



a journal of first-year writing

**The Shift in Parental Literacy
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to the Children of Immigrants**

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The Death of Authority

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**Looking Through the Semiotic Lens:
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an Academic Institution's Website
Through Time**

JACOB VOGELBACHER

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From the Editor

“Okay, but so what?” Has anybody ever said this to you about your writing? Perhaps a teacher, a peer, a friend, a parent? Maybe you’ve said this about someone else’s writing, or even something you’ve read for a class. As a writer, the question, “So what?” can sting, even if the person asking is trying to be helpful. It can sound dismissive, as though the reader is vocalizing a complaint about the quality of your ideas themselves, questioning why you would even bother. “The meaning is there on the page!” you think. “What more do you want?”

I remember well the first essay I ever wrote for high school. It was the second or third day of class, and my English teacher told us to write a paper about something important to us. I won’t go into the details of what I actually wrote about here, but know that it was full of teenage angst and self-importance, and I cringe a little when I think back to it now. These ideas, though, mattered to me. They represented thoughts and emotions I’d been trying to work through over the previous summer, but hadn’t actually shared with anyone yet. And, frankly, I thought I was brilliant. Nobody else was thinking like I was, I told myself. I couldn’t wait to hear my teacher praise my essay, and hoped that she would do so in front of the class, so that my peers, too, would know of the genius in their midst. Of course, that didn’t happen. When I received the paper back with a “D+” on it, and the comment, “So what?” in big letters at the bottom of the last page, my first reaction was to get defensive. Clearly, my teacher just didn’t “get it.” Eventually, however, with the benefit of time and more writing experiences, I could see her point. It’s not enough to have ideas—everyone has those. It’s not enough, even, to be able to present those ideas well. Instead, the real trick of writing is to get other people to actually *care* about your ideas. It’s a tough trick to pull off.

The four authors published in this issue of *Stylus* have managed to do just that. They seem to have no doubt that their ideas matter, and they’re able to convince readers that they should care about these ideas, too. Together, these four pieces serve to remind us that the question, “So what?”

doesn't need to be interpreted as a dismissal. Instead, it can be an invitation, an opportunity to take those subjects, feelings, and arguments that matter to you and convince someone else that they matter, too. This is writing that *does* things.

The first article is Yadilex Ali's "The Shift in Parental Literacy Sponsorship and Its Value According to the Children of Immigrants." Ali looked at her own experiences and found a question she wanted to investigate: How do immigrants to the United States sponsor their children's literacy? (To learn about the story behind Ali's research project, be sure to read the writer's statement accompanying her article.) Through a combination of secondary research, surveys, and interviews, Ali was able to complete a compelling analysis of three students.

Next up is Gabriela Tamayo's "The Death of Authority." Tamayo's piece might look a little different than what *Stylus* normally publishes, but it's no less valuable. Tamayo chose to write about the connections she saw between discourse communities and authority in the form of a short story inspired by classic detective stories. It makes for an informative read that manages to be both fun and thoughtful at the same time. Tamayo's reflection after the story, too, should be helpful for students looking to synthesize some of these concepts for themselves.

The third article is Paige Preston's "Looking Through the Semiotic Lens: Rhetorical Sponsors of Civic Engagement in Cyberpublics." Some of the vocabulary Preston uses might at first seem new, but keep reading and you'll find the subjects she's writing about are likely familiar to you. By exploring three cases of Internet activism, Preston manages to construct a set of rhetorical analyses that raise important questions about how individuals interact to promote social change in the digital age.

The final article of this issue is Jacob Vogelbacher's "Evolution of Cyber UCF: The Development of an Academic Institution's Website Through Time." This one should have some special resonance for all you Knights out there, as Vogelbacher explores the history of the UCF homepage as a means of considering best practices for web design. His research is extensive, blending his own informed interpretations with survey data. And, like the others, Vogelbacher's research matters. The UCF homepage has represented the face of the institution on the Internet for twenty years, so his analysis of its evolution makes for a fascinating look at how UCF's image of itself has changed during that time.

The exact answers might vary, but all four of these authors have formed a response to that "So what?" question. I hope their work inspires you to keep asking that question for yourself as you read and to generate some possible answers for yourself when you're writing about something that matters to you.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Stylus* and find it to be helpful in your explorations of what writing and research can accomplish. We also hope that you'll consider submitting your own work for publication in the journal; at one time or another, all of the students published here were sitting in a composition class, just like you. To read about their experiences (and, sometimes, struggles) along the way from receiving an assignment to being published, be sure to take a look at the writer's statements accompanying each essay. If you're interested in submitting work to *Stylus*, simply ask your Composition I or II instructor to forward the piece you'd like to submit to the journal and we'll take care of the rest. If you have any questions about this process, please feel free to contact me at Matthew.Bryan@ucf.edu.

-Matt Bryan