

Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion

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Editors' Letter: Call for Solutions

Harlot Editors

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Call for Solutions

It's hard to believe that it's been 9 years (!) since the inception of the Harlot project. This is the 15th issue of the little alternative journal that could... and did. And that's now wondering, what next?

Harlot was sparked by one particularly lively discussion about how, shall we say, unappealing most rhetorical criticism is for anyone outside the academic community. If this stuff matters—and we were dedicating our careers to that premise—then why isn't it being shared? Why does it only show up in stuffy print journals accessible only to scholars? (Yes, we're dating ourselves here!) Why aren't academic rhetoricians reaching out into the “real world” where their work might have real effects? Why were we writing in ways that none of our friends and family would ever want to read?

That conversation spilled from a grad seminar onto our front porches and neighborhood happy hours, and eventually complaining gave way to creating. What would an alternative to conventional academic publication look like? Who could it reach? What could it do? We didn't really know... but we figured it would be really fun to find out.

That experimental spirit—*What if...?*—has always been at the heart of *Harlot*. It's what kept things interesting and relevant, kept us going through the challenges that arose early and often, and kept the community around *Harlot* growing.

Along the way, *Harlot's* mission to publish work that bridges the gap between academic and public discourses clearly struck a chord in the rhet/comp community. From the very first presentation and pilot issue, we've noticed the enthusiasm and relief with which others in the field greeted the project. It turns out a lot of us shared these concerns about audience and access and wanted to play with new models for academic work.

And your generosity has been astonishing. Colleagues offer technical and emotional support; reviewers offer thoughtful and constructive feedback; contributors offer innovative and crowd-pleasing articles; volunteers offer copyedits and coding; readers offer praise and awards. We could not have asked for a stronger team of supporters.

Harlot was obviously onto something. Academics are thirsting for opportunities to make our work matter, to get involved in public conversations, to engage with audiences outside our usual reach.

But you'll notice the “us” here—and it's pretty darn academic. Turns out our popularity among academics furthered the academic drift of submissions, which has led to a struggle to gain—and maintain—relevance for non-academic audiences. In this way, our “success” within the academic sphere has complicated the fundamental mission. We've attempted to expand our community—publishing pieces by state troopers,

medical doctors, ceramists, lawyers, chaplains, film directors, web developers—and we're deeply grateful for the chance to have worked with such talented, enterprising, and engaging folk. Nevertheless, with a few notable exceptions, *Harlot* has not reached a wide readership among non-academic audiences; we have also struggled to solicit submissions from outside academia, and outside rhetoric and composition specifically. But simply managing the publication leaves little opportunity for the kind of strategic, creative work that would help *Harlot* attract public participants.

Many of you have offered help, and we so appreciate our volunteers, interns, and associate editors—even as we have lamented the difficulty of taking full advantage of your greatness. *Harlot* requires constant editorial recruitment and mentorship. Although these are some of the most rewarding parts of the project, they are also the most energy-intensive. This is largely due to *Harlot's* idiosyncratic positioning, which calls for a shift in the expectations of academic work, a reconsideration of intellectual performance, a change in the way we approach rhetoric in our everyday lives, and a rethinking of who that “we” should be. This constant conversation has been what's made our own experience with *Harlot* so rich—and it's what we would like to now share with you.

The truth, dear friends, is that the *Harlot* team lacks the resources to realize our vision for the project. It takes significant time, technical know-how, and financial investment to make any digital publication successful. The editorial board has been dedicated to the mission we set out to accomplish nine years ago, but meanwhile we've also taken up new jobs, pets, projects, and families. We've reached a point where finding the right balance has meant recognizing the truly heavy lifting it would take to get *Harlot* where we want it to be. Although we've attempted many (*many*) different strategies and tactics for achieving sustainability in these areas—and in doing so stayed true to *Harlot's* ethos of experimentation—we've yet to find a satisfying answer.

And so we're left with the big question: Now what? What's the next stage, if any, in this experiment?

Has this experiment ultimately been a successful failure, or perhaps a failed success? Is *Harlot's* mission realistic within the conventional peer review publishing model? Are there fresh innovations or untapped resources that could help *Harlot* truly achieve its mission? Should *Harlot* be a brand, a blog, a hashtag, a rallying cry? Is it time to pass the project to new leaders? If so, to whom?

The truth is, we cannot go on like we have been, but we're not ready to give up on *Harlot*. That is why we're turning to you, our friends and supporters. What's next for *Harlot*? You tell us.

- **We need your ideas, your proposals, your infinite capacity for creative, critical deliberation.**

- **We invite your proposals for leading *Harlot* into its next phase.**
- **What are your ideas for meeting *Harlot*'s mission?**
- **How might YOU make it happen?**

We're opening our doors, emails, and submission system for you. We hope that you'll take time to reflect, debate, and collaborate in thoughtful and thorough proposals for the next stage of *Harlot*, and we ask for your solutions by May 1, 2017.

From all of us at *Harlot*, **thank you for 9 amazing years of generosity, encouragement, and inspiration.** We're excited as ever about the potential for this project, and we look forward to the continuing collaboration.

Sincerely,

Team *Harlot*