before I even thought about going for a PhD, let alone coming here. So then I remember, like, in class...we all came to class that night—we're first year masters students—and we all come to class and we're all like "Wow, this scholar she's really nice!" You know, and somebody had Peter Elbow, and he just never answered his email for like a week.

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: But everybody else was like "Oh! She was really nice" or "So and so was nice" and Peter Elbow did answer, it just took a while. So we all came to class and talking about these scholars that we had interviewed and I'm like "Yeah, Kathi Yancey she was great!" You know like she answered these questions. She gave me all this information. She said I could call her. She was so helpful. I can't believe it.

DAVIS: I had one too!

ROBERTSON: Did you?

DAVIS: Yeah, I did my very first project was on the like Literature/Comp debate...Tate and Lindemann

ROBERTSON/TACZAK: Oh! Yeah!

DAVIS: And I was at NC State, and Erica Lindemann's at UNC. So I just wrote her, and I actually asked her when her office hours were, like "Could I stop in?" And, like, you know, I said I have these questions and I'd be happy to travel over to Chapel Hill and stop in. And she wrote me back like, relatively quickly, like "No reason to come by. I'm happy to answer these questions." And then she wrote out answers and she said, like, you know there might be a couple of newer things that I've written, or that other people have written, that you're not aware of, I attached them.

ROBERTSON: She's so sweet.

DAVIS: Yeah! So, that was like the first time I wrote somebody, and it was the same experience like they also said "Yeah, yeah. Happy to help!"

TACZAK: (inaudible)

(Laughter)

AW: This might give you another opportunity then, um, without that experience, what life experiences have shaped your thinking?

TACZAK: In Rhet/Comp or life?

AW: However you choose to answer it.

ROBERTSON: Isn't Rhet/Comp our life, though?

GROUP: Yes! Uh huh!

ROBERTSON: So, I'll go back to my original point about the career that I had before, which was Marketing and Public Relations, which is really similar. You know, you use the principals of rhetoric really in that career, so, um, all of my... and actually my undergrad work was journalism, so those things I guess have influenced... They're not the same, but they're similar enough, and they have really influenced how I look at the Rhet/Comp work that I do, like, I probably wouldn't be interested in transfer, for example, if it wasn't for my experience in the corporate world, and seeing that... That's how I got interested actually, was that people we would hire, right out of like a public relations program, like a degree in public relations, would not be able to write very well in the environment they were going into. Mostly because they didn't understand the rhetorical situation. Um, but that's what got... that's what sort of prompted me to be interested in transfer in the first place, back in my masters program, so I would say that that career really... had me thinking about life in a larger way that made me not necessarily get into Rhet/Comp, but once I was in it, to focus in the ways that I did.

DAVIS: I think mine are probably... So, I grew up in a... um, a household where like books and literacy were really important. Um, and, so like it was very much... the narrative of, like, my schooling and my family was, you know you have to read and write to get ahead, if you don't words you look 'em up, you know. And I participated in like Book It and all these other sort of, like, pro-reading/writing...

TACZAK: I remember that!

DAVIS: You remember! You used to get...

DAVIS/TACZAK: A FREE PIZZA! Just for lying about having read books. It's an incredible program.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: So... um, but it was also a little bit of a complex situation. So, you know I kind of took to this like reading and writing thing. And then, I was telling them yesterday, my mom had several books banned from our middle school library, because I read them and then I told her what was in them, and then she was like "This is wildly inappropriate for middle schoolers," or whatever.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: And so there were times when like the class read one book and I read a different book off on my own. Or, I started reading a book and didn't get to finish, cause then the librarian took it away or whatever...

(Laughter)

DAVIS: Yeah! So, that was sort of early on. Um, and then the... we had a home computer--my mom was a computer programmer--so we had a home computer, I think relatively early. And that sort of, you know, took off in another direction. That became pretty important to me. And then the last one was sort of similar to Liane's. So I worked, uh, in Germany as a technical translator, and I translated these train documents from German into English, so that the Chinese engineers could translate them from English into Chinese, and then build trains. Um...

ROBERTSON: That's scary.

DAVIS: Even though I didn't know anything about trains--at least to start.

ROBERTSON: This is why I'm scared...

DAVIS: Yeah! So if we hear about Chinese train accidents, it's not my fault.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: Um... and, uh, and then I just found it a very interesting kind of experience and I'd never done that kind of writing before. Um, it wasn't in the same as Liane described, like I knew it wasn't for me...

ROBERTSON: It's technical...

DAVIS: For like a lifelong kind of project. But it was a very particular kind of work that I thought like "Oh, you could totally make a living doing this, and a pretty good one. If you actually liked it." Um, and so that was another, kind of, veering off in a new direction for me.

TACZAK: For me it's a... it's kind of, um, a little cliché. So I'm a people person. I have a twin brother and because of that, it really has shaped like who I am as a person. So... he made me, like, a very social person, but he also made it so... I constantly feel the need to help people and like help them become... or what I would have perceived as like a 15-18 year old successful. Cause I was constantly trying to make sure he was successful alongside me. He probably resents that a lot.

(Laughter)

TACZAK: Cause then when we went to college together for the first three years, and that followed us into college, and I was constantly like... You know I was the kid where I'd be like "Hey Dave. What'd you get on your test? I got a 100." and like hold it up in front of the class. And he'd be like "Sis..." Um, so, my family has really impacted, like, who I am, which trickles into how I teach and stuff. So the fact that I'm social and a people person, really wanna, like, help, ya know, students succeed, that comes from like my family, um, but at the same time, like, my mom has probably been my biggest influence because she's always taught us, like me and my brothers to be like hyper unique. So I mean, from the way I dress to the way I like talk and like tell stories, it can be perceived as different. And like, ya know once or twice someone has told me, like if I wanna be a member of the academy, I need to stop standing on the peripheral and be on the inside. And like, my mom taught to stand on the peripheral and be proud of it, so I want to keep standing there. Um, so, yeah, I think like the way that I manage a classroom and the way that I just kinda respond to everything directly stems from like my relationship with my family and particularly my mom. So, my sassy personality definitely comes from her.

ROBERTSON: Is that what that is?

(Laughter)

TACZAK: Didn't you know that?

WORKMAN: Um, I think that I've... this is more I guess like the school setting, but, teaching and responding to students' portfolios...like having to do a standardized portfolio assessment was something that really I think has had an impact on me because, um, I could see like things students were doing that

weren't being appreciated by like the assessment. And the reflection as well, I saw a lot of discrepancies between what we were saying as writing teachers and then what we were being asked to assess and, um,...I started doing that whenever I was a Lit student and I think that was another thing that sort of, like, got me interested in the field. I mean, most of the Lit students didn't care about assessment, so it really wasn't like a place where I could be at home.

ROBERTSON: Steered you over.

JN: Okay so uh changing gears a little bit from influences to kind of where you are now, uh, this next question is which classes are you teaching, which are your favorite, and why?

ROBERTSON: Um, so I teach...Technical Writing is probably my favorite to teach right now. I get to teach at both graduate and undergraduate levels, and it's part of my research, which maybe makes me a little more invested in it. So I've adapted our Teaching For Transfer model to technical writing course for our research right now, um, and that's really fun, and it also, it's sort of right in my wheelhouse in terms of professional experience so I feel that the content is something I have real-world experience in, which is great in the classroom to share that, right? So it's enjoyable. Um, I'm also teaching editing, uh, writing and editing for like, the magazine market, that kind of course, and like, grammar and style, which would probably be my least favorite, but the students appreciate that. And, just some other, sort of, academic, sort of general writing. We have a critical writing course and first year writing occasionally I'll teach, um, so...so I'm teaching all sort of writing in different ways. And um, you know, I think that technical writing is probably my favorite but I would love...I would love to be, well I'm going to but, but I would love to be developing some other upper division courses and teaching those in the next few years...more digital, more, um, more rhetorical, actually, more theoretical, that would be where I'd like to go. Does that--is that the question?

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: Bit of a tangent.

DAVIS: I think um, uh, I've taught like 9 or 10 courses in my first like 3 and a half years, so, the range has been really like, crazy, from a graduate tutoring courses, to nonfiction, to digital culture, and, um, a lot of stuff in between those poles. And I think my favorite...I mean, there's a course I teach called Perspectives on Literacy that I really like. It's an upper-level undergraduate course, um, and it's full of... it's sort of half full of English majors and half full of, um, teacher...future teachers. And it's a service learning course so they actually like...we do a lot of reading and writing together, but they go out as one of their majors assignments and volunteer or do practicum or do whatever and bring it back. I really like that course. Um, and the others one's probably Teaching English with Technology, which is a graduate course for us, um, and it's often also partly English majors and part people getting MA's in education. Um, those are both really fun. Although I often sometimes wonder if the courses that I like teaching are the ones that I'm actually best at teaching. I'm not so sure they match up, you know? Like, I feel like sometimes in the digital culture class I'm like "I'm having a blast in here" and the end of the semester if I ask them like "So, you know, what is a network and why is it important for textuality" they're just kinda like "Oh yeah, I don't know" like "Yeah, that was really cool when you showed us that one thing," so, yeah, I don't know if they overlap as much. But those are my favorites

TACZAK: So at the University of Denver, I, it's uh, independent writing program, so I teach mostly first year writing courses, we just had a minor approved so we're going to have a minor in rhetoric and writing, although I don't think that's what it's called. Right? I think it's called writing in the, uh, oh...

(Laughter)

DAVIS: You can put brackets "inaudible."

TACZAK: It's a rhetoric and writing course...um, so I will be teaching in the minor. I literally just got an email that says in the fall I'm going to teach theories of writing, which is kind of fun. Um, so I don't know what that's going to look like because it's not supposed to be like, hyper Rhet/Comp-y. It's supposed to be like theories of writing more generally, if that makes sense, so like, all the way back to the ancients if I want to...less like Deborah Brandt, more like, um, across the disciplines I think. So, I actually really do like teaching first year writing. I feel like a lot of people don't really enjoy it, but I like teaching first year writing because, um, because I like working with first year students and I like the curriculum that I use. I don't know why (Laughter). And I teach a first year seminar course which is really fun on feminism and romance, and so I always get a lot of really, um, sassy, feisty women in that class which is kind of cool. And then, I just taught an honors seminar in the fall, and it was on reflection. It was on reflection across the disciplines, and it was so fun. And this is one time that I think that fun and like teaching it well matched up, um, so, it's probably been one of my favorite classes I've ever taught. It was just...I had honors students, and I had upper level honors student, and they just responded really...they did anything I asked them to do from like going out to the middle of the Green and laying down and being silent while people walked over top of them, and around them, to like, taking a meditation class, to like drawing multiple things, so...if you know honors students at DU, they don't always respond well to the like different types of teaching methods. They're like "Tell me what you want me to do, tell me how to do it, tell me when it's due." So they were just so enthusiastic, and I don't know.

DAVIS: I feel like you're really good at that; every time we talk you're like "I have a new course, it's on..." Like this time, "I have a course coming up on batman."

TACZAK: I'm also teaching a course this summer on batman through the ages, so that will be really fun I think. I know...I just like trying to...It goes back to what I said about my mom. She's always pushing us to think...think outside the box. Don't be like everybody else. I think that worked really well, and sometimes, for me, it's better than others. It depends like whose looking at me I guess.

WORKMAN: I teach one class, sooo...I, uh, but I do...I do like it. I do like teaching our second year comp in this case. Um, I enjoy 2135, and I might be one of the few who does. Um, and I guess I taught the pedagogy course over the summer, or co-taught, and um, that was a really interesting experience. I worked with graduate students before, but not...more as like a mentor and less as, like, being involved in like teaching and responding. So I really, liked, I guess the opportunity to talk about composition theory with people who are more invested in it than perhaps sometimes first-year students are, um, yeah.

JN: So, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask a follow up question. Um, so, uh, I'm just curious to know when you were teaching at FSU, uh, what was your favorite course?

TACZAK: WEPO.

DAVIS: WEPO.

TACZAK: For sure. It was...and we kinda got to help design the whole WEPO course. I...Liane, was it you and I that did the syllabus together and like created the base?

DAVIS: You guys did that one and we did rhetoric.

TACZAK: You did Rhetoric, yeah. That was just fun

ROBERTSON: It was fun to develop it and see it through.

TACZAK: And see it through, yeah

ROBERTSON: I have to say, though, my favorite was first-year writing. I think because like right now, I feel like I've done different things in first year writing. I feel like I have a more foundation....more of a foundation of what that means for me as a teacher and what it should mean for students, but, while I was at FSU, I was still sort of working that out. And I really was grateful to have a chance to teach a lot of it in different types of contexts across campus, like, in computers, not, with different...summer students, student athletes, you know, all kinds of different student types. So I was...I really enjoyed that more here. Even though I did enjoy the WEPO course as well, um, it just seemed like there was a particular type of student in that class...wasn't as, uh, broad a spectrum, as, um, as you got, in first-year. I still like first-year writing actually, but here, I really enjoyed teaching it.

TACZAK: I think too, for like our research purposes, like--

ROBERTSON: Right we were teaching our curriculum model.

TACZAK: If we didn't enjoy first year writing, we'd have a problem. But I think maybe, more importantly, what's really interesting about first year writing is we get to see how important it is, what we are teaching students. Like, I think that's what gets lost a lot of times in first year writing is like, just teach whatever we want because you know what it needs to be sexy. It needs to be cool. I'm gonna teach what I like, whatever. But I feel like we have such a unique opportunity that you don't get in any other context.

ROBERTSON: Yeah, and I feel like students really appreciate the direction instead of hey "Let's write about this because it's fun. This is a great theme." I feel like they really appreciate the chance to understand what's gonna help them in other writing across college, right? And, or beyond it. Even if they don't articulate that or they don't really understand why it's helpful, by the end of a good, solid course in first year writing, that's actually about writing, I think they really get that sense that "Okay, I...I feel prepared now to go out and conquer the world."

TACZAK: And I have tons of like handwritten notes and like emails from students like "Wow I can really see how this course..." either "already see how it's benefitting my writing habits", or "I can already see how I use that knowledge in other ways," and that to me is like...I like save every had written note that I get, every like email. So on days where I'm like "I suck at teaching and hate the world," that's when I'm like, "You know we do have an opportunity to make a difference."

ROBERTSON: And sometimes it's just more rewarding to work with the freshman students. First-year students are different and so...

TACZAK: They can be more eager in some ways.

ROBERTSON: Yeah, they can be, yeah, sometimes. Anyway, I enjoyed that.

TM: I've got the sexy question, which is "What's on your night stand?"

ROBERTSON: My kindle. In my kindle...

TACZAK: Not Sexy.

ROBERTSON: Definitely not sexy. Probably...and my bite guard is on the...

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: Talk about not sexy. In my kindle is the, um, not the newest, but a Barbara Kingsolver. I love her work, and I've been reading a lot of it lately, but I'm reading *The Bean Trees* right now and it's really enjoyable. And then I have some like, sort of field related, work related stuff. Like I have a Steven Johnson thing... "The Invention of Error," and I have some other things like, I kind of go back and forth, like sometimes I just want some really great fiction, sometimes I want something more work related. But probably not very often. Anyway.

DAVIS: So, I was saying for my...the stuff I'm actually reading makes me sound very boring, um I think I have Ellen Carillo's book on transfer and reading, and Ian Bogost's work on persuasive games, which are both very like, academic books. Um, recently I got into like reading books by people that I actually know, so I read a book of David Kirby's poems. I actually don't know him that well, but he's here, and I've met him. Um, I read Kent Wascom's second novel, who's an MFA grad from here.

ROBERTSON: Awesome writer.

DAVIS: Yeah he really is fantastic, and I enjoyed it a lot. And I read Michael Garriga's book, uh, hi...his *Duels* book. So that's been sort of fun, but I would say in terms of like "What are you reading right now?" it's been, um, following Ta-nahesi Coates...following his, um uh, work on the black family, the work on reparations, the stuff from *Between the World and Me*, which is unbelievable, and then the sort of pushback from all other sort of directions. Uh, so it's been occupying my mind, even though it's mostly digital and not on my night stand.

TACZAK: Well I have to separate my like work life and my life life, so I actually...

DAVIS: Tell me how! Teach me!

TACZAK: I don't have any scholarly books on my night stand, that's how. Um, I and I feel like I should say that I do because I'm a scholar but, um, I don't. And I, I literally have like People Style sitting on my nightstand, which would drive Kathi crazy, but I do. I have a subscription. Um, but, I am constantly reading different things. So I helped create at DU in the writing program a guilty pleasures book club and we try and meet once a month and just read different things a person picks, and so, I'm trying to like...most recently I just read like, a book by Jayne Ann Krentz, who tends to be like a suspense romance novelist, and I just read a book series, a young adult book series, on Catherine the Great. So it kind of looks at...if you know anything about Catherine the Great she had like multiple lovers at various times—sometimes they overlapped and sometimes they didn't, but it was a really interesting—I like historical stuff, and I actually enjoy historical romance. I'm not afraid to admit that. Also would drive Kathi crazy. Yeah, so, that was a really good book series. Obviously not 100% authentic, like it wasn't true to life, but it was kind of fun to see Catherine the Great's love interests. And then, what's the one, I just finished another book on the way here, what was it?

ROBERTSON: I'm guessing Catherine the Great did not have a bite guard on her night stand.

TACZAK: No, probably not. Um, Well, I just read this series by um, who wrote Harry Potter--

ALL: J.K. Rowling.

TACZAK: Her series about Robert, the guy that's like an ex-military, um, P.I. guy. It's under the name, uh penname, Robert like Galbraith, or something like that. I read that series which was really good.

WORKMAN: Um, I have a stack of things because I do different things depending on my mood, and sort of a mixture of scholarly and not scholarly. Um, so I've been reading Johanna Drucker's book *Graphesis*. And, um. Let's see...Thomas Bernhard? Uh, one of his novels, *Woodcutters*. Um. He's this Austrian novelist who writes—uh, most of the books are like just one par—the whole thing is a paragraph, it's like...and it's usually like, um, it's a narrator who is like one step removed from the story, so it's always coming from, it's like filtered through other people. And then Joanna Russ has this book, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* that I've been reading and that's really interesting. She talks about pretty much what it sounds like. All the different ways over time that women's writing has been like discounted, or, um, like not brought into the canon.

AW: So back to the scholarly stuff, what do you think is the most important question students in Rhet/Comp should be considering today?

DAVIS: Ooh, good question.

ROBERTSON: The most...probably...um...oh, like...I think where is the field of Writing Studies or Rhet/Comp going? And like, how do we define it as a discipline, or emerging discipline? What do we want to be? I don't think that's clear; I think there's...I think there are many, um...points of view. Particularly around first year writing, but not just around first year writing. But, you know, who are we, in this discipline, and what are we—what do we believe about ourselves and where do we see ourselves in the academy. We're constantly fighting for sort of...not recognition, but, um, I don't know, street cred out there in the academy, right? Like. So, I...I think that um the question though...the reason that I think that the issue is out there is because we ourselves don't articulate well who we are as a discipline. Um, to outsiders. So I think that we need to figure out who we are and what we want to articulate about ourselves. And then begin to do it. But that question would be really, “Who are we as a discipline,” I think.

DAVIS: So I—this is always a dangerous question because if you don't say something that's related to your own research, then the question is like, well what are you doing then? (Laughter)

ROBERTSON: Your future research.

DAVIS: Right? Yeah. Yeah. I also, I have to say, I don't really feel qualified to answer this. I mean, I feel like there's so many good possible questions that people could take up, um, that there's not really one. I agree with Liane, that there...I think this is probably an upcoming question, though, about like where the field's going, so I'll leave that part. Um, but about its sort of spreading, and the diffuseness of the moment, I guess. But I...I think...I think um it would be nice if we paid a lot of attention to what writing's actually like in the world. Um, we pay a lot of attention to what writing's like in the classroom, and especially in first year writing classrooms, and what it should look like, and why--and we have some good reasons for doing that and continuing to do it, but I...I find myself more and more interested in the perspective that sort of schools don't have any special purchase on what literacy is, how people value it...or that it's one of, um, a number of institutions that has a purchase on, um, those things and how it's practiced. So I...I find myself interested in real world writing, as it...even though I don't like the term real world. Actually, that would be a good question. How else can we never say “real world” again? And find a better term for writing.

ROBERTSON: 'Cause I'm always using air quotes when I say that.

Multiple: Yeah!

DAVIS: For writing as it circulates, like, into and outside of schools.

ROBERTSON: That's a great question. Yeah.

TACZAK: Yeah, I don't know, I mean, I kinda agree with Liane, and I think it's probably because we're writing something on this right now, but it's so hard to define ourselves as a discipline. And I think we struggle with what actually that looks like and what that means and what we want it to mean. And so that's kind of where I'm at right now, is like...cause I...I mean, I just had this conversation with different people, in quote "Rhet/Comp," but like, coming from different backgrounds, and it's like no one knows exactly how to respond to that question. And we're a new field, but we have never...I feel like we have some growing pains still, even though we've been around for what like sixty, seventy years or so. I don't know. I just feel like that's a really important question. Going forward, I don't...I mean, kinda to me like how can we answer that question if we haven't first answered like, who are we as a discipline? What does that mean? Because it should be like writing and rhetoric, but like it's not always.

ROBERTSON: And that goes back to Matt's question, too, about what writing is in the world, because I think we need to define ourselves more broadly now than just the Rhetoric and Composition discipline. Because you bring up a really great point, Matt, about how it's a...it's a, um, it's not just about...it's not just the academy that owns writing. Yes. Exactly. So who are we in the broader scope of things?

TACZAK: Well, yeah, and like what does that mean for when you hear the "Rhet/Comp undergraduate major"; what does that mean?

ROBERTSON: Yeah, exactly.

TACZAK: It means something different at like every school.

ROBERTSON: Yeah, it does. Yeah.

TACZAK: And like what are we like preparing those students to do for a job.

ROBERTSON: Yeah.

TACZAK: Could be like any number of things, depending on where and their curriculum.

WORKMAN: Yeah, so related to that, I would say, um, the focus that's starting to happen on everyday writing I think is important, um, and so thinking about what writers are doing across con...like in "real world" contexts, as you put it, um, like outside of institutions as well. And I guess related to that I would say the focus...I mean I guess there is like a...there has been for a while a move to make more meaningful writing assessments. But I would say like related to, um, like TFT or trying to capture I think about the writing that students are doing across settings.

JN: So you all kind of foreshadowed this last question a bit, um, but where do you see the field of Rhet/Comp, or Literacy Studies writ large...where do you see us heading now? Or maybe where do you want to see us heading?

ROBERTSON: Mm, I would say...I would like to see it heading toward a more prominent role across the disciplines. And I think we're...we're a field that can lead a more interdisciplinary approach to things, and I think that's where higher ed is sort of headed, or...or in some ways is headed, and I think that's

beneficial to students. Um, I think academia sort of operates in these silos...or has, historically, and I don't think that's really working out very well anymore. There's sort of a new model, you know, with retention issues, and there's sort of a new model of how students look at what they're getting out of their education. I think that we, uh, are sort of poised because we have...I mean, we have the WAC movement. We are strong with assessment. We have all these tools, if you will, these sub-expertise areas...or sub-areas of expertise? Yeah. Um. Because I'm very articulate! (Laughter) We have all these sub areas that we can sort of lead in, and it makes sense for us to take that on, I think. I would like us to be more cross-disciplinary and more interdisciplinary, if you will, um, in many ways. There's so many.

TACZAK: Can you explain that a little bit?

ROBERTSON: Oh geez, really?

(Laughter)

DAVIS: It's a prelim meeting. Tell me more about that.

TACZAK: Only because, so like going back to what you first said in the question before.

ROBERTSON: So let me give you an example. Would that help? So I think that people in Rhet/Comp, you know who have some background in assessment, in terms of writing assessment, could be very influential and beneficial in terms of helping with assessment across...like so say your university has a new gen-ed program or something. Right? So we could lead the way in terms of, um, helping to develop assessment for that, or for um--

TACZAK: Like, we should be the ones helping create like tests for like K through 12 in some ways or at least like being called in to bring some expertise. We're the ones that know--

ROBERTSON: Well, I wasn't thinking that...that's not what I meant, but that's a good point too. I was thinking more just at the college level, but that's a really valid point as well. But I'm thinking more of in terms of too that, um, there's more of a reporting responsibility. Like, I'm on the...um, you know our school is under Middle State's Accreditation review, and I'm on that team now, at our college; there's so much that goes into that reporting that's really interesting, but also a little bit scary. (Laughter) So I'm...I'm sort of sensing a new direction and...not a new direction, just more of the, um, accountability that's going to be necessary with changing enrollments and retention issues in the future, and I just think that, you know, if we as a field don't sort of step up and take on that interdisciplinary leadership, that others will, and we'll be less poised to remain a vibrant, strong field, I think, if that makes sense.

TACZAK: Yeah, I was just like confused. I thought you meant like we needed to have more like, people of different disciplines in our field. I was going to be like "HAHAHAHA did you just say it, like--?"

ROBERTSON: No, no. Nope. That's not what I...thank you for making sure I was clear on that.

TACZAK: You're welcome.

DAVIS: I think I'm...I think I'm with Liane...well, I feel like the answer if you're talking about research directions, like where would the field go in terms of research, and how would it think of itself, you get one kind of answer. I think Liane's probably right, this sort of like...sort of a broadness, sort of a broad influence and broadness of interest and expertise without being too diffuse, um, but...I don't know I was just thinking you know I am reasonably persuaded the main exigence for the field is not...doesn't have to do with writing at all. Like, basically, the neo-liberalization of education, uh, which, to my mind is sort of

the idea...the pervasive idea that both government and education should be run like a business, um, with a sort of market mentality, um, is the kind of thing that we could very well orient ourselves towards and, um, a lot of other people too. And it would be a moment for a kind of solidarity across fields to take on this kind of pervasive cultural, um, assumption that I think is probably in error. Um...but, and that's...I don't know. I mean it would be interesting for me to think about: what would the field think of itself if we...if we engaged with that as opposed to engaging...even though I mean I agree with Liane about how can we do WAC and WID better and more...

ROBERTSON: Well, I kind of meant what you just said. You said it so much better than I did; you articulated it well. But a little of that as well.

DAVIS: I can't connect the two, in my head.

ROBERTSON: I see them as connected.

TACZAK: You do that.

DAVIS: You should do that afterwards.

ROBERTSON: Okay. I'll do it afterwards.

TACZAK: I meant now.

ROBERTSON: No, I'll do it after.

DAVIS: What do you think, Erin?

TACZAK: Oh, did I get skipped?

ROBERTSON: Yeah.

DAVIS: Oh, I thought that was your thing.

TACZAK: No, you can skip me.

DAVIS: I thought you were piggy-backing Liane.

TACZAK: Well, I mean, now I feel like I have to. Yes, I agree with Liane.

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: Everyone does.

WORKMAN: I was going to say...

TACZAK: I guess if I were to add anything to it I think it's just something which his argument touched on...twenty first century writing, multi-modality, um, what's the...the everyday writing stuff. There's just so much there, and I don't think we wholly understand what the reality of all that writing actually means and how we can kind of add it into like our courses so it does mean something. Cause too often I feel like our students don't understand that they're actually writing, and they write all the time, um, so, plus like who knows like in ten years what kind of technologies we're going to be faced with? I have a student right

now in one of my classes looking at, um, AI and finance, and it's kind of crazy, um, so I mean...I can only imagine what that could look like for writing in ten, fifteen years. So, I would...that's what I'd add.

WORKMAN: I think I would just piggy back off what's already been said, um, so yeah. Yeah.

DAVIS: I also ask myself a lot, uh, how all of us who study rhetoric can be quite so bad at addressing the problem of, um, how our colleagues view or don't view or view through some sort of fun-house mirror what it is that we do. It seems...I mean, it just baffles me. I mean this is literally a question I can't answer, never mind anybody else, but it continues to baffle me that...well, I'll take my institution for example, because I actually like it a lot, um, and I like my colleagues a lot, and I like my job a lot. But, um, they've had senior composition folks for about thirty years or so, um and still people regularly ask me like "What is it exactly that you guys do in composition?" Like how could we be *so bad* at addressing that rhetorical problem?

TACZAK: I think it goes back to that question "Who are we as a discipline?"

DAVIS: But we seem to know, kind of--

ROBERTSON: No, we don't, I don't think. Nooo, I don't think we do.

DAVIS: Well, I know. I should write that...

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: You might know who you think we are, but someone else's--

TACZAK: But that's like Matt Davis's view, and then we have--

DAVIS: But that's an even worse challenge! We can't even get amongst ourselves--

ROBERTSON: That's what we're saying. That's the big issue, I think. Is that we can't.

JN: Do you think if we followed your idea and went even more interdisciplinary that it would be even harder to map out?

ROBERTSON: Probably. I'm not saying that comes first, by any means. I'm saying...that...that...well, would that be the chicken or the egg is the ultimate question. But that would be...that would be I think more difficult as you say because--

TACZAK: I think we would have to define ourselves first. Because it's kind of like...I think a lot of us think we know who we think we are as a field or a discipline--

ROBERTSON: That's exactly--

TACZAK: If other audiences can't define us, that suggests an issue, I think.

DAVIS: "Suggests."

TACZAK: I mean, yeah.

ROBERTSON: Yeah, that's a huge issue.

WORKMAN: I think that kind of interdisciplinary work could also be a good way to help people...

TACZAK: ...understand, yeah. I think, I still think it's such a funny question to hear across campus: "What *do* you teach in first year writing?"

ROBERTSON: Well, because some...so many different options that have been taught.

TACZAK: That's the problem. There are so many different ways--

ROBERTSON: People hear about different things. Like...like a course on Batman, versus, uh--

TACZAK: That's not...that...let the record hear that is not a first year writing course that Kara Taczak is teaching.

ROBERTSON: Right. But a course on vampires, then, or...or, whatever the case is. A course about something other than writing versus of a course about literature or a course about...There are so many different ways first year writing is taught that it's no wonder people outside of our discipline have a perspective that is so across the board.

TACZAK: Or very singular like we should be teaching grammar and grammar al--

ROBERTSON: Because they think writing can be generalized. Which we also don't do a good job of communicating outwardly. We don't...I think the perceptions about what we teach are tied to the perceptions about what writing is, inherently, and that is not understood in the same way by everyone.

TACZAK: Yeah, I always think of it like if you look at biology or like physics, it's so much easier to define them as a...as a field and a discipline, because we could write out exactly what that looks like, but I think if you ask, maybe not the people in this room, um, what Rhet/Comp is you could get any number of responses.

ROBERTSON: Glad you asked that question.

TACZAK: Someday, when we're all running things, it will all look a lot different.

ROBERTSON: Does anybody run things?

DAVIS: I doubt it.

ROBERTSON: Nobody runs things, not really.

DAVIS: Not that I can tell. Things run me.

TACZAK: Okay, I'll run things.

(Laughter)

ROBERTSON: Okay, Donald Trump.

(Laughter)

DAVIS: Well, that was easy. I'll do the discipline thing. You do the running of the things. We pretty much solves all our problems. Anything else? Yeah? Campaign finance reform? Balancing the budget? We could get something done here.

ROBERTSON: Drowning the bunnies.

(Laughter)

JN: So those are the end of our prepared questions. Do you guys have anything else you want to add, or follow up on, or? It's okay if you don't.

ROBERTSON: Please tell us you're editing this.

JN: Absolutely--

TM: No they don't.

JN: I'm going to edit out my comment saying that we're editing these.

TM: The transcripts will be editorialized, but the audio remains.

ROBERTSON: Oh god. Apologies.