

Origins and History

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Gail Hawisher: Our first authored book I just had to bring it, to hold it up and show it to you Jen. Computers and the teaching of writing an American higher education 1979-1994. It is with Charlie Moran as you know and Paul LeBlanc. One quick story with this is Cindy said I really want to do this book. She said do you think we could have it sort of gold blue? So anyway, this was her conception of a design which we wanted it to look very serious.

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Paul Leblanc: It is easy to forget that there was a real sense of promise and wow so it changed things and there was a lot of this opportunity and youthful energy about it and of course one is always nostalgic for one's own youth so for those two things to come sliding in at the same time was great. And then there was this amazing, wonderful sense of colleagues and unlike the full time tenured professors that so many of my graduate colleagues had in their traditional fields, the full time tenured faculty we dealt with like Cindy Self, Gail Hawisher and Hugh Burns, they were great and they made us feel like colleagues. We felt like we were all forging, well we were, at the time it was a new field. That is a pretty heady and wonderful feeling and I think we were riding the technology wave before much and maybe even most of the higher ed. So when you think about the disciplines in the academy that first embraced networking and PC's, it was writing almost before every other field.

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Charles Moran: I think computers and composition started at least my sense of it by people like Cindy and Gail who were in the field of composition but very much excited about what technology could do to improve the teaching and writing. So there had been this libertarian, liberal push from the beginning coming from Gail and Cindy and the people who joined that happy crowd and I think all of us were still part of the composition network but saw that something was going to be happening and if we could somehow get on top of it and direct it and use computers to help writers write as opposed to counting their spelling errors that maybe we could effect the way writing was going to be taught in this new era.

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Lisa Gerrard: The University of Minnesota had a conference in 1983 that my colleagues on this project went to and there were only 10 people there. They invited 10 people who were developing software for writing. That was the first conference but it was by invitation only and it was just a very informal meeting. The following year they had a full-scale conference and I went to that one. That was the first computers conference on the model that we have now. That was in April of 1984.

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Will Hochman: I started putting computers in writing classes in 1986 with John McDade at NYU and it was a revolutionary idea to plunk MACS in a classroom. Even more revolutionary to think, maybe a perimeter at a table in the middle would be nice, or swivel chairs? No, that's weird in a classroom. When I think about what computers in writing is about I want to say, you're too young to remember a Saturday night skit where a guy says "baseball has been very, very good to me!" I want to say "computers have been very, very good to me!"

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Charles Moran: In 1980, sometime in November our son Seth then aged, god, I'm terrible, I cannot remember, I don't know... 12, 13, 14 ... asked if he could have a junk car that he could put in our backyard and work on the car. My first thought was I don't want a junk car in our backyard and my second thought was automobiles are really dead technology. I've been reading all this stuff about computers and asked him "would you settle for a computer if you got one for Christmas?" and he said "sure" so we got an Apple 2 Plus Christmas of 1980 and it cost \$1,100, which in 1980 it was a lot. I was reluctant to get a disk drive along with it because that cost another \$600 which was a whole lot. To use it, because the storage capacity of the Apple 2 Plus was I believe 64 k, you had to save everything that you had done on a tape drive. You had to save it somewhere off the computer. That summer I started writing a book and I was always very much a blocked writer and I hadn't even thought of writing a book before so I sat down. This thing became a book and it wasn't a very good book and it was rejected but it was a book. I began writing articles in 1983, my first article on computers and writing came out in an English Journal and one shortly after that in the second volume of computers and composition and then we were off to the races. I ended up writing a lot following 1980. Before that, I had been a very much blocked writer. I was someone who wrote something and decided it was trash and then wrote something else and decided that was trash. But on the screen, your words were up there and they were on the screen and somehow the technology validated the language a little bit for me.

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Steve Krause: One of the first classes I took at Bowling Green must have been in the fall of 1993. It was a research methods class. I did a study for that class that involved asking students in first year composition classes to write an email and regular in class stuff but that became a project that became a presentation that was my first presentation that I gave in 94.