



Northeastern  
**College of Social Sciences  
and Humanities**

Jacksonville State University Department of English  
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October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear Search Committee,

I write to apply for Assistant Professor of English at the Jacksonville State University Department of English. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate in Writing and Rhetoric at Northeastern University's English Department and will defend in April 2021. My dissertation, directed by Professor Mya Poe, demonstrates how critical fans subvert harmful ideologies embedded in popular culture and their own digital communities to advocate for justice. My commitment to social justice is entangled in my research, teaching, and administrative work.

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My dissertation, “The Critical Fan Toolkit: Fanfiction Genres, Ideologies, and Pedagogies,” asserts the pedagogical and cultural significance of fans’ critical writing practices in transforming online communities. I contend critical fans engage the theoretical and political commitments of popular culture texts and reimagine how the world may be structured. Fans are both this projects’ subjects as well as collaborators and readers. I redefine the dissertation genre to make it accessible for fan readers. The *Critical Fan Toolkit* [<http://www.criticalfantoolkit.org/>] — funded through the Northeastern’s NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks — has a broad audience of fanfiction writers, multidisciplinary scholars, and teachers. My research builds off traditions of Black feminists, such as bell hooks and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, as well as rhetorical genre studies (RGS) scholars, like Anis Bawarshi, who posit that genres are not merely textual forms but rhetorical actions. Specifically, my project focuses on 38,000 *The Legend of Korra* and *Game of Thrones* fanfictions published from 2009-2019 on a fanfiction publishing repository. I incorporate an innovative research process by merging computational and qualitative methods. I analyze trends across these fandoms using data visualizations, word vectors, and natural language processing to identify metadata and writing practices that repel oppressive ideologies such as racism and heteronormativity. I also interviewed critical fans, whose voices are integral to this project. My qualitative coding centers on the specific actions fans take as they write: how they incorporate theory into these actions, how they describe genres and generic conventions, and how they resist harmful ideologies. One fan reimagines *Game of Thrones* in historic India; she challenges the show’s valorization of whiteness by celebrating her own culture and identity. Ultimately, my research advocates that critical fans are already theorizing about politics and representation in their writing, envisioning more diverse and equitable culture.

My teaching is invested in critical digital pedagogy (CDP), especially digital composition, across the disciplines. I received the 2019 Kairos Teaching Award, a national award in the field of digital rhetoric, because of my extensive experience in CDP curriculum development. CDP merges critical and digital pedagogy, in which digital tools can be used to analyze systems of power as well as analyze how these tools reify or subvert these systems. In my Writing for Social Media course, students engage with forms of digital activism, including #BlackLivesMatter and other social justice issues they are devoted to. Students define and trace digital activist genres, assess how information is disseminated, and create their own materials, such as infographics for Instagram stories. This assignment emphasizes the individual and collective power of online activism. I am well-equipped to teach both introductory and advanced courses in qualitative & computational research methods,



rhetorical genre studies, and digital rhetoric. Finally, I am developing a new course on coding and data rhetorics; students will actively engage with and critique digital technologies and use digital tools, practices, and methods — including SEO, data transformation, & digital surveillance — to advocate for justice in their communities. My teaching prioritizes how students can challenge and reimagine systems of power in both their professional and everyday work.

My ongoing research trajectory extends conversations on interdisciplinary knowledge, justice, and research methods. I published “Tracing Fan Uptakes: Tagging, Language, and Ideological Practices in *The Legend of Korra* Fanfictions” in *The Journal of Writing Analytics* article based off my dissertation, tracing the power critical fans have in persuading communities and reshaping genre conventions. My work has also appeared in several publications, including in *Composition Studies*, *Xchanges*, and *Digital Humanities Quarterly* (DHQ). With Mya Poe and another graduate student, I received a research initiative grant through the *Conference on College Composition and Communication*. We use computational and qualitative methods to trace multilingual writers’ practices to challenge limiting North American narratives about multilingual writers. Based on our findings, we are writing a manuscript with our findings and assessment methods that focus on justice and fairness. I will continue collaborating with scholars and students across the disciplines to strengthen methods, build projects, and reach wide audiences to advocate for justice.

As for administrative and service work, I helped pioneer a successful interdisciplinary program and have worked as an administrator, coordinator, and mentor with a focus on justice. As the Assistant Director of the Digital Integration Teaching Initiative (DITI), I partnered with the Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities to integrate digital technologies and methods across the curriculum. When DITI began in 2018, I was on the initial team and assisted in building the program from the ground up. Across the two years, I collaborated with more than 30 faculty from ten disciplines; I developed and led nearly 100 in-class or online workshops on digital and data ethics, digital methods, the front- and back-ends of software, and the logic behind digital tools. I also created extensive documentation, wrote semester reports for assessment purposes, helped design the website, and left a sustainable legacy. As the current Assistant Director of the Writing Program, I work with the Mya Poe, the WP Director, to advance anti-racist curricular and policies in the program. Currently, we are assessing WP instructors’ syllabi to analyze the use anti-racist policies, language, and texts. We will be using this assessment to update the WP Learning Goals. I have also dedicated much of my time to service work, including organizing the 2018 English Graduate Student conference, founding the Graduate Student Welfare Advocacy Group, and leading the Feminist Coding Collective. This work provides me with extensive experience in program assessment, curriculum development, community-building, and mentorship.

Jacksonville State University is an exciting place to grow as a scholar, teacher, and member of a vibrant community. My emphasis on critical digital pedagogy, digital and data rhetoric, new media, and social justice fits well within the curricular and scholarly profile of the department. Please find all requested materials enclosed. You may find more information on my [website \[https://caramartamessina.com/\]](https://caramartamessina.com/).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. M. Messina".

Cara Marta Messina  
PhD Candidate, English, Writing and Rhetoric  
Assistant Director of the Writing Program  
Northeastern University