KairosCast Episode 3 Transcript

[intro music]

Courtney: Welcome to KairosCast.

Harley: Welcome to KairosCast.

[music fades]

Harley: Welcome to KairosCast, episode 1.3.

[game noises]

Harley: (clears throat) Welcome to KairosCast 1.3!

[game noises]

Harley: Courtney, we're recording!

Courtney: What? Oh! Uh, Welcome to KairosCast!

Harley: I already said that.

Courtney: Whoops. What's my line?

Harley: Just say hello to our listeners.

Courtney: Hello! I'm Courtney Danforth.

Harley: and I'm Harley Ferris. In this episode, we're going to talk about activities that are typically classified as hobbies or amusements instead of so-called "real work".

Courtney: Good! Because this is the sweet spot between Midterms and Finals and the new Dragon Age just came out!

Harley: We'll begin with some thoughts about gaming and gamification in pedagogy, and then we have an interview with Samantha Blackmon and Alex Layne about their podcast, *Not Your Mama's Gamer*.

Courtney: In fact, we're excited to announce that theirs is a new affiliate show we'll be promoting on the *KairosCast* network. We also have an interview with the editors of a special issue of Harlot on rhetoric and crafting.

Harley: So let's get to it. And I'm curious--do you use games at all in your teaching, Courtney?

Courtney: Not really. I do use the board game *Apples to Apples* in a lesson on audience for my comp students, but that's about it. You're doing something exciting with gaming and your business writing students though, right?

Harley: I sure am. When I learned I was assigned business writing again for this semester, I decided I needed to do something really different with the course to keep it from getting stale.

Courtney: Oh yeah? Tired of teaching business writing?

Harley: Well, yes and no. Business writing can be a tricky course to teach, I think… You want to rehearse the moves and genres appropriate to the business world, but so much of the course is hypothetical. Plus, at least for me, teaching a course the same way over and over again can get tiring.

Courtney: I'm sure we all relate to that. So what did you do?

Harley: I guess I started thinking about how to make the assignments less contrived, and I realized I couldn't--unless we really acknowledged how contrived they were and turned it into a game. I've had a few colleagues who have had great success adding game elements to courses, so I decided to reimagine Business Writing as a semester-long alternate reality game. So, I started the course by telling the students that I would be hiring six project leads, and their first assignment would be a resume and cover letter applying for that position. I hired those six, and then I put the rest of the class under those six. Those six groups each had to form a small business and develop a product, service, or app. Suddenly, although still hypothetical, all the same assignments seemed much more purposeful, and as I've hoped, the students have really embraced the whole simulation, and their work has been so much more engaged than in previous courses when I've taught business writing more traditionally.

Courtney: That's great news. But I know you're leaving something out of your description…

Harley: Yeah, well, like I said, I needed to make the course more interesting for myself, too. So, one of the elements I included in the course was that the students would draw from Good News and Bad News piles each week, sort of like Community Chest and Chance in Monopoly. I would write the prompts, and their written responses would be their weekly homework. Dealing with crisis is something that most business writing students don't get enough practice doing, so I decided to shape the narratives in the course to get worse and worse. Eventually, I did away with the Good News pile, and then, on Halloween, I introduced zombies.

Courtney: And how in the world did they handle that?

Harley: They loved it! I'd been setting up the Bad News to head toward that several weeks… illnesses, shady characters, strange behavior from employees--all situations that needed to be dealt with through business writing, but when taken together, shaped a fiction that led to a zombie outbreak. And, you know, Louisville is the setting of Return of the Living Dead, so everything just fell into place. They've totally bought into the simulation and are doing excellent work.

Courtney: Wow… this is too cool. So, what's happening in the course right now?

Harley: So right now, the president has declared a state of emergency in Louisville, all transit in and out of the city has been halted, utilities and food are being rationed, and all non-essential businesses have been suspended until further notice. The six companies in the class have had to reimagine their assets and capabilities along the lines of usefulness in a zombie apocalypse, and they're forming partnerships with each other. So we have three merged businesses working on group proposals to explain their new products or services in this scenario. Since money has lost its worth, they're focusing on how to be a sustainable operation, which means they're looking at bartering and other alternate forms of commerce. I've got to say, I've been so impressed by how creative and engaged the students have been.

Courtney: So you'll do this again, I take it?

Harley: Oh, absolutely. This being my first go at it, I'll have some revisions to make, but I'll definitely do this again.

Courtney: That sounds great. Gamification in pedagogy seems to be getting hot lately.

Harley: It does. And of course, the link between play and learning isn't new.

Courtney: That's true. James Paul Gee's work comes to mind, and recent publications in Computers and Composition and CCC have discussed games in the classroom.

Harley: And I love the quote from Marshall McLuhan, "Anyone who tries to make a distinction between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either."

Courtney: So while the idea isn't a new one, it sounds like people are bringing together games and teaching in ways that maybe are new.

Harley: I think so. I know that technology has changed a lot… All of the businesses in my class are using websites and Twitter in their writing projects and as part of the simulation. And what I've been doing has made me curious about how others are using games in their classes, so I decided to ask a few colleagues what they've been doing.

Scott Lasley: My name is Scott Lasley, and I am an adjunct professor at the University of Louisville, and this is actually my first time using this particular assignment.

So, in terms of my project, it basically consists of students in teams of four or three, creating a game or interactive text, in which the player can make various choices and change the structure of the narrative or the structure of the text as a whole. This is a seven-week assignment, and I did that intentionally because of the difficulty in terms of students learning a new kind of software, a new kind of technology. And to make things relatively simple in terms of what they would be required to do, I have students more or less either use YouTube annotations to creative interactivity or use Adobe Flash Professional to create an actual interactive Flash animation. Although I do have some students who have kind of gone outside the box and are using their own kind of technologies to accomplish the same goal. So I think that's important as well, to encourage students that if they don't want to use those two, if they

don't work for what they want to do with this particular project, they can use other technologies, so long as the objectives of the assignment--players being able to interact with the text, and also being able to make significant choices that influence how the text is understood--then I'm perfectly satisfied.

In terms of the lesson plan, in terms of how it's been set up, normally what I do with most of my lesson plans is I have kind of a week or two of, more or less, understanding terminology, ideas that we're after, so things like critical analysis--what is that count as? What does that mean? Replay value, which is the main criteria that I'm evaluating their text on--what does that mean? And then move more into the actual designing phase for weeks three, four, and five, and then using the final two weeks to conference, workshop, and really begin to prepare these. Because on the final day of class, I'm going to actually have a sort of convention in which teams will present their games and allow other students in the class to play them and to ask any questions and that kind of things, too, to sort of simulate that experience of presenting their texts to an actual audience ahead of time that is going to be their target audience.

Part of what I'm after with this assignment is, not only do I really want to challenge students to think about writing in different contexts, especially kind of pushing out of the academic frame of mind, but also (1) to have students think about what goes into a text they create and also (2) about having the audience do a different kind of thing. So instead of thinking about, OK, “who is the audience?” they also have to think about what they can do, and what kind of way they can act on their text. It really has students think about the reasons behind why they choose certain things in their writing or why they choose to frame an argument a particular way, which I think is really useful, especially for the Freshmen composition course, where learning those kinds of skills and strategies is extremely important, especially before they get into writing research papers.

In terms of this project, scaffolding is extremely important to the structure of this assignment, (1) to make sure everything is clear, but also (2) leaves lots of room open for mentorship, which is something that I do in my teaching in general, so it works out nicely. But also, too, to really ensure that students are challenged but aren't overwhelmed and frustrated to the point where they give up. So it's definitely something important in terms of how you structure your various lessons plans with this kind of assignment, that you do make sure to tell students and show students what this is trying to accomplish. So whether you're gamifying the class--which is what I'm doing in mine, in terms of teams being game developers and I am the game publisher and having particular progress reports that I want them to tell me what the status of the game is and to take on that role. But I think it's also important to be as transparent as possible in this particular assignment, too, so students don't get disillusioned by the process of putting things together, and also to know what they're supposed to get out of it as well.

So I definitely think that whenever you use games or gamification in teaching, it's extremely important to be transparent, too, because sometimes students just see games or anything related to games as either childish or something non-academic. So, if they don't see how it relates to their academic experience, or to writing in an academic context, I think you do run into that problem of "Why are we doing this? What's this point of this? What are we supposed to get out of this?" And that can work against you in some sense, too, if they don't really have

an idea or an objective in terms of what they're supposed to get out of this particular assignment.

Harley: And this is Stephen Cohen, PhD student at University of Louisville.

Stephen Cohen: Last fall was the first time I was scheduled to be observed teaching, and I was a little nervous, mostly because I was teaching business writing for the first time, but also because this business writing class was a little different. I was working from a curriculum developed by Rob Terry and Barrie Olson, and the idea was to gamify the curriculum. So, students were asked to develop a business idea over the course of the whole semester, and then asked to pitch it to an audience of investors, who were really just a group of people who were also teaching business writing. The ideas was to not only give students a reason for composing the various documents--the resumes, cover letters, business plans--that are usually a feature of the business writing class, but also to introduce an element of competition. The group with the best pitch was awarded fictional funding by our group of investors.

So, the day of the observation, I think I remember I got through the mini-lesson about PowerPoint with a minimum of awkwardness, but when I spoke to the faculty member who observed us that day, I learned that what she felt was most striking was that when she arrived a few minutes before I did, before class had begun, the students were already there, and they were working. All of them, before class started and without direction, were using the few minutes before class to polish up their business plans. And this, I think, speaks to what seems to me to be the most powerful effect of a gamified curriculum, and that is that students seem genuinely engaged with their projects. I think that, in giving them a purpose and a specific project that they were free to be really creative in solving, they were set up to be excited about the quality of that project.

I've taught the course a few times since, and by the end, students are usually diligently--and really happily--largely working on their own with projects they are really invested in.

Courtney: A lot of interesting work happening here!

Harley: Definitely! There are countless ways to teach, and to teach well, but I'm really excited about ways to make learning fun for both students and teachers.

Courtney: I know--what a concept, right? Well, we'll revisit this topic next semester and check back in with everyone to see how things went. I'm eager to hear if everyone survives your business writing with zombies course.

Harley: Right--me, too!

Courtney: And speaking of games, have we got a treat for everyone. We announced last episode that we're syndicating a new podcast, *Not Your Mama's Gamer*, through the KairosCast network. As with the other podcasts we've picked up, we took some time to interview the hosts. Here we are with Samantha Blackmon and Alex Layne, from *Not Your Mama's Gamer*.

Samantha Blackmon: [fades in] … And actually, I wrote a piece about this for *NYMG* last week. Well, Alex and Rickie and I were playing *Destiny* and I was pointing out some things about gender inequity in the game. And Alex kind of screamed at me, "Don't tell me my game is sexist!" [laughter] So we just kinda play through as gamers but there is that constant critical lens that's up, but some people don't--and I'm not saying that Alex does this, I'm just giving her crap--but, some people don't necessarily want their lens to be up all the time. But, for me, unfortunately, it is.

Alex Layne: That's the thing, too. I mean, when you talk to people when they're first getting into games research, they do it because they love games, and that's a really complex relationship to sort through. I think, Sam, you've done it better than I have because you've been doing it for longer. But you have to analyse your love for the game while constantly being aware of the horrible things happening behind the scenes and terrible representation or stereotyping or whatever is happening in the game and it's difficult to enjoy something that's awful.

I've been thinking about this because we just did a guilty pleasure games segment on Wednesday where we talked about sexist, racist, awful games that people sneak back into play once in a while because they love the game. And it's a hard, weird. You know, you can't. You have to accept both while you're playing. You're loving this game and it's awful and what can you do? So you go to a site like *Not Your Mama's Gamer* or whatever and talk about it and provide a space to be critical about it, I guess.

Samantha: Yeah, there are games that you can't play. We also did a segment where we talked to [unintelligible] just because by that critical lens are just so horrible that you just have to quit. There's this running joke about me and *Red Dead Redemption*. As I was playing that game just for fun, but there was a snippet of dialogue that went on during a side mission in there. It was not part of the main narrative but it was so horrible that I rage quit the game and never went back to it. This was probably the first or second time I first or second play session I had with the game, so sometimes you're able to be objective and have a critical lens and then sometimes who you are as an individual and your own kind of moral and critical sensibility will definitely stop you from playing the game.

Harley: It seems that's one huge difference between, for instance, games and movies--the participatory role.

Alex: I just did a talk last night about to a group of students who that focused on the reason why games are a different medium than TV and movies. It was a talk about Games for Change so it was about creating positive change, but one of the main tenets was games make you complicit in the narrative. They force you to play along and be active in it in a way that movies and TV don't really push you to do. So we're playing games like the PETA game, *Cooking Mama*, and it's forcing you to be complicit in the torture of these animals and killing all these animals and it gets really disgusting and that's their way of convincing you. But I think you're a hundred percent on in like the way it forces you to be party to whatever merriment it's giving you is one of the reasons games are so complex and so persuasive. And so engaging if it's in a positive way.

Samantha: That's one of the things in my minority rhetorics seminar, it would've been like eighteen months ago. I won't say "forced." I "asked" my class to play *Bastion.*

Alex: Oh yeah.

Samantha: And they were like, "Well, can I watch someone else play it?" or "Can I watch a list play it?" And I was like, "No, everyone has to play it." And I made sure everyone played it. And a couple people got really angry at me once they had finished the game. Cuz, the game makes you the colonizer and they felt that I had forced them to colonize a group of minority peoples in this game and it was that interaction, that actual interactivity.

Alex: That's what worries me about games, though, because people don't take that seriously. They're taking it moreso seriously, but because they're "just toys" or they're just "things for little boys" or there's not that critical attention on that so things like that sort of go unquestioned or unchecked and now it's the biggest entertainment industry in the United States and it's saying these messages but we don't have enough people talking about what it's really saying. I mean we have the ratings on each game but I think we can agree that that's not nearly enough critical attention to be paid to that, right, about these things that are cuz that's emotional stuff. Forcing someone to become the colonizer to participate in this game is emotional and people need to be talking about what that means and what that says about society and all that kind of stuff, you know?

Courtney: Is there much scholarship on gaming coming from the industry itself or do you think most of it is still happening more academically?

Alex: There's so much and most of it's narrative-based, right? Like Kosser's stuff and *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*, stuff like that?

Samantha: There's not published stuff, but there's some interesting stuff. There's writing on but they don't necessarily publish it but you hear it at these awesome talk at like GDC [Game Developers Conference]. Where people talk about things like race and gender and diversity and sexism, not only in the industry but in the games themselves and kind of the connection between the two. But it doesn't get published so it's not public knowledge, and it almost makes perfect sense that it's not. I mean, if we look at what's going on with #gamergate, there would be so much backlash if most of what gets said at GDC, kinda behind closed doors, among industry professionals and academics were to make it to mainstream, I think all hell would break loose.

Alex: For sure.

Harley: I don't consider myself a gamer, per se, though I play, and follow a little bit, but I have just been amazed lately at the heat, I guess, and not just with #gamergate, but you know, the death threats from releasing patches to modify weapons in *Call of Duty*, and I loved the game *Fez*, I thought that was a fantastic, one of the best indie games I'd ever played, and then to hear that *Fez 2* was just dropping out because he couldn't stand the people pushing him to finish. I don't think I've ever seen that kind of anger, heat, and vitriol from the consumers of a product toward the creators in any other industry. It seems really unique to me.

Alex: It's unique and depressing and overwhelming and it's stuff I talk about every day. I remember having to on my dissertation doing research for just six months anyway it was like the worst six months of my life and I was reading the stuff that's happening in the game industry. It's. You know, I don't even know what to say, I mean it's mind-blowing the amount of hate and attacks and you know they do it towards Melburg for sure, but anyone who they see as threatening what their view of what gaming, what it should be, is absolutely threatened, death threats, and Anita Sarkeesian had stuff brought to her house. Zoe Quinn had stuff--her parents called and this was all the way back to, years and years, any women who worked in programming and spoke up about issues like this. Like Kathy Sierra. And I was just reading some stuff today even about like GitHub employees, women, having this stuff happen to them, like it's completely out of control. Yeah.

And we've talked about why and it seems like whenever people talk about why there's so much anger in there it just goes into a sort of apologist and ignoring the ending implications because people want to say "Oh, they're just not socialized well you know gamers are only social skills and this and that and I don't know, when you're sending detailed rape threats to somebody's mailbox, like real mailbox at their house, I don't know. The questions of why seems less important than what we do with it.

Samantha: And that's problematic. 1. because as a population, demographically, gamers are getting older.

Alex: Yeah, it's easy to say that it's seventeen year old boys that are doing it, but the truth is they only take up like, younger boys only take up like 15% of the gaming industry right now, or 17%, regardless, it's not that big a number. And you can say, well, they're the most vocal, but Sam, I think you're right, the average gaming age is 31 and I think that's where a lot of this is coming from. Guys who grew up with games saw it as this nostalgic ideal and now see it communicated away. When you see the people who harassed Zoe Quinn, weren't kids. It was her ex-boyfriend and a contingent of people on 4Chan and online who joined him and it certainly wasn't kids. So.

And it certainly wasn't kids harassing Kathy Sierra out of programming, so that took a depressing turn.

Courtney: Well, let's cheer things up slightly, I hope. Do you use gaming in your classroom? And do you see any of this heat or danger? Do you covet it or do you promote it in your classroom or is it easy enough to ignore?

Alex: I'll go first because I know Sam will have way more to say about this than me. I'm teaching my first class on games right now. I'm doing a media studies class that's children, adolescence, and the media and culture of video games. And we're studying video games particularly as they pertain to children. So I'm having them, like, their first assignment was to do a video game review so they're playing games. And then like each week is a different hot topic is how I arranged it. I'm not. Because I really think a lot of my exams work is having to say you can't study games without studying the problematic nature of it. This is why Jane McGonigal, who is awesome, had this amazing TED talk about how games can change the world for the better, but how it's difficult to accept that because gaming is not available to everybody in the same way because of the horrible harassment issues and things like that. It

needs to be sort of worked out first before it's some kind of great medium that can change the world. So we do like sexism one week and we do violence one week. We do educational possibilities one week. That's how I organize it. I do these hot topics each week that sort of cover the gambit and then they play games along with it. But I don't have any equipment yet, so I can't have them sit down and play games with me because we don't have the. I'm just trying to get it but I know Sam does all sorts of good things with games in her classrooms.

Samantha: Yeah, well, she's right, I do all kinds of stuff. In terms of graduate classes, there's usually games-based classes, like in theory classes, that are specifically people who are interested in studying games, but then occasionally like in my minority rhetorics seminar, we'll bring in stuff that, is not a games class, and say, okay, this is going to be an easier, more interactive, fun way of us getting at this and kind of closer to this subject. And it usually works pretty well that way.

It's funny because we were talking about invention in my Intro to Comp Theory class this semester and I brought in a bunch of iPads with *Scribblenauts* loaded and made them play *Scribblenauts* to make them think about invention. So I do it a lot at the graduate level but we don't get as much heat at the graduate level because they're more invested in games if it's a games course and that's kind of what they're there for [unintelligible] for a bit.

But recently I've been developing an undergraduate curriculum in gaming studies in the department. And so I've been kicking off [unintelligible] undergraduates. And I've been pleasantly surprised because all the undergraduates who are taking the courses are not humanities majors and some of them, they don't tell me what they've done in the past but you can tell from conversation, and they will say outright sometimes even, that they have not thought about search paint as being problematic or these issues beforehand. Right? And it's just being in this environment where there are twelve, fourteen, eighteen other people talking about this kind of in real, theoretical ways and not just slinging around racial epithets online that it makes sense that these things are issues. I think it kind of diffuses some of the heat as we were saying, because it gives them a safer place to talk about it. And I never call them out and say "Oh, so you do this online". But just kind of giving them that space to hear what others have to say and even not have individual cases pointed out, but looking at things broader, more thematically, and kind of over a larger span of time gives them some history behind it too.

Courtney: Well, I want to invite both of you to think about is there anything that you want to tell to *KairosCast* listeners, who are gamers to an extent, rhetoricians for the most part, we're glad to welcome you to the *KairosCast* network, what would you like listeners to know about you and your show?

Alex: Um, I would say that what we do, any discussions of technology, anybody who's interested in technology and sort of the issues, scholarly and culturally issues that are happening with technology, I think it would be a good podcast for you to watch, because, and listen to, because we do talk about games, specific games, particularly for the first half hour of the show, but we talk about really broad issues that I think would really apply to anybody who's doing stuff with technology critically. And I think out of our conversations, there's a broader implication for how we can keep ethics in mind and keep people in mind and keep culture in mind while we're talking about these very computational things that we want to sort

of pretend fell out of the sky as like these amazing pieces of technology but really are indicative of our society and influence our society so I think our conversations really would be broadly applicable to people even if they're not solely interested in games.

Samantha: A couple things that I would say to the audience is about our podcast, and just remember that in addition to the podcast there's also a blog where we post daily about games and issues about diversity and just games and game reviews, so there's fun stuff and there's serious fun stuff--I won't separate serious from fun--but about the podcast, other than the fact that you have a bevy of brilliant women talking about games, but we talk about important issues in games and it's a diverse span in terms of the issues in games. So it's not just games and feminism. It's games and education, games and economics. We talk about games and a whole range of things, so we like to think that there's a little bit of everything for everybody. And I think that's important because most people will think, "Oh it's games; I don't play games" or "that's something I don't have time for" but there's lots of stuff there that I think can be useful to people who are not even gamers. Or don't play games, I won't say "are not gamers" because a lot of people don't consider themselves gamers since it's become a bad word to some people lately. But I think that there's a lot of stuff and in terms of games and rhetoric, I think rhetorically, one of the things we need to focus on and one of the things we need to pay close attention to is that rhetorically, games are important. Games are there. Here. And as an entertainment medium, are now we've, in terms of revenue, exceeded film, have exceeded kind of audio entertainment in terms of music, they're not going away. And it is something that our children, our students, our colleagues, our friends, our family members, are all engaging with on a regular basis and that is why games are so important rhetorically, at least, and we have to be able to figure out what games are saying, what games are teaching, and how to deal with those things, negative and positive.

[segue music]

Harley: Do you make stuff, Courtney?

Courtney: Other than podcasts and proposals and poems, you mean?

Harley: Right, like tangible stuff… kind of the opposite of the virtual realities of the games we've been talking about.

Courtney: I do. I mostly do textile crafts (quilting, knitting, embroidery) and kitchen stuff (I make cheese and soap and jams). I make stained glass. I don't make much time for it all, but it's always a fantastic relief from the otherwise abstract stuff I do all day. Do you do any of this sort of thing?

Harley: Well, most of my projects are digital, but I do paint from time to time. I'd love to do more of it, but the inspiration for it takes a lot longer to build--probably because I don't do it often. But every now and then, an idea forms, and if it hangs around awhile, it starts to simmer. Eventually, it boils over and I paint. And it might be a few years between each time, but there's something really satisfying about making a physical thing that I can see without turning on a screen. But I do wish I had more time to work on fun projects.

Courtney: Me too. And I think it's important that we look at this kind of thing as more than a pastime or hobby.

Harley: Oh yeah? What do you mean?

Courtney: Well, gaming and crafts are fun and fulfilling, but they're also activities that connect people and create a shared experience and a space that facilitates meaning.

Harley: So, you're saying these activities are, or at least can be, rhetorical?

Courtney: You are such a nerd.

Harley: Well, who's playing Dragon Age? Just tell me that.

[laughter]

Courtney: Recently, I spoke to some colleagues about a CFP on rhetoric and craft they've organized for Fall 2015 in Harlot. Amber Buck, Megan Condis, Kristi Prins, Marilee Brooks-Gillies, and Martha Webber are all composition and rhetoric scholars who are also interested in the materiality, meaning-making, mediality, and communicability of craft. I asked them each to first introduce themselves and say a little about their particular interest in this topic. The first voice you'll hear is Amber Buck's.

Amber Buck: So, I am a assistant professor of English at the College of Staten Island where I teach comp and multimodal rhetorics and writing/composition pedagogy and I, in terms of crafting, I'm pretty much just a cook. And I don't mean to say "just a cook". You know, we don't usually think of cooking as craft, right, but I think there's been a little bit of resurgence of that in terms of canning. People taking on kind of crazy cooking projects in terms of canning or making your own mayonnaise or butter. I don't do anything that crazy but when I became vegan, I discovered that I had to make a lot more things from scratch. So that's kind of where my own interest, my own hobby lies in terms of making things like vegan cupcakes and vegan Buffalo wings and various vegan versions of non-vegan items.

I became interested in craft kind of academically when I was doing my dissertation when I had a research participant who was very active on Ravelry, the social network for knitters and so I'm really interested in how crafters--and I wrote about this a little in my dissertation--how crafters represent their work in different digital spaces.

Megan Condis: My name is Megan Condis and I am a graduate student at the University of Illinois. I work on video game culture, so not particularly on crafting, although I do do a lot of work on fan mods and hacks so I guess you could call that a kind of digital craft, and, in my personal life, I enjoy knitting and I do cosplay at conventions, so I put together and assemble and occasionally sew costumes and do makeup art.

Kristi Prins: My name is Kristi Prins and I'm nasally right now because I have a cold. I'm a graduate student at the UW in Milwaukee, in Wisconsin, and in my personal life I do craft. I'm kind of a self-taught crocheter and I can read patterns but I tend not to work with them and just make stuff up as I go along. I do some like sewing and stuff like that too. In my scholarship,

I've been working on my dissertation that looks at adapting craft [Hangout Alert Sound] meets and community work for teaching multimodal composition and so that's kind of tying those two things together.

Marilee Brooks-Gillies: I'm Marilee Brooks-Gillies. I direct the writing center at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. And I craft as well, I crochet, mostly. I do a lot of tactile things, so a lot of feltwork, things like that. I made a bunch of felt flowers for my wedding, for instance. And, in my research, I'm really interested in what motivates people to craft, so why do they do it? Because it's a useful thing, but you don't really need to knit a scarf, right, like you can buy one. It's a lot less time-consuming and probably cheaper even, so these kind of things really fascinate me. Is it about a certain kind of identity that you're trying to craft for yourself? Is it staying in touch with certain people? Is it handing down traditions? So these are the kinds of things I explored in my dissertation and that I'd like to continue working on.

Martha Webber: My name is Martha Webber and I'm currently in my second year as an assistant professor in the Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics at California State University, Fullerton. My interest in crafting has really been since I was quite young. My mom taught me how to sew with a sewing machine and we would make clothes for my dolls and that was something that was really important to me. I didn't have words for it at the time, but I came to understand through schooling that my mother had a developmental disability and that alphabetic literacy was not necessarily something that came easy to her, or as easily as it does for some. It was through visual expression, especially handcrafted art, that she has incredible intelligence, so learning that from her very early on was something that was really important to me.

Courtney: Great! Nice to meet you all and thanks for taking the time to talk to *Kairos*. You start off your call with five guiding questions on the topic. So, how about if each of you choose one of these questions that speaks to you especially and then tell us some about what sort of work you expect or want to get in response and maybe what your motivation is in addressing that particular angle on this topic.

Megan: So our first question is perhaps the most broad question. It's "What is craft?" and as a person who works in English and writing, and I'm sure this is true of my colleagues as well, but one thing I really like about the word "craft" is that it has many faces. So, it can be like the noun, "I made a craft" or it can be the verb, "I am crafting" or it can even be an adjective, and that adjective occasionally means that you are trying to elevate something, like you are fancy if you order a craft beer, right, like ooh you're trying to impress someone, or it can occasionally be kind of a dismissive term like I think of someone saying "Oh, that apron you made, it just looks like a craft" as opposed to something that is fashionable or something that is well done, like as if "craft" is thrifty or craft is something that is second best or like a make-do object.

And so we think that that is really interesting, that there are all these connotations that can attach to the word and then there's also this, I think of it as this new upstart category of "DIY". Why did we invent this new term, "DIY", that's seemingly tangential to crafters but definitely a separate subculture, like almost a punk or a hipster-zine subculture. So that's one of the things we're interested in. We might encourage submissions that talk about the way that the word "craft" is mobilized in different contexts or we might be interested in, I believe it was Marilee who was talking about "crafting an identity," so, like, what is it that you think you're

affiliation as a crafter or as a member in a crafting community says about you? What are you trying to project or what do you think you're projecting by using that as an identity? And also we might be interested in the differences between "craft" and "art" and historically how those two were differentiated, particularly when it comes to who is doing the creating. So, what types of gender or race or class identities are associated with "craft" versus which ones are elevated to "art".

Courtney: Cool. Thanks, Megan. As a personal aside, my brother runs Maker Faire North Carolina, and those guys do everything from weaving to metallurgy to rockets and robots, so I'm wondering where the term "maker" falls in with what you're trying to accomplish.

Megan: Oh yeah! That's a really interesting question. That makes me wonder what type of… like, when I hear the word "craft" or the word "DIY", both of those evoke in my mind a movement or a subculture, like that you're part of a community and you're trading secrets or trading information. And I think the word "maker" is really interesting because it suggests like a lone figure that is forging ahead and so obviously if there's a "maker" convention and these people are gathering together, but that label makes it sound as though it's rugged individuals that are figuring out how to survive or to make-do on their own but I don't know, I'd have to investigate that a little more. We would welcome a contribution from someone if they were interested in sussing out what is the difference between a "crafter" or a "DIYer" or a "maker" and why might someone choose one label or another.

Marilee: Yeah, I think that is an interesting question. I think "maker" has some really good and interesting implications for those of us in rhetoric and writing because I always talk about writing as a type of "making". And so I think if we can talk about writing as making and we can talk about other things as making, then we can help people understand that rhetoric goes beyond writing because sometimes our field focuses a little too much on writing--I say this as a writing centre director--but, you know, there are other kinds of rhetorical practices we need to be looking at too. So, I'm really excited about this idea of "maker" and how we might use that as scholars.

Kristi: I wanted to jump in a little on that because I am working on the second question. I think Megan, in her answer to the first one, took up a lot of the issues that I was thinking about for that second question, about the language of craft and how that language influences our perceptions of crafting and crafters. And for me, craft in particular really is this term that accretes meanings and never really [unintelligible] any of them, and that's true even in people who write in craft studies often point to that, where you get all these contradictory things that come together under this umbrella term. And for me, craft usually ends up being somehow separate from mainstream capitalism and "maker" really evokes for me, because of the Maker Faires and the community surrounding those, this kind of entrepreneurial, technological, twenty-first century identity that's very much taking up connections between digital technologies and craft in a lot of ways, and I'm sure that's not true for everyone in the maker movement, in the same way that someone who takes up craft at this point in history might be rejecting contemporary capitalism, industrialization, standardization, but you do also have home crafters who are going to places like Michael's or Hobby Lobby and that can fulfill something very similar for those people. I do think it's just a really interestingly complex constellation of terms that come together where you do get these really conflicting identities and groups that can be brought together under that umbrella.

Courtney: Kristi, why don't you go ahead and read that question?

Kristi: Yeah. That question specifically says, "How does the language of craft—whether warcraft, witchcraft, or craft cocktails—influence our perceptions of crafting and crafters?" And one of the things I like about that inclusion of "warcraft" in particular is that it connects to "witchcraft" in that, you know, the game takes place in this vaguely fantasy medieval space which, historically, European medieval spaces is where the term "witchcraft" developed and so it's taking up the association with like old, prescientific world, but also warcraft is this massive multi-player online game that is very much contemporary and digital and yes, you're kind of playing the game with your hands, usually, by like typing on the keyboard as you're moving around, but both witchcraft and something like craft cocktails you're looking very much at local resources, very physically intensive work, you have a path that people may or may not think is worthwhile given the work involved, and so there's conflict, again, even among those three examples.

Courtney: Thanks, Kristi. I think Martha's going to take question number three.

Martha: "What does your own craft practice look like? What does it mean to you? What does it communicate to those around you?" These questions are really getting at our submission call for our practice and reflection section. In those sections, we really specifically want crafters to participate in them through image and video, audio and alphabetic texts or some combination. What can you show and illuminate for audiences to that they can get a sense about your composing practices in crafting? Perhaps ethical, cultural, or environmental considerations that are going into your practice. Maybe it's the personal insights that your handicraft illicites but that audiences may not be able to see at first encounter with your craft and words. So that question, "What does your craft practice look like? What does it mean to you?", we're really hoping that people are thinking about creative new dynamics, step-by-step processes, that will situate their craft practices for others.

Marilee: So then the next one, "Why does the craft movement seem to be so persuasive at the moment? How should we understand these rhetorics of craft? How has a culture of DIY crafted a rhetoric of its own?" I think this really touches on what Kristi was just talking about, that there is this localized emphasis in the craft movement, so this is something where you can make it yourself. You know, you don't go to Chili's and Applebee's anymore, I mean who does that?! Lots of people. But the sense is that people who want to craft things for themselves make things for themselves are part of a local culture choose different venues. They go and have the craft beer and they go to a local establishment to eat. These are communities that are linked and not necessarily separate. Not to say that if you like to knit that you can't possibly ever go to an Applebee's, or that that's a bad thing, but I think that as a movement, these groups are configuring themselves around these types of practices, so not just "I make my own furniture" but "I also buy local beer". And I'm curious about that and how these economies have grouped and how they'll persist. I think that's really fascinating. And also geographically where are they more common?

Courtney: Do you have any instinct about the answer to that question yet, Marilee?

Marilee: I don't know, I'm looking to our contributors I guess, to see what they might have to say to us.

Megan: And maybe I might even jump in here. So there's the localization movement of like in my imagination I see this "stitch 'n bitch" circle, like we're all going to meet at the coffee shop and we're going to work with yarn together and we're going to support our local businesses and stuff like that. But then the other moment that craft is having right now is the online moment gathered around places like Etsy and Pinterest, where you are turning your craft into, perhaps, a small business or you are sharing images of what you're able to create with communities that are really far flung. Like, in particular, I am a member of the Craftster.org message board and so a lot of that is trading instructions or showing off pictures, but one of the really cool things that group does also is that they'll sign up for little like trading communities. So you'll get a penpal and your guide will be like, oh they want something knit and they like the colours red, purple and green, and then it's up to you to create something and to send it to that penpal and then you'll receive something back. It's almost like the experience of making that local community expanded a little bit or creating communities where you can find them as opposed to relying on your geographic area and in particular it even makes me think if we have DIY practitioners who are maybe more counterculture or who are maybe queer or feminist or like politically active, then they might be in a geographic area where they can't necessarily tap into a local community, and so those Internet groups will provide them a place where they can exchange and find resources that maybe their local small town may not be able to afford them.

Kristi: Picking up on that a little bit, one of the things that's interesting to me about contemporary craft--and you can kind of hear it in the ways that we're talking about it now--is that it very much is looking at people who are participating in craft and DIY by choice and not out of necessity. There have always been people who have provisioned for themselves out of necessity and it's interesting to me that that is so little a part of the conversation. In my own work, I've participated in that to some extent, so, I guess one of the things that I would love to see is somebody working on craft and DIY that hasn't received attention, practices, and provisioning that usually flies under the radar because they are practiced by people who are doing it because they have to.

Megan: Like craft as survival instead of craft as hobby?

Kristi: Yeah. Not survivalism as in people who are choosing to go out and leave everything they have behind, but people who really are surviving through their own craftiness.

Megan: Hmm. That makes me think about… perhaps parallel movements to that might be like couponers or like thrifters. Is that kind of the angle that you're taking?

Kristi: In some sense, I guess, I mean I'm thinking in some ways about the Appalachian craft of the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries that was really taken over by, I think it's Black Mountain College and some of the Appalachian arts movements that kind of co-opted the work that people were doing on their own, in which you shift the local economy and really shift the place that that craft had in the local culture.

Marilee: This also makes me think of some of the research I've done where craft had taken on sort of an unsavory connotation, you know like, "you wouldn't do that unless you had to" and so if you craft, you're poor. I did some research with a local craft [unintelligible] in Lansing. That's what part of my dissertation was. ...came kind of late to craft and they were kind of convincing themselves they liked it because I think there were elements of craft they really liked, like crafting a table, like a Thanksgiving dinner and hosting that--that was a form of craft for them, and crafting their home, and so like things that they did to their home space that made it happy. But when it came to things like yarn crafts, those were seen as something kind of gross that you would only do if you had to and in fact, you wouldn't even where a knit product that looked handmade even if someone else made it. And I found that really interesting because other members of that group had opposite reactions and really wanted to do something with their hands and like a lot of folks work in information and so those of us who are academics really do this. We don't work with our hands, well, I guess we type a lot, I'm lying; we work with our hands all the time, but we don't work with our hands in these ways--we don't make tactile things in the same way and so, I think sometimes this is a way to escape that a little bit. So it was really interesting to me to hear these different motivations and I'd really be curious to see more work in that area.

Courtney: There's one last question in your call, so, Amber, I think this one's yours.

Amber: "What are the larger implications for craft practices when they enter digital spaces? How have sites like Pinterest, Ravelry, and Etsy changed craft practices and activities?" That was a question I wrote because I was particularly interested in that aspect of it. I'm really interested in the materiality of craft items entering digital spaces and how people represent them in digital spaces. But I also, there are so many interesting ways I think people could take up this question in terms of because I think a lot of the resurgence in craft has accompanied a rise in these websites. They all have a different kind of ethos that's changed over time and I think people could really take up either an analysis of any of these sites in terms of how they're constructing craft so, what does "craft" mean on Pinterest versus what does "craft" mean on Etsy or Ravelry, but I also think that people could go into very specific practices that happen on any of those sites too, whether they're analysing the way a particular community is using the site or kind of their own practice. *Harlot* has a great piece in their current issue, actually, on moms and how moms use Pinterest. It was written by a mommy-blogger. So, I think there are lots of ways people could take up that particular question.

Courtney: Why don't you guys tell us about how the idea got going for this issue on this topic.

Amber: So, in terms of the special issue, I proposed a panel for FemRhet last year with Marilee, Kristi Prins, and Kristin Ravel and the panel just fit together really well in terms of talking about different aspects of craft so I wanted to collaborate further with them, so that's where the special issue came out of.

Kristi: I guess properly this got its start, from my perspective, at the Feminisms and Rhetorics conference in 2003 at Stanford. Marilee and Amber and one or two other people and I were doing a panel about craft and afterwards we were talking and Amber said,

"there's momentum here; we should really work on putting together like a special issue somewhere." And I said, "Yes! That's great. Tell me what I can do." Sign me up. Yeah. Prior to that Martha and I and people had been presenting on craft at conferences like the Cs and Watson and through that we hooked up with Marillee and so we had kind of a nice group and Megan is totally new to me and I'm excited to be working with her too. But it seems like kind of that University of Illinois, [unintelligible], Michigan State confluence and then Amber is certainly the person who, I think, got in touch with *Harlot* and did all the groundwork there. I think in some ways it happened, for me at least, because in the larger rhet/comp scholarship you have people like Jodie Shipka and even Jason Palmeri looking at different approaches to multimodal composition and historicizing that and taking that phrase, "multimodal" and thinking really broadly about what that can mean. And for me personally, that connected up so well with craft practices and craft communities.

Marilee: I think Amber really was the spearhead in this and I would say the same, I think for us and our presentation at FemRhet last year. I think Amber got us together for that too. So, she really brought us together and now we can talk about craft as a group all the time, which is great!

Megan: I was just going to address my like newbi-ness with this whole thing. So, one of the neat things about this group is that they are very public with sharing interesting links, and interesting work that they have done online, and so I actually happened to come in by as an interested spectator in a Facebook group on crafting and DIY rhetoric and I kind of had been you know a lurker there I think and occasionally would throw up a link that was interesting and so when the opportunity came around to maybe be able to participate with these folks and actually work with them on a project, I kind of shoved my way in there and said like, "If you need anything, please let me help you" because I'd enjoyed looking at their work online in the past. So, it was very kind of them to let me stick my nose in and join them.

Courtney: Somebody tell us about *Harlot*. How did you get involved there? Why did you choose it? And tell us what they do.

Megan: Yeah. *Harlot* is a digital magazine, it's open access so it's free to anyone who is curious and wants to stop by and look at the work. And it is interested in looking at the role of rhetoric in everyday life, and they mean that both in the sense of like "let's discover some areas of life where rhetoric is present but maybe you wouldn't immediately think of it as being present" but also in a sense that "we're not just interested in the viewpoints of only scholars of rhetoric, we're also interested in the viewpoints of artists and creators and even just like curious individuals who have something to say about their own communities and their own practices." So, it's written for a general audience and we really try to cut down on jargon and theory and excessive notation and we're more interested in I guess being like public intellectuals and like from both ends on that too: intellectuals speaking to the public and the public speaking back to the classroom and saying like "here's what we can contribute to your classroom". And one of the really cool things about it being a digital magazine as opposed to a print magazine is that we can publish as many images as people would like to send in to accompany their work or any videos or podcasts or multimodal kinds of practices. For an issue on craft, we think that that's particularly exciting and we'd be interested to see images of craft or like to see if you wanted to give

us a pattern or a recipe or video of you making something with your hands. Like I think those kinds of things are something that will really flesh out these essays that we're going to be receiving or flesh out this idea of what "craft" can be because it will make it more concrete instead of more abstract and that's something *Harlot* was able to offer us that we're really excited about.

Courtney: Tell us about your submissions process. What's the deadline? Are there any special procedures you want us to follow? How can we participate?

Marilee: Well, we've been getting a lot of interest and I think it's helpful when, if folks aren't sure if they have something that's a good fit to go ahead and send us a message. Sometimes they've been doing that through *Harlot* and that gets forwarded to us and that's fine. Sometimes if people know us they'll contact one of us individually and we get that word out to the rest of the group and we talk it over. So, either way is perfectly fine and so they can send us a sense of their direction. Some folks have been particularly interested in whether or not what they're naming as craft is craft, so that's been really interesting to us to see these kinds of ideas that people have put forward and saying, "do you think this is craft? because I think it's craft, but maybe it's not to you guys ?". So that's been really interesting and engaging and so I think that's really helpful and one note that when doing that, if possible, let us know where you think the submission lies when it comes to our different focus areas. We call them "reflection", "inquiry", or "practice". So, in the reflection section we're really interested in seeing something that reflects on the craft practices in your own life and you might share something that is linked to family or another group or community, a craft history. And this could also be something where you talk to other people about their craft practices, so you might have a video of someone talking through their own practices. And then we have the inquiry section which is I guess more of your traditional scholarly kind of focus, not that it has to be, but it's more about interactions within a community. So, a crafting group of some sort, or perhaps looking at sites like Ravelry or Pinterest and so spaces where you're asking these kinds of questions of these groups and craft practices. In the practice where you're telling us about just your own practice or a practice in general so we talked about people sharing patterns and things like that, so walk us through a pattern, maybe.

Megan: And so, if you are interested in sending along questions, you could email them to editors@harlotofthearts.org and if you have a submission that you're ready to send in, you would go to harlotofthearts.org and there is an online system there so you'll just register yourself and put in all your contact info and then it'll just walk you through the process of uploading your piece in whatever form your piece happens to take.

Kristi: Submissions are now due on April 15 2015. So this is going to be their Fall 2015 issue, so if you do the math from there, from the April submission, there will be some work with both the *Harlot* regular editors and us, the special issue editors to get submitted projects ready for publication. So there will be continued work once you've submitted your project. And then it will go live in Fall 2015.

Courtney: There is a link to this CFP on the KairosCast show page, as well as links to some of the resources mentioned by our guests. Thanks to Marilee Brooks-Gillies, Amber Buck,

Megan Condis, Kristi Prins, and Martha Webber for taking the time to tell us about their project.

If you have a CFP you'd like to tell KCast listeners about, please let us know. We would like to feature your project on an upcoming episode.

Harley: Thanks also to our pedagogy contributors, and Samantha Blackmon, and Alex Layne for participating in this episode.

Courtney: Visit our show page at kairos.technorhetoric.net/kairoscast

Harley: Email us at kcast@technorhetoric.net.

Courtney: OK, so can I get back to Dragon Age now?

Harley: Well, that depends… can I join your party?

Courtney: You're on!

Courtney: KairosCast is produced by Courtney Danforth and Harley Ferris.

Harley: It is distributed by *Kairos*, Doug Eyman, senior editor.

Courtney: Our editor is Cheryl Ball.

Harley: If we had interns, their names would go here.

Harley: For more *Kairos*, see kairos.technorhetoric.net.