



Open access book publishing in writing studies: A case study
by Charles Bazerman, David Blakesley, Mike Palmquist, and David Russell

Abstract

The publication of scholarly books has been shaped strongly in recent decades by two factors: assessments by publishers of the potential market for books and the influence of publisher's reputations on tenure and promotion decisions. This article reflects on the choices made by a group of senior scholars in the field of composition and rhetoric as they conceived of and published an open access book on activity theory and writing and, subsequently, published an open access book series in the area of rhetoric and composition. The implications of open access book publishing for access to scholarly work and tenure-and-promotion decisions are considered.

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Introduction

Open access publishing of scholarly journals — especially in the sciences — has received a good deal of attention, as the many *First Monday* articles on online journals attest. But issues related to the publication of open access books are particularly important in the humanities and social sciences, where the publication of a scholarly book is frequently a central part of the evidence offered in support of tenure and promotion cases.

Over the last several years the print publication of scholarly books in the humanities and social sciences has been affected by financial pressures ranging from increased production costs to decreased acquisitions of books by libraries and individuals. As a result of these pressures, publishers have grown cautious about entering into contracts for scholarly monographs and collections of scholarly essays. One of us experienced this directly as the academic editor of the series *Rhetoric, Knowledge and Society*, formerly published by Laurence Erlbaum Associates. The quality of the volumes in the series was high: the work was detailed, well-documented, and theoretically innovative. However, in the face of low demand for books in the series, the publisher justifiably said in late 2001 that it could not offer further contracts.

Another of us had a similar experience as the editor of the *Rhetorical Philosophy and Theory* series, formerly published by Southern Illinois University Press. The publisher reported that sales to libraries for many of its titles had declined as much as 400 percent in recent years, making it cost prohibitive to continue publishing books that couldn't cover their production expenses with sales revenue.

Erlbaum and Southern Illinois University Press are not alone in basing their decisions on the potential marketability of scholarly work. Although scholars, commercial publishers, and university presses have long enjoyed a successful working relationship concerning the production and distribution of scholarly work, that relationship has increasingly come under strain. Scholars, who have traditionally consigned copyright to their work to publishers in exchange for bearing the cost of producing and distributing work, have begun to question the wisdom of their long-standing barter agreement with publishers. With low press runs (typically between 500 and 1,400 copies over the life of a book) limiting the exposure of their work in academic forums, and resulting in low royalties for that work, scholars have begun considering other options for engaging in the exchange of scholarship. The growing conflict between the needs of scholars — who seek to find the widest possible audience for their work — and publishers — who cannot afford to invest significant resources into the editing, printing, marketing, and distribution of books that have limited audiences — has led to what some have called a crisis in the scholarly publishing world (Davidson, 2003; Greenblatt, 2002; McPherson, 2003; MLA, 2002; Townsend, 2003; Withey, 2003).

The nature of this crisis, however, is not straightforward. Even as press runs have decreased, the total number of scholarly books being published has increased significantly over the past three decades. Withey (2003) notes that since 1960 the number of university presses in the United States has increased from 60 to 96 and that membership in the Association of American University Presses (AAUP) rose to 120 (the discrepancy can be explained by scholarly professional organizations such as the Modern Language Association setting up publishing arms and joining the AAUP). Moreover, Withey adds, the average number of titles published by university presses increased from 41 in 1963 to 88 in 1993 and has held steady since then. The problem, then, is not that too few books are being published. Rather, it is that a growing number of books are competing for the attention — and funds — of a limited group of readers. The situation is complicated by the rising costs of scholarly journals, which has decreased academic libraries' resources for acquiring scholarly books. Whereas scholarly publishers could once rely on baseline sales of around 500 copies to scholarly libraries, they now can anticipate fewer than 200 copies sold on standing orders. Faced with decreased sales to libraries, academic publishers have covered the cost of publishing scholarly books by increasing the price of their books, which has reduced the attractiveness of those books to individual scholars.

As scholars who care deeply about intellectual work, we are concerned that worthy ideas are not finding their way to readers. Although the argument can be made that good ideas will eventually win out, at best some of these ideas are finding their way to the marketplace of ideas far later than we would like. At worst, scholars faced with tenure and promotion decisions will set those ideas aside in favor of others that are more likely to find a market.

During a conference in spring 2000, Charles Bazerman and Mike Palmquist spent some time reflecting on these issues, and considering the role the Internet might play in supporting access to scholarly books and monographs. The two had been involved, since 1997, in providing online access to scholarly work on writing across the curriculum (WAC) through a Web site, the WAC Clearinghouse (<http://wac.colostate.edu>). The Clearinghouse provided access to three open access electronic journals, to PDF archives of what was then the leading print journal in WAC, *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines* (which has since merged with the WAC Clearinghouse online journal, *academic.writing*, to form a new online journal, *Across the Disciplines*, at <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/>), and to PDF versions of out-of-print books on WAC, such as Susan McLeod and Margot Soven's edited collection, *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs*.



Instigating event: The book

Bazerman and Palmquist's discussion coincided with a difficulty Bazerman was having on a project he was pursuing with David Russell. In early 2000, Russell and Bazerman had brought together a set of authors and written a prospectus for an edited collection that would explore

the application of activity theory to writing studies. The collection would build on a 1997 special edition of the journal, *Mind, Culture, and Activity*. The collection's approach stood at the intersection of two worlds — the writing research world (particularly studies of socially situated writing using genre and activity theories) and the activity theory world (with its strong interest in educational issues). The collection called for a publisher that would provide distribution in both worlds. But the publishers who had lists in both worlds thought the idea, although intellectually exciting, was financially risky. And although publishers in writing studies provided a more positive response, the work would have been less visible to scholars in the activity theory world.

Reflecting on the conversations he had had with Palmquist in New York, Bazerman raised the possibility of publishing with the WAC Clearinghouse and distributing the book on other established Web sites that would provide visibility to the several audiences they hoped to address. Following discussions with Palmquist, they contacted Michael Cole, the founder and editor of *Mind, Culture, and Activity* and the director of the Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition, who could provide access, through Web sites for the journal and the laboratory, to a large electronic community that includes much of the activity theory world. Like Palmquist, Cole was enthusiastic about the idea.

Bazerman, Palmquist, and Russell subsequently went into an intensive period of discussion about how to publish the collection — so intense, in fact, that the basic designs and principles were worked out within about 10 days of the initial decision to explore this option. Those discussions led to an understanding that, in addition to finding Web sites of high visibility and legitimacy in the academic worlds we wished to reach, a number of related issues would need to be addressed, including:

- Crafting an argument about the legitimacy of our undertaking, an issue of particular importance to the junior faculty contributing to the edited collection, who needed the publication to count seriously towards tenure and promotion;
- Convincing the authors to undertake this risk;
- Editing and producing the book;
- Choosing and implementing a design;
- Choosing the most appropriate form in which to provide access to the book;
- Ensuring the stability of the Web site and the book format for long term access;
- Considering how best to address the complications of producing rich texts, which might include graphics, video, and embedded data files;
- Deciding how best to handle copyright ownership and permissions for republication;
- Funding the production and maintenance of access to the book;
- Publicizing the book; and,
- Ensuring the book was entered into information systems, such as Books in Print and the Library of Congress.

Responses to these issues were worked out over a surprisingly short period of time, reflecting no doubt the years during which we had separately considered many of these problems and the experiences we had accumulated as editors, writers, and publishers. Those responses have served us well throughout this project and have served as a foundation for subsequent publications. The responses were articulated as a set of principles that were shared with the contributors to the edited collection in an e-mail message titled "Crossing the Virtual Divide."

Subject: Crossing the Virtual Divide

Dear authors of *Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives*,

We live in interesting times, at least as far as academic publication goes. Academic print publishers are hard pressed economically because of decreasing library purchases; as a result they are taking on fewer scholarly projects, and very many fewer edited volumes. On the other hand, the internet is providing new venues for publication and holds out the hope of truly low cost academic exchange, freed from the financial pressures of the publishing industry.

The interdisciplinarity and theoretical novelty of *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* has made even the most obvious publishers cautious about this project, despite receiving strong reviews about the quality of the volume. Rather than pursue other print publishers who would be less well positioned to find more than one of our markets in K-12 literacy, college writing, and activity theory, we have begun inquiries about electronic

publication. We have received excited encouragement from two major Web sites that might serve as co-publishers of the volume, and would reach much of our intended audience, the readers of *Mind Culture and Activity* and the WAC Clearinghouse. We may also seek affiliation with a K-12 literacy site as well. After preliminary investigation we believe that free-distribution electronic publication is not only feasible, but may be a very exciting step. Among the simplest and most immediate benefits are that space limitations will not be so stringent, and some enhancements will be possible, such as data appendices in various formats.

Of course, there will be numerous questions to answer and problems to solve. We have started to grapple with some of them and have started to develop some principles.

- Authors will keep the copyright for their material and will grant the volume only right of first publication as part of this volume in its primary and mirror Web site locations. Thus authors will be free to seek print or other publication for the material once the electronic volume has been published.
- The electronic volume needs to have a visible identity as a coherent collection of related articles.
- The volume needs to have visible markers of its refereed, edited character to give the contents all the legitimacy of a print publication.
- The design and editing need to be of the standard of print publication.
- Chapters will be readable in HTML format and downloadable for printing in book-quality PDF format.
- The chapters need to be fixed as of publication date, and must remain accessible indefinitely at a stable Web address.
- Supplementary material must be part of the publication at the primary Web site so that volume's integrity will not be violated by changes at other Web sites, and so that links will not have to be maintained.
- We need to gain visibility for the volume through publicity and book reviews.
- The volume will be made available at no charge to users.

We are in the process of developing a detailed plan and will share that with you as soon as possible. Part of the plan necessarily involves identifying financial, technical, and labor support to develop and maintain the volume. We have, however, after only brief investigation, had indications that various kinds of support will likely be forthcoming.

However, before we proceed down this new path, we want to give you the choice of whether you want to go with us. So we are now asking each of you to indicate whether or not you want to stay as part of this transformed project. We understand that some of you may wish to withdraw at this point, and we have no difficulty with that. Rather we are much more concerned that each of you who do stay with us are freely willing to enter into this experiment.

So we need a response from each of you, whether positive or negative. And we would also appreciate any thoughts, questions, or wisdom you have on this project. Since we are entering into uncharted territory, any anxieties, premonitions, or intuitions you might have are valuable in pointing us to issues we may need to address. Any experiences, knowledge, or models you might know also might help guide us. Also if you know of resources we might draw on, please also let us know.

So, it appears we are in the new millennium. We hope you will be interested in exploring with us what scholarship will look like in this brave new world.

Yours, Chuck Bazerman and David Russell

Of the 20 chapters in the initial proposal, the authors of all but two agreed to stay with the project. One involved a junior scholar worried about how her tenure committee would view electronic publication. Another set of co-authors did not respond to the message. In the ensuing editorial process, four other chapters dropped out for typical editorial reasons (missed deadlines, insufficient revision, final reviewing), resulting in a volume of fourteen strong essays.

The decision of the junior scholar to leave the book project reflects a real and widely felt concern about the place of digitally distributed scholarship in tenure, promotion, and merit decisions. The editors and publisher of *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* are senior scholars with strong reputations, with much less to risk by choosing to devote time to the project instead of pursuing publication with a traditional print publisher. So too were a number of the contributors to the volume, among them Linda Flower, Paul Prior, Cheryl Geisler, and Richard Beach. A sizeable number of contributors, however, were more junior members of the field and the editors and publishers were, at least to some extent, surprised that so many of the original group of contributors chose to stay with the project. In retrospect, the commitment to the project by a sizeable number of senior scholars might have helped some of the junior scholars choose to take on the risk.

Following the renewed commitment of the authors to what had now become a digital publishing venture, the editorial process was much the same as it had been on similar print projects. Authors submitted draft chapters, which the editors then returned with comments for further developmental revisions. This was followed in most cases by another round of sentence-level editing and revision. Using techniques that had proven effective in comparable print collections, the editors used communication and pressure, as well as expressions of excitement about the project, to hold authors to deadlines. The manuscript was then reviewed by members of the WAC Clearinghouse publications board. The results of the review led to some additional revisions to the essays in the collection.

The most significant departure from the production process used by print-based scholarly publishers was concerned with copy editing, which typically would be handled by the press. Because the editors and publisher were operating on an *ad hoc*, sweat equity basis, we had to arrange for our own copy editing. Fortunately, Bazerman had some extra grant funds and was able to obtain the assistance of a graduate student who in her previous life had been a journalist and copy editor for a medium-sized newspaper.

The copy-edited manuscript was then sent to Palmquist at the WAC Clearinghouse. Palmquist conducted an additional round of copy editing and developed a design for the book, which he shared with the editors. After the design was finalized, Palmquist created HTML and PDF versions of the document for review by the editors and authors. A final review, comparable to that in which editors and authors examine galley proofs for print publications, ensued and the manuscript was finalized.

Toward the end of the design and production process, the editors and publisher turned their attention to listing the book with various organizations. The book needed to have an identity in the established systems of publishing and academic libraries so that it could be accessed in the usual circulation systems of academics. That entailed obtaining a copyright registration, a Library of Congress Control Number (LCCN), an ISBN, a listing in *Books in Print*, and a place in academic libraries. Russell took on a task that he at first thought was "daunting." He contacted a colleague at the Iowa State University library, Gerry McKiernan, who specializes in electronic information. McKiernan assured him that the process was relatively routine and that, with the exception of obtaining ISBNs, could be done online and at no cost. McKiernan provided the information Russell needed to begin the process, cautioning him to call *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* a "book" and not an "online book" or "Web site." In the worlds of publishing and academic libraries, he told Russell, there is no functional difference between digital and print books.

Russell's experiences proved McKiernan right. Using the computer in his office, Russell visited <http://www.loc.gov/loc/infopub/> and was able to register the copyright and apply to the Library of Congress for an LCCN. Russell provided Palmquist with the information necessary to register the WAC Clearinghouse as a publisher and Palmquist subsequently obtained an ISBN for the book from Bowker, the U.S. ISBN agency. Once the book was in its final form, Russell printed the book, bound it at a local copy shop, and sent it to the Library of Congress. Within a month, *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* was ensconced in the publishing system. It appeared in *Books in Print* and *WorldCat*, the online catalog of books in libraries around the world, complete with the book's URL. Through *WorldCat* and *Books in Print*, the book was available to libraries to acquire, which simply meant putting it in their online catalogs. To encourage that, Russell included a request in the publicity e-mail messages asking academics to request their libraries acquire it. To date, the book is in 19 libraries worldwide.

The only complication encountered during this process was that the organizations who listed the book expected that readers would have to have to pay for it. Bowker, for example, required a price to be listed, and has subsequently targeted the WAC Clearinghouse with marketing efforts designed to help sell the book. It turns out that it can be hard to give a book

away, at least in the publishing world [1].

The efforts to publicize *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* were done almost completely through e-mail, not only because it's free and quick, but also because that's where the readers of the book spend a good deal of their time. The editors and publisher decided to do four kinds of publicity (in addition to the back cover blurb for the downloadable PDF version): (1) messages to e-mail lists used by potential readers, both in rhetoric and cultural psychology, (2) e-mail messages to book review editors, (3) a template e-mail message for individuals that could be adapted for use by the authors as well as the editors and publisher, and (4) a flyer that could be attached to e-mail messages (See [Appendix](#)). From there it was simply a matter of identifying e-mail lists and journals that might review the book, finding the names and e-mail addresses of the book review editors for those journals, and composing and sending the e-mail messages. Russell, who handled publicity, crafted the messages to read like a publisher's catalog announcement of a new academic book. He adopted a more informal tone for the template e-mail that would be sent to individuals, to which the editors and authors would be expected to add a personal note. In total, Russell spent roughly eight to 10 hours on the project.

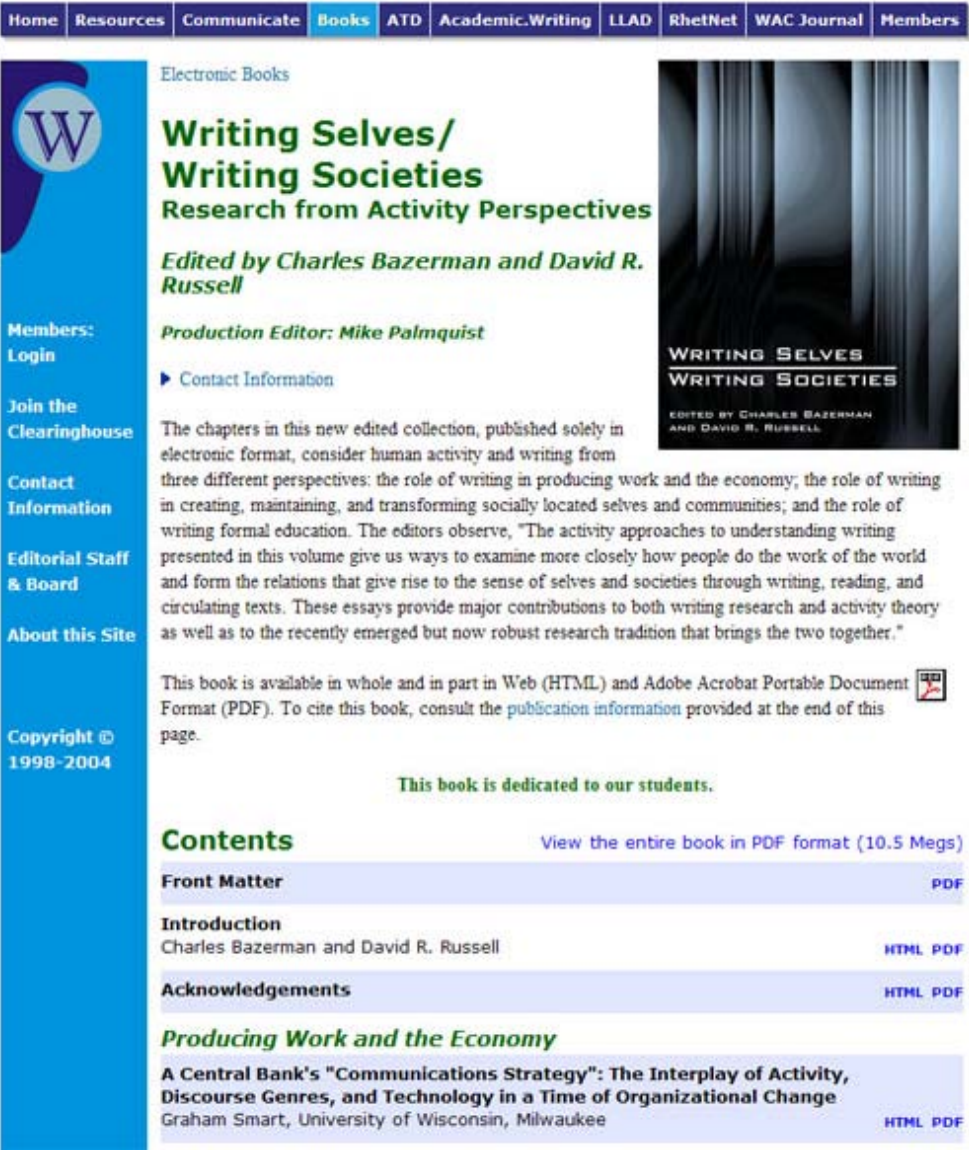


Figure 1: The *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* Web page (http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/).

The primary challenge in crafting publicity for the book was to help readers realize that the book was free for a click, while not sounding, as Russell put it in an e-mail message to

Bazerman and Palmquist, “fly-by-night cheap.” With new self-publishing ventures cropping up on the Internet every day, including publisher–distributors such as Lulu.com, many self-published authors are seeking attention for their books. It is especially critical for a scholarly publisher to ensure that the books it publishes are peer-reviewed and their scholarship sound — and for both of those qualities to come across clearly in promotional material, whether the book costs US\$100 or has been published under Open Access or with a Creative Commons license. In an ideal world, the cost of a book would have no bearing on judgment of its merit, but experience tells us also that sometimes “cheap” or “free” suggests questionable quality. Authors whose academic careers hinge on the acceptance of their work by the scholarly community deserve to have it represented professionally, in ways the academic community expects. To adopt a more formal tone, Russell used marketese and provided the complete citation, including the URL, the ISBN, and the Library of Congress number. He also suggested in the messages to e-mail lists and in the template for individual messages that readers ask their acquisitions librarian to place the book in their institution’s electronic library catalog. Russell also attached the publicity flier to his messages.

The immediate reaction was satisfying. A large number of colleagues around the country (and, in a few cases, the world) sent e-mail messages expressing interest or thanks or explaining that they’d asked their university library to acquire the book. That initial reaction, however, did not prepare us for the acceptance the book ultimately received from the academic communities to which it was addressed.

Since its publication, the *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* Web page has been visited more than 85,000 times by more than 36,000 unique visitors. The trend, interestingly, has been a steady increase in visits over the past four years, with more than 30,000 occurring in the past 12 months. Since its publication, the book has been downloaded in its entirety more than 36,000 times. Individual essays have been downloaded more than 108,000 times. In terms of perceived quality of the scholarly work in the collection, the book has been well received by the field. Within six months of publication, the book was positively reviewed by four journals: two print and two electronic. One year after its publication, in the keynote address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the major annual conference in writing studies, Kathleen Blake Yancey quoted extensively from chapters in the book. And the book has continued to figure prominently in scholarly work subsequently published in the field of composition and rhetoric.

According to a search of Google Scholar, which indexes scholarly publications available on the Web (29 September 2006), the book or individual chapters in it has been cited 68 times, according to a search of Google Scholar [2]. Although we do not have comprehensive comparison data for print publications, we suspect that this is a higher rate. A print-only collection with about the same number of chapters (15) published in the same year as *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* (and winner of a best book award given by a leading journal in the field), had far fewer citations: 10. Our experience suggests that open access scholarly books follow a pattern of citation similar to journals, which indicate that open access journal articles in a wide range of fields are both more likely to be cited and likely to be cited more quickly [3]. Our experience with *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* supports this, as have the citation rates of subsequent open access essay collections, such as Gurak, *et al.*’s (2004) collection of 22 essays, which a search of Google Scholar indicates has been cited 93 times (29 September 2006).

Overall, *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* appears to have entered into the system of book publishing neatly, in spite of the fact that it was not published by a traditional academic publisher and was being offered at no charge. Perhaps the best support for this conclusion is the book’s listing on discount book Web sites that invite customers to “Compare Prices!” Clearly, the book is now in the relevant databases.



A second instigating event: The book series

In the late 1990s, Charles Bazerman and Mary Kennedy contracted with Greenwood Press to produce a reference series aggregating scholarship relevant to the teaching of writing since the field of rhetoric and composition had professionalized in the 1970s. It was a unique series with a challenging scope. The series was projected to include at least 35 volumes and, by 2002, had 10 volumes under contract and several others under review. In the summer of 2002,

Greenwood Press decided that it could no longer support the series. They agreed to honor the 10 volumes under contract, but would develop none of the others. They subsequently sold off the 10 contracts to a publisher that had no track record or proven distribution success in the field of rhetoric and composition.

Writing Selves/Writing Societies was well into the final stages of the editorial process at this time and both the editors and the publisher were pleased with the progress it was making and the professional relationship they had developed. Bazerman approached Palmquist about the possibility of housing the series with the WAC Clearinghouse. Not long after agreeing to publish the series with the WAC Clearinghouse, the author of the first volume that would be published in the new series suggested that they contact Parlor Press, an independent scholarly press run by David Blakesley. The press specializes in publication of academic books using digital printing technologies, which reduces the overhead costs of warehousing books and avoids the up-front costs of paying for sizable print runs. The WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press subsequently agreed to serve as joint publishers of books in the series, with the WAC Clearinghouse providing free access to the books on its Web site and Parlor Press providing print and CD-ROM distribution of the books at a price competitive with similar books published by other university presses.

Like the WAC Clearinghouse, Parlor Press is a new configuration in the world of scholarly publishing. It is in many respects modeled on the university press example but has no means of support beyond its book sales and has no formal ties to a university (although Blakesley, its president, is a professor at Purdue). Like the Clearinghouse, it relies on the efforts of a cooperative group of scholars and writers who have learned the ins and outs of publishing as editors of journals and books, as teachers of writing and technical writing, and as Web developers to ensure the quality of its scholarly publications. Both entities are much like many of the Open Access projects that now challenge traditional models of journal publishing and show strong signs that they are sustainable resources for scholarly and creative work. The WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press have been able to collaborate on the *Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition* series in part because the pressure to cover high production costs has been relieved, and in part because both are coordinated by scholars who have a stake in advancing knowledge in the disciplines they serve. (Production costs are lower only because the publishers and editors receive no compensation for their work, which is not uncommon among editors in academia. In addition, for the Clearinghouse, production costs are lower because its sponsoring institution, Colorado State University, provides the necessary Web infrastructure to support the Clearinghouse.) The series and journal editors associated with Parlor Press enjoy their ability to influence the direction of scholarship in their fields without feeling the pressure from a traditional publisher to cover the bottom line. Exercising such an influence is a major motivation for many editors and publishers, perhaps especially so in the wider open access movement.

Three books have now appeared in the series:

- *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition* by Janice M. Lauer, at http://wac.colostate.edu/books/lauer_invention/ and <http://www.parlorpress.com/lauer.html>.
- *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum* by Charles Bazerman, Joseph Little, Lisa Bethel, Teri Chavkin, Danielle Fouquette, and Janet Garufis, at http://wac.colostate.edu/books/bazerman_wac/ and <http://www.parlorpress.com/bazerman.html>.
- *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice* edited by Alice Horning and Anne Becker, at <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/revision/> and <http://www.parlorpress.com/revision.html>.

Like *Writing Selves/Writing Societies*, these books have been well received by their intended audience. Since its publication in January 2004 by Parlor Press, Janice Lauer's book, *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition*, has sold more than 175 copies in print and digital media format. Since its release for free download on the WAC Clearinghouse Web site in January 2005, the book's site has received more than 13,000 visits from more than 7,000 unique visitors. Similarly, the site for *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum* by Charles Bazerman, Joseph Little, Lisa Bethel, Teri Chavkin, Danielle Fouquette, and Janet Garufis, has sold more than 125 copies in print and digital media format and has received more than 8,000 visits from more than 3,000 unique visitors since it was released on the WAC Clearinghouse for free download in late 2005.

The series has several books in production or development. A book on writing program administration by Susan McLeod is in production, two more are in revision, and five more are currently being written. In all, 11 volumes have been published or are slated for publication.

With the series well established, we are now in the process of recruiting new volumes to ensure the appearance of two to three volumes a year for the foreseeable future.

The publication process

The development and editorial process used to publish the digital books on the WAC Clearinghouse and at Parlor Press is similar to that used by larger publishers and university presses to publish print-only books. Proposals and drafts are reviewed by outside experts in the field and, with the assistance of series editors, authors develop their projects. Once submitted for production and after permissions have cleared, books will be copyedited — often by the publishers and editors themselves. Careful copyediting is extremely difficult and time-consuming, and it requires significant experience to do well (the sweat equity is high at this stage). Authors review copyedited text—in MS Word (using tracked changes and comments), in Adobe Acrobat with its edit tools, or on printed pages. The production of the manuscript into a book happens more quickly, with the manuscript laid out in desktop publishing program such as InDesign or QuarkXPress, sometimes in one day. From there, we can produce a proof in PDF or HTML format for authors to review. We can repurpose the text for delivery as a printed book, as a screen-ready PDF, as a rich-multimedia PDF, or, through a more involved process, a hypertext. Printers — whether offset or digital — expect to receive print-ready PDF files these days, so our printing options remain open.

This process will sound familiar to anyone with experience on the publishing side of the aisle. What's unusual, perhaps, is that there are only a few people (at most) involved in the production and (later) promotion process, whereas at a traditional press, there might be several distinct groups of people responsible for each stage in the process. The development of desktop publishing technologies has reduced the need for specialization. Experienced computer users can learn enough about all aspects of the production process (from manipulation of graphical content to design and layout) to produce high quality documents. They can use the networking capacity of the Internet to distribute them. This consolidation of expertise also helps reduce time to print or Web. Communication between authors and the publisher is faster, and the process of producing the book can involve greater collaborative among authors and publishers than has typically been the case in the past. Because almost every part of the process is managed electronically, it happens much more quickly than it might at a traditional press. Time to publication can be as short as a month at the WAC Clearinghouse or Parlor Press. With typical projects, it takes six to nine months to publish once a full draft has been submitted for production. At traditional presses, the process can occasionally take years, as many know, because of busy production schedules, crowded publication seasons, employee turnover, shortage of funding, and technical problems.

Once the production process is finished, the book can be published quickly, provided CIP data has been received from the Library of Congress, which typically takes about two weeks after submission of the full (proof) text that has been properly tagged. A Web-ready PDF version of the book — in its entirety or broken into chapters — can be generated in a few minutes. If the book is to be printed, it can be processed with Adobe Acrobat and Distiller, then sent electronically to the printer. Turnaround time on a printed proof is about a week, after which books may be ordered. Because the printer uses a digital printing process — meaning that each book can be queued in a computer and run one at a time, without the need to create offset plates — books can be ordered one at a time or in high volume, with the price per unit the same.

Implications for scholarly exchange

Bringing *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* to completion without major difficulties demonstrates to us that the historical arrangement with commercial publishers for editing, production, and distribution is no longer an absolute necessity. The cooperation of the authors indicates that, given the opportunity, academic authors are ready to shift to the electronic world. The academic quality of the book convinces us that we can support peer review and engage in

substantive editing outside the framework of a traditional press. The quality of the design and editorial polish of the distributed volume convince us that the electronically produced work can be an attractive product without the need of the services of a traditional publisher. The unexpectedly large distribution of the book demonstrates to us that free electronic distribution is an attractive method of supporting a free and open exchange of scholarly information.

Many book production and distribution services have historically collected around the material acts of setting in print, printing, and binding volumes, leaving the selection of titles, pre-publication reviews, developmental editing, text editing, copy editing, book design, bibliographic registration, advertisement, and distribution to others with experience in those processes. Although academics are often enlisted in some of these tasks as managing editors of journals and editors of book series, control of the overall process remains with the publisher, which retains stewardship of the peer review and book development process, even though the people most capable in those areas are typically experts in the respective fields. The bundling of these tasks has turned the printing function into the dominant power of the academic publishing system, wresting control and driving interests away from the academic world and its pursuit of knowledge and toward publishers' need to produce profit or, at least at university presses, to cover production costs.

In this process, academics become dependent, seeing themselves as having little power in the distribution of knowledge. Placing work in prestigious publication venues became the mark of contribution and the coin of academic evaluation. These goals of bringing knowledge into being and making that knowledge accessible becomes secondary to negotiating the publication system. In this system, academics often see themselves as victims rather than agents.

New tools that support electronic communication, editing, book design, publication, publicity, and distribution allow the functions of scholarly knowledge production and distribution to be returned to scholars. The old deal is breaking, although it is far from broken, and newer, more satisfactory partnerships are emerging. The cost of these new partnerships, for the moment, is a lot of sweat equity and the need to hunt for marginal funding for technical work, most notably copy editing. The major need we see to make an electronic system of scholarly production independent of commercial presses is modest subvention from universities, university libraries, or some external funding source to ease the burden of copy editing and electronic formatting. These costs are minimal compared to the current costs university libraries now incur in acquiring books from traditional presses. They are so minimal, in fact, that even in a time when sales of individual academic books are declining, Parlor Press has been able to survive solely on sales of the 30 books it has published since 2003. Even with expanded institutional support, however, it is clear that scholars will need to take on greater responsibility in this new publication system. Taking on that responsibility will ensure that scholars can shift their role — and their perceptions — from victim to drivers of change.

Electronic publication of books, as well as journals, offers a response to the increasingly untenable economic status of academic publishing. Further, the free electronic distribution of academic publication makes work available to scholars who lack free access to the print and electronic resources of research libraries. By accessing scholarly work distributed via the Web, faculty, undergraduates and even high school students in small communities and non-elite schools can explore the most current research in areas of interest to them. Moreover, scholars and students around the world can gain access to that work. We have heard, for example, from a number of colleagues in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and South America that they have used and found our collections of value. We have heard also heard this from scholars working with limited institutional and bibliographic resources. For that matter, we've also received positive comments about our efforts from colleagues working at elite educational institutions.

The viability and benefits of electronic publication, particularly when paired with the option of obtaining printed versions of a work, have made the decision to bring the *Reference Guides to Composition Series* to this format an easy decision. We have found arrangements that work and that are not excessively burdensome — particularly if we are able to find a more regular source of support for the marginal costs incurred. As a group, we are convinced we have developed the framework of a model that can meet at least some of the needs for the future of scholarly publication, while also ensuring the scholarly integrity of the process. Just recently, one scholar wrote us that "Janice Lauer's book [*Invention in Rhetoric and Composition*] is going to be the cornerstone for my Invention and Innovation graduate seminar." A review of this same book in *Composition Studies* noted:

This monograph will also be of great interest to writing teachers in its close attention to pedagogical practices.

As a well stocked compendium of primary and secondary scholarship, *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition* is a book that all serious students of rhetorical invention will want for their personal library (Goggin, 2005).

In July 2006, the Council of Writing Program Administrators gave the Parlor Press book, *Histories of Writing Program Administration: Individuals, Communities, and the Formation of a Discipline* (edited by L'Eplattenier and Mastrangelo) its 2004-2005 WPA Best Book Award. *Histories of Writing Program Administration* is not an open access book (yet), but the award does signify that independent publishing ventures such as the WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press — when the focus is on scholarship and quality production — can produce books that compete intellectually and aesthetically with the best books out there.



Implications for tenure—and-promotion decisions

The implications of open access publishing were very much a question for the editors and publishers in these two projects, and lay behind our attention to making the books carry as much scholarly credit as possible in the systems of academic publication.

Russell surveyed the contributors to *Writing Selves* in July 2006 to learn a) how they had listed it on their *curriculum vitae* and b) whether they had gotten any responses, positive or negative, to indicate it was treated differently by committees or administrators charged with promotion, tenure, or merit decisions. All of the 21 contributing authors listed their chapters as regular refereed publications on their *vitae*. None listed the publication in a separate category for online or electronic publications, though some included the URL and some did not, and one gave hit counts for the chapter. Five of the contributors were reviewed for tenure and/or promotion since the book's publication (three for tenure). All five received tenure and/or promotion. All five reported that there was no feedback from review committees or administrators on the fact that the publication was open or electronic, either negative or positive.

The significance of this response (or lack of response) is difficult to judge, as tenure and promotion decisions are not generally made on the status of one publication and, in any case, are necessarily made confidentially. But at least in the humanities and social sciences (where all but two contributors work), perhaps the widely-felt concern about the place of digitally-distributed scholarship in tenure, promotion, and merit decisions needs to be rethought. Or at least there needs to be further research on the issue. Attitudes may be changing, in regard to chapters in edited collections. Single author books may pose different issues and carry different attitudes.

Nevertheless, there is a need to educate tenure and promotion committees, and the field as a whole, that the primary concern about the scholarly quality of a book is not its publisher *per se*, but rather the integrity and rigor of the publisher's review process and the qualifications of its editorial board and reviewers. This is the same issue open access journals have been addressing.

For any academic (tenured or untenured) who takes on the challenges associated with publishing in digital form, it is important to consider how this kind of work — as editor, reviewer, and publisher — figures into one's job performance evaluation. Will it be considered (in academic parlance) "service work" to the profession, like serving on a committee of a professional organization or organizing an academic conference? That seems to us the most likely scenario, although this new work will have to be taken into account in some way. And eventually there may evolve informal or even formal guidelines for such "sweat labor." Indeed, there are already such arrangements in place for valuing journal editing, and this may be the model for scholarly book publication as well.

From the perspective of publishers, it has been important to make sure that a work published by the WAC Clearinghouse or Parlor Press has credibility with new authors and the people at their institutions who will evaluate their work. In many respects, we have already accomplished this goal. Several new Parlor Press authors have received tenure and promotion with significant help from their books, some of which were still in production. Similarly, the wide acceptance of *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* has figured positively in promotion and

tenure decisions for scholars who contributed to that collection. As publishers, we gain credibility in several ways: by publishing first-rate scholarship, of course, and often by publishing the work of scholars whose work has earned the respect of others in the field; by producing elegant books; through successful reviews and a wide readership; and, by putting our own reputations on the line as scholars and publishers. We have been especially sensitive about the integrity of the development, review, and production processes and have gone the extra mile to write tenure and promotion support letters for a large number of people, and with more detail (and perhaps authority) than a T&P committee might expect to see from a director of a university press.



Conclusions

Our experience producing open access scholarly books suggests it has the same advantages and difficulties associated with open access journal publication. These books disseminate scholarly work more quickly than print books, and appear to be viewed by a larger audience. As a result, these books are cited more widely than comparable print books. Open access scholarly books are also finding their way into the system of book and library circulation.


Open access scholarly books can be rigorously peer-reviewed, but it remains to be seen whether their authors receive the same credit for their work on these book than they would for print-only publications. To some extent, this will depend on whether open access books will find sites to house them that can carry the prestige of established scholarly presses. In our case, the WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press provide well respected homes for the books we've discussed in this article. The Clearinghouse is recognized as the leading site supporting the study of writing across the curriculum (WAC), a major emphasis within the larger field of rhetoric and composition. It has assembled an editorial board that includes a majority of the leading scholars in the area, publishes the leading journal in writing-across-the-curriculum studies, provides access to the PDF archives of the two print journals that focus on WAC, and serves as a repository for a wide range of information related to WAC. When the decisions were made to publish *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* and launch the Reference Guides series, the Clearinghouse was already well known for its book series, *Landmark Publications in Writing Studies*, which provided access to PDF copies of out-of-print books on WAC. The Clearinghouse has since become home to the national organization for WAC scholars and has established partnerships with other groups within the field of rhetoric and composition. In short, the Clearinghouse, which began as a distribution mechanism for information about WAC, has evolved into a well-known and widely respected publisher. Similarly, Parlor Press, which was launched in part to prove that alternative publishing methods could produce high-quality books and in part to provide an outlet for projects that might not attract the attention of conservative academic presses, has emerged as a significant player in scholarly publishing. By fall 2006, more than 150 authors had written or were developing projects for Parlor Press, 12 book series had been launched, and the Press was beginning the development of projects involving multimedia and other hybrid forms of print, visual, aural, and haptic media.

Our work on *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* and the Reference Guides book series provides evidence that we can wrest the agency for dissemination of our scholarship from those who have long held power over the means of material production of books. Our success to date allows us to look forward to the rich possibilities afforded by our unique configuration of publishers, authors, and editors. We can choose, for example, to repurpose free online texts for print when doing so will add reassurance for authors and editors — as we will do later this year when *Writing Selves/Writing Societies* appears in print. We can also choose to explore new approaches to copyright and open access, free content, as Parlor Press has done with its newest imprint, Glassbead Books, edited by John Holbo (<http://parlorpress.com/glassbead.html>). Books in this series will be distributed under a Creative Commons non-commercial, no-derivatives license that will allow free access through the Web and provide access to low-cost print volumes for those who want a more traditional format. Parlor Press has also formed new alliances with scholarly blogging communities to repurpose content for print and e-book formats. And both the Clearinghouse and Parlor Press are developing new methods for making scholarly review an open, collaborative process at all stages of development.

There are costs, however, associated with these approaches to scholarly publishing — costs largely borne by hardworking editors and publishers. These costs are similar to those that have

long been associated with our work as journal editors for commercial entities, as series editors for university presses, and as under-compensated reviewers for commercial and university presses.

Sustainability of this model is also a critical issue. We continue to be challenged by the need to develop more efficient ways to manage the copy editing process. We must also ensure that open access scholarly content isn't co-opted by the traditional distribution mechanisms and databases that package and redistribute our work. If we are to rely on sales of printed books to support free distribution of electronic books, for example, then we need to crack the closed world of book distribution, where information processors control data and take their (large) cut. Finally, we need to work closely with libraries to ensure that our work meets their standards for distribution and archiving, while also being sensitive to simplifying the acquisition process for them.

In short, much work remains, and that work will be challenging. But publishing our scholarship has always involved a significant amount of work. What's different now is that many of us have a greater stake and more agency in the dissemination of our scholarship. That alone makes the effort worthwhile. 

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Notes

¹ David Russell observes, "I have since learned that there are many people in academic libraries who are familiar with the now-routine process and willing to help, as this is the future of academic publishing from their financial and professional perspective — though I don't know that there are many with Gerry's unfailing patience with a novice."

² The major citation indexes — SSI, SSCI, A&HCI — do not include collections of articles.

³ *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_access.

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Appendices

Publicity E-Mail Message to Journal Editors

Dear x [editor]

We would be most grateful if _ would review a new electronic book:

Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives, edited by Charles Bazerman and David Russell. The collection is published solely in electronic format (html and pdf) by *The WAC Clearinghouse* (writing studies) and *Mind, Culture, Activity* (cultural psychology).

This collection brings together fourteen new empirical studies of writing as it is used in a range of activities — educational, workplace, civic, and

personal. Our goal is to show the commonalties in research on writing and activity, and to spark interdisciplinary dialog among researchers who use activity approaches to writing.

The collection also launches a new, non-commercial academic publishing venture, to provide — free of charge — important new research on writing. These online books will cross disciplinary boundaries and offer research that commercial academic publishers are increasingly unwilling to support.

To access **Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives**, (html and pdf versions), point your browser to http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/

Yours,

Charles Bazerman and David R. Russell, editors

Publication Information: Bazerman, Charles, and Russell, David. 2003. *Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives. Perspectives on Writing*. Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse and Mind, Culture, and Activity.
ISBN 0-9727023-1-8.
Library of Congress Control Number: 2003100499
Books in Print (Bowker) Number: 8343039
Available at: http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/

Publicity Messages to E-Mail Lists

New online collection: Writing Selves/Writing Societies

PLEASE CROSS POST TO RELEVANT LISTS

Announcing a new free electronic book: **Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives**, edited by Charles Bazerman and David Russell. The collection is published solely in electronic format (html and pdf) by *The WAC Clearinghouse* (writing studies) and *Mind, Culture, Activity* (cultural psychology).

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To access **Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives**, (html and pdf versions), point your browser to http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/

Yours,

Charles Bazerman and David R. Russell, editors

P.S. We would very much appreciate it if you would email your acquisitions librarian and ask that the book be put in your institution's electronic library catalog (this is also free of charge). Library catalog listings will make the book much more widely available.

Publication Information: Bazerman, Charles, and Russell, David. 2003. *Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives. Perspectives on Writing*. Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse and Mind, Culture, and Activity.

ISBN 0-9727023-1-8.

Publicity E-mail Template for Messages from Contributors to Colleagues

Dear contributors,

We're launching publicity for Writing Selves/Writing Societies.

We'd appreciate it if you'd send an email to people who might be interested in this — to let them know, of course, but also to ask them to ask their

libraries to put it in their online catalog. Below is a sample letter to adapt, just in case you are too busy to do any more WRITING your SELVES! (And of course your own librarian will want to know too.)

Hope to see many of you at CCCC, where there will be a session featuring the book on Thursday, 1:45–3:00, Lincoln Suite, Fourth Floor, Hilton (E21).

Many thanks,

David

POSSIBLE EMAIL

Subject: New online collection: Writing Selves/Writing Societies

Dear X.

I want to let you know that I've [co-edited] [published a chapter in] a new free electronic book: [Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives](#), edited by Charles Bazerman and David Russell. The collection is published solely in electronic format (html and pdf) by The WAC Clearinghouse (writing studies) and Mind, Culture, Activity (cultural psychology).

I'm very pleased with this collection as it showcases new research on writing and activity. To access it (html and pdf versions), point your browser to http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/

The collection is also important, I think, because it is a new, non-commercial way to publish new research on writing at a time when commercial academic publishers are increasingly unwilling to support this kind of work.

Please have a look at it — and tell others interested in writing research. And we would very much appreciate it if you would email your acquisitions librarian and ask that the book be put in your institution's electronic library catalog (this is also free of charge). This will make the book much more widely available. Publication information is below.

Yours,

Publication Information: Bazerman, Charles, and Russell, David. 2003. *Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives*. Perspectives on Writing. Fort Collins, Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse and Mind, Culture, and Activity. ISBN 0-9727023-1-8.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2003100499

Books in Print (Bowker) Number: 8343039

Available at: http://wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_societies/

Writing Selves flier

Announcing a New Online Collection of Essays

Writing Selves/Writing Societies: Research from Activity Perspectives

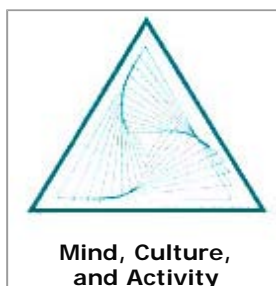
Edited by Charles Bazerman and David R. Russell

This free electronic book brings together fourteen new empirical studies to show the commonalities in research on writing and activity, and to spark interdisciplinary dialog among researchers who use activity approaches to writing.

In the 1980's theorists and researchers in a range of disciplines began to investigate the ways the intellectual, professional, and cultural forms of



work are mediated by writing. In the 1990s, activity-oriented studies of writing have flourished and been published in a range of disciplines — in education, psychology, rhetoric, sociology of science, communication, and human-computer interaction. The study of writing within complex systems of interaction is a site for the study of higher cognitive functions and social processes, in the Vygotskian tradition of cultural-historical psychology. The study of the organized, situated practices of writing in which people come to participate — from the grandest treatises of science and literature to the humblest of bureaucratic forms — can tell us much about the enactment of power and influence in the modern world, as well as about the formation of the collective and individual minds that inhabit this modern world.



These studies grow out of substantial empirical and theoretical research projects that carry forward our understanding of how writing mediates human social interaction, how writing itself is a form of activity, how writing is shaped in typified forms or genres and carries out localized — or even globalized — action within these typified forms. The collection contains articles that address writing in a wide range of human activities, including writing in all levels of schooling and professional training, professional and workplace writing, writing within play and leisure activities, writing mediating various spheres of public and private activity, and writing in all media of production and dissemination, especially including electronic environments (see Table of Contents).

The chapters use a variety of research methods, qualitative and quantitative — though all empirical. These include surveys, text-based interviews, observations, and discourse analysis of texts.

The collection is co-published free of



charge as an e-book (html and pdf) by international journals, [The WAC Clearinghouse](#) and the international journal, [Mind, Culture, and Activity](#).

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at
wac.colostate.edu/books/selves_society/**

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