## Chapter 5:

## Implications and Future Research

**Summary of the Argument**

Susan Baxter, an online studies scholar, effectively summarizes one of the main issues motivating the analysis conducted in this study:[1]

> New media scholars seem to be caught in a catch-22. Scholars who want to create new media—digital scholarship that uses the various modes afforded by new technology in rhetorically significant ways—run the risk of their work not being taken as serious scholarship because it differs from the traditional arguments other scholars are trained to read and interpret. However, when new media scholars stick to publishing simply scholarship about new media, with its print-based, linear, easily recognizable argument structure intact, it amounts to a tacit nod that somehow new media is inferior to print. (3)

Baxter's statement, written in 2007, demonstrates the challenge Computers and Writing scholars continue to face with respect to creating and publishing web-based online texts and submitting this nontraditional work as evidence of scholarly achievement for tenure, promotion, and review purposes.[2] The challenge, presented in chapter 1, is clear: How can work that does not resemble traditional scholarship be valued as such? More to the point, how far can texts diverge from traditionally accepted conventions and still be valued as scholarship? Tenure, promotion, and review committee participants and online journal decision makers are similarly challenged to justify why and how these new kinds of "texts" do or do not merit the label "scholarship" as well as the requisite credit for scholarly publication required for advancement in the field. Online

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[1] Baxter uses the term "new media scholarship" in this quote in the same way that this dissertation refers to "web-based scholarship," namely, discourse that uses the allowances of the medium in "rhetorically significant ways." However, the term "new media scholarship" used later in this chapter refers to texts that make meaning in non-textual ways.

[2] Baxter confirms Ball's assertion that a majority of the published online scholarship is "scholarship about new media texts" rather than "new media scholarship" in part due to scholars' concerns about the potential lack of acceptance of these more experimental texts ("Show, Not Tell" 404).

texts that take advantage of the unique allowances of the medium (e.g., multi-linear structural designs, formal enactment of content, contextualization, and incorporation of multi-media) are indeed new forms of rhetorical presentation that require new assessment approaches. This dissertation addresses the very need to define the characteristics of "online scholarship" in relation to traditional print scholarship—namely, how online texts fail to meet, meet, and/or extend the traditional conventions that signify scholarly work. To respond to this need, this study uses a tailored assessment tool that accounts for the differences between the print and online environments.

In chapter 2, I review several factors involved in the debate over the scholarly value of online work. The MLA and CCCC, two governing associations in the field of English Studies, point to the need for new assessment frameworks to account for work being constructed and presented in the online medium, particularly as scholars move toward online alternatives to traditional print publishing. However, their recommendations do not directly address how the significant differences between print and online writing affect the reception of such work as "scholarly." Additional research has considered the peer review process as an indicator of scholarly value regardless of the medium of publication. However, it has not suggested on what grounds peer reviewers determine the value of these new kinds of texts; these "standards" are implicit in the publishing decisions of editors and reviewers. Moreover, recent research focuses on assessment strategies for new media texts that clearly move beyond the relatively familiar form of the scholarly journal publication. While this work is valuable, it bypasses the necessary first step of understanding the important changes from print-based to web-based writing; further, it bypasses the next step of determining an initial set of standards prior to assessing the

substantial differences that occur in media-based work that makes meaning in non-textual and, therefore, much less recognizable ways.

In chapter 3, I identify the method I employed for developing an assessment tool that accounts for both the traditional and the hypertextual qualities found in webtexts. The assessment tool provides the framework for a rhetorical analysis of a select subset of *Kairos* webtexts, those that are labeled "best" for particular years. In chapter 4, I present the findings from the analysis, which renders a listing of these webtexts' common characteristics. In addition, I discuss a significant factor in legitimizing the unique forms of the text as scholarly; specifically, I suggest that a rhetorical value is added through the use of the allowances of the medium, and that this added-value distinguishes online texts as legitimate forms of presenting research that extend the genre-based definition and parameters of traditional scholarship. The results of this study contribute to a developing understanding of the scholarly nature of web-based journal publications. Additionally, the findings lead to the creation of a tentative heuristic that tenure, promotion, and review participants, journal decision makers, and scholars in general can use as guidance for constructing and assessing web-based journal publications. In the remainder of this chapter, I address in more detail the synthesis and implications of the findings, the significance of the study, and recommendations for future research.

**Synthesis of the Findings**

While the webtexts in this study appear to meet traditional scholarly conventions regarding content, they often move beyond traditional scholarly conventions regarding form by incorporating the unique allowances of the medium. Moreover, incorporation of the unique allowances appears to provide an added rhetorical value to the presentation of content in this environment. My findings begin to distinguish this form of online publication as a distinct and

transitional genre of scholarly writing in the subfield of Computers and Writing. The following four statements summarize the common characteristics of webtexts from which defining characteristics of online scholarship as a genre both related to and different from traditional print texts can be drawn.

## Summary Statements of the Findings

***These webtexts follow traditional scholarly conventions regarding content.*** My findings indicate that the webtexts analyzed for this study meet standards of content established by print-based texts. The majority of the webtexts incorporate clear goals in prominent, opening positions of the text; adequate preparation through contextualizing reviews of literature; appropriate methods based on a comparison to those employed in print-based scholarship; documentation to support main points of the text; and a generally formal, academic tone. The arguments in these texts tend to be logically supported and well-written with clear, field-specific prose. It is never the case, based on my analysis of this limited subset, that these webtexts subordinate significant content to technological bells and whistles—no matter how the webtexts may "look" upon first glance, particularly by readers new to the online environment. By extension, the unique forms that webtexts can assume as well as the more dependent relationship developed between form and content undoubtedly challenge the ease with which "what" is presented (content) can be assessed separately from "how" it is presented (form). In determining the characteristics that represent the current state of online scholarship, it would seem reasonable to assert, based on the findings, that in order for online texts to be valued as legitimate scholarship, the content must meet traditional standards. In other words, even the most technologically advanced forms of presentation will not be an adequate substitution for sound scholarly content.

***These webtexts diverge from traditional scholarly conventions regarding form.*** The most obvious divergence from traditional scholarly conventions occurs through the various forms that webtexts can assume based on the incorporation of unique allowances of the online environment. The ability to manipulate form directly influences the ways in which content is presented and received, and most obviously changes the traditional scholarly "look" of the text. Instead of a single, linear document with key sub-head divisions and consecutive, long paragraphs, content in the analyzed webtexts is often subdivided into short, discrete nodes. These nodes are connected in various ways and made accessible through links that offer multiple paths of movement through the text. Unquestionably, traditional notions of linearity and coherence are disrupted in this environment. However, my analysis indicates that the functioning of traditional conventions is often met in non-conventional ways through the rhetorical use of the allowances of the medium. For example, these webtexts enable the development of coherence by providing strategies of repetition and contextualization within nodes in order to help readers conceptualize the text as a unified argument. Additionally, the inclusion of visual and textual guides or webviews that show the extent of the web as well as the connections among main ideas provides another way in which readers can follow the argument. (Several other divergences are discussed below regarding emerging web-based conventions.) Arguably, these webtexts meet traditional goals of scholarship, albeit in non-traditional ways. An understanding of this point is necessary for web-based texts to be valued as legitimate scholarly contributions to the field.

***These webtexts incur an added value through the use of the online medium's allowances.*** Not only do the webtexts in this study meet several key traditional scholarly goals, but they often exceed those goals through the incorporation of the unique form-based allowances

of the medium. My findings indicate that four unique allowances are incorporated in a majority of these webtexts and that their incorporation provides an added value for enhancing the rhetorical effectiveness of the texts' main arguments. First, the ability to design a multi-linear structure enables authors to provide multiple paths and associations among content and concurrently allows readers ultimately to control the reception of information. Moreover, multi-linear designs create an enhanced potential for readers to discover additional meaning that emerges from the juxtaposition of certain nodes. Second, multi-linear structural designs enable authors to create forms that enact—underlie, exemplify, demonstrate—the content of the text, thereby providing an extra layer of meaning and increasing potential adherence to the argument. Third, the division of content in discrete nodes and the connection of these nodes through various links enable enhanced contextualization not possible in print-based texts. Linked content becomes contextualizing support for key areas of the argument and helps to provide readers with additional information—definitions, illustrations, relevant digressions—that can enhance the persuasive potential of the argument and meet the needs of readers who require or are interested in additional layers of information. Moreover, the contextualizing information can be vast; the webtexts often incorporate links to full online sources, providing readers with primary source material to consult. Finally the ability to incorporate multi-media such as video, audio, or animation adds dimension and can enhance the pathos of an argument.

*These webtexts follow emerging web-based conventions necessitated by the form-based divergences.* My findings indicate that the webtexts I analyzed follow several emerging web-based conventions governing effective writing in the online environment. Adherence to these conventions is particularly helpful in accommodating readers who may be unfamiliar with the unique forms of presentation. The extent to which a unique form of presentation affects a

reader's ability to access the main content of the text depends on the effectiveness of the author's navigational strategy. These webtexts incorporate several key elements that contribute to an effective navigation design: navigation instructions, introductory or overview nodes that establish the goals of the text and context for the argument; webviews that indicate the extent of the web and the connections among main content nodes; meaningful link text that provides readers with information regarding the content of potential node selections; contextualizing nodes that connect content to the main argument; and visual cues that provide consistently placed navigation devices and indicate the history of link activation. Additionally, these webtexts appear to accommodate readers by adhering to several web-based conventions regarding the visual design of the text. In order to ease the screen reading experience, authors divide content into short chunks of text with additional spacing between paragraphs; use a dark font on a light background; and alter elements such as font style, color, and layout in order to emphasize important content. Again, while the incorporation of these elements changes the traditional look of the text, the ultimate goals of traditional scholarly work are achieved.

## Relating the Findings to Previous Studies

My findings both disrupt and confirm previous assertions regarding online scholarship. Several scholars have attested to a scarcity of "native webtexts"—texts that are created to take advantage of the affordances of the medium and move beyond print-based frameworks of writing (Ball "Show, Not Tell," Burbules, Peterson, Katz, Krause). On the contrary, my findings indicate that a majority of the analyzed webtexts incorporate the unique allowances of the medium and do so in rhetorically effective ways. In concession, they do not approach the parameters of native hypertexts—truly exploratory, open-ended structures. Several hypertext theorists have argued that truly native hypertextual forms may not be the most effective venues

for scholarly argument (Kolb, Landow *Hypertext*, Brent). The use of guided structures and textually-based arguments, for example, demonstrates that writers exploit the medium cautiously and with attention toward accommodating readers who are still new to this environment. Only two of the analyzed webtexts (Wysocki and Anderson) move beyond textually-based arguments to "new media scholarship"—texts that incorporate multi-media to present content and, therefore, make meaning in non-textual ways. Ball certainly is correct in her assumption regarding the minimal presence of these more divergent forms of online scholarship ("Show, Not Tell"; see also Burbules). Both of the webtexts were published in the latter half of the ten-year period of study; a glance at the most current issues of *Kairos* indicates that these new media texts are a growing trend. I discuss the need to assess these texts with different criteria in my recommendations for future research.

My findings also confirm key assertions regarding *Kairos* webtexts. Recall that *Kairos* describes their publication goals on the cover page of the journal (cited earlier in this study): "With *Kairos*, we seek to push boundaries in academic publishing at the same time we strive to bridge the gap between print and digital publishing cultures." Indeed, my findings indicate that the analyzed webtexts "bridge the gap" by drawing from the influences of both print and web media. Certain core features of traditional scholarship (e.g., content, arrangement, documentation, and tone) are retained. Additionally, new features emerge that account for the form-based changes associated with online writing. An anonymous *Kairos* reviewer of Joyce Walker's most recent webtext titled "Hyper.Activity" provides a representative description of this type of scholarship: "This is a kind of bridge or transitional text in which the author is making strategic and controlled use of the new media affordances while echoing print-based

practices just enough to avoid alienating traditional readers."[3]  The adjective "transitional" is particularly fitting for these texts that combine elements of print-based scholarship with elements of web-based scholarship in order to help readers literally transition to from print to this new reading experience.  Additionally, this description highlights a significant feature of online scholarship with implications for Computers and Writing scholars who attempt to publish and earn credit for this type of work—namely, the element of "safe experimentation."  Writers of online texts appear to push boundaries enough to gain some of the value of the unique allowances of the medium, but not so much that their texts risk losing recognition as serious scholarship.  For example, a majority of the webtexts offer a guided navigation option (in addition to a multi-linear option) in order to accommodate those readers who prefer a more familiar, linear reading experience.  The ways in which authors incorporate the unique allowances of the medium are crucial to the successful presentations of arguments in the online environment.  The ability to engage with the content of a text depends on the accessibility of the form; if the form moves too far beyond readers' conceptual frameworks, the content may be inaccessible.

**Implications of the Study**

My findings from the analysis respond to the study's research questions and help to achieve its goals, which are to identify common characteristics of online scholarship; determine the extent to which these characteristics fail to meet, meet, and/or exceed traditional scholarly standards; and consequently articulate more explicit assessment criteria for these non-traditional forms of scholarship.  These findings have several significant implications for both assessing and

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[3] Walker's "Hyper.Activity" (2005) was not included in the analyzed subset of webtexts.  However, this text incorporates a useful strategy of contextualization—namely, a link to an internal node of the text offering direct quotations about her work from reviewers as well as her response (defense and agreement) to the review statements.  This inclusion not only provides readers with additional context and clarity regarding the author's position and perspective, but it also exposes both some of the author's writing process and the reviewers' assessment processes.

constructing online scholarship, particularly for the purposes of advancement within the subfield of Computers and Writing.

Readers new to these texts understandably question the scholarly value of this type of work. Divergence from traditional notions of form disrupts readers' expectations. Certainly some forms disrupt more than others. The form of Wysocki's "A Bookling Monument," for example, is so unexpected and unfamiliar that it risks losing the audience, as Ball explains: "Figuring out how to navigate this text may pose a large enough obstacle for some readers to keep them from entering it, let alone engaging with it in order to make meaning from its overt design" ("A New Media Reading Strategy" 23). Lack of engagement tends to be equated with lack of value; readers often do not value what they do not understand. In this study, I found that only two of the analyzed webtexts truly extend readers' frameworks based on their use of non-textual elements to make meaning.

The majority of the webtexts I analyzed arguably disrupt readers' expectations, but they do so in ways that are recognizably scholarly. First, readers must suspend their need for conventional elements (e.g., transitions, signposts, headings, and linear text) as they move through the text and instead rely on non-conventional strategies motivated by the changes in form (e.g., node contextualization, webviews, and explicit navigation directions) and create their own coherent reading of the text. Online texts require more active readers, who are responsible for choosing a path through multi-linear texts and deciding which digressions or sub-nodes to follow. Additionally, readers are expected to "read between the lines" and fill in the gaps created by the juxtaposition of content nodes and visual elements. Online scholarship, in this view, becomes a more active negotiation between reader and writer. Readers, particularly those in positions of judgment, can more easily find the value in these texts once they become conscious

of the ways in which their needs and expectations as readers of print-based texts are met and transformed in this environment.

Those readers in positions of judgment—either as tenure, promotion, and review participants and/or journal decision makers—can benefit from being able to justify and articulate why and how a text that deviates from familiar print-based standards is, in fact, scholarly. Clear and explicit assessment criteria for discussing the elements of value within these texts can provide reviewers with the necessary tools to make more standardized judgments regarding the quality of the work. Writers, too, must revise their approaches to constructing texts in the online medium. They must consider how the incorporation of the unique allowances of the medium and adherence to the emerging web-based conventions can effectively enhance the rhetorical situation of their argument in order to produce a successful example of online scholarship. My findings from the study provide scholars with an initial set of standards for constructing online texts that can be valued as scholarship. Furthermore, as a way of extending the findings of this study to other webtexts, they lead to the development of a heuristic that tenure, promotion, and review participants can use to assess the scholarly value of online journal publications. In figure 5.1, I present an example heuristic that engages the core questions of this study, thereby representing the common characteristics of successful online scholarship. I envision that an online text assessed by such a heuristic ideally would demonstrate several if not all of these characteristics.

**Figure 5.1: An Example Heuristic for Assessing the Scholarly Value
of Online Texts**

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**An Example Heuristic for Assessing the Scholarly Value of Online Texts**

**Content**
*Considers whether the content of the text meets traditional standards of scholarship.*
- Does the text establish clear goals within an introductory, prominent node?
- Does the text incorporate documentation to support the logical appeal of the argument?
- Does the text contextualize the main argument and demonstrate its significance within the field by offering a review of relevant literature?
- Does the author employ a method acceptable in the field?
- Does the text establish a formal tone throughout a majority of content-based nodes?

**Web-based allowances**
*Considers whether the text incorporates the allowances of the medium to enhance the rhetorical effect of the argument as well as to justify its construction within the online environment.*
- Does the text divide content into discrete nodes?
- Does the text move beyond print-based forms of presentation and provide a multi-linear navigation option (either visually guided or fully multi-linear) for readers to select their own path based on their interests and needs?
- Does the text provide internal and external linked contextualizing nodes that enhance the content?
- Does the form enact or exemplify the content in some way?
- Does the text incorporate multi-media to enhance or present the content?

**Emerging conventions**
*Considers whether the text follows emerging conventions of web-based writing in order to accommodate the new reading experience (e.g., in terms of navigation, coherence, and screen-reading).*
- Does the text provide navigation instructions (particularly if it is extensive) comprised of multiple nodes and designed with a multi-linear structure?
- Does the text include a textual or graphical webview that shows the extent of the web, indicates the connections among nodes, and provides direct link access to main content nodes?
- Does the text incorporate an effective rhetoric of link text?
- Do the text's nodes include contextualizing information that connects to the main argument?
- Does the author provide a rationale for the formal design of the text?
- Does the text incorporate visual elements (e.g., icons, graphics, and images) to assist with navigation and/or to enhance the content?
- Does the text provide feedback for link activation as a way to enhance navigation?

The questions that comprise the example heuristic reflect my major findings from the analysis: the finding regarding content is encompassed in the content segment of the heuristic; the findings regarding formal divergence and added value are encompassed in the web-based allowances segment; and the finding regarding adherence to emerging conventions is encompassed in the emerging conventions segment. The questions in this heuristic offer a starting point for determining the scholarly value of online publications. It needs to be field-tested with numerous texts and refined in order to certify its practical value for readers and writers of online scholarship. At minimum, it contributes to the ongoing dialogue regarding the nature and legitimacy of work produced and presented in and for the online environment.

**Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

The limitations of my study are addressed as implicit recommendations for future research. First and foremost, this study is limited in scope. The subset of webtexts that I selected as the data set for the study—the *Kairos* "Best Webtext" award winners and finalists—is a rich group for analyzing and identifying common characteristics. However, a much larger group of texts published in various reputable online journals would help to widen the scope and perhaps reveal interesting comparable findings that can broaden and validate a set of defining characteristics for scholarly web-based online journal publications. Moreover, in this study, I intentionally exclude collaborative webtexts in which the collaboration involves multiple authors contributing individually composed texts to a unified web—similar to an online edited compilation. These collaborative forms require an extended assessment strategy that accounts for the ways in which links among the individual texts can enhance the meaning and rhetorical impact of the arguments.

Second, the assessment tool I construct and employ in my analysis offers a starting point, not a definitive set of statements for analyzing all types of online scholarship. As trends in online scholarship move toward new media studies, scholars will need to develop revised assessment strategies; the current assessment tool does not account for texts that make meaning in non-textual ways. I often assessed certain characteristics in the Wysocki and Anderson webtexts, for example as exceptions because they are the only two analyzed webtexts that make meaning in non-textual as well as textual ways. Assessing elements like tone, for example, is difficult for readers who lack an understanding of how tone can be established through images, audio, or video. Recent literature regarding new media studies has begun to address issues of assessment (Ball "A New Media Reading Strategy," Wysocki, Sorapure, Joyce Walker "Hyper.Activity"). However, more studies like the one I conducted in this dissertation can help scholars identify some common components of new media texts, relate the value of these presentation approaches to familiar scholarly goals, and explain how new media texts extend even more the parameters of scholarship. Again, in this dissertation I identify some commonalities of web-based texts that can be used as a springboard for assessment of new media texts.

Additionally, some of the statements in the assessment tool require a more in-depth analysis of the function and value of certain conventions. For example, my analysis of appropriate methods should consider whether research methods are or should be chosen according to different criteria when the text is web-based and the relationship of form and content becomes a factor in constructing the text. In other words, questions such as the following should be addressed: Should the consideration of method apply only to the text's research methods or also to the design choices for developing the web-based project?

Furthermore, should an analysis of method then apply to the formal design as well as the content? As another example, an analysis of visual design might address how a text's visual elements support the writer's rhetorical purpose. Visual rhetoric scholar Pamela Takayoshi asserts: "The design of a text can be produced in such a way that the rhetoric of its page design supports the text's written arguments, giving writers more control over the effects those texts produce on readers." Discussions of page design lie outside the jurisdiction of traditional processes of composition; however, authors of web-based writing must consider the impact of their design decisions as part of the construction process. Because the creation of these kinds of texts requires specialized and continually updated knowledge of new and evolving web software, not every scholar will be able to produce these kinds of texts. Some questions to consider in light of the trends toward this type of scholarship include: Will this work lead to the creation of new forms of collaboration where teams of designers/writers co-construct the final products? Further, how would this kind of collaborative work be judged for tenure, promotion, and review purposes?

Moreover, my assessment tool does not directly address the issue of "significant scholarly contribution"—a major factor in determining the publication value of traditional scholarship. Certainly, reviewers can assess whether the content of a webtext contributes to the scholarly conversation by traditional markers such as the author's review of literature and statement of the "gap" that the study purports to fill. However, determining whether a webtext is, indeed, a significant scholarly contribution is complicated by the need to explore what, specifically, constitutes a significant scholarly contribution in web-based form. If experimentation is a notable characteristic of web-based texts, to what extent must the form be experimental for the text to be considered a significant scholarly contribution? If the content of

the text is deemed a significant contribution, but the form presents nothing new, can the webtext

as a whole be considered a significant contribution to what can be called the genre of online

scholarship?  These and other questions should be addressed in future studies.

In my analysis, I discussed the changes in form motivated by the unique allowances of

the medium have been discussed in some detail in the analysis.  However, additional research

might address the new argumentation strategies required of texts that incorporate multi-linear

structural designs and non-textual modes of presenting content.  Various hypertext scholars have

asked whether hypertext is an effective medium for argument (Kolb, Brent, Carter, Ingraham,

Hawk, Snyder).  Brent acknowledges, for example:

> The essence of rhetorical argument is control—not intellectual tyranny but the
> ability to have a predictable effect.  Even when the goal is not to foist a point of
> view on another but simply to create an image of the world as one sees it, the
> rhetor must be able to ration out the argument she will make in order to present
> that point of view.  Points of view are expressed in chains of arguments in which
> ideas come first, second, third in order to achieve maximum argumentative
> weight.

This linear sequence is often disrupted in web-based texts, and so scholars are justified in

questioning whether the form-based changes in online texts can truly present a sustainable

argument that can potentially secure the adherence of readers.   Carter addresses these very

concerns in his dissertation, as I reviewed in chapter 3.  From his analysis of four authors'

hypertext writing processes, he is able to identify several new approaches to argumentation

including, for example, "encapsulating the full argument within each reason, so that the entire

argument is composed of many sub-(but complete-) arguments" and offering a "suggested

argument structure" to readers so that the strongest arguments are in a "preferred path" and the

weaker ones are available for interested readers to explore (13).  The identification of these and

other strategies of argumentation in multi-linear structures will add to the list of common characteristics that define online scholarship.

An additional limitation of the assessment tool and the subsequent example heuristic I presented in figure 5.1 is that both undoubtedly will require revision over time in response to the pace of technological advancement. Walker notes that work in the online writing space is "still in the process of becoming" ("Hyper.Activity"). The current state of online scholarship can be defined to an extent, but it will need measures in place to account for changes in software and writers' continued experimentation with new technology. Indeed, the limitations of computer software, specifically web-writing programs that enable and disable certain authorial choices, also should be addressed in a study of online scholarship. Identifying and verifying core aspects of online scholarship will be crucial to the successful use of such a tool for the purpose of scholarly assessment.

**Concluding Remarks**

My study reveals that a representative subset of web-based texts published in a Computers and Writing online journal can be valued as legitimate scholarly work according to an extended, but traditionally-grounded view of "scholarship." My identification and rhetorical analysis of common characteristics shows that these texts adhere to traditional scholarly conventions associated with content, but they often diverge from traditional conventions associated with form. These changes in formal presentation based on incorporating the unique allowances of the online medium do not appear to detract from the effective communication of the content and, instead, often enhance the rhetorical effectiveness of the arguments offered in these texts, thereby distinguishing them as valuable contributions and extending the parameters of "online scholarship" to include emerging web-based conventions. The identification of non-

traditional and traditional elements that constitute web-based online journal publications in Computers and Writing helps to establish practical criteria—such as the example heuristic in figure 5.1—for assessing the scholarly value of texts composed and presented in the online medium.  Such a heuristic, as it is further tested and refined, may prove useful for tenure, promotion, and review participants and journal decision makers, who require a more standardized means of assessing these new forms of scholarly presentation as evidence of scholarship.  My study is a first step for understanding the scholarly nature of the web-based online journal publication in the Computers and Writing subfield.  More research into the evolving nature of online texts—particularly the increasingly popular new media texts that incorporate non-textual elements—is necessary to understand both the impact of technological advances and the bolder authorial experimentation with the unique allowances of the medium in the genre of online scholarship.  Such understanding eventually may be extended beyond the Computers and Writing subfield more broadly to English Studies in general.

Recognizing the early history of caution with respect to online publication, I believe, based on evidence from my research and analysis, that a trend is clear: A growing number of Computers and Writing scholars will engage in reading and interpreting others' web-based online publications as well as producing these types of texts themselves.  Academic tension regarding print-based and web-based scholarship will dissipate as each of these new media continues to overlap and inform each other.  The result of my dissertation—defining the characteristics of web-based scholarship in relation to print scholarship through a focus on web-based journal publications—should contribute to this optimistic academic development.