

## Guest Editor's Introduction

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As a reading of Writing in the Academic Disciplines indicates, writing across the curriculum started changing in multiple ways (institutionally, theoretically, pedagogically) even as it began. During the more recent, formative period of the 70's and 80's, discussions commonly centered on written texts—their genres, their formats, their disciplinary conventions. Today, "writing" has come to represent for us the more realistic variety of communications across the curriculum: the oral, spatial, electronic—the visual and multimodal. This collection, focusing on the visual and multimodal, is premised on the assumption that since we are/have been in a visual culture for many years, we can not ignore how images influence our students, their perception of the world, their interaction with it, and, as a result, their definition of communication.

Anyone who flips through new writing textbooks will note immediately the turn to the visual: there are more images included; text boxes—imitating web formats—are common as are borders and color coded commentary (e.g. *Picturing Texts* by Faigley, George, Selfe, & Palchik, 2004; *Envision* by Alfano & O'Brien, 2005; *Beyond Words* by Ruszkiewicz, Anderson, & Friend, 2006). Our authors in this issue of *Across the Disciplines*, however, are asking us to be sure that we are not just taking this use of the visual at face value, as another object on which to lay rhetorical practices, or as just another item to include in our growing definition of "writing." Using visuals is a powerful way to ensure that students understand the images surrounding them and realize the ones they produce are not pictures of what is: "'vision [and words] is...a cultural construction, that it is learned and cultivated' and that it is 'deeply involved with human societies, with the ethics and politics and aesthetics and epistemology of seeing and being seen'" (Mitchell, 2002, 166 as quoted in this issue by Duffelmeyer and Ellertson).

In addition, though, the use of the visuals in classrooms provides for us who write in this issue a particularly effective pedagogy that effectively teaches students to think about, engage in, "see" communication. Duffelmeyer and Ellertson's article "Critical Visual Literacy: Multimodal Communication Across the Curriculum," reviews the move from the written to the multimodal, showing "how multimodal composing reinforces and further develops at least three essential characteristics of a critically literate person," by

- 1) understanding that a text is not a transparent window on reality, but is constructed;
- 2) developing and demonstrating rhetorical awareness both as a composer of text and as a reader of text; and
- 3) developing agency as a communicator and as a reader, rather than opting for the passivity that our popular media environment makes so easy.

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The goals of this article, supported by student work, complements Childers' and Lowry's explanation of how incorporating visuals as both teaching and composing tools leads student to new understandings of the ethics and politics of the environment ("Connecting Visuals to Written Text and Written Text to Visuals in Science"). Through individual and collaborative projects, and by interlacing writing and the visual, their students learn not just how visuals function in conveying a point of view, but how they can use those same techniques to create an argument that will catch the attention of peers largely used to observing but not thinking about images. It is this very use of the collaborative, so popular in writing/visual literacy classes that Price and Warner investigate, noting that "[b]oth collaboration and visual media are elements of pedagogy which are tempting to add on to a course like garnish." They, like all authors herein did not assume that their students' problems in writing or working with visuals were due to the difficulty of subject matter or the challenge of technology only. Price and Warner investigated whether collaboration was different when visuals were the subject and found that "among the key concepts challenged by collaborative projects [are] *author, audience and coherence*."

These articles address the challenges and benefits of incorporating visuals, encouraging readers to do so as well. The final article in this collection, though, investigates the use of visuals in the classroom with a qualitative study of students in art and design. These students might be in an excellent position in the media/visual/writing classroom because of their experience with producing and manipulating images. They might well be comfortable with many of the textbooks and articles that draw relationships between writing and imaging, and apply rhetorical principles to both written and visual. Yet Orr, Blythman, and Mullin note that "little account has been taken of *students' perceptions* of the visual and the written." In this transcontinental research project, the authors came to the conclusion that "we need to remember that many of us are strongly word-based in our own approaches. Their work supports Duffelmeyer's and Ellertson's critique of some research, pointing out that "even those of us doing work in visuality and writing may be actually reinforcing static ways of thinking about texts and their production." This study underscores the work presented in this issue by causing us to reflect on our practices: "[w]hether we are teaching visually adept students (or teaching students how to be visually adept) we need to understand the students' construction of reality and the way they approach learning." We hope that our ideas will help us all consider how visuals across the disciplines are being used, how we are using them, and how we might develop, with our colleagues, more effective pedagogy when teaching and communicating across the curriculum.

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