If we define English studies as literacy studies, we may be better able to engage with the changes in literate technologies, economies, and epistemologies that are transforming what we study and how we teach it. The changes in the political economy of higher education are all too familiar. Over the last decade, cuts in state funding have led to dramatic increases in tuition that have deepened student debt. That debt has intensified the vocational turn that has contributed to the privatization of public education. These trends have been compounded by the increased costs of IT, administrative overhead, and other nonacademic expenditures. The challenges of dealing with rising costs and declining funding have been exacerbated by the resistance to change arising from the fact that the largest generation of faculty in history are at retirement age and they are not leaving, which is contributing to the rising numbers of nontenure-track faculty. These cascading changes have led to a 40% drop in the MLA job listings in the last decade and stark declines in undergraduate majors (MLA). On the other hand, these trends are raising attention to teaching, outreach, and interdisciplinary collaborations. To address these challenges and opportunities, English departments need to invest in their local engagements with schools, public agencies, and writing at work. These global challenges and local collaborations converge at the glocal junctures where broad social movements come together with expanding disciplinary trends and institutional needs and assets. One such conjunction is formed by converging changes in literacy and the literate.

To help us reflect upon these changes, I will briefly note three junctures where developments in literacy, literature and the literate had a formative impact on the development of college English.

- **Our first English professorships** were founded in the 1750s in the emerging colleges that expanded the curriculum beyond classical languages and literatures (see Miller; Longaker). Benjamin Franklin and other college founders sought to cater to the rising numbers of students seeking careers in law, teaching and business.

- **The first textbooks to formalize English and American literature** as a subject of study appeared almost a century later as the penny press and common school helped create the “revolution in reading” that gave rise to a national reading public (see Davidson; Kaestle, et al.; Warren). These texts, like our first professorships, emerged out of broader changes in literacy and the literate.

- **Our first professional organizations**—MLA and NCTE—set out competing coalitions and frames for our discipline by constituting it as an area of academic specialization and a broadly based field of work. From its origin in 1883, MLA worked to exclude teachers, journalists, and other writers, creating an organization that was more limited to academics than other disciplinary associations (Veysey 70). Teachers and professors articulated their shared concerns quite differently in the National Conference of Teachers of English in 1911. While MLA distanced itself from teaching, NCTE was envisioned as a confederation of associations that would help teachers organize to address workload and other issues.

**These focal points can help us reflect upon how to use our local engagements to address global challenges.** Civic imaginaries can be a generative *topoi* for such reflections (see “New Imaginaries”; Strauss). I will expand the concept from imagined publics to consider the civic infrastructure formed by colleges, schools and other representative institutions of self-governance, including public media and other civil institutions that people look to for models and venues to articulate their shared needs and aspirations. Thus defined, civic imaginaries include guiding narratives about collective and individual identities as well as the institutional structures for articulating and instilling them, including the genre and activity systems that shape the rhetorical capacities of publics.
**Articulation** provides a productive frame for exploring how the discipline has engaged with the conjunctions among public changes in literacy, literature and the literate. “A theory of articulation is,” according to Stuart Hall, both “a way of understanding how ideological elements . . . cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects” (53). A *conjunctural* history of our work focuses on the points where ideological, institutional, and social trends converge. *Articulation* has particular resonance in English departments because we have articulation programs that reach out to schools, community colleges and diverse publics. These engagements provide an expansive articulation apparatus that includes bridge and outreach initiatives, teacher-preparation programs, creative writing and community lecture series, writing centers and WAC programs, and other collaborations that reach across curricula and into the community. The potentials of this civic infrastructure are apparent in how the history has been shaped by publicly accessible institutions, genres, and coalitions.

**The first professors of English** helped expand the curriculum in response to broader changes in literate technologies, economies, and epistemologies. Into the 1750s, the scholastic curriculum functioned as a scribal information economy to instill a deductive epistemology to prepare students to preach received truths in isolated communities. As I discussed in the *Evolution of College English*, colonial professors read from redactions of timeworn texts, and students recited from their copybooks and memorized syllogistic disputations. In the 1750s, compositions shifted from deductive syllogisms to forensic disquisitions that helped institute the inductive modes of inquiry of the “new learning.” Early professors of English lectured on a range of sources and assigned compositions from students’ independent reading. This student-centered mode of inquiry depended upon increased access to print, and it was well suited to students who lacked classical grammar school training. Newly established colleges admitted students when professors denigrated for only being able to “recite the classics by rote” (Alison to Stiles, May 27, 1759). From the perspective of the learned culture, the introduction of English to accommodate the needs of the less literate marked the onset of the literacy crisis that led to the de-Latinization of education.

As with our first professorships, early surveys of English literature responded to the growth and diversification of public education and the reading public by articulating literature in terms of its general education mission. The textbook market accounted for one third of the $2.5 million sales in US books in 1820. A 500% increase in textbook sales in the second quarter of the nineteenth century fueled the development the civic imaginary of the national reading public (Kaestle et al). As Vanderbilt discussed, rhetoric handbooks and elocutionary readers gave rise to the growing numbers of surveys of English and American literature at midcentury. The most popular was Shaw’s *Outlines of English Literature* (1846). In 1852 Shaw’s text was combined with Tuckerman’s “A Sketch of American Literature” to create a textbook that would “dominate the college trade for thirty years” (Vanderbilt 330). Tuckerman observed that the “germ of American literature” was antebellum “reviews, lectures, and essays”: “that delightful species of literature which is neither criticism nor fiction—neither oratory nor history—but partakes somewhat of all these, and owes its claim to a felicitous blending of fact and fancy, of sentiment and thought—the belles lettres” (439). This bellestrific articulation of literature arose out of the conjunctions among the magazine literature of the time and its popularization in colleges and self-improvement societies. As Tuckerman noted, “the two most prolific branches of literature in America are journalism and educational works. . . Newspapers and school-books are, therefore, the characteristic form of literature in the United States” (Shaw 439). This civic imaginary is markedly different from the one upon which our profession was founded.

Consider the civic imaginaries imbedded in evolving definitions of literature:

1. **Familiarity with letters or books:** knowledge acquired from reading or studying books, esp. the principal classical texts associated with humane learning. c1450—2005
2. **The action or process of writing a book or literary work:** literary ability or output; the activity or profession of an author or scholar; the realm of letters or books. 1663—2002
3.a. **The result or product of literary activity:** written works considered collectively; a body of literary works produced in a particular country or period, or of a particular genre. 1711—1995
3.b. Without defining word: written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit. 1852—2001
4. **A body of non-fictional books and writings published on a particular subject.** 1797—2004
5. **Printed matter of any kind.** 1859—2006

*(quoted from *OED*)*
With the founding of MLA in 1883, our discipline set out to distance itself from teaching and writing for the public. As Bender has discussed, the specialized expertise of modern professionals came to be distinguished from the more broadly based “civic professionalism” that was exemplified by “the activist, pragmatic, institution-founding character” of the first half of the nineteenth century (“Erosion” 86). According to Bender, scientists and other academic disciplines shifted their civic frame of reference “from community-based amateur science to . . . professional disciplines” *(Intelllect* 21). Bender’s research provides a framework for considering how disciplines were constituted as enclaves of expertise that are now being undermined by market forces (see also Radway).

**To distance itself from its origins in general education, MLA programmatically excluded teaching and teachers.** A sense of the formative impact of general education on modern literary studies is provided by the first article on American literature published in PMLA. “American Literature in the Class-room” was published by a high-school "Professor of English Literature," Albert Smyth. Despite the involvement of such teachers, MLA had a more restricted membership than other disciplinary associations such as the American Historical Association. Only one quarter of the AHA’s original membership were academics, while over three quarters of MLA members were, and that percentage grew as the group came to concentrate on research and ignore broader audiences and concerns, unlike the AHA (Veysey 70). While most of the first issues of PMLA were devoted to teaching, it ceased publishing on pedagogy by 1903, when the MLA’s Pedagogical Section closed.

**A more broadly based approach was taken by the National Council of Teachers of English in 1911.** NCTE was organized to address the shared challenges of college and high school teachers. Workloads were the lead topic at the conventions organized to provide a "progressive" forum for teachers to articulate their “class-consciousness” (“NCTE” 38). The first issue of *English Journal* opened with the report of the committee chaired by Edwin Hopkins: "Can Good Composition Teaching Be Done under Present Conditions?" To answer that question, the committee reported on the workloads facing college and high school teachers. This collaboration was aimed at establishing English as a research-based “laboratory subject” (3). While such models had limitations, they could have supported the professionalization of teaching if our discipline had invested more of its intellectual capacities in organizing its articulation apparatus. Instead, articulation became consigned to colleges of education, who were pressed by their marginal standing and expansive obligations to be as practical as possible, which in practice meant concentrating on "methods" courses that were as isolated from “content” disciplines as mechanics-driven composition courses.

**As professions have come to be seen as commercial enterprises, disciplinary enclaves of expertise have been undermined by market forces.** As Brint has discussed in *An Age of Experts*, the late-twentieth century shift away from “social trustee professionalism” was part of an historic “splintering of the professional stratum along functional, organizational, and market lines.” This same splintering is evident in our own field in the diverging perspectives and engagements of critics, applied linguists, compositionists, creative writers, and English educators. One way to bridge these intradisciplinary divides is to rearticulate our civic engagements in ways that can help us harness the glocal capacities of the changes in literacy that are transforming our discipline, for we currently face changes in literacy and the literate that have the same transformative possibilities as those that shaped our first professorships, anthologies, and professional organizations.
The “engaged university” provides a glocal frame that can help us articulate the values of our work in the venues that have shaped the history of English studies. In The Engaged University – An Invisible Worldwide Revolution, Hollister has outlined the converging social movements, disciplinary trends, and institutional needs that are making civic engagement vital in research and teaching as well as outreach. Global environmental, social, and technological challenges have pressed universities to engage in economic and community development to secure funding and provide students with problem-solving skills. As Hollister details, universities around the world are becoming involved in local communities, often following the lead of students and through partnerships with government agencies, businesses and foundations. These efforts are strengthening civil society and expanding opportunities for the rising numbers of students in the developing world: “The most exciting fact about this future is that it is realistic and attainable. We know it is a practical vision, because it is already happening.”

The civic imaginary of the “engaged university” provides a framework for re-envisioning the role of rhetoric and composition in institutions of public learning as we expand our programs of study to address global challenges and engage local collaborators. Specialists in rhetoric and composition are building majors that could bring together our outreach to schools and businesses, our involvement with community literacy and service learning, and research on social movements and marginalized traditions. These collaborations challenge us to expand our field of vision beyond writing and theories of rhetoric to consider collaborative modes of self-governance. The history of our work extends far beyond the history of our profession. Our broader history can help us make strategic use of our engagements if we can combine rhetoric’s traditional concern for ethical issues, political leadership, and collaborative action with composition’s strategic involvements in interdisciplinary teaching and learning programs, outreach partnerships, and bridge programs.

WORKS CITED


Davidson, Cathy N et al. Reading in America: Literature and Social History. 1989.


Miller, Thomas P. The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns. 2011


Stiles, Ezra. Letters from June 20, 1755 to October 22, 1773. Philadelphia Historical Society, MS A4c1-23.


Veysey, Laurence R. The Emergence of the American University. 1965.


A digital version of this paper is available at http://tmiller.faculty.arizona.edu/other-projects