From the Editor

This journal began four decades ago as an 8.5 x 11” newsletter called *Freshman English News (FEN)*. The first issue appeared in March 1972 as a “report on the status of Freshman English throughout the country” (1) that included sections on both four-year and two-year colleges. The practical focus on how writing and rhetoric were being taught across the U.S. stands in stark contrast to what was left out: “Theoretical and speculative articles should not be submitted” (3).

Reading through the first issue of *FEN* inspired that “everything old is new again” commonplace. For example, Richard Larson comments on diverse writing forms as central to “what we once knew as ‘Freshman English,’” underscoring the perpetual instability of composition courses. In addition to studying literature, he argues, “freshman English, like possibly no other part of the curriculum in English,” should also include “the study of all modes of communication, print, non-print verbal, and non-verbal” (1). His comment telegraphs the current focus on multimodality, visual and embodied rhetorics, and digital media in writing and rhetoric courses: *all modes of communication*.

I’m also struck by what’s just plain old. An annual subscription was $2.00, for which one received several stapled, photocopied pages with content arranged in a single-sided three-column layout.

Not a single woman wrote for that first issue. Even the reviews are written by men on books published by men. Jim Corder contributes a column called simply “I Like These,” in which he lists eleven recommended readings, not one written by a woman. Textbook advertisements for new books, some of which are authored or co-authored by women, are the only exception.

This glimpse into a disappointing (not really surprising) past is part of the journal’s story. That story writ large is embodied in the archive that now fills an entire six-shelf bookcase in my office. I like the camaraderie of all those voices and words physically taking up space around me. With this first issue under my editorship going to press, I’m already aware of editorial work as a powerful form of curatorship, an opportunity to sponsor others’ words, views, and distinctive registers. I would like to receive more submissions representing the diversity of our field, to interpret curatorship as a form of scholarly activism. I would like to reach more members of our field whose voices, experiences, and knowledge-making practices aren’t yet represented adequately or at all.

When a (nonacademic) friend learned that I would be editing a journal called *Composition Studies*, he asked if it featured studies of how things are made. That is, he zeroed in on *composition* as the main thing. I’m trying to follow that impulse through the creation of the “Composing With” section,
designed to showcase both “how things are made” and to acknowledge that making is always making with. For our very first contributor to this section, Michelle Gibson, composing with chronic illness ends up requiring her to re-learn how to write. Describing this learning process in terms of radical revision, Gibson eloquently writes, “I have been forced to revise long-held beliefs and habitual ways of functioning as a writer.” I hope to run at least one piece in this section per issue. I want to insert composing and composition into a broad framework, placing writing alongside other art- and meaning-making activities, and represent diverse composing practices and partners.

This issue, shorter than subsequent ones due to the journal’s transition from the University of Winnipeg to the University of Cincinnati, features two articles that take an historical approach to different aspects of teaching practices in 1920s American culture. Together, these articles produce a varied portrait of unconventional sites of literacy instruction. Brian Ray examines the Americanization Movement’s effects on teacher training for student immigrant populations, and Courtney Adams Wooten connects early correspondence courses to contemporary distance education initiatives, identifying difficulties associated with both. Also included in this issue are two course designs: one on visual rhetorics, and the other on an advanced composition course for pre-service teachers. Finally, our book reviews cover a wide spectrum of new work on literacy, rhetoric, writing practices, situated writing initiatives, and more. I hope you’ll discover new texts here that inspire and enlarge your perspective.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Jennifer Clary-Lemon, former editor of Composition Studies, for walking me through the editorial and business processes and for her patience and good will, particularly when my university took longer than seemed reasonable to facilitate the transfer. Asao Inoue has stayed on as book review editor, for which I am grateful. We are introducing review essays as a regular feature beginning with the next issue. We also invite dialogic reviews by collaborative teams (for more on this and other journal information, visit our new website at http://www.uc.edu/journals/composition-studies.html). I’m also indebted to editorial assistants Christina LaVecchia and Janine Morris, who have enthusiastically embraced their roles and responsibilities, making the process communal and fun for me. My department chair Jay Twomey has offered valuable support to me as well; without a course release, I’m not sure how I would have managed to pull this off.

A final word about the re-design of the journal’s cover. Though I couldn’t quite put my idea into words, I wanted for the cover an image that personified the OED definition appearing in the dialogue bubble, specifically “The forming (of anything) by combination of various elements, parts, or ingredients; formation, constitution, construction, making up.” In looking through drawings made by my nine-year-old son Giovanni, an avid illustrator, I found the
cat-snake hybrid you see on the cover. The image struck me as an embodiment of precisely the kind of “making up” that I couldn’t fully articulate. My husband Gary, a visual artist (as well as writer and teacher), put the pieces of the composition together, designing the text, image, and overall presentation. In addition to the homegrown collaboration, I love that the cover evokes imagination, interest, and curiosity—crucial resources for all modes of communication.

L.M.
Cincinnati, OH
October 2013

Works Cited