Faculty and "Teams": Academic literacies in the post-lockdown, digital university.

Morgan Suzanne Blair

University of Louisville

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FACULTY AND “TEAMS”: ACADEMIC LITERACIES IN THE
POST-LOCKDOWN, DIGITAL UNIVERSITY

By

Morgan Suzanne Blair
B.A., University of Louisville, 2014
M.A., Brandeis University, 2015

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in English/Rhetoric and Composition

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2024
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A Dissertation Approved on

April 15, 2024

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DEDICATION

To my mom,

for teaching me to persevere through everything,

and to my husband,

for encouraging me to follow my dreams.
ABSTRACT

FACULTY AND “TEAMS”: ACADEMIC LITERACIES IN THE POST-LOCKDOWN, DIGITAL UNIVERSITY

Morgan Suzanne Blair

May 11, 2024

The increased presence of disruptive digital technologies in academia has been a subject of multidisciplinary scholarly conversation and public speculation over the past few decades. Many literacy studies scholars have contributed to this discourse, examining topics like multimodal literacies and perceptions of agency among students. These scholars have noted with skepticism that such technologies may mask operations of power, surveillance, and control which serve the demands of an increasingly “corporate” or “neoliberal” university. Building upon this scholarship, my study contends that the evolving literacy environment of the digital university requires a closer examination of corporate-sponsored narratives and literacy practices implicating faculty in their daily work.

This study adopts a socio-material literacy framework to explore the nuanced ways in which faculty create and share knowledge as they participate in new forms of multimodal literacy activity introduced by the COVID-19 lockdown. This perspective extends beyond human- (and student-) centric narratives of the digital, enabling my study to highlight the complex socio-cultural and material realities which faculty navigate as the nature and expectations of their work continue to change. Using methods derived
from posthumanism for interviewing objects, my study is grounded in the observation of a digital epistemic object—Microsoft Teams ("Teams")—and a co-emergent literacy practice—the Teams senate meeting—in the lives of faculty, both of which emerged in response to the COVID-19 lockdown. Findings reveal that a complex range of actors—from corporate-sponsored narratives which position faculty as “digital first responders” to aspects of the Teams interface like the camera feature—come together to shape how faculty literacy is imagined and enacted. Moreover, a range of power dynamics inherent in the deployment and adoption of Teams raise questions about the influence of private entities on academic practices, including the role of digital platforms in mediating corporate-driven forms of knowledge-making.

Overall, my study calls for further critical inquiry into the assumptions and values underlying the integration of digital technologies into academic practices and a more holistic rather than siloed approach for comprehending the interconnected yet distinctive uptake of these new technologies among diverse academic stakeholders.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, an array of scholarly articles and public reports have identified fundamental changes, or “disruptions,” to higher education (Andresheva; Arday; OECD; Royer et al.; Selingo; Times Higher Education). Recurrent themes have included the challenges and opportunities of online learning, significant financial challenges in the midst of declining enrollment and budget cuts, the emotional and psychological effects of remote work, and the future of higher education as a whole. In addition, some scholars have claimed that market-driven pressures and economic imperatives have influenced academia’s response to the pandemic, shaping decisions around online learning, budget allocations, and institutional priorities (Gee; Goldrick-Rab; Neem; Yuen). The rapid shift to digital modalities prompted by the pandemic has accelerated existing debates surrounding the role of technology in higher education, as well, including concerns about equity, surveillance, and the erosion of traditional forms of academic engagement. Overall, the discourse surrounding higher education in the wake of the pandemic reflects a complex interplay of factors which have led many to re-assess traditional academic practices and institutional structures, including how these intersect with the corporate world. My study positions the literacy practices of faculty at the center of this multi-dimensional conversation. Given these profound and rapid changes stimulated by pandemic, there is
an urgent need to resituate faculty literacy at the heart of this changing landscape. One relevant way to do this is by examining the digital objects and practices which have emerged within the “new normal” of the academic workplace. My study attends to this need, asserting that a closer attention to the literacy practices of faculty in relation the emergence of new digital technologies may illuminate relatively under-explored complexities within our changing academic environment.

One of the most noticeable changes in faculty work following the lockdown has been the salience of digital objects, with consequences for how the university is experienced and performed. The pandemic necessitated the widespread adoption of digital technologies across the academic community, which depended on a quick transition to platforms like Microsoft Teams (“Teams”) to adapt to the abrupt new reality of remote learning and work. What might have taken years to unfold in terms of technological adoption was compressed into a matter of months or even weeks, as universities had to quickly implement new technologies, policies, and practices to maintain operations. Beyond the lockdown, this digital growth persisted due to numerous factors like the continued need for remote work and learning solutions in an increasingly hybrid work environment, the need to maintain investments in newly digitized operations, and changing views of the relevance and potential of the digital, particularly in terms of its productivity and efficiency promise. In addition, the unprecedented growth in the profitability of these technologies for the tech industry, measured by the surge in demand for remote work solutions, online learning platforms, digital collaboration tools, and other software, showcases the lucrative potential of continuing to “do business” with academia. Joining scholars who have noted the increased corporatization of the “digital
university,” my study claims that the pandemic has sparked an unparalleled growth in corporate-influenced forms of digital literacy sponsorship (Gourlay; Williams). Across higher education, new rhetoric surrounding the digital has also emerged as a more visible participant in the constitution of academic life, influencing how faculty understand their identities, work, agency, and academic membership. Though the digital has, for several decades, been formative to academic work and culture, alternative frameworks are necessary for “making new sense of [new forms of digital] literacy” in academia, particularly in the context of the pandemic (Burnett and Merchant 32). Building on the work of the above scholars, my study adopts a socio-material perspective for analyzing literacy as a dynamic and situated phenomenon. By attending to the materiality of literacy, it draws attention to power dynamics, inequalities, and structural constraints that influence how literacy is accessed, valued, and practiced among faculty. Complementing this study’s socio-material lens are the concepts of literacy sponsorship, discourse communities, and genre, all of which facilitate additional insight into changes in social identities, values, and norms within academia as well as the underlying ideologies, power relations, and social practices which influence these. More practically, these complementary frames make it possible to connect my study’s implications to the multidisciplinary conversations mentioned above as well as to open its potential for future conversations on faculty literacy in our field.

To highlight the intertwined relationship between material artifacts and socio-cultural practice in the context of the digital, my study is organized around two key concepts borrowed from digital literacy studies: “digital epistemic objects” and “digital epistemic practices” (Gourlay, Posthumanism 35). Elaborated in further detail in Chapter
Two, these concepts enable a slower, more detailed look at Teams (Chapter Three) and the Teams senate meeting (Chapter Four) as they unfold in the lives of faculty. A variety of digital texts are considered, from a vast and diverse selection of Microsoft’s online publications (webpage, blog, shareholder reports) to the Teams interface, in order to identify emergent themes in how the literacies of faculty are imagined and enacted in relation to the product.

**Research Questions**

In seeking a more detailed and robust account of the changing nature of digital literacies among faculty, one which considers the embeddedness of literacy practice in the distinctive social, cultural, and material context of our post-lockdown, digital university, my study asks the question, “What sustained socio-material networks within the post-lockdown, digital university shape the literacies of faculty?”. To explore this question, my study also asks the following more specific ones:

1. How does the emergence of Teams as a corporate product in academia impact literacy sponsorship among faculty?
2. What sociohistorical discourses influence the conception and enactment of faculty literacy practices?
3. How have the socio-material aspects of Teams, for example its digital interface and surrounding rhetoric, affected faculty identity and practice?
4. How have digital literacy practices co-emerging with Teams impacted the ways in which faculty articulate their professional identities and participate in the creation of knowledge?
5. What emergent genres mediate the ways in which faculty engage in literacy practice in relation to Teams?

To demonstrate the relevance of applying the above questions to a study of literacy practice among faculty, the following section discusses a relatively new yet growing area of interest in literacy studies—faculty writing. By highlighting the limitations of existing scholarship surrounding faculty literacies, this section also argues for a much broader notion of literacy, including its interrelatedness with corporate forms of sponsorship as well as institutional and cultural issues impacting faculty experience. At the same time, it highlights how literacy is interconnected with systems of power which play a role in perpetuating and regulating particular forms of social activity. In light of this expanded view, key concepts for repositioning digital literacy practice as a shared aspect of faculty culture and work are discussed.

Literature Review and Key Concepts

Perspectives on Faculty Literacy

The idea that faculty comprise a distinctive sub-community of writers worthy of specific attention emerged within composition studies in the 1980s and continues into the present. Understanding the historical development of this limited body of scholarship is insightful for my own study in several ways. Most importantly, it demonstrates precedence for conceiving of faculty literacy within a discourse community framework, implying that shared forms of literacy exist among faculty. Related, it demonstrates interest in better understanding the literate lives of faculty, though existing scholarship demonstrates a much narrower view of what that constitutes than does my own study. At the same time, analyzing this conversation also sheds light on many themes interrelated
with how the digital engagements of faculty are imagined. These themes, which appear both in the scholarship below on faculty writing and again in Chapter Three as part of institutionally and corporate-sponsored discourse, limit how the literacies of faculty are understood, especially in relation to the digital.

Since the 1980s, faculty writing has been framed largely as a developmental issue, with many scholars continuing to examine the impact of faculty development programs on writing practices and teaching (Adler-Kassner and Wardle; Anson; Elbow and Sorcinelli; Murray and Newton). This theme reflects the growing recognition that faculty need ongoing support to enhance their writing abilities and that supporting their writing skills reaps a variety of institutional benefits, primarily for learners but secondarily for the purposes of tenure and promotion as well as institutional reputation and credentialing. A persistent assumption has been that improved faculty writing processes equate to improved student writing outcomes. Perpetuating this myth has been the interplay of accountability and assessment movements across higher education, with writing often regarded as a skill that can be measured and assessed more systematically. In recent years, some scholars have questioned the relationship between faculty writing development and improved student writing outcomes, though the majority of scholarship on faculty writing assumes this connection. Adjacent to the concern for pedagogical outcomes related to faculty writing support has also been the secondary concern with scholarly publication. Several scholars have examined faculty writing support as it relates to publication in academic journals (Anson; Clark-Oates and Cahill; Geller and Eodice; Eodice and Cramer; Flowerdew and Ho-Wang; Moore et al.; Schendel et al.). Sub-themes within this area include support models like faculty writing workshops, groups, and
retreats as well as co-authorship and cross-disciplinary collaboration. A secondary theme within many of these studies is writing and research productivity, as measured by publication in scholarly journals, a theme which Chapter Three of my own study uncovers as fundamental to outcome-driven forms of digital literacy sponsorship among faculty.

Overall, attitudes toward faculty writing both within institutions and within scholarship continue to parallel those toward faculty work more broadly, which tends to be categorized into teaching and research. While teaching and research undoubtedly form an important part of faculty identity and practice, my study aims to show that faculty have other lives (and goals) within the university which—though they may intersect with teaching—warrant fuller consideration. For example, faculty engage in various forms of professional communication, including email correspondence, departmental meetings, and academic conferences, all of which contribute to the overall culture and reputation of their academic units and institutions. They also participate in service activities such as committee work, academic governance, and community outreach, which play a role in shaping the institutional culture and governance structures of their departments. In addition to mediation by the digital, a commonality of all of these forms of literacy activity is their inherently social as well as multimodal nature. Nevertheless, though faculty live vibrant textual and social lives across the university, drawing from numerous semiotic resources in order to create and share knowledge, limited attention has been given to the impact of multimodal forms of social literacy on how faculty form their identities and engage with others across the institution.
Despite considerable attention in recent years to the writing practices of faculty, specifically as these intersect with broader institutional issues like writing support, tenure and publication, and the teaching of writing, there remains significant need to explore how faculty create, acquire, and disseminate social knowledge and identities in multimodal environments. As one component of literacy, writing profoundly impacts how faculty construct their identities, situate themselves within the broader academic community, derive a sense of relational value for their work, and ultimately contribute to institutional missions and priorities. Writing plays a crucial role in how faculty perceive and construct both their individual and group identities, serving as a means of self-expression, communication, and reflection, shaping how faculty members understand themselves, interact with others, and contribute to their academic communities. My study examines faculty writing as a multimodal phenomenon which is interconnected with other forms of literacy and having consequences both within and beyond the faculty discourse community. Moreover, my study broadens the scope of faculty work and the conditions in which their literacy practices emerge. In doing so, my study engages in a multidisciplinary conversation on the changing nature of the faculty community, emphasizing the recursive relationship between how faculty work is conceptualized and how digital literacy is understood. This relationship is important for understanding an array of issues related to policy-making, faculty retention, collaboration, and teaching as well as organizational change. A more grounded approach for examining faculty literacy may also be useful in identifying assumptions related to the abilities, identities, and belief systems inherent in forms of institutional support and expectations regarding not only
faculty but also other members of the academic community, including administrators and students.

In light of the above, my study will contribute most directly to that of literacy researchers who have employed socio-materialism as a framework for analyzing various forms of academic literacy. Most of this scholarship has focused on students, examining topics ranging from digital composing practices and networked learning to course management systems (Adams and Pente; Adams and Thompson; Ehret and Hollett; Goodfellow; Gourlay; Leander and Burriss; Williams). At the same time, a few scholars have borrowed from socio-materialism to explore the literacy experiences of faculty, specifically during the initial pandemic lockdown. Specifically, in their 2020 article “Quarantined, Sequestered, Closed: Theorising Academic Bodies Under Lockdown,” Gourlay et al. explore faculty’s experiences at the beginning of the lockdown, focusing on the spatial and socio-material networks they configured in their domestic spaces in order to engage remotely via digital devices. Their qualitative study seeks to better understand faculty perceptions of how the nature of their teaching, research, and relations with their academic communities have changed. My own project builds on this recent study, seeking to better comprehend the role of the pandemic in disrupting academic norms among faculty. At the same time, my project differs by extending its scope past the limited temporality of the lockdown period. Instead, it fast-forwards past the initial experience of physical displacement as a result of remote work, attending to the post-lockdown reality of what became the new normal for many while recognizing that even this reality continues to change.
By examining a much fuller scope of literacy activity, my study extends beyond the developmental and productivity models of faculty writing which continue to shape scholarship as well as discourse surrounding faculty literacy, discourse which carries over into how their digital literacies are imagined. Instead, it explores a multidimensional landscape, illuminating how literacy sponsorship, embedded within academic environments and evolving technologies, influences discursive shifts and cultural transformations among faculty in U.S. academia. This concept of literacy sponsorship, including its relevance to resituating faculty literacies in relation to emergent digital technologies, is elaborated below.

Literacy Sponsorship

Framing this study’s socio-material approach is the concept of literacy sponsorship as articulated by Deborah Brandt. Brandt famously describes literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (“American Lives” 19). She further explains that “sponsors set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance [. . .] they are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners” (19). Literacy sponsors in the lives of faculty from a socio-material perspective encompass a complex network of human and non-human actors that shape the ways in which faculty engage with technologies and navigate their literacy practices. This study explores a range of sponsors, from university administrators who influence faculty’s access to digital technologies and set expectations for their usage to software developers who shape the functionalities, interfaces, and
features of digital technologies. Chapter Four of this study engages substantially with a historically influential sponsor in academia which continues to set the terms of literacy’s valuing, enactment, and experience. This chapter traces Microsoft’s influence on the valuation, enactment, and experiences of literacy in academia before examining the company’s role in shaping the norms, practices, and discourses surrounding faculty engagement with its Teams platform. This tracing of sponsorship entails “expos[ing] more fully how unequal literacy changes relate to systems of unequal subsidy and reward for literacy. These are the systems that deliver large-scale economic, historical, and political conditions to the scenes of small-scale literacy use and development” (Brandt, “American Lives” 32) By analyzing how corporate interests, technological affordances, academic practices, and institutional rhetoric all intersect within the assemblage of faculty literacy, my study argues that sponsorship manifests in various forms to collectively shape the landscape of digital literacies within the faculty discourse community, including the practices and norms surrounding interaction with digital technologies.

Sponsorship shapes the availability of digital technologies and authorizes their integration into aspects of faculty work. Brandt explains that “sponsorship creates access and opportunity to something valuable at the same time that it creates obligation and pressure” (Brandt, “Literacy and Learning” 50). Thus, sponsorship is dual in nature, both enabling individuals’ access to literacy practices while also imposing certain expectations and constraints on which kinds of literacy engagements are permitted. That is, sponsorship comes with expectations and constraints, dictating which forms of digital engagement are deemed acceptable or desirable within specific contexts, as Chapter Five
demonstrates by exploring the university senate meeting on Teams. This regulation of literacy has many consequences for faculty as it limits their autonomy and creativity in navigating new digital environments like Teams.

Finally, and important to filling the relative void of digital literacy scholarship as it pertains to the experiences of faculty, sponsorship “forces us to consider not merely how one social group’s literacy practices may differ from another’s, but how everybody’s literacy practices are operating in differential economies, which supply different access routes, different degrees of sponsoring power, and different scales of monetary worth to the practices in use” (Brandt, “Literacy and Learning” 32). Studying faculty literacy provides a unique lens through which to understand the broader dynamics of literacy sponsorship that encompass the experiences of various academic stakeholders, including students, administrators, and other members of the academic community, who utilize platforms like Teams. As it explores forms of digital literacy sponsorship in the lives of faculty, my study also considers these in relation to diverse economies of access, power, and value that comprise digital literacy as a whole. In this way, studying faculty literacy helps to render a more detailed portrait of literacy sponsorship in the context of the digital university as a whole, shedding light on the interconnectedness of literacy practices across different identities and roles within the academic ecosystem.

**Faculty as a Discourse Community**

The concept of a discourse community provides a concrete as well as versatile starting point for examining literacy sponsorship surrounding the digital within the present post-lockdown moment of U.S. higher education. This framework also resituates literacy as central to several interconnected conversations on faculty communication,
work, and culture which are taking place primarily within organizational studies, where scholars have argued that faculty constitute a unique academic sub-culture (Cohen and March; Eckel; Haviland et al.; Hendrickson et al.; Kezar and Lester; Manning). These scholars acknowledge that faculty culture is embedded within social, historical, and rhetorical networks which impact how faculty conceive of their roles, construct their identities, and approach their daily activities. The extent to which faculty have been discussed within organizational studies as forming a particular discourse community, with distinctive social identities, behaviors, and practices, demonstrates that further attention to their literacy activity has import for an interdisciplinary body of scholarship as well as direct implications for a number of institutional areas like decision-making and climate which ultimately impact the advancement of a variety of institutional goals, including student and employee retention.

Numerous linguists have examined components of the faculty discourse community, including culture and work. For example, some linguists have adopted this lens as a way of examining issues related to faculty communication, meaning making, and identification (Hyland; Hyland and Ruetten). On the other hand, many organizational studies scholars like those mentioned above have gone one step further to examine the relationship between these issues and broader institutional ones pertaining to decision-making and the advancement of teaching, research, and institutional goals (Kezar; Manning; O’Meara; Pascarella). For example, two of the most influential scholars of faculty culture, Michael Cohen and James March, argue that faculty culture in higher education is characterized by its ambiguity and resistance to external control, emphasizing that faculty members often value autonomy and independence in their
teaching and research endeavors. They assert that this culture of autonomy can present challenges for institutional leaders who must navigate the delicate balance between promoting institutional goals and respecting faculty autonomy. Furthermore, Cohen and March highlight the role of faculty culture in shaping decision-making processes, suggesting that faculty members often play a significant role in governance structures and that their values and norms influence institutional policies and practices. Cohen and March’s work has been highly influential across higher education studies, providing a foundation for several more recent studies of faculty culture in its relationship to aspects like mentoring relationships, institutional effectiveness, and organizational change. This precedence for analyzing faculty culture provides an additional layer of relevance to my own study, opening its insights to a multitude of organizational issues within contemporary academia. For example, many scholars have explored the need for faculty culture to evolve to support cross-disciplinary engagement (Boyer; Holland; Thompson), an area which overlaps with some existing scholarship on collaboration and co-authorship within faculty writing studies. Many have further sought to analyze the faculty discourse community in the context of institutional change (Conley; Kezar; Manning). As part of these studies, these scholars highlight the fact that the faculty discourse community itself is embedded with an organizational structure characterized by fluid participation, unclear as well as disruptive technologies, and environmental vulnerability. Related to this change, a handful of scholars have examined culture in the specific context of the post-lockdown university. The COVID-19 pandemic’s disruption to traditional modes of teaching, research, and collaboration has prompted a re-evaluation of the elements that constitute faculty culture in the first place, sparking novel
considerations and perspectives. One notable change in scholarly discussion which is highly relevant to my study has been an intensified focus on the intersection of technology and faculty culture. The rapid adoption of virtual “tools” for remote teaching, research dissemination, and communication has prompted some scholars to examine how these technological shifts influence the dynamics of academic communities (Selfe and Hawisher; Veletsianos). Recent discussions have centered on the relationship between digital platforms and faculty interactions, the formation of virtual academic networks, the implications of technology-mediated communication for faculty identity and relationships, and the long-term evolution of faculty culture as a whole. My study will add to this growing area of scholarship by conceiving of faculty literacy activity as interconnected with larger organizational issues, including cultural change, within academia.

While the above scholarship offers valuable insight into the organizational relevance of exploring faculty as a distinctive sub-community, there is a noticeable lack of perspective on the everyday literacy experiences of faculty. My study seeks to fill this gap, offering a concrete and nuanced understanding of how faculty adapt to organizational changes like disruptive technologies as they navigate their roles within the academic landscape. My study initiates this conversation by employing a grounded socio-material framework for exploring the interconnectedness of organizational change, faculty literacy, and digital technologies within the context of the post-lockdown university. By examining literacy as a phenomenon which is deeply entangled with the material and social affordances of digital technologies, institutional policies, and disciplinary norms, as well as processes of organizational change, a socio-material
account of faculty literacy challenges discourse which frames faculty as passive recipients of or resistant to organizational change as well as digitally deficient members of the academic community. Instead, it repositions faculty as agential participants in shaping their digital literacies and emphasizes the importance of acknowledging faculty expertise and agency in navigating complex socio-material environments.

Though scholarship on faculty writing is limited in the field of rhetoric and composition as well as in literacy studies, the concept of a discourse community, on the other hand, has played a central role in shaping scholarly conversation. Scholars have employed the discourse community framework to investigate the conventions, practices, and identities that shape communication within specific groups, ranging from academic disciplines to online communities. One scholar whose insights have significantly influenced the uptake of the discourse community concept in our field is James Paul Gee. In *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, Gee discusses the social nature of language and writing, introducing the idea that language is not just a tool for communication but also a means through which individuals construct their social identities. He elaborates the concept of discourses, arguing that these are more than just linguistic constructs, as they encompass social practices, identities, and ways of thinking. One of his key points is that discourses are not just about language; they are about “ways of life” (126). My own study explores this exact relationship between discourse and identity as well as how faculty members navigate and negotiate their identities within the complex landscape of academia. Another significant aspect of the relationship between identity and discourse which is relevant to my study of faculty is the fact that individuals may participate in multiple discourses, each with its own rules, values, and ways of communicating, as
discourses are multifaceted, interconnected, and often overlapping. In addition, discourses are dynamic and fluid, adapting to changing situations and contexts. Thus, as discourses change, individuals like faculty may participate in multiple discourses, and these changes in participation are interconnected with their identities and ways of thinking. Gee’s emphasis on identity underscores the idea that language is a fundamental element in how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others. This transformative view of language is important for expanding the conversation on faculty discourse as well as the limited one on faculty writing within our field.

In addition to drawing on the transformative view of language and discourse articulated by Gee, my study also extends Gee’s historical and institutional contextualization of discourse, a feature influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explains that “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (93). In other words, power is viewed as dynamic and context dependent. Similarly, Gee emphasizes the dynamic and context-dependent nature of language and discourse, highlighting how social and institutional contexts shape the production and interpretation of discourse practices. He explains that “discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (*Social Linguistics* 127). By integrating Gee’s view of discourse with Foucault’s theory of power, my study aims to provide a nuanced analysis of how faculty discourse is situated within broader sociohistorical contexts, in this case the post-lockdown period era of the digital
university, and how power operates within discursive practices like the online meeting examined in Chapter Four.

Gee’s definition of a discourse community has been particularly useful in rhetoric and composition among genre studies scholars, who have applied the concept to explore various social contexts like disciplinary and professional communities as well as public discourse and participatory environments (Bazerman; Bhatia; Devitt; Orlikowski and Yates; Pare; Swales). Influenced, as well, by the work of Carolyn Miller, who described genres as “conventional categor[ies] of discourse based in large-scale typification of rhetorical action,” these scholars share the view that genres reflect, shape, and reinforce worlds through the social actions they define and perform (163). As with communities themselves, genres are relational and continually evolving in response to particular rhetorical conditions. According to Miller, “genres emerge as already complex rhetorical situations reconfigure themselves in response to a constellation of developments” (qtd. in Cagle 73). Thus, they provide a window into discourse communities in motion and are simultaneously relevant for understanding other related genres and their rhetorical contexts. As artifacts of social norms, genres provide a useful way to analyze changes in the nature of faculty life, including emergent practices and forms of social identity. This is because genres offer a means of tracing how social realities emerge in response to and come to be altered by shared cognitive, affective, and ideological frames. Thus, genres index patterns of experiences, relationships, and practices which become more or less solidified within and across communities over time. While genres are contextually grounded, they also may exist in constellations across times, locations, and spaces, enabling the identification of patterns of behavior, ideology, and practice across
boundaries. Thus, not only do genres index and produce social frameworks but also do they index codified, or habitual, cultural practices in motion. In the context of a disrupted social context like academia in a post-lockdown world, genres offer a backward glance at how a community’s norms persist, cease to be, evolve, or come into conflict. Moreover, in consideration of digital technologies and the embodied responses they invite, elide, or exclude, genres also provide a means of acknowledging material agencies which come to impact individual disposition and collective identity and behavior.

**Genre**

As situated forms of cognition, or “meaning landscapes” which “orient us toward shared mentally constructed spaces,” genres mediate both human experience and action (Bazerman qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 60). They organize how we perceive, relate to, and act within the world around us. The concept of intentionality borrowed from phenomenology has been adopted within genre studies to explain this situation: “in the same way that intentions bring objects to our consciousness, genres bring texts and situations to our consciousness. Genres inform our intentionalities” (Bawarshi and Reiff 66-67). Overlapping with the concept of intentionality is that of the life-world, or the “taken-for-granted world of shared intentionalities” (Bawarshi and Reiff 67). The life-world has been described as a “fundamentally intersubjective and social phenomenon in which human experience and activity are learned, negotiated, and distributed in mutually constructed, coordinated ways” (Bawarshi and Reiff 67). Given the scope of my own project, I find this concept useful for highlighting the social work of emergent digital genres, which coordinate human expectation, behavior, relationships, and action within and across academic sub-communities (Bawarshi and Reiff 67).
The metaphors of meaning landscapes and life-worlds are important for illuminating how genres organize social experience, for example what it means to be an academic in a particular spatial or temporal context. On the other hand, another concept which further emphasizes the intersubjective and intertextual nature of this organization is the related concept “stocks of knowledge,” which are central to the construction and experience of the life-world as they mediate our apprehension of objects (Schutz qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 67). Stocks of knowledge are “socially derived and confirmed rules, maxims, strategies, and recipes for behaving and acting in typical situations” and are, in part, composed of typifications derived from situations perceived as similar and “constituted in inferences from…previous direct experiences” (Bawarshi and Reiff 67). As forms of habitual knowledge, typifications are “routinized, socially available categorizations of strategies and forms for recognizing and acting within familiar situations” (Bawarshi and Reiff 67). To connect the concepts of life-world, typification, and genre, we could say that genres emerge, in part, by means of typified social experiences and, like typifications themselves, “help arrange our subjective experiences of the life-world within certain structures” (Bawarshi and Reiff 68). To relate back to intentionality, how we determine a situation is based not so much on our direct perception of the situation but more so on our ability to define it by way of the available typifications which then shape our perceptions of how, why, and when to act. As Chapters Three and Four illuminate, these typifications emerge by various means, from corporate-sponsored rhetoric to pre-existing genre conventions which enable or constrain particular modes of perception.
The concepts of intentionality, typification, life-worlds, and genres are all pertinent to the present study because they highlight several key aspects of discourse communities. These include shared habits of perceiving, creating knowledge, and acting; shared affective experiences, e.g., shared motivations and sources of confidence; and limitations on agency derived from membership. Regarding this last aspect—agency—, Bawarshi and Reiff explain that while typifications help arrange subjective experiences, they are neither static nor completely determinative. “Rather, they are subject to (or brought into contact with) unique, immediate experiences” (68). As Schutz explains, they are “‘enlivened…arranged and subordinated to the living reality’ of our immediate experiences” (qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 68). That is, while genres mediate our experiences of reality, individuality hybridizes these experiences when individual, concrete experience comes into contact with the “socially derived, intersubjective typifications available to us” (68). Agency, in this case, arises out of an assemblage comprised of social expectation as framed by genres and individual experience, which come together in unpredictable ways. This understanding of agency parallels that of socio-materialism, though the shortcoming of this interpretation becomes clear, namely the role of matter within this assemblage of meaning. The present study seeks to fill this gap by considering how genres frame and are framed by the coming-togethers of human and non-human actors like digital technologies which are constantly in motion across spaces and temporalities that additionally play a role in degrees of agency. Like networks, or assemblages, genres are “rhetorically and socially dynamic […] ‘stabilized for now,’ ideological, performative, intertextual, socio-cognitive, and responsive to [as well as] constructive of situations” (Schryer qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 60).
In addition to conceiving of genres as stabilizers and normalizers of experience, my study also regards genres as “dynamic rhetorical forms that develop from responses to recurrent situations” (Bawarshi and Reiff 79). Changes in material conditions, community membership, technology, and disciplinary goals, among others, all impact how genres change in structure, organization, and use value. Thus, the concept of genre enables my study to explore normalized forms of knowledge-making, practice, and identification as they become disrupted. Moreover, as codifications of shared intentionalities and social knowledge, genres help to identify patterns of engagement with human and non-human matter and question the role which this engagement plays in the creation of changing social realities. In summary, the concept of genre is useful for analyzing faculty writing practices and identities, especially in the context of change. The dynamic and relational nature of discourse communities and their genres underscores the importance of viewing faculty literacy as continually evolving and adapting. Socio-materialism, discussed below, provides this lens.

**Socio-materialism in Literacy Studies**

In their 2020 article “Critical literacy for a posthuman world: When people read, and become, with machines,” Kevin Leander and Sarah K. Burriss acknowledge the need for “not only more rigorous engagement with changing technologies, but also new ways of conceiving digital literacies” which move beyond “worn models of text and reader” (4). Here, Leander and Burriss are referring to one of the greatest contributions of posthumanism to literacy studies, namely the ability to conceive of literacy as a nonlinear and embodied experience influenced by a range of social and material confluences. A socio-material sensibility derived from posthumanism may get us one step closer to better
accounting for the impact of digital technologies on literacy. However, it is important to recognize that digital objects serve as merely one entry point into larger assemblages of social and material actors which come together to affect meaning. An overemphasis on the role of the digital—as well as humanistic conceptions of digital literacy as a disembodied, liberating process—both may serve to absorb apparently posthumanist theories of the digital into the humanist paradigm against which these are responding. In her 2021 article “There Is No ‘Virtual Learning’: The Materiality of Digital Education,” literacy researcher Lesley Gourlay argues that one consequence of the shift from face-to-face to distant digitally mediated educational engagement as a result of the pandemic has been the perpetuation of a dominant discourse surrounding the digital as a “disembodied realm” which “exists outside of physical, material movement, placement or practices” and “does not involve the body, the ‘person,’” (58). Concepts like “digital collaboration”, “online learning,” and “virtual meetings” are commonly discussed in terms which “suggest a ‘breaking free’ from the constraints of physical spaces and temporal frames,” arguably enacting a “somewhat neoliberal and thoroughly humanist fantasy of the human subject, whose capacities are imagined to be extended or even transcended via digital technologies” (Gourlay, “Virtuality” 60). In response to this disembodied notion of virtuality, literacy scholars like Christian Ehret and Ty Hollett have leveraged the concept of “real virtualities” to demonstrate the fact that literacy engagements with digital technologies can actually be more body-centered than “techno-centered,” exposing tensions between institutionalized learning environments and students’ affective, cultural histories of being mobile while engaged in literacy” (428). Similarly, some in writing studies like John Tinnell have advocated for an “ecological orientation” which situates
the act of human-technology making as “autopoietic—as being emergent not from any individual human subjectivity but through a distributed set of relations of human and nonhuman capacities of engagement,” arguing that writing studies needs an altogether different orientation to the relationships between technologies and human subjectivities (125). Joining these scholars, my study considers interacting agencies—both digital and material—which comprise how the multimodal literacies of faculty unfold in our changing environment. Following the lead of these researchers, my own project resituates digital literacy among faculty as both a socio-material and embodied entanglement, with materiality arising out of a negotiated interplay among digital objects, physical spaces, textual and non-textual artifacts, and humans (Adams and Thompson; Ehret and Hollett; Fenwick and Edwards; Gourlay and Oliver; Hodgson; Leander and Boldt). At the same time, it also recognizes the constantly shifting degrees of agency which comprise the complex interaction between human and non-human actors as meaning is created and shared. Together, concepts drawn from actor-network theory (ANT) and new materialism will provide a more comprehensive lens for understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in the evolving landscape of the faculty discourse community.

Actor-network theory

As briefly mentioned, a key assumption of my study is that agency is distributed across a range of actors, both human and nonhuman. This de-centering of human agency means that “artefacts and material things which would normally be seen as ‘tools,’ inert objects, or simply elements of material or natural context, are instead seen as lively, active elements of how life and social practice unfolds” (Gourlay, Posthumanism 18). Discussed further in Chapter Two, the concepts of agency and entanglement are central to
developing a more robust and inclusive understanding of faculty literacy, acknowledging a wide array of actors which collectively shape not only how they write but also how they create knowledge, make sense of their identities, and relate to others. In other words, an expanded view of agency dismantles the common misconception that faculty writing is a solitary activity, showcasing it as part of a larger assemblage of actors, including forms of literacy, which converge in complex and unpredictable ways. ANT highlights the tensions and negotiations that occur within this coming togetherness, shedding light on the nuances of digital literacy as it unfolds in academic environments.

Several researchers have adopted ANT-inspired views of agency to reconceptualize literacy in an increasingly digitized world. For example, some scholars have attended more closely in their research to digital objects (Adams and Pente; Adams and Thompson; Bayne and Ross; Carrington; Goodfellow; Leander and Burriss), while others have examined digital composing practices and “networked” learning environments (Carvalho and Yeoman; Ehret and Hollett; Gourlay and Oliver; Thompson). Relevant to my own study and complementing its ANT perspective by allowing for a more microscopic view of faculty writing activity is the concept of the digital interface. This concept foregrounds the emergent nature of digital epistemic objects and the unique ways in which humans become entangled with them, as well as with other material agencies, in negotiations of meaning and identity.

Another import of object agency for my study is its impact on subjectivity. As Sian Bayne notes, posthumanism represents an “ontological shift [in] understanding ‘the human’ as an individuated entity separate from and observant of the world and its (human and nonhuman) inhabitants, to one which is inextricably connected to the world and only
conceivable as emergent with and through it” (84). According to this view, subjectivity and materiality are viewed as intertwined in a co-constitutive relationship. Perhaps nowhere is this relationship clearer than in the performative online meeting environment, where boundaries between the “real” and the “digital” become blurred. To rethink subjectivity in posthumanist terms, then, means not only embracing hybridity but also recognizing how subjectivities move. To better account for this aspect of movement, my study will supplement the notion of entanglement with the new materialist concept of the assemblage.

The potential of ANT-inspired views of agency for reconceptualizing academic literacy within the digital university has been demonstrated well by Lesley Gourlay. In her work *Posthumanism and the Digital University*, she argues that such orientation toward understanding digital knowledge practices is significantly lacking in educational theory, specifically that which focuses on academic and/or digital literacies at the higher education level. As mentioned above, Gourlay proposes that digital engagement should be understood as a complex set of entanglements among human and non-human entities. Moreover, she demonstrates that, in contrast with disembodied notions of virtuality, digital engagement is actually entrenched in materiality which has been under-theorized. The displacement of posthumanism by humanist understandings of digital engagement is mirrored in the policies, rhetoric, and public discourse which form contemporary understandings of the university. My study holds that the pervasiveness of human-centric views of literacy across institutional forms of knowledge-making has detrimental consequences for learners of all contexts, including but not limited to students, faculty, administrators, and university leaders. This is because human-centered, tool-,
resource-based models of digital literacy elide the specific, material, and affective experiences of academic “users,” thereby perpetuating systems of power and privilege which seek to erase these in virtue of neoliberal values such as productivity and efficiency. In concurrence with Gourlay, I believe that “the practices of higher education and the subjectivities conjured by it tend to be discussed in relatively abstract, even ideological terms, [while] the ‘nitty-gritty,’ fine-grained ‘doings’ of what actually goes on in the day-to-day of higher education” have been, to a large extent, ignored (Posthumanism 38). As our increasingly digitized academic environment changes the very nature of texts and textual practices, including their relationships to digital technologies, it becomes even more pressing to analyze literacy activity in a more comprehensive way by recognizing the networks of interconnected human and non-human agencies which come into play. Discussed in more detail in the following chapter, several concepts from socio-materialism offer a means of accounting for the diverse elements which come together, interact, and collaborate to shape faculty literacies, especially in the context of their engagement with the digital.

New Materialism

Interrelated with ANT, New Materialism is another socio-material framework useful for understanding changes in faculty writing activities and identities, especially following the pandemic. As faculty have continued to adapt to hybrid and remote work as well as new forms of digital communication, New Materialism fosters a way to make sense of the materiality of technologies and spaces which influence how writing is enacted and identities are formed. For example, the concept of “material-discursive practices” showcases how writing practices and identities emerge from the entanglement
of material and discursive elements, all of which impact senses of identity, presence, and belonging within the faculty discourse community. Likewise, discussed further in Chapter Two, the New Materialist concept of the assemblage helps to reframe faculty literacy activity as a “collection of things that happen to be present in any given context. These things have no necessary relation to one another, and they lack organization, yet their coming-together within the assemblage produces any number of possible effects on the elements in the assemblage” (Leander and Boldt 25). The concept of the assemblage is prefaced on movement, reconfiguring agency not only in terms of its distribution but also in terms of its instability and spontaneity as a wide range of actors move into and out of relations, enacting varying degrees of agency and consistencies of participation.

Geographers Martin Müller and Carolin Schurr explain that “at the most basic, assemblages could thus be thought of as a collection of relations between heterogeneous entities to work together for some time. But they are more than this. Terms such as ‘contagions’, ‘epidemics’ and ‘the wind’ hint at the fluidity and ephemerality of assemblages and at their unpredictability, while ‘sympathy’ and ‘symbiosis’ suggest that there is a vital, affective quality to them” (219). This observation regarding the lively, affective quality of assemblages—not just in how they are formed but also in how they travel—demonstrates why examining the literacies of faculty is essential to understanding more broadly the ecology of the university as a whole, itself in a constant state of movement and change exacerbated—or, at least, made more distinctive—by the pandemic.

While my study focuses primarily on the emergent nature of assemblages pertaining to a particular literacy context, it also acknowledges the multiplicity of identities and communities to which faculty belong. Thus, my study asserts that faculty
literacy moves, or circulates, across contexts. Two main areas scholarship inform how my study conceives of this relevance: ANT- and assemblage-inspired educational studies and New Materialist rhetoric. For example, Sage et al.’s work “Exploring the Organizational Proliferation of New Technologies: An Affective Actor-Network Theory” proposes the notion of “affective ANT,” a cross-fertilization of ANT technology studies and assemblage theory useful for explaining not only the role of technologies in the circulation of affects but also the role of affects in the circulation of technologies (345).

Similarly attending to the movement of affect, rhetoric scholar Catherin Chaput emphasizes the relationship between connectivity and affect, including how affect may either perpetuate or undermine ideology. This aspect of connectivity is important for my own study because it illuminates the significance of attending more closely to embodied entanglements with digital epistemic objects as well as emergent epistemic practices, both of which may play a role in either perpetuating or resisting neoliberal ideologies.

Other work on circulation by visual and digital rhetoric scholars like Laurie Gries and Lauren Cagle also provides a context for my study. For example, while Gries is concerned primarily with the circulation of visual texts, Cagle connects assemblage theory to genre, demonstrating how technological assemblages may produce new genres which exercise forms of biopower for the regulation of individuals.

By highlighting both the fluid and affective dimensions of knowledge-making, the concept of the assemblage is useful for reframing literacy activity. Gourlay, et al. provide one model for utilizing the assemblage framework to analyze academic literacies, exploring changes in the material and social actors inherent in remote work during the pandemic lockdown. Yet, with the exception of Gourlay, et al.’s study, assemblage
theory is relatively under-utilized in scholarship on faculty literacies. Still, some researchers have applied this lens to youth literacies (Leander and Boldt; Hassett and Curwood; Leander and Lovvorn; Mulcahy). For example, in “Rereading ‘A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies’: Bodies, Texts, and Emergence,” Leander and Boldt employ assemblages as a nonrepresentational approach for analyzing the literacy activity of a 10-year-old boy Lee as he engages in reading and role-playing with a Japanese graphic novel series. In their study, an assemblage framework enables these researchers to trace Lee’s movements among the various activities of reading, playing, drawing, conversation, and other fluid engagements in which he enacts his needs and desires. The affective and emotional intensities which form part of his literacy activity demonstrate the stakes of an assemblage-based model of literacy, which better accounts for the movement of literacy as an embodied and socio-material activity, enabling researchers to build connections among previously unconnected elements. In addition to the movement of literacy itself, assemblages also highlight subjectivities as being in a perpetual state of becoming, always “the-body-and” some other agents (36). This perspective acknowledges that bodies change in response to material environments, not only in terms of the agents present but also in terms of shifting degrees of agency. As bodies change, so do identities, actions, relations, and perceptions of reality, all of which function to alter an ever-changing social reality. Assemblages also position literacy researchers themselves differently. To refer back to Lee’s literacy activity, the researchers admit that, “in naming such an assemblage, [they] are capturing only what [they] can see or what Lee can articulate, which is not the same as what they are doing or as the conscious and unconscious affects experienced in the body” (36). This implication of assemblages is
important because it re-embodies literacy’s subjects and enlivens literacy itself, opening rather than closing the potential for new ways of perceiving, being, relating, and understanding, ultimately engaging researchers in a more inclusive and humane relationship to subjects.

While assemblage theory is limited within literacy studies as a whole as well as studies of faculty literacy, its adoption within digital rhetoric provides insight into a new way of thinking about literacy. For example, in *Post-Digital Rhetoric and the New Aesthetic*, Justin Hodgson demonstrates quite well how new assemblages can transform the very root of human sensibilities. In the work, Hodgson explores how new mediating technologies and their related practices of expression and mediation can transform human sensory perceptions, changing the ways (and scales) by which individuals make sense of the world around them (32). Referring to emergent subjectivities, he asserts that the coming together of human and technologies can foster “some vision, some representation, some ‘thing’ otherwise not possible” (117). Citing digital rhetoric and writing scholar Casey Boyle’s work “Writing and Rhetoric and/as Posthuman Practice,” he explains that “the current human condition is one increasingly ‘practiced in’ and ‘more sensitive to being in relation’ with various technological systems” (540). This “gestures toward and reflects a set of cultural circumstances in which the vast majority of day-to-day experiences are mediated experiences, so saturated by computational, screen-mediating technologies that to be is, in many ways, to be mediated—to relate to the world in mediated way” (117). Moreover, these new human-technology assemblages may “alter both the rhetorical practices by which people inhabit and interact with the world (and with things in the world) and the relationships that come to bear on how people make
sense of those dynamics” (117). Relevant to my own study is the idea that technologies may not only extend human capacities for action but may also “introduce entirely different ways for people to think about, describe, qualify, and explain those actions, those capacities, and their place within that rhetorical potentiality” (118). In the context of a rapidly changing and highly saturated technological environment, assemblages provide a means of bringing to the forefront the materials aspects which play a role in shaping new sensibilities about faculty writing, identity, and work.

**Conclusion and Implications**

As discussed above, existing scholarship on faculty literacy conceives of literacy itself primarily in terms of writing productivity and development. Taken for granted are the multimodal forms of literacy engagement which comprise faculty work, not limited to but including the digital. An expanded view of literacy, as well as an expanded framework for analyzing how literacy unfolds, offers these conversations a much more rich and meaningful perspective as well as greater import as a topic worthy of exploration. This is because, as many educational studies scholars have demonstrated, faculty work is central to a number of important institutional issues like decision-making and climate. In other words, a closer attention to the expansive as well as changing nature of faculty work—an attention somewhat limited in literacy studies—as well as more nuanced conception of literacy as an inherently social and material phenomenon may offer unique insights regarding the livelihood and future of higher education.

In light of the disruption to traditional forms of academic work instigated by the pandemic, there exists immense opportunity to expand as well as bridge the multidisciplinary conversations above. My study does this while also challenging the
fairly homogeneous and significantly limited way in which faculty traditionally have been portrayed in terms of their literacies. As discussed further in Chapter Three, much of the digital literacy discourse surrounding faculty has been corporate- and institutionally sponsored. Therefore, my study also extends the concept of literacy sponsorship into a relatively under-theorized territory within academia. A socio-material lens, combined with that of genre, is essential for analyzing the ways in which this sponsorship emerges in specific configurations of power. These configurations impact the diverse ways in which faculty members engage with the digital—and each other—as they navigate a changing academic world.
A vibrant and diverse range of interacting agencies shape how faculty create and share knowledge as they navigate their responsibilities within academia. Despite this richness, the majority of studies which consider faculty writing—as one form of their literacy—utilize a text-centric, reading-and-writing approach which focuses on abstract scholarly output, a so-called “staple of the academic marketplace” (Manning 6). While these studies are important, especially in focusing on interconnected issues like tenure, publication, and productivity which impact faculty experience, they also tend to overlook the array of socio-material actors—including the objects, discourses, and institutional norms—that shape their daily literacy environments, especially in relation to the digital.

My study advocates for a closer consideration of both literacy and digital literacy among faculty members. Literacy, and increasingly as it relates to the digital, shapes how faculty are perceived as productive members of the academic community, a situation which has real implications for the functioning of universities and the roles of faculty within them. By attending to the socio-material dimensions of one form of faculty literacy, this study also provides insight into literacy sponsorship as a whole within the increasingly corporatized and digitally mediated institution of higher education. The methodology below offers this study the ability to highlight the interconnectedness of faculty literacy
with broader social, cultural, and institutional dynamics that play a role in this sponsorship.

Given the varied ways in which literacy can be defined—and literacy activity analyzed—, this chapter first establishes the definition of literacy which frames my study while situating this definition within a distinctive and emerging sub-area of literacy studies, socio-materialism. A few key concepts borrowed from socio-materialism are elaborated, followed by four methods which offer a tangible way of resituating faculty literacy in the context of our changing academic environment.

**Methodological Framework**

Over the years, numerous scholars have disputed the omnipotent “literacy myth” which revolves around a monolithic notion of literacy as something to be possessed and, with that possession, makes people better and higher human beings (Barton and Hamilton; Brandt; Gee; Graff; Williams). Deconstructing this myth, these scholars utilize a more pluralistic definition of literacy (“literacies”) as a set of social practices which occur differently in a variety of sociocultural and material contexts and are deeply entrenched in power and ideology. In particular, the sub-field of New Literacy Studies has played a pivotal role in changing conceptions of literacy within our field, asserting that literacy—as an inherently social phenomenon—is shaped by and contributes to power relations which are enacted and negotiated as individuals interact with their environments. Extending this conceptualization in order to account for a fuller range of material actors which comprise these environments, socio-materialism expands the range of agencies involved, emphasizing the entanglement of social and material elements like technologies, material artifacts, social structures, rhetoric, discourses, and bodies. For
example, Ehret and Leander explain literacy in terms of “movements, words, and bodies
[which] enter into relations, practices, and performances that may be raced, classed, or
gendered in old ways that strengthen categories or new ways that extend, critique, and
remake social life” (2-3). They understand literacy as “evoking and compelling embodied
response that cannot be captured by rationality alone” and thus demanding broader
epistemic domains to account for “the role of embodied interactions, collaborations, and
relationships” which form part of learning, in other words the “surplus” that cannot be
explained in forms of neoliberal individualisms like “measures” and “outcomes” which
narrow conceptions of literacy (2-3).

In light of the expanded conceptualization above, it becomes clear that literacy
involves not only the mastery of reading and writing skills but also the capacity to
critically analyze and traverse socio-material environments, interpret and produce
meaning within different discourse communities, and adapt to evolving technological and
social contexts. It is also inherently social, about “being moved, being connected, and
finding new ways of becoming, together and apart” (Ehret and Leander 8).

Acknowledging these potentials of literacy, my study adopts Williams’ definition of
literacy as “the ability to use sign systems to compose and interpret texts that
communicate ideas from one person to another” (Agency 7). It is important to note that
this definition differs from that used by other proponents of socio-materialism, for
example Burnett and Merchant, who confine their notion of literacy to written language.
My study, instead, broadens the scope of literacy to encompass a wider range of sign
systems beyond written language. This includes visual, auditory, spatial, and digital
modalities, recognizing the diverse ways in which individuals compose and interpret texts
to communicate ideas. By aligning closely with Williams’ definition, my study offers a more inclusive analysis of how individuals engage with and create meaning from various forms of texts, whether these are traditional written documents, multimedia presentations, digital interfaces, or other communicative artifacts.

Many scholars have drawn on a socio-material view of literacy to think specifically about how digital technologies interface with educational practice (Adams; Burnett and Merchant; Gourlay; Williams). These scholars challenge traditional dichotomies between the social and the material, arguing that these are mutually constitutive and shape each other in complex ways. As Burnett and Merchant explain, a socio-material perspective “invites us to engage with the work being done by all sorts and categories of things—policy documents, frameworks, artefacts, and so on, including digital devices—as they enter relations with people and other things” (27). In other words, this perspective acknowledges the diverse range of semiotic resources that contribute to how meanings emerge and become articulated within complex networks of literacy practices, and it “prompts us to look at the specificities of what happens in the moment” while “tracing the webs of relations that are significant” (Burnett and Merchant 28). Socio-materialism also pays attention to the embodied, affective dimensions of literacy, which are integral to how bodies and identities, too, emerge in relationship to the other bodies, objects, and things in which they become entangled in meaning making. Like Ehret and Leander, my study wonders “what comes of meeting language, culture, and power in how they matter, through how they feel as fully embodied experiences that are constantly unfolding?” (9).
Like the plethora of emergent digital technologies across academia, “becom[ing] different things as they become embedded in the relational contingencies of everyday life;” so, too, are the literacies and identities of faculty emergent, changing in interaction with the conglomeration of semiotic resources through which they constantly enact, negotiate, and navigate their academic roles and responsibilities (Burnett and Merchant 28). Despite the diversity and complexity of these interactions, the digital encounters of faculty are often oversimplified and categorized in terms of deficiency and competency models which are reinforced by corporate and institutional rhetoric. Gourlay explains that “higher education as a sector is saturated with ideologies, imaginaries, fantasies, desires, conjured figures and hidden operations of power, surveillance and control with are not aligned with the values of human (and nonhuman) flourishing, but instead may serve the demands of an increasingly marketized sector” and that the “dominance of these ideologies limits the essence of the academy itself, and also curtails our ability as [researchers] to ‘see’ clearly what is happening on the ground, in the intricate, unobserved pathways and passages being forged, the threads being tied and unraveled, the meshwork in which students and scholars are entangled” (Posthumanism 165). Within the framework of socio-materialism and genre studies, my study advocates for a repositioning of faculty literacy within the specific socio-material contexts in which their literacy unfolds, asking how representations such as discourse come to affect bodies as they enter into relations with material phenomena. Ehret and Leander explain that this kind of analysis requires “disavowing the representational logics that place the human at the center of all reality, that place the human apart from matter” (10). To this end, the conceptual framework of “literacy-as-event” outlined below guides my analysis.
Litarcy-as-Event

Within academia, Teams has evolved beyond its intended corporate use, acquiring diverse meanings and functionalities unforeseen by its creators at Microsoft or even its purchasers in academia. This evolution persists, reflecting the fluid nature of literacy objects and practices as they co-emerge with the similarly evolving demands and contexts in which faculty literacies are situated. A great example of this emergent phenomenon lies in the adaptation of Teams by academic institutions for remote learning and work, diverging from its original corporate context. On an even more granular level, the integration of Teams into collective academic governance processes, such as faculty senate meetings, underscores its indeterminate and emergent qualities. These examples highlight that literacies are not static or predetermined but are constantly negotiated and reshaped in response to the specific socio-material conditions. Like objects, they are emergent and “messy” in that they involve an unpredictable and complex interplay of human and non-human agencies which disrupt or reshape existing norms. Technical glitches, competing power differentials, and diverse interpretations of digital communication norms all contribute to this messy and unpredictable situation.

Recognizing the dynamic, contingent, and embedded nature of literacy practices, the framework of literacy-as-event offers a more inclusive way of analyzing faculty literacies in contrast with the device-, resource-, and competency-based models of digital literacy which have come to dominate the discourse surrounding faculty literacy in relation to the digital. The notion of “literacy-as-event” comprises three main principles:

1. The event is generated as people and things affect and are affected by one another.
2. What happens in the event always exceeds what can be conceived and perceived.

3. Implicit in the event are multiple potentialities, including different possibilities for what might materialize as well as what doesn’t. (Burnett and Merchant 57).

Enriching the analysis of faculty literacy by extending beyond the all-too-familiar discursive boundaries of “research, teaching, and administration,” my study utilizes the notion of literacy-as-event to acknowledge the much broader range of activity which takes place as faculty engage with the digital. This perspective enables my study to highlight the contextual nature of their literacies, conceiving them as ongoing and unfolding within particular moments or situations as faculty engage with texts, technologies, and social practices in diverse and unstable ways to produce and interpret meaning. The literacy-as-event framework ultimately deepens my analysis of the senate meeting in Chapter Four by accounting for the range of agencies which come into play as affects, rhetoric, technologies, social practices, and bodies come together in diverse and unstable ways, keeping an expanded view of social potential at the forefront.

Simultaneously, the related concept of the assemblage described in Chapter One and re-engaged below emphasizes the dynamic and contingent nature of this potential.

Assemblages

As discussed above, the notion of literacy-as-event is rooted in movement and material entanglement, with purposeful, rule-governed practices entering into relations with spontaneous and improvisational elements in constant interaction (Leander and Boldt 29). Some scholars have likened such movement to the “social dance of life,” that is the “everyday movements of people and things approaching and pushing against one
another, coming up alongside, making a dance-like turn, [and] pulling apart” (Ehret and Leander 6). Perhaps most famously, Deleuze and Guattari have characterized this movement as rhizomal, consisting of heterogenous materials (bodies, things, signs) which are “held together in ways that might allow for durability but also for dividing up and reorganizing” into new entities (qtd. in Ehret and Leander 6). According to Leander and Boldt, assemblages represent “a collection of disparate elements present in a given context, lacking inherent organization or necessary relations. Yet, their fortuitous convergence in the assemblage generates a multitude of potential effects on its constituent elements” (25). Thus, the notion of assemblage extends an analysis of faculty literacy beyond individual events, emphasizing the fluid and contingent nature of their formation within complex socio-material networks. In other words, assemblages provide a more interconnected and fluid perspective of literacy taking into consideration a broader totality of interacting agents.

Building on the concept of the assemblage, Gourlay appropriates the concept of “semiotic assemblage” from linguistics as a way to encapsulate the socio-material “work” performed by assemblages, including their relationship to discourses that shape lived experiences within the university (“Lockdown Literacies”). Burnett and Merchant broaden the concept even further, using the terminology of “material-discursive-semiotic” to account for the movement of signs, symbols, and meanings within assemblages and to highlight the role of language, discourse, and communication practices in shaping literacy (23). These more precise terminologies clarify that meaning itself is assembled together in a conglomeration of intentionally and spontaneously interacting social and material agents which co-emerge, dissipate, transform, and
reappear. Like digital media, which are “held in place through quite specific assemblages
of people, things, and practices,” meanings as well as discourses have a “limited shelf-
life” so to speak (Burnett and Merchant 23). Material-discursive-semiotic assemblages
keep this movement and connection at the forefront.

In addition to thinking about literacy as a material-discursive-semiotic
assemblage, Leander and Boldt expand the notion of assemblage to include bodies
themselves as assemblages, emphasizing their fluid and relational nature, always “the-
body-and” some other agents (29). This is important when considering academic bodies
because it acknowledges that these bodies change in response to the material
environment, not only in terms of the agents present but also in terms of shifting degrees
of agency. As bodies change, so do identities, actions, relations, and perceptions of
reality, all of which function to alter an ever-changing social reality. The body, in this
sense, is indeterminate because it is “in constant movement in an environment that is
itself always in motion;” consequently, “the potential for variation is almost infinite, [as]
the body is [. . .] in an immediate, unfolding relation to its own potential to vary”
(Deleuze and Guattari 30). In their famous analogy of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari
describe the body as always in a state of emergence as “the site that experiences and
gives (or doesn’t give) expression to the energies and potentials of the present that are
constantly generated as the always-emerging body interacts with the always-emerging
environment” (30). This understanding of bodies-as-assemblages is particularly relevant
to Chapter Four of my study, which explores how bodies interact with aspects of the
digital interface and socio-cultural norms within the genre of the Teams senate meeting to
shape discursive interactions and identities. These particular assemblages, which travel as
discursive-material concepts, represent “knowing in the making” (Ehret and Leander 10). They are significant for many reasons, one of which is the fact that they may come to mark bodies with neoliberal and corporate-driven ideologies, many of which are outlined in Chapter Three. Several scholars have noted this situation. For example, Anderson writes that “neoliberalisms might exist as structures of feeling: dispersed qualities such as a ‘sense of inevitability’ or an ‘anxiety about the state’ that become part of policies, programs, and projects that extend the market” (qtd. in Ehret and Leander 11). Similarly, Ehret and Leander explain that “anti-humanly charged discursive material concepts like neoliberalism affect human bodies toward capitalistic outcomes that are not always real and certainly not in favor of the many. Yet these concepts feel like something, and these somethings don’t always carry names—representational categories of mediating emotions [. . .]. They are intensities of living that move bodies with consequence, whether those intensities become known as emotion or not” (11). Technologies—and the forms of literacy which they sponsor—play a significant role in structuring these feelings while potentially masking inherent biases via the “glossiness” of their interfaces, as discussed in the previous chapter (Gourlay Posthumanism 100). The concept of the assemblage, and the body-as-assemblage, reconciles these dynamics in a productive way.

By exploring literacy as a socio-material phenomenon, my study attends to the manifold interactions shaping literacy practices—including those among faculty—within the ever-changing landscape of higher education. This perspective ultimately connects faculty literacies to broader processes of meaning making, identity formation, and social change with which they intersect in the changing digital landscape of academia, including those among students and administrators.
Agency and Entanglement

Fundamental to the notion of the assemblage is an expanded view of agency. Several scholars have drawn from Latour’s notion that action is overtaken and that objects, too, have agency in order to account for the diverse array of material actors involved in literacy. According to Latour, “action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled” (Latour 44). Extending the concept of the assemblage, Latour’s notion of entanglement more pointedly decenters human agency, emphasizing the varying degrees of power which humans actually possess in their interactions with objects. Referring to material objects as social actors, Latour explains that their participation does not mean that they determine action. He suggests, instead, that “there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer existence. In addition to ‘determining’ and serving as a ‘backdrop for human action,’ things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (71). This perspective becomes particularly relevant in a study of the senate meeting as literacy-as-event, in which the Teams interface mediates how participants enact specific, allowable forms of literacy. While the interface lacks a distinctively human consciousness, it nonetheless shapes the flow of communication and interaction, authorizing certain actions while restricting others. Moreover, material actors like the Teams camera play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of the senate meeting as a literacy event. The positioning and functionality of the camera influence how participants present themselves and engage with others, thereby affecting the overall trajectory of the meeting and, thus, gaining a
representational function as a meaning-making device within the multimodal platform of the Teams senate meeting. My study acknowledges the agency of these material objects within the literacy practices of faculty, particularly as they navigate new digital environments.

While the interfaces of digital objects may be seen as enacting diverse forms of agency, so do discourses, ideologies, and power relations exert their own degrees of influence within literacy practice. As discussed briefly in Chapter One, Gee’s notion of discourse is useful for understanding the role played by social structures and cultural norms in shaping both literacy practices as well as discursive regimes through which certain forms of literacy are permitted, enacted, and imagined. Gee explains that a discourse is comprised of “distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities and engage in specific socially recognizable activities” (Social Linguistics 152). In addition to these socio-cognitive aspects of discourse, Ehret and Leander further explain that materials, too, travel along with discourse, in the form of “discursive-material concepts” which circulate not only symbolic meanings but also social and material affordances that shape how discourse is enacted and experienced (11). This is especially relevant to my study’s analysis of Microsoft Teams given the extent of Microsoft’s ability to shape discourses which travel as part of (e.g., via interface aspects) and alongside (e.g., via the rhetoric contained within its marketing and implementation content) the Teams product.
In addition to the above, Gee dispels a notion of discourses as bounded entities, asserting that they are, instead, fluid and dynamic systems which intersect and overlap, shaping and reshaping individual and collective identities, beliefs, and actions within specific social contexts. In thinking about faculty as a discourse community, my study argues this very point, that a variety of socially recognizable relations with objects, people, institutional practices, and disciplinary norms—intersecting with and yet beyond written language—comprise the complex experience of being a faculty member. In other words, “changes in mediating technologies also necessitate the inhabiting of new perspectives. That is, new practices of representation, computational or otherwise, require that one adopt new perspectives for *making with* and *making sense of* those mediations” (Boyle qtd. in Hodgson 117). Moreover, it is through the sedimentation of particular ways of thinking and behaving socially, via literacy practices, that faculty gain access to and participate in various discourses. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that while literacy may equip faculty to navigate and negotiate these discourses as they participate in social life, on the other hand it can serve as “an instrument of cultural power that grants access to participation but also sanctions and reproduces cultural authority” (Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy” 1998). This point is elaborated further in Chapter Four in an analysis of the university senate meeting on Teams which includes observations of bureaucratic ideologies like hierarchy which are perpetuated by authorized forms of engagement with the Teams interface.

*Digital epistemic objects and practices*

Bridging the gap between socio-material and as well as genre analysis, the concepts of digital epistemic objects and digital epistemic practices highlight the
intertwined relationship between material artifacts and typified socio-cultural practices in shaping literacy. Examining both the materiality of Teams and one of its related socio-cultural practices offers my study the ability to address its main research concern, namely the nature of faculty literacy practice in the specific socio-material context of the post-lockdown, digital university. Understanding changes in literacy practice among faculty requires acknowledging the complex interplay between material artifacts, socio-cultural practices, and discursive norms, which is precisely what the concepts of digital epistemic objects and practices facilitate. These concepts are elaborated below.

Digital epistemic objects refer to digital artifacts or entities that are central to the production, dissemination, or negotiation of knowledge within or surrounding a digital environment. Gourlay explains that they are “both meaning producing and practice generating” (Posthumanism 24). Moreover, more than just “tools,” they affect our habits of mind, as many media and digital literacy studies scholars have demonstrated through their studies of various software, documents, algorithms, and interfaces which participate in academic knowledge-making (Adams; Gourlay; Williams). An important quality of digital epistemic objects is that they are incomplete until we do things with them, as demonstrated quite well by Teams in academia. Intricately related, digital epistemic practices refer to the ways in which individuals or communities engage with these objects to produce, validate, or share knowledge. Moreover, the relationships between digital epistemic objects and digital epistemic practices are symbiotic and interconnected. On the one hand, digital epistemic objects like Teams shape and structure the practices through which knowledge is produced and shared, while on the other hand, the practices in which
individuals and communities engage influence the creation, use, and interpretation of those objects.

Important for how my study conceives of agency within the interplay of digital epistemic objects and practices is a definition of practice as a “repeated social and material act that [has] gained sufficient stability over time to reproduce [itself]” (Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 27). At the same time, by acknowledging the agency of digital epistemic objects and the unpredictable unfolding of literacy-as-event, my study also conceives of practice as entailing a “vast spillage of things which form [. . .] part of hybrid assemblages” (Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 27). In other words, my study integrates the concept of the assemblage with that of practice in order to recognize that practices, while repeated acts, are nevertheless composed of a multitude of heterogeneous elements that come together in complex and unpredictable ways. This understanding emphasizes the need to consider the diverse array of influences that contribute to the construction of knowledge within the faculty discourse community and also highlights that this coming-together of elements and derived meanings are not pre-determined.

**Research Methods**

To address my main research question, which investigates the socio-material networks comprising faculty literacy following the COVID-19 lockdown, my study examines numerous “texts” which surround faculty engagement with Teams. Many of these are written texts, as in Chapter Three which analyzes a large and diverse corpus of corporate-sponsored narratives surrounding Teams as well as faculty. These circulate as press announcements, blog articles, official webpages, shareholder reports, and how-to guides published mainly by Microsoft. At the same time, many of the texts examine
be considered within the distinctive category of “digital texts” which render “ephemeral and emergent features of speech into a more complete, self-conscious, and fixed textual performance” (Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 111). In other words, digital texts serve as more deliberate and concrete forms of performance which render more visible the unspoken aspects of how meanings are created. My study examines various aspects of the Teams interface, from its interface languages to its visual design, as a digital text with implications for how faculty literacy is imagined as well as enacted.

The multi-genred textual analysis described above is key to rendering not only a more robust portrait of faculty literacy but also a lively conversation about their literacies-in-action by acknowledging a range of agencies at play. The following methods, derived from actor-network theory (ANT) and formalized as a set of heuristics by Adams and Thompson in their work *Researching a Posthuman World*, guide my analysis.

*Gathering Anecdotes*

Anecdotes offer a window into the heterogeneous networks of human and non-human which comprise social phenomena. Moreover, as indicated by the broad range of texts which comprise anecdotes—from field observations, online sources, and visual artifacts to personal reflection—, they enable a multi-genred perspective for exploring social phenomena. To qualify as an anecdote, Adams and Thompson pose the question, “Does this source reveal something about how a given technology is taken up, used, integrated, and/or mobilized in professional practice and everyday life?” (25). Using this framing question, my study gathers anecdotes from a wide variety of sources, and the anecdotes themselves are also diverse in how they engage with the research questions.
presented in Chapter One. The selected anecdotes illuminate the ways in which various actors such as discourse, physical environments, technologies, institutional policies, and disciplinary norms come together to shape practices and perspectives on faculty engagement with digital technologies. My study argues that anecdotes serve as a powerful form of literacy sponsorship, providing rich contextual insight about various aspects of faculty experiences with digital technologies, including their challenges, successes, strategies, and perspectives.

In addition to revealing the complex network of actors involved in shaping faculty literacies, anecdotes are also significant to literacy sponsorship because of their performative quality. When anecdotes surrounding the expectations of faculty in relation to the digital are shared and circulated, they contribute to the construction of collective narratives that reflect shared understandings, beliefs, and norms, influencing perceptions as well as practices. These narratives give voice to specific perspectives, experiences, and ideologies, shaping both how faculty members conceive of their group identities and work as well as how others conceive of these. Inevitably, anecdotes contribute to the circulation and reproduction of dominant narratives and ideologies, reinforcing certain perspectives while marginalizing others. Through recurrent sharing, anecdotes surrounding faculty engagement with specific digital technologies like Teams integrate into the broader discursive fabric surrounding their digital literacy, reinforcing particular perspectives and interpretations of how these technologies come to matter in their lives. As they circulate, these narratives shape the collective understanding of their digital literacy, reinforcing existing discursive boundaries and power dynamics.
One of the key aspects of gathering anecdotes is an emphasis on the diverse perspectives and experiences of different actors involved in a given network. This approach recognizes that actors perceive and interpret their interactions in varied ways, and anecdotes serve as windows into these multiple viewpoints. Ultimately, this approach allows for a more critical examination of the complex inter-relations among sponsorship, discourse, and power within the academic community as a whole, illuminating the ways in which various actors—including but not limited to faculty—shape and negotiate the evolving digital landscape of higher education.

*Listening to the Invitational Quality of Things*

This heuristic attends to the agential capacities of digital objects and environments. It highlights the idea that non-human actors such as digital and material objects have an “invitational” quality that shapes human behavior and action, suggesting that through their design, affordances, and functionalities, these objects invite or prompt particular actions or behaviors. As discussed previously, this includes not only the explicit design choices and affordances of digital technologies but also the broader socio-material systems and infrastructures that influence how they come into interaction with individuals and communities. To reconcile these various agencies, my study draws on the concept of the “interconnecting interface” discussed by Gourlay and others, as it highlights this intersectionality between intentional design and spontaneous contact with preexisting structures of meaning (Friesen qtd. in Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 100). Gourlay refers to the “glossiness” of interfaces to depict their polished and user-friendly appearance, which she claims can mask the underlying complexities and power dynamics inherent in digital interactions (*Posthumanism* 100). My study examines the Teams
interface as a tangible means of foregrounding this complexity, bringing to the surface a
diversity of agents which are largely “hidden from view, residing in circuits, relays,
cables and connections–things that we hardly ever get to see” while also tracing their
intersection with other actants, such as discourses surrounding faculty and their relation
to the digital, to gain deeper insight into their collaborative role in mediating digital
literacies (Burnett and Merchant 11). In contrast with accounts of faculty literacy which
reduce their literacy activity to textual engagement, my study acknowledges the diversity
of interacting agents which comprise how faculty imagine and present themselves and
engage with others in order to create knowledge.

Though the concept of the interconnecting interface is not confined to the digital,
as many have shown, my study utilizes the term specifically in relation to the digital,
referring to the point of interaction between an individual and a software program. The
interface encompasses all visual, auditory, and tactile elements that allow individuals to
interact with and navigate within the software, for example via screens, pages, buttons,
icons, and other graphical elements that facilitate interaction as well as the underlying
structures and algorithms that shape individuals’ experiences within the software.
Throughout Chapters Four and Five, my study analyzes various aspects of the Teams
interface, arguing that it opens a space in which faculty can engage not only with each
other but also with various sources of visible and invisible information and structures of
meaning which influence faculty literacy.

Following the Actors

This heuristic involves tracing the network of human and non-human actors
involved in shaping literacy events. According to Gourlay, “the goal is to render visible
what is not normally seen, in terms of objects and also negotiations taking place in order to create and maintain an assemblage. The object is seen as an entry point in order to explore the assemblage and practices of which it forms part” (Posthumanism 30). By following the actor of Teams, my study exposes the complex interplay among these diverse elements and their influence on the enactment and negotiation of literacy within the Teams senate meeting. Moving beyond the traditional skills- and competencies-based framework through which faculty engagement with the digital is predominantly articulated, my study instead explores their digital literacy as a dynamic and situated event that unfolds through interactions between various actors. To do this, my study draws upon the following interview questions offered by Adams and Thompson:

1. Consider the main practices you are interested in examining. What micro-practices can you discern? Look closely at how materialities and material actors are implicated in the way these micro-practices are performed.

2. Who-what is acting? What are they doing? Are some actors more or less powerful than others? Who-what is excluded?

3. How have particular assemblages of actors come to be configured this way? How have these people, objects, ideas, discourses, and events gathered? What is related to what and how?

4. What sort of work does this assemblage do or try to do?

5. Choose an object of interest. What is the sociality around the object? The materiality? (qtd. in Gourlay 49).

As a whole, my study is guided by the heuristic of following the actor of Teams as it interacts with the discourses and practices comprising faculty literacy. My study
analyzes Teams as one semiotic assemblage within a much broader socio-material network, illustrating how it both shapes and is shaped by the discursive and practical dimensions of faculty literacy by means of various signs, symbols, and practices that mediate how they communicate as well as create and share knowledge. At the same time, Chapter Five of this study adapts this heuristic to a more granular study of the Teams camera as an actor within the Teams senate meeting. Following the actor of the Teams camera, a particularly agential aspect of the Teams interface, as it intersects with this form of collective governance provides an entryway into the assemblage of agencies at play within the online meeting as an emergent genre of literacy activity in the lives of faculty.

*Studying Breakdowns, Accidents, and Anomalies*

Derived from ANT and frequently used in media ecology, this heuristic involves examining breakdowns in practice as entryways into socio-material analysis. By attending to moments of disruption or failure, this heuristic aids my study in exposing the underlying assumptions and power dynamics which frame how faculty engage with digital technologies by “lifting the entangled digital thing of interest into relief, and then reflectively analyzing its medial relations and material contributions” (Adams and Thompson 32). Latour emphasizes the importance of studying breakdowns, as they reveal the relational and contingent nature of social realities, illuminating the vulnerabilities and dependencies inherent in these networks as well as the roles played by different actors in maintaining or disrupting them. Like anecdotes, breakdowns are productive moments which reveal the underlying dynamics of social order and organization. Chapter Five most explicitly engages this heuristic as it analyzes a few anecdotes gathered by
following the actor of the Teams camera within the meeting. The original intent of this analysis was to consider a recording of a faculty senate meeting published online in 2021. However, due to its inadvertent removal from a publicly accessible domain, I have instead based my analysis on a staff senate meeting published in the same year. My study recognizes that each sub-format of the university senate meeting (i.e. “faculty senate” and “staff senate”), including the identities of those represented, has its own nuances worthy of further exploration, and it acknowledges the need to examine these distinctions in more detail. At the same time, my study also finds value in examining the changing nature of this shared form of academic literacy in a much broader sense, as the Teams senate meeting. This is because many generic features are common across both faculty and staff senate meetings on Teams, including protocols regarding attendance, the use of pre-made agendas to structure the meeting discourse, the facilitation of meeting discussion by a committee chair and appointed sub-chairs, representation by a faculty (in the case of staff senate) or staff (in the case of faculty senate), and the appearance of guest speakers, typically from members of the university leadership. Taking into account these similarities and differences, my study claims that the Teams senate meeting, as one sub-genre of the virtual meeting format, reflects a collaborative and participatory genre of digital epistemic practice which makes it an ideal case study for exploring the multimodal literacies of faculty as they navigate the power dynamics inherent in collaborative governance, discourse, and meaning making.

**Conclusion and Implications**

As discussed above, a socio-material view of literacy guides my study in addressing its main research goal of better understanding faculty literacy activity
following the pandemic lockdown. There are several key concepts—including literacy-as-event, assemblages, agency, and entanglement—which enable my study to achieve this goal. These concepts help to enliven the conversation on faculty literacy by attending to the complex and shifting array of actors—from objects to discourses to bodies—which come into play as faculty make sense of the hybrid world around them, as they navigate their changing roles and responsibilities, and as they determine how best to contribute to the academic community. In essence, these concepts are vital to updating views on faculty literacy, replacing expired conceptions of the faculty writer with the more complex hybrid realities of their literacy activities. These expanded views entail updating definitions of texts themselves, recognizing that, while academia is a particularly “textually entangled” organization, there are a variety of ways in which these texts are mediated (Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 39). In addition, it is important to recognize that there are multiple competing interests at play in terms of how faculty engage with these texts—and each other—as they collectively make decisions, facilitate their work, and engage socially in the world around them.

Guided by the framework above, the following two chapters trace the development of multiple narratives surrounding faculty and their literacy activities, exploring the ways in which such narratives become mediated via corporate sponsors, digital technologies, and broader discourses surrounding their digital literacy. The upcoming chapter collects a surplus of anecdotes surrounding Teams, following these as extensions of Teams as a digital epistemic object. Continuing this act of following Teams, Chapter Four analyzes a genre of related literacy activity as it disrupts traditional genre conventions to re-structure a shared form of literacy in the lives of faculty.
CHAPTER III
MICROSOFT TEAMS

Since its delivery to academia in the midst of the pandemic lockdown, Teams has become deeply embedded in academic work and culture, so much so that the very connotation of the word “Teams” evokes something quite different than it did just a few years ago. After all, as Manning explains, “disruptive technologies and the changes they catalyze are, by nature, only disruptive for a short period of time before they are either incorporated into our lives or passed over for the next technology” (145). In academia, as in other organizations, disruptive technologies like Teams have always played a role in altering the ways in which knowledge is created, shared, and understood. However, the unique pace and expansiveness of the integration of Teams following the lockdown indicates a distinctive scale of influence on academic literacies. Since the pandemic, the rise of the digital in academia has not only transformed the technologies involved in literacy but has also reshaped the very foundations of how we conceptualize and engage with language, meaning, and discourse. More than a mere facilitator of literacy, the post-lockdown digital landscape in academia is shaping the expectations and ideals that govern how we communicate and interact, derive meaning, and ultimately make sense of our membership.

Coupled with the situation above, the historical dominance of the Microsoft brand in academia has also contributed to the pervasiveness of Teams a digital epistemic object,
enacting a significant amount of agency in reshaping digital mediation through scholarly practice. Over the years, Microsoft has been a powerful literacy sponsor in the lives of faculty, shaping their evolving literacy expectations and practices with each new iteration of its technology. As detailed in this chapter, Microsoft’s Teams product is built upon a longstanding presence of the brand in academia, including existing interfaces and rhetoric. Therefore, examining Teams as a continuation of Microsoft’s historical body of rhetoric surrounding digital literacy offers a unique opportunity both to examine the evolving nature of faculty literacies and to illuminate the larger-scale implications of corporate forms of sponsorship in academia. As part of this historical approach, this chapter traces the emergence of narratives surrounding faculty literacy and the trajectory of Microsoft products, emphasizing their roles within the relational assemblage of faculty literacies. These narratives influence how institutions and members of the academic community, including faculty themselves, imagine, define, and articulate their literacies. They also indicate a crucial mismatch between how digital literacy is imagined and the reality of how technologies become integrated into academic knowledge-making. This mismatch should come as no surprise, however, given the marginal position of academic institutions in relation to Microsoft’s corporate-dominant consumer base. Largely omitted throughout these narratives, faculty come to engage with platforms like Teams knowing that these are not built for them but are rather second-hand products of the corporate sector. Moreover, persistent references throughout Microsoft’s Teams rhetoric to “deployment” and gatekeeping underscore the power dynamics inherent not only in technology integration but also in the emergence of new narratives of faculty literacy which find their way into institutional policies, rhetoric, organizational processes, and
other activities, where they reinforce ideologies surrounding faculty (Gatimu). These narratives affect the distribution of resources, recognition, and opportunities for faculty within the academic community, all of which go hand-in-hand with the perpetuation or challenging of existing power structures. Thus, by identifying and interrogating the ideologies embedded within narratives of faculty literacy, this chapter as well as the following one provide a concrete means of connecting perceptions of literacy to the emergence of institutional practices, certain forms of resource allocation (for example, via digital literacy initiatives) and faculty experiences.

There are many avenues through which technology companies like Microsoft shape public as well as institutional discourse surrounding literacy. Some the most obvious ones include webpages and official blogs; press releases and other forms of public relations to communicate major milestones and product developments; product documentation like how-to guides and “toolkits;” educational initiatives like institutional partnerships; and annual reports (Gatimu). This chapter draws from all of these sources, employing a multi-genre approach for investigating the various ways in which Microsoft communicates the story of Teams—and, by default, literacy—to its vast and diverse audiences. At the same time, this section draws most of its content from the Microsoft blog, embedded within the company’s webpage.

The Microsoft Teams blog is particularly relevant as a source of anecdotes about Teams due to its dedicated role in facilitating the flow and dissemination of content across various digital platforms. The blog serves as a dynamic node within the Teams network, where anecdotes, testimonials, and user experiences are aggregated, curated, and shared. As a central hub for Microsoft’s communication efforts, the blog collects
firsthand accounts from users, showcases case studies, and highlights success stories related to Teams’ usage in diverse contexts. By leveraging its extensive reach and influence, the Teams blog amplifies these anecdotes, disseminating them across social media, industry forums, and other digital channels, thereby shaping perceptions and fostering engagement around the product. This process of aggregation and dissemination positions the blog as a vital nexus for gathering and circulating anecdotes surrounding Teams and the literacy experience it represents.

At the same time that the Microsoft blog circulates ideals and values pertaining to Teams, it also shapes and regulates discourses surrounding literacy. By aggregating content from diverse sources and cross-posting it across multiple channels, the blog contributes to the construction of a coherent narrative about literacy in accordance with Microsoft’s evolving brand identity. Audience engagement displayed at the margins of blog posts further reinforces this discursive formation, as comments, shares, and subscriptions serve to validate and perpetuate the dominant discourses promoted by Microsoft. Overall, the Teams blog operates as a powerful discursive apparatus within the digital landscape.

The following analysis integrates a wide selection of Teams blog content which spans the developmental trajectory of rhetoric surrounding Teams from as early as 2016 when the new application was “unveiled” to the public to as recent as December 2023 at a time in which Teams has very much become the norm in academia (“Microsoft Unveils Microsoft Teams”).
Teams: The Latest Corporate Product

The Unveiling of Teams

A November 2016 press announcement published by the Microsoft News Center details the “unveil[ing]” of Teams by Microsoft, “the leading platform and productivity company for the mobile-first, cloud-first world” (“Microsoft unveils Microsoft Teams”). In the release, Teams is presented as a new and upgraded “experience” within the Office 365 “toolkit” and centered on core promises such as “providing chat for today’s teams,” “bring[ing] together the full breadth and depth of Office 365 [as a] hub for teamwork,” and “offer[ing] advanced security and compliance capabilities.” As indicated by the language of “teams” and the commitment rhetoric of “promises,” purchasers of this “new chat-based workspace” were primarily envisioned to be corporate entities and organizations seeking to streamline communication, enhance collaboration, and increase productivity. For those already subscribed to Office 365, Teams was promoted as a “free add-on, instead of a separate bill,” thereby offering cost savings in addition to easy implementation and demonstrated reliability as part of the Microsoft brand (“The Total Economic Impact™ of Microsoft Teams”). Though Teams was created with Fortune 100 companies in mind, as evidenced throughout Microsoft’s investor relations materials, it inevitably became adopted–and adapted–by individuals and organizations of all sizes and sectors, including state government entities like public universities. This was likely due to numerous factors including but not limited to Microsoft’s market dominance, the increased marketization of public institutions, neoliberal pressures urging institutions to “do more with less,” and, of course, the rise in remote and hybrid work. In U.S. academia, faculty, students, and staff inherited the Teams experience as a second-hand
corporate product, a familiar situation in today’s digital university. As with other Microsoft technologies which historically have shaped the nature of their work, faculty inherited more than a new productivity “tool.” As implied by the carefully unveiled narrative of literacy surrounding Teams, they also inherited an extensive and dynamic body of discourse surrounding how they should interact, communicate, and exist within the digital environment.

Like most mandated corporate products in higher education which are reinforced by institutional efforts like digital “transformation” centers, Teams soon became part of daily routines, incorporated across aspects of teaching, institutional culture, and administrative work. Teams (or, “Teams for Education” as it was eventually re-branded for academic audiences) brought huge and unanticipated market opportunity to Microsoft from the higher education sector, largely owing to dependency on the platform during the COVID-19 pandemic (UC Today). It also appealed to university administrators, enthusiastic buyers of “best practices” and “one-stop shops” which offer economies of scale such as increased operational efficiency resulting from standardization as well as a means of information control and social monitoring (Williams, “Blackboard” 176). Over the years, many scholars have criticized one-stop shop learning management software like Blackboard and Moodle in terms of the material and ideological imperatives they facilitate, including forms of control and surveillance within processes of course delivery (Aronowitz; Gourlay; Williams). As digital technologies continue to pop up across academia for reasons including but not limited to the financial incentives they offer to corporations, the convenience they offer university administrators, and the cost-savings they offer to universities, there is an urgent need to expand the umbrella of technologies
and literacies examined through the one-stop shop lens. Brandt explains that literacy is at the heart of a growing knowledge economy as “both a form of knowledge and a way of formalizing knowledge, a means and an end of production” (“Literacy & Learning” 188). A productivity “super-app,” Teams surpasses all other one-stop shop products on the academic market not only in terms of revenue but also in terms of integration capabilities as well as the diversity of literacy activities it facilitates and generates into knowledge for use by institutions and corporations (Tomaschek). As universities continue to buy into Teams and other productivity software in the midst of reduced state funding, declining enrollment, and other financial pressures, there is a significant need to bring these technologies into relief not only for their relevance to student learning but also for their role in reshaping academic literacies as a whole, including among faculty.

As the principal technology vendor of the U.S. public sector, Microsoft plays an incongruent role within the knowledge economy as a leading literacy sponsor in academia (CCIA). Historically, the company has played a leading role in shaping how literacy is conceived and enacted in relation to the digital. The basis of this dominance can be traced to the development of the Windows PC and the Internet during the late 20th century, a period described by former Microsoft CEO Bill Gates as witnessing “two revolutions” which fundamentally altered the ways in which “hundreds of millions of people around the globe” communicated, learned and shared information (“1997 Annual Report”). In fact, he explained, Microsoft’s developments were changing “the way entire industries operate[d]” (“1997 Annual Report”). In academia, these changes in how literacy is perceived and enacted in relation to the digital have been manifested largely through software developments to and extensions of Microsoft’s core products. For
example, alongside developments like Windows 2000 and continual updates to Microsoft
Office 1.0, new narratives of digital literacy progressively have emerged, including the
most basic and persistent narrative that Microsoft technologies empower knowledge-
makers to “bring information to life in powerful new ways” (“1996 Annual Report”). By
leveraging Microsoft’s technologies, consumers are promised interactive and engaging
experiences involving new dimensions of information interaction. Ironically, this
“empowerment” rhetoric goes hand-in-hand with the “growth mindset” which Microsoft
describes for its investor audience in its 2023 annual report (“2023 Annual Report”). In
the report, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella explains that a growth mindset “means
everyone is on a continuous journey to learn and grow, operating as one company instead
of multiple siloed businesses,” in other words as “One Microsoft.” Thus, as individuals
are empowered to engage with information in new—and productive—ways, conducive to
this empowerment is the investment in a unified and commodified package of continuous
learning which ultimately advances corporate productivity and revenue. What is
particularly interesting about Microsoft’s rhetoric surrounding Teams is how explicit the
company is about this utilitarian and corporate-driven view of literacy. For example, on
the “Teams for Enterprise” webpage, a bold header reads, “Simplify collaboration and
empower your employees.” Beneath the header is the line, “Help your team communicate
and work together effectively while driving business growth.” This rhetoric of (business)
growth, productivity, and empowerment through literacy is reinforced visually in the
following screenshot displayed on the webpage:
The above imagery is typical of that displayed on the Teams webpage in recent years in terms of its artificial aesthetic, with the same designed shapes in purple against a white backdrop. Literacy is centralized within the digital interface of Teams, which spills out into the semi-realistic world beyond the screen, as highlighted by the buttons of “Wellbeing,” “Productivity,” and “Teamwork” at the bottom edge of the tablet platform. At the same time, the artificially generated greenery, with the familiar Teams brand colors of purple and pink interspersed as flowers, frames the Teams experience contained within the tablet. As a whole, the imagery of Teams disrupts the binaries of natural/artificial as well as interior/exterior which are common to how the digital is understood. In an interesting way, it also plays on the notions discussed above of empowerment through productive literacy activity alongside a growth mindset.

Moreover, the centralization of the imagery in contrast with its white surroundings indicates that, regardless of whether Teams is contained within the tablet or spilling out of it, this particular hub of well-being, productivity, and teamwork is a commodified package designed specifically for enterprises. It also aligns with Microsoft’s idealization of “friction-free knowledge management” so that “information [can] flow effortlessly
through businesses,” at the center of which is the productive literacy of individuals, or “21st century knowledge workers” also referred to as “information workers” (“1996 Annual Report”; “2000 Annual Report;” “Frontline Workers”). The colorful and curved shapes, which frame the information exchange surrounded marginally by boxes of smiling humans, contribute to this notion of a free-flowing environment at the center of which is knowledge, of primary interest to enterprise customers.

Microsoft’s rhetoric surrounding literacy, particularly its emphasis on knowledge management, raises several significant concerns. First and foremost, by reducing literacy to a marketable product, particularly one that is reliant on technical proficiency in Microsoft software, this approach oversimplifies the multifaceted nature of literacy and diminishes its intrinsic value while reinforcing a narrow, market-driven version. It also fosters dependency on proprietary knowledge management systems, thereby perpetuating power imbalances between corporations like Microsoft and its customers, as demonstrated quite well by the prevalence of Microsoft products in academia. By framing knowledge as a resource that can be managed and controlled through its productivity software, Microsoft has positioned itself as the central authority responsible for organizing, accessing, and disseminating knowledge. This power imbalance is significant for any study of literacy, including that of faculty, because it influences the very framework through which knowledge is accessed, produced, and disseminated within academia. Microsoft products, and their surrounding rhetoric, disproportionately shape how literacy is imagined and enacted, and they reinforce particular understandings of literacy which often prioritize efficiency and productivity for the benefits of organizations.
As demonstrated above, Teams is but a new member of a familiar knowledge economy surrounding faculty which historically has been dominated by Microsoft and its information technologies. Moreover, as continued second-hand buyers of Microsoft’s social productivity promise of “empowering every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more,” U.S. universities were bound to incorporate Teams into their digital infrastructures over the course of time (“About Microsoft”). However, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated this process alongside administrative buy-in to an umbrella of literacy products like Office 365, Adobe Creative Cloud, Workday Enterprise Management Cloud, Peoplesoft Enterprise Resource Planning. While Teams represents, in one regard, a larger collective of one-stop shop software implicating faculty in corporate-driven literacy expectations and values, nevertheless the acceleration, extent, and diversity of its operation and implementation distinguish it as exceptionally influential in the assemblage of faculty literacy.

Teams Deployment

Much aligned with the outcomes-driven instrumentalization and commodification of knowledge discussed above, the theme of “Teams deployment” brings into focus the notion that literacies emerge as part of larger socioeconomic and political agendas (Gatimu). In “Guidance for a Successful Microsoft Teams Deployment,” Microsoft’s principal manager of its customer advisory group offers comprehensive advice to “Admins. and IT Pros” of organizations for effectively implementing Teams (Gatimu). Reaching an audience of 15,800 viewers, the article was originally intended to drive traffic to a designated implementation site, the content of which was later consolidated into various versions of a “Teams Toolkit” with “practical guidance [for] driving,
simplifying, and accelerating adoption [to] improve business outcomes” (Gatimu). The article is representative of a broader trend across Microsoft’s blog content, with thirty-two blog posts (representing nearly 1.2 million views) containing the term “deployment” in their titles. Such content is geared toward “decision-makers” within organizations who might benefit from the various forms of “practical guidance” on how to “plan, deliver, operate, [and] manage” Teams among their employees (Gatimu). In other words, these individuals are imagined by Microsoft as literacy co-sponsors, responsible for delivering the “economies of literacy” represented by Teams (Brandt, “Sponsors” 167). They are portrayed as key mediators in introducing and embedding Teams within organizations, thereby determining the parameters, practices, and priorities surrounding its integration into existing workflows and practices. The persistent reference throughout Microsoft’s online instructional content to these gatekeepers underscores the power dynamics inherent not only in the deployment of digital technologies like Teams but also in the emergence of new genres of faculty literacy activity. This raises questions about how these power dynamics may impact faculty members’ experiences and engagement with Teams, including their perceived autonomy and agency in their own literacy experiences.

In addition to Microsoft’s implicit acknowledgement that key figures within the university set the parameters of faculty literacy, there is also an assumption within its deployment content that a problematic social reality exists which is in need of repair. In one blog article, a Microsoft employee asserts that Teams “gives your people superpowers to do their jobs better, more efficiently, and more transparently” (Moreno). In other words, without Teams, employees are perceived as operating at a disadvantage, potentially facing challenges in achieving optimal productivity, efficiency, and
transparency in their work processes. Moreover, by framing the platform as providing users with “superpowers” to perform their jobs better, this rhetoric implies that the worth of individuals is contingent upon their ability to utilize such technology effectively. This perspective aligns with a technocentric worldview, in which the value of individuals is measured by their contributions to achieving organizational goals, with technology serving as a means to optimize and maximize human potential within a competitive marketplace.

For the above reasons, Microsoft’s deployment rhetoric conjures other corporate rhetoric—for example managerial, utilitarian, governance, and cost-cutting languages—which marginalize the input and expertise of faculty in shaping academic policies and priorities, including decisions about digital technologies. Though faculty themselves likely do not access Microsoft’s webpage and blog content directly, the languages and assumptions of this content continues to be reappropriated for higher education audiences, including faculty, by more formalized means like university webpages and policies as well as less formal ones like conversations at conferences, departmental and committee meetings, and collaborations. This rhetoric has direct consequences for how faculty literacy is imagined. Technological competence, adaptability, collaborative literacy, outcomes-based measurement, and a closer alignment with institutional goals all come to the forefront. Though Microsoft claims that “the foundation for future success lies in delivering work practices and cultures that people desire,” the reality is that institutional rather than individual desires govern the literacies, practices, and cultures delivered to faculty (Moreno). As problematic as the situation may be, the greatest source of irony is the lack of faculty presence within Microsoft’s deployment content across its
blog, various implementations sites, and resources. For example, within the Teams Toolkit, the most comparable customer profile to that of a faculty is the “remote worker” Daria, depicted below:

![Fig. 2. Excerpt from Microsoft’s “Remote Worker Guide.”](image)

As seen above, Daria’s segmented daily routine begins with checking her Teams activity feed at 8:00 a.m. and ends with sharing a vacation photo in the “Teams Fun channel.” Needless to say, many aspects of Daria’s experience differ from those of faculty, including the workday routines, habits, styles of engagement, kinds of collaboration, and culture. The omission of faculty as a professional profile in the Teams Toolkit is representative of a larger gap in integrating the lived experiences of faculty into the deployment rhetoric which frames their literacy experiences. In addition to a missed opportunity, this omission—especially when replicated within the discourse surrounding
their digital literacy—plays a role in eroding trust and collaboration among faculty and the “digital champions” or “change ambassadors” who govern their literacy activities (“It Continues to be a Brand New Workday @UofL”). It also influences the ways in which technologies like Teams are perceived by faculty in relation to their senses of agency and inclusion.

Ultimately, the emphasis which Microsoft places on “administrators and IT pros” as deployers of the new social experience of Teams indicates a crucial mismatch between how digital literacy is imagined and the reality of how technologies become integrated into academic knowledge-making. This mismatch should come as no surprise, however, given the marginal position of academic institutions in relation to Microsoft’s corporate-dominant consumer base. Regardless, Teams was delivered to academia as a ready-made hub, or “digital cockpit,” built for the corporate world yet conducive to the increasingly corporatized as well as highly flexible academic community (Koenigsbauer). For many reasons, including its dynamic embodiment of complex socio-cultural meanings, practices, and power dynamics, Teams has played an active role in mediating social realities, identities, and practices in academia. As a digital epistemic object, it has become an omnipresent feature of academic knowledge-making, fundamentally altering the ways in which academia as a whole is imagined as well as performed. Viewed as an extension of academic capitalism, the antithesis of the collegial model around which faculty culture is centered and in which higher education is rooted, Teams also represents a changing U.S. higher education system, specifically toward the market- and commercially based model noted by many across education studies (Andrews; Jarvis; Giroux and Myrsiades; Gourlay; Manning; Rhoades and Slaughter; Schrecker). Thus, it
provides an insightful lens through which to examine the intersection of digital technologies, organizational change, and scholarly practice as these come into conflict with changing values regarding the function of higher education as a whole.

“Tips and Tricks”

Building on the above analysis of Microsoft’s deployment rhetoric, this section details a large corpus of content curated by Microsoft into the blog category of “Tips and Tricks.” To demonstrate the large-scale impact of this content, Microsoft’s curated collection of “tips and tricks” has received over 4.5 million since 2016. Some articles feature advice for administrators such as “habits for boosting productivity,” creating and awarding “publicly verifiable badges,” and “deliver[ing] superpowers to your people,” while others like the online meeting tips discussed above directly target users (Cady; Moreno; Shandilya). Moreover, the majority of the blog content is disseminated through channels like the Microsoft Teams webpage, Microsoft’s social media platforms, and multiple forms of educational materials. The diversity of genres represented by the tips and tricks, as well as its strategic dissemination by Microsoft, makes this content an interesting case study for tracing how discourses surrounding faculty literacy emerges and come to play a role in their literacy identities and behaviors. The tips and tricks, while less overtly authoritarian than the deployment rhetoric, nevertheless goes hand-in-hand with the deployment strategy of Microsoft. Much like the emphasis on IT administrators and decision-makers as imagined sponsors of literacy, most are geared toward this same audience. However, much of these advice-style articles do directly address imagined Teams users, as well, thereby diversifying and strengthening the
development of a particular discourse meant to regulate the use of Teams and normalize literacy behaviors and values.

Tips and tricks geared toward administrators typically involve the rollout of new Teams features, with instructions on how to facilitate engagement with these in order to enhance as well as “streamline” collaboration, thereby driving organizational productivity and efficiency. One example is the 2023 announcement to “Celebrate success using Together Emojis in Teams.” The article opens with the following blurb: “We’re celebrating #NationalHighFiveDay today by introducing an exciting and unique way to interact with your team members using new Together Emojis in Microsoft Teams. The new Together Emoji for high fives is currently rolling out and will be available to users soon!” (Cundall) A member of the Microsoft Tech Community continues to describe that Together Emojis are designed to celebrate success and foster a positive collaborative environment within the Teams chat space, offering the ability for individuals to express collective achievements, teamwork, and celebrations. The new emojis offer a variety of “together” options, ranging from “a slap of hands with high fives, clinking glasses to cheers, grabbing a coffee, or getting pizza for lunch” and are meant to “bring everyone’s sentiments together and belong” (Cundall). An interactive GIF of this emoji experience is also depicted in the article and screenshoted below:
The introduction of Together Emojis is framed as a way for people to “come together when they are apart,” promoting the idea that digital communication can bridge an assumed gap by fostering a sense of connection and community (Cundall). Moreover, the particular language of “Together Emojis” can be viewed as emerging out of a larger discourse associated with the pandemic, symbolizing the digital manifestation of unity and solidarity during a time of social fragmentation caused by physical separation, i.e. social distancing. Therefore, the Together Emojis feature may be viewed as a collective effort for maintaining a sense of connectedness and mutual support assumed to be lacking among workplace users of Teams. While this may be true, especially given the ongoing social ramifications of remote and hybrid work, among other socioeconomic and political
circumstances impacting faculty life, the rhetoric of togetherness takes on a superficial connotation among many within the faculty community for several reasons. Firstly, the emphasis on togetherness by means of digital communication is largely disconnected from the realities of faculty life, where meaningful collaboration typically occurs through face-to-face interactions or, secondarily, through written rather than visual forms of communication. Additionally, as a feature of Teams, the Together Emoji may be perceived as a corporate attempt to gloss over deeper issues or to impose a one-size-fits-all solution to complex social and organizational dynamics within academic institutions. This particular “tip” for IT administrators risks trivializing or oversimplifying the experiences of faculty, framing these within the narrow confines of a selection of celebratory emojis and positive messaging.

In contrast with the more covert advancement of literacy values via the deployment of new Teams features, user-focused content— with the user audience largely imagined as corporate office workers—more directly advances particular forms of social engagement by means of interactions with standard interface features. For example, in “9 tips for having the best online meeting experience with Teams,” a senior program manager at Microsoft offers meeting etiquette advice such as “stay[ing] in control of your meeting [by] designating who can present [and] muting attendees” as well as “encouraging everyone in your Teams meeting to turn on their video” (Skay). For some less critical readers, this advice might seem ideologically neutral and solely technical, though underlying assumptions about social behavior dictate the recommendations. Most obviously—and in alignment with the deployment rhetoric discussed above, the emphasis on giving the meeting organizer control over defining roles permissions for participants
implies a hierarchical structure that aligns with neoliberal ideologies favoring individual authority and efficiency. This hierarchical approach undermines collective decision-making and democratic participation, both of which are central to faculty culture (Manning 50). Moreover, as Chapter Five demonstrates, much of this etiquette such as “turning on [one’s] video” during Teams meetings conflicts both with pre-existing expectations regarding certain genres of activity like the online senate meeting and with the practical constraints of the Teams interface as it has entered into faculty literacy activity.

The above articles, and many like them, play an active role in sponsoring particular perceptions of and forms of literacy surrounding faculty. The “tips and tricks” phrase is a familiar one within academia, often eliciting skepticism among faculty for masking broader socioeconomic and political agendas, or a “hidden curriculum” so to speak (Jackson qtd. in Gourlay, Posthumanism 61). Thus, even as some faculty may not endorse Microsoft’s advice, its proliferation nevertheless sets the norms and expectations within academic communities as faculty are pressured to conform to these standards in order to be perceived as competent and successful within their changing roles. To better understand the relevance of Microsoft’s tips and tricks discourse within the assemblage of faculty literacies, it is useful to reflect the Foucauldian concepts of discursive formations and disciplinary power. As discussed in Chapter One, Foucault explains that discourses are not isolated but rather are interconnected and operating within broader power structures. The “Tips and Tricks” content, while seemingly trivial, reflects a broader discourse which shapes and regulates social norms and behaviors within the digital workspace. By presenting certain behaviors as standard or desirable, this content
exercises a form of disciplinary power wherein individuals may internalize and regulate themselves according to the norms and values of the dominant discourse.

In conjunction with other forms of rhetoric surrounding digital literacy, Microsoft’s circulation of tips and tricks may contribute to the sedimentation of a coercive discourse which regulates and disciplines faculty bodies, identities, and social interactions. This discourse may constrain agency and perpetuate forms of domination and control such as “surveillance capitalism,” a concept discussed by many in digital literacy studies as an economic system driven by the commodification and exploitation of personal data for profit (Burnett and Merchant; Zuboff). By offering suggestions on how to use features, navigate interfaces, and optimize workflows, Microsoft’s extensive library of tips and tricks presents the opportunity to collect detailed information about user preferences, behaviors, and interests, data which is then used to refine algorithms, personalize content, and target advertisements more effectively, thus enhancing the platform’s commercial viability and profitability. On a macro-level, much of this data is made available to consumer organizations like universities, whereas on a micro-level, opportunities are created for individuals, including meeting administrators, to collect and manipulate this data in more insidious ways, for example through features like attendance records, meeting transcripts, and engagement data.

All-in-all, Microsoft’s tips and tricks content—both practical and ideologically laden—enters into circulation with other actors in the assemblage of faculty literacy, joining a network of institutions, practices, and technologies which play a role in shaping, regulating, and normalizing particular forms of social literacy. In this way, the advice advanced by Microsoft may be viewed as an “active and agentive participant in [the]
practice” of faculty literacies (Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 163). Moreover, as a form of social advice provided by a tech giant with substantial capital and access to diverse platforms, this content carries significant agency in influencing and directing the discourse and practices surrounding faculty literacies.

**Faculty as Digital First Responders**

The uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation above by intensifying the reliance on digital platforms and remote communication technologies like Teams. With educational institutions worldwide transitioning to online learning models virtually overnight, there was a heightened need for guidance and support in navigating these new digital landscapes. In this context, the advice provided by tech giants like Microsoft carried even greater weight, as educators sought reliable resources to adapt to the rapidly changing educational environment. As with the tips and tricks content discussed above, Microsoft’s substantial capital as a result of revenue growth during the pandemic as well as its significant growth in commercial partnerships enabled the company to assert significant influence over the discourse and practices surrounding faculty literacies, particularly during this period of heightened uncertainty and reliance on digital solutions (“2020 Annual Report”). Capitalizing upon this record-breaking growth, Microsoft repositioned itself to investors as “digital first responders to the world’s first responders, supporting those on the front lines, from healthcare, to education, to the public sector” (“2020 Annual Report”). This hero narrative also extended to Teams, as Microsoft took on a new role of “helping organizations navigate the response, recovery, and reimagine phases of the crisis,
equipping them not only to stay open for business but to innovate” (“2020 Annual Report”).

When the COVID-19 lockdown impacted U.S. universities, Teams emerged as a significant actor in—and organizing element—academic life. For IT administrators and central university leaders, the embedded Microsoft 365 application represented a cost-minimal, rapid communication solution which could be used at scale amid a period of disruption to in-person work. It offered several efficiencies of scale, thus making it a satisfactory quick-fix to a sudden rupture in normal business operations. Though many within universities remained skeptical of dependency on the new platform for many reasons outlined in this chapter, Teams was portrayed by administrators as offering stability and security during a time of organizational crisis. For example, still hosted on the University of Louisville College of Arts and Sciences’ Faculty and Staff Resources webpage is the following statement: “Given the uncertainty of our current situation and the increasing likelihood that many of us will be working remotely for some time, it’s important that we all get very comfortable working in Microsoft Teams” (“Working Remotely”). As demonstrated by this message, Teams gained additional significance during the pandemic as a temporary solution to a socially distanced—and laboriously fragmented—academic community. In other words, it was a band-aid solution, responding not only to a sudden rupture in traditional ways of communicating and collaborating among faculty and staff but also to the fear of decreased student retention and an already declining student enrollment. University administrators turned to Teams as a one-size-fits-all platform which would enable a quick pivot to an online learning and student services model. Yet, this turn also represented a critical step in “saving” universities from
a situation which threatened to undermine their financial sustainability, reliant heavily upon tuition fees and student engagement; tarnish institutional reputations key to attracting talent and resources; and dismantle part of their core mission which involves functioning as intellectual, cultural, and economic resources for society. In addition to the band-aid nature of Teams, then, so was it a pivotal actor in the long-term viability and relevance of higher education as a whole.

Microsoft, university leaders, and IT administrators–the lead “deployers” of the Teams experience–largely controlled the emergent narrative of faculty literacy in relation to Teams during the pandemic. This narrative, of course, was market- and enrollment-driven, construing Teams as a conduit not only for information delivery to students but also for an enhanced and “inclusive” social environment essential to retaining students (Microsoft Teams for Education). The changing nature of faculty literacy was portrayed, then, within a digital-first and student-first narrative which repositioned faculty as “digital first responders” to an academic experience at risk of dissolution, with faculty expected to repair and deliver a shiny new remote learning experience. For the first time, a specific “Teams for Education” subpage also appeared on the Teams product page, with faculty grouped alongside K-12 teachers as an implied but not specified user segment within the category of “educators.” This digital-first and student-centric rhetoric is reinforced visually on the “Teams for Education” webpage, with digitized images of smiling students in contained within the Teams interface, as depicted in the following image:
Fig. 4. Screenshot of “Teams for Education” webpage.

As seen above, the visual content of the webpage displays numerous photos of smiling, engaged students in the virtual space of Teams, yet finding a faculty—or even an educator—representation is a bit like playing “Where’s Waldo?”. Faculty are subsumed by imagery of Teams interface features like an interactive whiteboard and a classroom version of “together mode,” as displayed below:

Fig. 5. Screenshot of “Together Mode” on “Teams” webpage.
Eventually, “Higher Education” would also appear on the “Teams for Education” page, though in the restricted form of a three-bullet-point blurb which positions faculty (i.e., “educators”) as facilitators of student collaboration, inclusivity, and progress. As depicted by the screenshot below, the “Teams for Education” webpage reinforces the narrowly defined image of the faculty member, ironically omitted, as a deliverer of the Teams experience as students look onward from the artificial world beyond:

Fig. 6. Screenshot of “Built for Every Stage of Learning” on “Teams for Education” webpage.

Complementary to image above, which features an un-smiling, solitary student popping out of an artificially created background, faculty are urged to “stay organized and connected to all [their] students [and] personalize learning for each student with insights” gleaned through the analytics feature of Teams. They are also encouraged to “build community and improve collaboration” through various Teams features. As with
Blackboard and many other learning management systems, faculty are implicated in the same managerial role of the “Admins. and IT Pros” governing their own literacy experiences, as they are tasked with “track[ing] individual student and class progress with built-in insights” (Microsoft Teams for Education). This positioning not only burdens faculty with the responsibility of micromanaging the new educational environment of Teams but also reinforces a surveillance culture in which educators are expected to constantly monitor student progress, potentially overshadowing genuine teaching and learning interactions. Ultimately, as with much of the current scholarship on faculty writing in our field, the diverse and multiple identities of faculty as advisors, administrators, mentors, researchers, and collaborators are, for the most part, glossed over by this narrowly defined and utilitarian view of faculty as educator-managers. Yet, the narrative of educators as digital first responders diversifies this image by adding an additional layer of social responsibility and assumed technological proficiency.

In addition to Microsoft’s own reinforcement of corporate-driven narratives surrounding faculty literacy, as discussed above, another form of discourse which serves to strengthen this narrative is the customer success story. The genre of the customer success story serves to reinforce narratives of compliance or coercion by highlighting the benefits experienced by individuals or organizations who conform to the desired behavior or ideology. By showcasing the positive outcomes achieved through adherence to certain practices or beliefs, the success story validates and promotes the agenda of coercive discourse. In the case of Teams for Education, less than 7% of customer success stories accessible through the Teams product page represent universities, while even these rely on the pandemic hero narrative as their central story point. For example, in Kent State
University’s success story, which has been featured on the “Teams for Education” page since the pandemic, the university’s senior vice president and provost affirms that the institution “believe[s] students come first in all that [they do], and with Teams, no student is left out, no student is unseen, and no student is unheard” (“Kent State University”). This opening declaration indicates that, like Microsoft, Kent State’s administration measures the success of Teams in terms of its relevance to student inclusivity and engagement.

While the student-first rhetoric of the Kent State success story may be interpreted as enmeshing faculty within Microsoft’s own rebranding as digital first responders, another interesting feature is the centrality of Teams to this response. Throughout the article, Teams is referred to as a supporter, an enabler, and an innovator which “empower[s] change” and propels faculty toward their mission (though no particular faculty mission is actually stated). Of course, the tech-hero aspect of this narrative is quite familiar, as digital technologies and the tech industry have, for decades, been framed as heroic, known for their vital roles in driving innovation, solving complex problems, and positively transforming society. However, what is particularly striking about the article and this quote is the distinctive role played by the Teams product—more than any other product belonging to Microsoft or its competitors—in empowering an effective response by academic institutions like Kent State to the pandemic. Kent State’s vice president for information technology and CIO explains that, with the commencement of the pandemic, his university “completely directed [their] focus into Teams,” which “really became the centerpiece of [their] attention and the foundation for […] providing a new platform with new opportunities for collaborative remote work” (“Kent State
These words imply an unprecedented level of reliance on and trust in Teams following the onset of the pandemic, highlighting how educational institutions like Kent State embraced Teams not only as a supplemental tool but as a central and indispensable component in their day-to-day operations.

Finally, reinforcing Microsoft’s own deployment rhetoric, the Kent State success story also reveals that “a crucial part” of the university administration’s effort was directed toward “familiarizing faculty, staff, and students with the technology to the point where it [would become] a natural part of their teaching and learning workflows” while addressing the “spectrum of comfort with technology” that existed across their institution (“Kent State University”). The rhetoric of “naturalizing Teams” raises obvious alarms mentioned previously, for example pertaining to autonomy and academic freedom, technological determinism, user experience and well-being, and transparency in decision-making. It also mirrors advice from the Teams blog like, “How do you get your people, particularly the laggards, to adopt and love teams? [It’s] probably easier than you’d think” (Moreno). Perhaps more explicitly than the language of familiarization, the term “laggards” to refer to individuals who have not yet adopted Teams reveals a hierarchical power dynamic all-too-familiar to faculty, who are consistently framed within a deficit model of digital literacy, positioned as inferior or behind the curve of the modern digital workplace. Unfortunately, such discourse often arises within educational technology circles and other online platforms dedicated to higher education. It is centered on the perception of rapid technology advancement and the need for faculty to keep pace with these changes in order to prepare students for the modern workforce. For example, in the U.S. Department of Education’s “2024 National Educational Technology Plan: A Call to
Action for Closing the Digital Access, Design and Use Divides,” digitally deficient educators occupy the second of “three key divides limiting the transformational potential of educational technology to support teaching and learning” and are urged to “expand their professional learning and build the capacities necessary to design learning experiences enabled by technology” (U.S. Department of Education). Though professional development opportunities like building digital proficiency are not, in and of themselves, a bad thing, the persistent positioning of faculty, and indeed all educators, as lacking in terms of the digital literacies necessary to deliver exceptional learning experiences to today’s learners is troublesome. Ironically, in the case of Microsoft, by encouraging the adoption of Teams without critical examination of its sociocultural and ethical implications, the company’s rhetoric displaces the development of critical literacy skills among these “laggards” with uncritical conformity (Moreno).

Coupled by the pandemic and reiterated by the Kent State success story, Teams represented not only a change in how learning was delivered to students but also a significant change in contemporary academia as a whole, contributing to shifts in social values, norms, and practices which continue to reshape the nature of literacy, the very basis of academic culture. If Teams represents the “future of work,” as indicated on the Teams webpage, then notably omitted from Microsoft’s vision is a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse actors, including faculty, whose experiences combine to form this social future.

The Teams Hub

As discussed throughout this chapter, Teams was originally imagined—and eventually deployed—as a corporate assemblage which “[brought] together people,
conversations, content and the tools teams need to collaborate” (“Microsoft Unveils Microsoft Teams”). Simultaneously, it was depicted as a solution for enterprises looking to manage their operations, marketed as “put[ting] everything organizations need to make faster, more informed decisions in a single, intelligent hub” (Wright). The Teams hub was imagined within the confines of the one-stop-shop framework signature to the Microsoft brand and centered on the rhetoric of centralization, standardization, and convenience. This artificial experience was engineered on the principles of simplicity, transparency, and efficiency, all contained within a unified digital environment that promised a social experience which would drive positive business outcomes. Depicted below, features like “Together Mode” promised “a more engaging meeting experience” by enabling participants to “focus on faces, pick up on nonverbal cues, and easily see who’s talking” (Microsoft Teams for Enterprise).

Fig. 7. Screenshot of “Together Mode” on “Teams for Enterprise” webpage.

Teams was also portrayed as empowering users to “feel closer to [their] team,” through integrations of virtual backgrounds, live reactions, and interactive whiteboarding tools. However, this restructuring of the socio-material landscape by Teams leads to several
questions with direct implications for faculty literacy: how do these new arrangements of humans within the digital interface impact interpersonal dynamics and culture? Moreover, how do faculty perceive the influence of digital platforms such as Teams on the culture of academic institutions, and how do they navigate potential shifts in communication norms, collaboration practices, and power dynamics within the academic community? While the competitive advantage of Teams in the productivity market is social, with reports that Teams can deliver savings worth around $6.9 million by improving collaboration, surprisingly little is known about the social implications of Teams outside of Microsoft’s carefully measured productivity insights (Wright). The following section complicates this narrowly defined image of the social.

The Hub’s Unfolding

When Teams was deployed among academic audiences, it began to serve as a nexus for diverse knowledge domains, facilitating complex interactions and exchanges beyond the boundaries of corporate collaboration. For example, it facilitated interdisciplinary research projects, cross-institutional academic initiatives, professional development communities, remote work coordination, and committee work, just to name a few. Moreover, with the introduction of the 200+ application Teams Store and additional integrations, the literacy environment of the Teams hub has grown even more complex. As Teams interacted with diverse audiences and adapted to various contexts, the unexpected complexities of its social nature became apparent. Despite its initial framing as a streamlined solution for collaboration and decision-making, the platform’s adoption revealed the intricate interplay between different forms of literacy and materials which intersected with the digital environment. Users brought diverse skill sets,
communication styles, and technological competencies to the Teams interface, leading to emergent patterns of interaction and meaning making. Moreover, the integration of Teams with third-party products introduced additional layers of complexity, as users navigated the convergence of multiple tools and platforms within an ever-expanding “semiotic ecosystem” (Scollon and Scollon). These complexities challenge the notion of Teams as a straightforward productivity software.

The adaptability of the Teams hub underscores the fluid nature of digital platforms as epistemic objects, constantly evolving to accommodate shifting contexts and expanding possibilities for collaboration and knowledge exchange across various industries and domains. In this way, Teams embodies the unfolding ontology discussed by Latour, in which entities emerge and evolve within networks of relationships and interactions. As users engage with Teams and share their experiences on platforms like the Teams blog, they contribute to the ongoing evolution of its ontology, shaping its functionality, affordances, and perceived value within the digital landscape. As a dynamic “hub” now omnipresent in the lives of faculty, Teams is reshaping the landscape of academic literacies. The precise metaphor of a hub elucidates the intricate socio-cultural environment that faculty members must continue to navigate. For instance, understanding and adhering to organizational protocols and etiquette within Teams meetings and channels are now crucial aspects of social literacy. Faculty members must learn to interpret subtle cues and navigate power dynamics within digital spaces, such as recognizing the authority of moderators or navigating the nuances of “hand-raising” and participation in the flow of conversation. Moreover, Teams blurs the boundaries between work and personal life, requiring faculty to negotiate the integration of professional and
personal identities within digital environments. For example, the use of Teams for informal chats or social interactions—coupled with the added dimensions of GIFs and emojis—may challenge traditional norms of professional conduct and interpersonal boundaries.

Though the Teams hub is, in a sense, a self-contained virtual space, nevertheless its reassembly of social literacies extends beyond the digital realm, influencing the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, professional networks, and community partnerships. Its integration into institutional workflows has reshaped power dynamics and decision-making processes within academic governance structures, as with the university senate meeting analyzed in the following chapter. Just as Teams itself operates as a complex assemblage of literacies, so does it form part of a much larger network of relations which constitute faculty literacy. This larger network encompasses various interconnected literacies in the lives of faculty which are disciplinary, technological, pedagogical, and administrative in nature. Moreover, this assemblage of faculty literacies intersects with others across institutional contexts to a degree which has been magnified by the centrality of the Teams hub to organizational processes. The convergence of diverse literacies within the Teams hubs reflects the complex sociocultural dynamics inherent in academic life, and the centrality of Teams to organizational processes amplifies the multifaceted nature of faculty identity and work, underscoring the need for a more elaborate approach to studying faculty literacy. As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, Manning emphasizes the importance of examining how organizational structures and practices shape individual behavior and collective identity within academic institutions. Teams, as a central component of these processes, mediates faculty literacies,
shaping the norms, values, and practices surrounding faculty within the academic community. Therefore, studying faculty literacy within the context of Teams requires consideration of broader institutional factors, including power dynamics, institutional cultures, and professional norms. Understanding how faculty navigate the complexities of Teams as a socio-material assemblage is essential for updating conversations about the evolving nature of their literacies as well as the institutional significance of these literacies.

Simultaneous to their navigation of various dynamics, cultures, and norms within the Teams hub, faculty must also navigate the blurred boundaries of the artificial and the natural, a theme highlighted by the Teams webpage imagery. The following screenshot from the “Teams Online Meeting” subpage portrays a new reality impacting faculty though omitted from their portrayal as Teams users:

![Teams Online Meeting screenshot](image)

Fig. 8. Screenshot of “Teams Online Meeting” webpage.

Consistent with the intermingled emojis and online personas depicted above—many of which would likely not have been recognizable by many faculty prior to Teams—, Microsoft reassures its enterprise customers of their employees’ “natural movement” from “one collaboration tool to another” which “all naturally work together” (Microsoft
Teams for Enterprise). Such rhetoric reflects the blurred human/non-human boundaries of the Teams hub, emphasizing the interconnectedness and co-constitutive relationship between Teams and those with whom it interacts. As faculty navigate and merge with the Teams’ interface, they develop new ways of interacting and expressing themselves that are influenced by the affordances and constraints of both the digital platform and the regulatory discourses discussed previously in this chapter. As they negotiate the boundaries between their physical and digital realities, so must they navigate their roles as educators, professionals, or team members, all of which converge in unorganized ways within—and, by extension, outside of—the hub of Teams.

In a sense, the Teams hub has evolved into an “everyday reality” among faculty, transforming their literacy environments into a “pervasive computing space” and “adding the thickness of the digital (an expansive representational dimension) to the physical world” (Hodgson 180). Moreover, one result of this condition is that the ways in which faculty navigate and make sense of the world around them are “beholden to a ‘constant interplay and permeability’ between digital mediations and material reality (and digital realities and material mediations)” (Hodgson 180). As the following chapter observes, what emerges by means of the Teams interface is not simply a digital/real mixed reality but “altogether different modes of embodiment [. . .] perceptible and accessible to particular human-technology assemblages” (Hodgson 69). The nature of these embodiments in relation to Teams deserves more attention, as it unveils underlying ideologies embedded within digital platforms, ultimately raising many questions about corporate forms of literacy sponsorship.
Conclusion and Implications

Many organizational studies scholars have claimed that higher education is particularly affected by environmental change “because of its strong dependence on tuition dollars, national and international economies, reputational measures of quality, and fluidity of the client group served,” i.e. the transience of the student population (Conley; Manning; Newman et al.). As this chapter demonstrates, environmental factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, government-mandated requirements surrounding remote work and learning, and market-driven pressures have all played a role in accelerating an increasingly corporatized university, paving the way for Microsoft to position its latest Teams product as a literacy sponsor within academia. Through mechanisms like the Microsoft News Center, Teams webpage, and Teams blog, the company has played an active role in this sponsorship, circulating rhetoric surrounding the platform as it relates to higher education and remote learning. Moreover, as this chapter showcased, this rhetoric has been taken up by higher education institutions themselves, most significantly by IT administrators and university leadership, in ways which seek to regulate and normalize particular forms of engagement with the Teams product. Yet, given the presence of ambiguity, multiple authority structures, and numerous perspectives within the organization of higher education, the ways in which the Teams product has been appropriated by academic stakeholders is much more nuanced and diverse than outlined in dominant discourse.

The implications of the Teams unfolding described above are manifold. Firstly, the unfolding of Teams within academia highlights the complex interplay between external environmental pressures and internal institutional dynamics, demonstrating how
market forces and technological advancements shape the priorities and practices of higher education institutions, specifically in relation to new digital technologies. Secondly, the emergence of Teams as a digital epistemic object in academia highlights the power dynamics inherent in corporate forms of literacy sponsorship, raising questions about the influence of private entities on educational policies and practices. Moreover, it showcases the role of digital technologies as mediators of literacy and knowledge production within academia, suggesting that platforms like Teams not only facilitate utilitarian goals like remote collaboration but also reshape the norms and values surrounding digital literacy within the academic community.

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrated the need for critical inquiry surrounding the assumptions, values, and implications underlying the integration of disruptive technologies into scholarly practices. The following chapter engages this nuance, using Teams as an entryway into an emergent digital epistemic practice which accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic—the online senate meeting. By offering one glimpse into a much more complicated portrait of how faculty and staff are interacting with and within the new socio-material “hub” of Teams, Chapter Four seeks to uncover the diverse interactions among practices, identities, and power dynamics enacted by Teams as faculty and staff navigate the complexities of online senate meetings. Moreover, it interrogates the implications of this digital transformation for broader discourses of institutional change, democratic participation, and scholarly communication within the contemporary “digital” university.
CHAPTER IV
THE TEAMS SENATE

Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the university senate—taken up by faculty and staff in their systems of shared governance—has played a significant role in U.S. universities. The senate serves as an interdisciplinary forum in which academic stakeholders gather to make decisions on matters related to academic policies, curriculum development, employee well-being, and other issues affecting the entire academic community (Austin and Jones; Hendrickson et al.). Governance structures like the senate also serve as a means for faculty and staff to “cooperate with the administration and other institutional governance organizations” like student government associations and university leadership (Manning 44). Given the historical presence of the senate in academia as a genre which mediates “situated practices, interactions, symbolic realities, and ‘congruent meanings,’” among a diversity of academic stakeholders, it makes for a fascinating case study as it comes into interaction with a similarly wide-reaching genre of emergent literacy activity: the online, or “virtual,” meeting (Bawarshi and Reiff 59). In addition, as some education scholars have observed over the past few years, the pandemic has exacerbated the complex, evolving nature of professional identity construction in academia (Veles, et al.). Some scholars have conceived as the post-pandemic era as typifying the “rise of third space professionals,” referring to “an increasing number of staff in higher education with both academic and professional credentials” who find
themselves working in “third space” environments (Whitchurch 2015). As these “third spaces” and “boundary zones” become more prevalent, shared genres of digital literacy within academia such as the Teams senate meeting may provide rich insight into the literacy expectations, values, and norms which position academic stakeholders in different ways (Veles, et al. 127).

As discussed in Chapter One, my study builds on an understanding of genre as “rhetorically and socially dynamic, ‘stabilized for now,’ ideological, performative, intertextual, socio-cognitive, and responsive to and also constructive of situations” (Bawarshi and Reiff 60-1). This characteristic of genre has become increasingly transparent in the digital university, especially as members of the academic community have quickly incorporated digital communications platforms into their pre-existing work. The university senate is just one example of many genres comprising this work in the lives of faculty, and it intersects in relevant ways with other genres of both academic activity as well as online meeting practice. As a new, hybrid form of the university senate meeting, the “Teams senate meeting” discussed in this chapter represents a distinctive, “interactionally produced world” or “meaning landscape” which many faculty have been forced to inhabit following the lockdown (Bawarshi and Reiff 61). Faculty have learned to “act and recognize situations in a particular way [and] orient [themselves] to particular goals, values, and assumptions” via the Teams senate, as discussed below (Bawarshi and Reiff 61). Recognizing the distinctiveness of this landscape is critical for diversifying a relatively new area of scholarship on the online meeting, attending to its uptake in academia as a whole but also for one function (academic governance) of a much larger umbrella of faculty work. To better understand this new genre, this chapter analyzes the
senate and online meeting as a genre set, used by members of the faculty discourse community “to accomplish particular tasks within [the vast] system of genres” which comprise a changing academic environment (Devitt qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 141). Better attending to these intersecting genres may provide unique insight into “social roles and relationships, power dynamics, the distribution of cognition and activities,” and much more (Bawarshi and Reiff 87).

Within the Teams senate, literacy takes on many forms as faculty and staff navigate the power dynamics inherent in collaborative governance, discourse, and multimodal meaning making. Though the faculty and staff senate traditionally have differed in terms of composition, the issues discussed, representation structure (e.g., academic departments versus functional units), and other nuances, nevertheless they overlap in many ways. For example, protocols regarding attendance, the use of pre-made agendas to structure the meeting discourse, the facilitation of meeting discussion by a committee chair and appointed sub-chairs, representation by a faculty (in the case of staff senate) or staff (in the case of faculty senate), and the appearance of guest speakers, typically from members of the university leadership, all typify the senate meeting. Taking into account these similarities and differences, this chapter studies the genre of the Teams senate meeting more generally and mainly in terms of the arrangement of discursive norms rather than the specific content discussed. However, future studies which attend more specifically to the unique content, concerns, and identities of Teams senate attendees would immensely enrich the conversation which my study initiates.

All-in-all, the online senate meeting provides a tangible platform to observe and analyze literacy as a dynamic and diverse phenomenon, shaped by both individual
capabilities and broader socio-political contexts. The senate’s shift to an online format as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic adds richness to this already complex form of epistemic practice, adding new layers of digital mediation. Amidst the backdrop of a global pandemic, the senate meeting has undergone a fundamental transformation as a genre of literacy activity. The widespread adoption of digital communications modalities like Zoom, Teams, Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, and even YouTube for facilitating the senate meeting indicates that there has been an undeniable change in epistemic practice, as these technologies have disrupted pre-established values and micro-practices within the meeting while reconfiguring the relationships among participants and an array of other emergent actors. At the same time that new digitally mediated norms have emerged within the genre of the senate meeting, so has the visibility of an array of materialities, technologies, bodies, practices, and social structures which comprise the meeting, some of which are new and some of which are now made more salient. In this respect, while all of the human and non-human actors which perform the “digital” senate meeting are not necessarily novel, their unique re-assemblage in an online format complicates the portrait academic literacy which dominates various levels of discourse, from scholarship on faculty writing to discourse surrounding the nature of their engagement with digital technologies like that discussed in the previous chapter.

Despite noticeable changes in how faculty literacy is enacted and experienced in relation to the digital, including but not limited to specific digital objects and practices, nevertheless there persists a “widespread and unquestioning acceptance” of these platforms by university administrations without due consideration of how these impact the organization of higher education as a whole by means of the day-to-day, micro-level
practices which emerge. Burnett and Merchant explain one perspective on this situation which my study seeks to unravel—the assumption that “if it works, and if it works quickly and efficiently, most of us are happy. In this sense, accepting technology into your life is a bit like believing in magic—a hidden force that usually works in your favor and only occasionally seems to throw obstacles in your way” (11). My study demonstrates the relevance of critically analyzing these technologies further as they not only disrupt pre-established genres of academic literacy but also impact organizations in various ways, as discussed further below. The supposedly “seamless” integration, or “deployment,” of digital technologies into academic practice is a much messier and complex phenomenon than represented in Microsoft’s deployment rhetoric or, indeed, institutional rhetoric surrounding technology implementation as a whole (Gatimu). A closer look, specifically through a socio-material lens, makes apparent that an array of emergent non-human actors like the interface design, languages, and functionality of platforms like Teams have disrupted and reconfigured genres of literacy activity like the senate meeting, influencing how discussions are facilitated, how faculty engage (and are permitted to engage), and what literacy resources are available. In addition, as the previous chapter demonstrated, several aspects of new technologies including but not limited to their interface design and surrounding implementation rhetoric can reflect and perpetuate neoliberal ideologies and social norms which are antithetical to faculty culture (Manning 50). As these come into interaction with genres of social activity like the senate meeting, they may reinforce or even clash with pre-established social norms, values, and embodied experiences.
Making Sense of the Teams Senate Meeting

To examine one of many disrupted and interconnected genres of academic literacy which emerged following pandemic, this chapter combines several heuristics useful for analyzing both digital epistemic objects and their surrounding practices. Whereas the previous chapter explored how the specific digital epistemic object of Teams, including its accompanying discourse, has shaped the lens through which knowledge is produced and shared in the digital university, the current chapter demonstrates that digital epistemic practices like the senate meeting shed particular light on the ways in which individuals and social communities within academia interpret and engage with such objects. This chapter both builds upon and extends beyond the object analysis of the previous chapter by elucidating how contextual factors like materialities, social norms, power distribution, and organizational structures influence how recipients of deployed technologies like Teams take up and interact with those objects in order to co-produce knowledge as they resituate their understanding and performance of literacy.

“Interview” with the Teams Camera

The initial “interview” of this chapter draws most directly from the concepts of literacy-as-event, affect, and embodiment to counterbalance my analysis of senate participants in terms of discursive subject positions or identities. Modeled after a similar interview conducted by Gourlay with her laptop, this section utilizes the heuristics of following the actors and gathering anecdotes, detailing a personal account of my experience as a participant in a series of staff senate meetings which took place on Teams in 2021 (Posthumanism 49). Building on the concept of bodies as assemblages discussed previously in Chapter Two, this anecdotal section seeks to hold in tension the text- and
discourse-centered perspectives on the production of subjectivity which dominate the study of academic literacies. As many literacy scholars have argued, such perspectives tend to “ignore movement and sensation, favoring instead the story of ideological apparatuses or subject positions that ‘structure the dumb material interactions of things and render them legible according to a dominant signifying schema into which human subjects were interpellated [and thus] capture bodies in a ‘cultural freeze frame,’ removing movement from the picture” (Massumi qtd. in Ehret and Leander 31). While joining scholars like Gourlay in recognizing that academia is a textually entangled discursive environment, and that the “work” of academics involves texts of many kinds, this chapter seeks to reconcile text-based rhetorical study with a focus on affect and embodiment, arguing that these go hand-in-hand. Ehret and Leander argue for literacy studies scholars to “recover [. . .] a sense of the energy, possibility, and feeling of life within the everyday ways people engage with literacy, as well as within the specialized ways we engage with research on literacy” (8). Answering this call and challenging my own tendency to exclude affect and embodiment from analyses of literacy, I offer a brief personal account of my experience as a means of acknowledging these dimensions and opening the potential for connecting my experience to others as a means of more critically interrogating how affect itself is structured in distinctive ways by means of digital epistemic objects and practices.

The second half of this chapter utilizes the ANT-inspired heuristics of following the actors and studying breakdowns, accidents, and anomalies to render visible the observable, dynamic agencies of the Teams interface and participants in a recording of a 2021 staff senate meeting at a public research university. Rather than beginning with
predefined categories or structures, this heuristic involves tracing connections and associations between various human and non-human actors involved, including faculty members, digital technologies and texts, institutional policies, and socio-cultural norms. Within this framework, the video feature of Teams emerges as a central actor in shaping the epistemologies and multimodal literacy practices of the senate meeting. As detailed in the following sections, the video feature impacts the degree to which senate participants feel present, the ways in which they participate, and how they perform their identities as well as how those performances are perceived. At the same time, several breakdowns, accidents, and anomalies which occur as participants navigate the video feature of Teams provide rich insight into the complex interplay between technological affordances and social practices within the senate meeting. These breakdowns illuminate moments of friction, resistance, and negotiation as participants interact with and within the Teams environment. Analyzing these anomalies allows for a more nuanced interpretation of engagement and participation, highlighting the intricate ways in which the Teams interface mediates their literacy.

Employing the heuristics above, this chapter highlights the senate meeting as a nuanced site of multimodal literacy among faculty while also recognizing that this practice forms just one small part of the vast and ever-changing assemblage of faculty literacy—and literacy as a whole—in relation to the digital. As Burnett and Merchant describe of digital literacy practices, it is important to recognize that no single activity exists in isolation; rather, each forms part of a broader assemblage of multimodal engagements which intersect with various discourses and contexts. In addition to intersecting with other shared forms of literacy, both digital and non-digital, within the
faculty discourse community, the Teams senate meeting also overlaps with other genres of literacy practice within and beyond the specific Teams platform, such as teaching, mentorship, collaborations with colleagues, advising, course and team management, and other forms of administrative work. By focusing on a specific way in which academics engage with the object of Teams to produce, share, and evaluate knowledge, this chapter counters the “ideological and broad-brush assumptions” about their literacy practices (Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 165). In other words, it draws from socio-materialism in order to “‘surface’ and see more clearly the “complex mesh of actors at work in the constantly emergent assemblage of faculty literacy” (Gourlay, *Posthumanism* 162). The lens of genre supplements this socio-material analysis below by offering a grounded way of connecting the micro-practices outlined to established academic practices, familiar genres of digital activity, and the broader cultural and social contexts in which they operate, enabling a better understanding of how digital practices are situated within larger discursive frameworks.

**Interview with the Teams Camera during Staff Senate**

*It is mid-pandemic. Working from my university office rather than from home due to the classification of my job role as an “essential worker,” I log on to Teams, a platform which is somewhat familiar to me as it has become the default platform for meetings (even when meeting participants are just a few feet away) and “attending” courses deemed eligible to be hosted in an online format. I am intentionally a few minutes early to today’s staff senate meeting, as I am eager to feel the co-presence of familiar colleagues and observe the faces of unfamiliar ones who are permitted to or inadvertently appear on screen. I am also somewhat excited to observe the interactions of*
the committee chair and sub-chairs as well as the guest speaker as they participate in the unspoken requirement to engage in small-talk when on screen. On this particular day, the university president is scheduled to be “present” at the meeting, and I am excited yet somewhat nervous to see that she, too, has arrived a few minutes early. As I listen to the small-talk—mainly commentary on physical appearance, which I find to be strange and uncomfortable yet somehow fascinating to witness in a professional setting—I realize with horror that my video camera is still turned on. Even worse, the senate secretary has already started the meeting recording. Nervous that I will have to engage in superficial pleasantries while being watched by the floating circles popping up on the side of the screen and while being filmed, I quickly turn off my laptop camera and dissolve into another reality that seems off-stage. Relieved, I return to my Outlook account displayed on my connected desktop computer to resume my previously interrupted work. When it sounds like the meeting has commenced, I turn back to my laptop to watch the opening performance by the president, attempting to follow the cogency of her speech while following along with the moving stream of fragmented comments and emoji reactions on the side of my screen. After typing my own few words—I forget which ones—to demonstrate my attentiveness, I return to my desktop to continue my work, knowing that my active participation in the senate discussion is unnecessary.

—October 2021

At one point in time, the anecdote above would have seemed novel. Even the phrase “I log on to Teams” would likely have caused confusion, needing further clarification that I am attending to the specific Microsoft Teams platform. However, since the pandemic lockdown, many of the negotiations above have become the new norm, as
senate participants navigate their presence and performance in the digital space based on micro-practices like choosing to leave their Teams cameras on or off. Changes in the social activity of the senate meeting have required academics to negotiate the unspoken rules and etiquette of multimodal genre conventions surrounding the use of a computer camera, balancing the desire for human connection with concerns about privacy, professionalism, and social dynamics. Similarly, with the emergence of Teams as an actor in their literacy practice, academics have been forced into learning how to manage their presence, engage with others, and navigate social norms and expectations in new ways. These “socially defined and shared recognitions of similarities” which have become “part of [senate participants’] habitual knowledge” represent typified ways of recognizing as well as acting within the increasingly familiar online environment and are, thus, worthy of further exploration (Schutz qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 219).

As demonstrated by the anecdote above and detailed further in the remainder of this chapter, aspects of the Teams interface such as the camera feature have become salient actors in the performative assemblage of faculty literacy. Within the senate meeting, the camera feature enacts a disproportionate degree of agency in how knowledge is created, re-assembling micro-practices like creating a hospitable environment, facilitating and controlling discussion, constructing presence, and performing positionalities. For example, in contrast with the in-person senate meeting of the pre-pandemic era, the locus of agency within the Teams meeting has shifted, as most participants exist only inasmuch as their profile icon is traceable on the attendance report and as their textual engagement is captured via the Teams chat. The camera emerges within the Teams senate meeting as a genre which, together with expectations regarding
meeting etiquette, regulates who gets to be present, participate, and how. Micro-practices authorized by the camera within the multimedia platform—for example, certain forms of engagement in the Teams chat—become meaning-making actions that represent a particular kind of composing, or “emergent representational practices,” in which agency is distributed between participants and the interface; thus, locating the agency of the action is secondary to the mediation itself (Hodgson 125).

As the camera feature interacts with expectations regarding meeting format, meeting “etiquette,” and other forms of discursive regulation, it also impacts how identities are constructed, enacted, and experienced by meeting participants. In terms of genre, the significance of this reassembly is manifold. However, there are two main areas of significance which my personal account foreshadows. First, my anecdote highlights that power dynamics and social hierarchies influence aspects of engagement, perceptions of agency, and participation not only in the discursive event of the meeting but also in meaning- and decision-making about and beyond the meeting. Intersecting with these power differentials is the structuring of affect. The personal account above highlights various affective responses which emerge as I navigate new norms-in-the-making regarding professionalism and engagement in the digital environment. Genre not only organizes my interpretations and interactions throughout the meeting but also play a role in shaping how I experience my senses of agency, identity, and presence. Affect forms a crucial part of this structured experience, mediating my capacity to act and respond. Thus, power operates not only via meeting etiquette like disabling the camera but also through the regulation and modulation of affective forces which are entangled within this act. To explore these dynamics in a more detailed way, the following section analyzes a
series of micro-practices which have emerged in relation to the Teams camera. These micro-practices, which complicate any simplistic definition of digital literacy via a proficiency/deficit model, have been ingrained as part of an emergent genre of digital literacy in academia and deserve fuller attention.

**Analysis of a Teams Senate Meeting**

The following section, based on an October 2021 Teams recording of a staff senate meeting at a public research university, analyzes the interactions observed as senate participants engage (or do not engage) with the Teams camera. In addition to noticing how aspects of the Teams interface like the camera feature seek to orient participants to distinctive forms of engagement, participation, and discourse, this section also identifies several micro-practices which mediate the specific form of the Teams senate meeting as a genre of literacy activity. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the original intent of this analysis was to consider a recording of a faculty senate meeting published online in 2021. However, due to its inadvertent removal from a publicly accessible domain, I have instead based my analysis on a staff senate meeting published in the same year. Though each sub-format of the university senate meeting, including the identities of those represented, has its own nuances worthy of further exploration, the nature of the analysis below is grounded primarily in discursive norms and socio-material contexts which are similar between the two.

**Visual “Higher-archy”**

As many scholars have noted, the integration of digital platforms within our evolving academic landscape introduces new channels and structures through which hierarchical power dynamics are enacted, experienced, and contested (Gourlay;
Williams). The spatial arrangement and interface design of Teams in interaction with the senate meeting provides a particularly rich example of how these dynamics may unfold in the lives of senate participants, who simultaneously must navigate a digital environment and intersecting discourses which stem from two conflicting organizational models described by Manning as existing in constant tension within higher education: that of bureaucracy and collegium. As senate participants interact with the interface of Teams, they must navigate the tensions inherent within these models, a situation which has profound consequences for how they perceive their roles and influence within academic institutions, including their senses of agency. Most obviously, the tension between centralized control and collaborative governance enacted by the senate meeting on Teams affects participation in discourse and decision-making, with implications beyond the meeting, for example in the shaping of institutional policies. Both the spatial arrangement and interface design of Teams become a playing field, of sorts, for these clashing organizational models. As participants merge with the interface of Teams, not only must they navigate a bureaucratic environment, but also must they experience the tensions between hierarchical power structures and democratic principles, centralized control versus collaborative governance, the prioritization of efficiency over deliberative processes, and formal rules versus informal norms, tensions which bring into question the very foundations of faculty culture. Several emergent micro-practices discussed in further detail below reflect and reinforce this distribution of visibility, control, and authority among off-camera participants, forming a key part of the Teams senate meeting.
“Disabling the Camera” and Other Micro-Practices

A university’s faculty senate webpage offers several “guidelines for Teams meeting,” the first of which is to “join the teams meeting” and the second of which is to “mute microphone and disable camera” (University of Wisconsin Milwaukee). In the context of the faculty senate, which is built around principles of consensus-building and active participation, this advice may seem ironic and counterproductive, as it seems to restrict active engagement, hinder transparency, and convey a perception of disengagement, ultimately jeopardizing the effectiveness and legitimacy of the meeting. Yet, muting oneself and turning the camera off in senate meetings has become the norm. This form of etiquette has emerged specifically as a result of changing material realities which intersect with the pre-existing genre of the in-person senate meeting. Thus, these expectations for engaging with the Teams interface may be viewed as micro-practices, referring to the intricate and often subtle interactions, activities, and behaviors that occur at the individual level within a socio-material context. While there are many micro-practices which can be discerned within the senate meeting on Teams, this section focuses on those entangled with the Teams video, or camera feature, which has become central to shifting patterns of communication, power relations, and participation as well as perceptions of agency and identity within the Teams meeting environment. Etiquette surrounding engagement with the Teams camera may serve as a disciplinary mechanism for regulating behaviors and identities while reinforcing power structures. These mechanisms operate through surveillance, normalization, and the establishment of hierarchical systems of authority, all of which extend beyond the imagined confines of the digital environment into various aspects of literacy activity and social life within the
university, as many have claimed (Gourlay; Zuboff). Thus, in addition to serving as an organizing principle of the senate meeting, the Teams camera has introduced a new set of dynamics within the academic discourse community as a whole, and these require closer attention.

Disabling the Camera

If removing oneself from the audiovisual arena of the Teams senate meeting is a normalized form of presence, then this raises the question of what it means to be present in this new environment. In the context of Teams, being present within the senate meeting can be summarized quite easily: at a minimum, this means being traceable within the Teams interface, primarily as an encoded source of data masked by a profile icon meant to represent attendance within the meeting. The screenshot below depicts this situation:

Fig. 9. Screenshot of profile icons during Teams Senate.
As depicted above, each off-camera Teams meeting participant is represented by a small circle or square icon, referred to throughout this chapter as a “profile icon.” These icons serve as visual renderings of participants, including the networks of user data, for example contact information, institutional affiliation, and user IDs, generated into attendance reports for meeting organizers. Profile icons are visible traces of presence within the digital space that merge bodies into the digital interface. In this way, the icons represent “emergent subjective configurations,” or a “coming together of human and technology [which] allows for some vision, some representation, some ‘thing’ otherwise not possible” (Boyle qtd. in Hodgson). This process of emergence, in addition to rendering participants visually identifiable, also homogenizes the diverse identities of participants to identically sized, circular shapes and limits the degree of agency which they may exercise in order to express themselves authentically, engage with colleagues, and assert their presence in the Teams environment. This homogenization of identity and limitation of agency have important consequences for meaning making and literacy because, firstly, they undermine the richness of interpersonal communication by reducing the diversity of visual cues and expressions available to participants. Thus, the icons may play a role in impeding the development of mutual understanding, trust, and rapport among faculty, all of which are vital for meaningful collaboration and knowledge exchange. Furthermore, the standardized nature of the icons may contribute to a sense of detachment or alienation, particularly in contrast to the richness of in-person interactions in which physical presence allows for the embodiment of identity and the manifestation of unique personalities. This is especially relevant for those participants whose icons do not occupy a space on the screen and instead are relegated to the “+” bubble where they
are numerically accounted for yet invisible from the screen. Without a visible presence, these participants may be less likely to speak up or actively participate, fearing that their contributions may go unnoticed or be overshadowed by others who are visually present on the screen, a generic feature of online presence which many scholars have discussed (Turkle; Garrison and Cleveland-Innes). This hesitancy to engage can result in a loss of diverse perspectives, insights, and expertise within the discussion, ultimately diminishing the quality of decision-making and potentially reinforcing existing power dynamics where those with visible presence hold more influence. Moreover, beyond consequences for behavior, this visual phenomenon has direct implications for aspects of self-perception, as Bailenson has argued in his work on “avatar embodiment.” Bailenson coins this term to describe a process in which individuals identify with and embody the characteristics of their virtual avatars. He asserts that, in virtual environments, individuals often perceive their avatars as extensions of themselves and may experience changes in behavior and self-perception based on the traits and abilities associated with those avatars. Applying this concept to the micro-practice of camera disabling, it becomes obvious that feelings of disembodiment, invisibility, and diminished agency might accompany the limited form of engagement allowed in the visual space of the Teams screen. The voices and contributions of those with disabled cameras (i.e., the majority) may be marginalized, further exacerbating their feelings of exclusion within the academic community, a situation which parallels my own experience in attending the online staff senate meeting over the course of the year 2021. Similarly, in constraining the ways in which participants can express themselves and engage with colleagues, their inscription as profile icons within the senate meeting may negatively impact their development of
interpersonal relationships, collaborative practices, and shared understandings that are essential for academic discourse and knowledge creation. While the micro-practice of disabling the camera may undermine effective collaboration and collegiality within the Teams environment, it also has consequences for interpersonal relationships, trust-building, and the cultivation of a sense of community beyond the meeting confines.

**Attendance Tracking**

Attendance tracking and the inscription of senate participants as profile icons within the Teams interface are interdependent micro-practices within the Teams senate meeting. The design and implementation of profile icons affects how attendance is monitored, how participants engage with the meeting environment, and how their presence is interpreted within the context of the meeting. While attendance protocols like attendance recording, absence notifications, and proxy voting are certainly nothing new in terms of the senate genre, my study claims that attendance culture in relation to the digital is a distinctive phenomenon exacerbated by online forms of communication and collaboration. Using examples from the Teams senate meeting, the following section demonstrates the complexity of attendance culture, arguing that this co-emergent feature has hitherto unexamined implications for aspects of knowledge-making, including but not limited to participation and engagement.

There are two standard ways in which presence in the senate meeting is “tracked”: participant lists, which display the names of all attendees present in real-time, meaning that the list is updated as they join and leave the meeting; and “meeting details,” which display all attendees who join the meeting as well as their respective join/leave times. This latter method of attendance tracking can be found in the meeting summary which is
automatically generated by the Teams platform for meeting organizers. To better understand the relationship between the micro-practices of disabling one’s camera and attendance tracking, it is useful to explore the concept of “attendance culture,” a phenomenon which encompasses a range of attitudes, behaviors, and expectations regarding attendance and continues to be shaped by cultural, institutional, and individual factors.

The shift to digital platforms like Teams has transformed how attendance is understood, managed, and valued within the academic community. Attendance culture has taken on new dimensions in which individuals may prioritize the appearance of being present over actually engaging with the content or contributing meaningfully to the discussion. This can manifest in various ways, such as simply logging into a virtual meeting but remaining silent throughout, passively observing discussions without actively participating, or attending to other tasks outside of the meeting environment while nominally being “present” cognitively in the meeting itself. While some literacy scholars like Gourlay have examined superficial forms of engagement in online student learning contexts, attendance culture does not discriminate, abounding within the digital discursive environments of faculty, as well (Posthumanism). Within the senate meeting, attendance culture affects the dynamics of participation, collaboration, and decision-making. It undermines the authenticity and effectiveness of meetings by fostering a culture of passive presence rather than active engagement. When attendees prioritize the appearance of being present over genuine participation, discussions can lack depth, a diversity of perspectives, and critical engagement with meeting content (Turkle).

Moreover, my personal experience as a Teams senate participant has been that attendance
culture contributes to a sense of disconnection and alienation from colleagues, as I feel compelled to attend meetings solely to fulfill attendance requirements or social expectations. In their qualitative study of work-from-home employees between April 2020 and April 2021, Okabe-Miyamoto et al. noted similar experiences with video conferencing more generally, identifying themes such as perceived surveillance, forced interaction, and increased “video conferencing anxiety.” In stark contrast with Microsoft’s rhetoric of productivity and empowerment discussed in Chapter Two of my own study, Okabe-Miyamoto et al.’s study found that employees, on the contrary, felt less productive as well as less autonomous. This discrepancy between rhetoric and reality in terms of virtual meeting environments ultimately may erode trust and cohesion, interfering with the establishment of a supportive and collaborative sense of community within and beyond the meeting environment.

Going hand-in-hand with the micro-practice of disabling the camera, the attendance culture discussed above is mediated largely through the Teams video feature. The expectation of turning on one’s camera and/or unmuting oneself plays a role in reinscribing power dynamics within the Teams environment. Most obviously, participants are aware that they could be called upon at any moment to perform visually on screen, whether by turning on their camera or unmuting themselves in order to animate their profile icons through verbal response. This creates a sense of constant surveillance which not only is enforced by the meeting organizer but also may be internalized by participants, who feel compelled to maintain a certain level of engagement and attentiveness throughout the meeting knowing that they are potentially under scrutiny at all times. Those who seek to resist this norm might engage in a variety
of actions, for example spontaneously engaging in chat discussion, whether by emoji response or actual written message, in order to feign engagement. This dynamic of constant surveillance and the pressure to maintain a facade of engagement can have several implications for participants as well as the overall dynamics of the meeting. For example, my own experience has been that of heightened stress and feelings of burnout as I have navigated the pressure to appear engaged throughout the senate meeting while struggling to maintain focus or productivity.

It is important to recognize that the attendance culture above permeates other online as well as face-to-face interactions, which exist in networked relations to the Teams senate meeting. By conditioning participants to disengage, the attendance culture of the Teams senate meeting may inadvertently reinforce a culture of passivity and detachment as some faculty hesitate to speak up or contribute actively when accustomed to the controlled environment of Teams. Combined with the prevalence of surveillance, the pressure to conform to attendance norms like superficial chat activity may also reinforce existing expectations regarding participation and engagement within the academic community. For example, faculty may perceive visibility in meetings as validation of their commitment and contribution to their academic roles, aligning with broader norms of professionalism and cultural expectations of collegiality and collaboration. These expectations, whether formalized by organizational policies or embedded within institutional culture, encourage faculty to “participate”—whether authentically or superficially—in meetings as forums for discussion, decision-making, and collective problem-solving. Additionally, faculty may perceive meeting participation as a means of career advancement such as tenure, promotion, and leadership roles, further
motivating them to adhere to attendance norms as a means of demonstrating their leadership potential and engagement with institutional priorities.

Seating Arrangements and Sideline Spectatorship

Going hand-in-hand with the reconfigured genre of attendance tracking described above is that of seating arrangements. In relation to the Teams interface, traditional seating arrangements within the genre of the senate meeting are reconfigured in a way which reinforces particular social dynamics and gives rise to new sets of power relations which govern engagement and meaning making. As seen on the right-hand side of the screenshot below, icon arrangement within the Teams interface is seemingly random. This randomized placement is significant for several reasons. For example, it reinforces the notion that the identities and positionalities of off-camera participants are irrelevant and that their appearance on the screen bears no significant impact on the central discourse. It also impacts the perception of social cohesion among senate participants, who may find it difficult to locate specific colleagues on the one hand and view themselves as disparate, singular entities on the other.
The seemingly randomized placement of profile icons above disrupts established social norms present in traditional face-to-face versions of the senate meeting, where seating arrangements often serve as visual cues which reflect social hierarchies, organizational structures, or disciplinary affiliations. The absence of these visual cues on Teams plays a role in altering power dynamics and communication patterns within the familiar genre of the senate meeting and in ways which have yet to be explored. For example, in contrast with the social hierarchies of traditional face-to-face senate meetings, with higher-ranking members seated in more prominent positions, Teams flattens this power dynamic to some extent by mixing everyone together either as off-camera profile icons or even in the moments of on-screen presence. Another example of disrupted power dynamics associated with the change in seating arrangement between face-to-face and Teams senate meetings relates to the establishment of social networks and sub-dialogue in senate meetings, which typically develop in person based on physical proximity or
institutional/disciplinary affiliation. In contrast, the Teams arrangement reconfigures how proximity is imagined and enacted, forming new possibilities for collegial interactions and engagement which ultimately might lead to novel collaborations or exchanges of ideas. Despite the new possibilities afforded by a disrupted and reconfigured social arrangement within the senate meeting, nevertheless it is significant to recognize how these are limited by the convergence of the Teams interface design with the senate’s regulatory practice of disabling one’s camera.

The relational dynamics mediated via the spatial arrangement of profile icons, which seem to be random in one regard, nevertheless is the result of a carefully curated digital interface in interaction with an emergent genre convention (i.e., disabling one’s camera). The alignment of the icons in neat rows at the margins of the central action indicates that there is an element of intentionality behind their locale, as the strategic placement of profile icons on the sideline of the Teams interface reinforces the hierarchical organization of the senate meeting. This design choice aligns with principles of visual hierarchy, where elements that are visually emphasized are perceived as more important or relevant. By highlighting participants who are permitted an embodied presence on the screen, the Teams interface encourages participants to prioritize communication with those who are currently engaged and visually present, in this case figures of authority, by facilitating more immediate and direct interactions with them as opposed to their adjacent colleagues. In other words, participants are encouraged to engage unidirectionally with the central figures and content on screen at a disproportionate level than that with their disembodied colleagues in the Teams chat. Consequently, this can result in an uneven distribution of attention, participation, and
contributions, potentially marginalizing individuals who are visually absent or less prominently featured within the interface. Such marginalization can have several implications, for example a reduction in the diversity of perspectives, inequitable participation, limitations on collaboration, and a deterioration of trust among colleagues.

The situation above presents several potential consequences for knowledge-making. Firstly, the uneven distribution of visibility may lead to selective participation, wherein only select attendees actively contribute to discussions, potentially resulting in a limited range of perspectives being represented and a skewed understanding of meeting content. Secondly, the power dynamics inherent in this distribution of visibility may give undue influence to certain individuals, affecting the direction and focus of the conversation and potentially marginalizing dissenting viewpoints. The accessibility of information is also affected, as participants with an embodied presence may have greater access to visual content and real-time interactions with presenters, while those represented solely by profile icons may struggle with or opt out of engaging in the meeting. Overall, the unequal distribution of visibility in the Teams senate meeting reconfigures traditional forms of participation in discourse and decision-making which characterized previous in-person forms of the senate meeting.

In addition to skewing engagement and meeting discourse, the visual hierarchy discussed above transforms participants into visual spectators of the select few moving bodies in the center of the screen. This dynamic is significant as it may undermine senses of agency, participation, and identity. By being visually marginalized and reduced to static profile icons, participants may feel disconnected from the decision-making process within the meeting (Okabe-Miyamoto et al.; Turkle). This can impact their senses of
belonging within the academic community as a whole, leading to feelings of alienation and disengagement. Furthermore, the transformation of participants into spectators may reinforce existing power dynamics and hierarchies within the academic institution, perpetuating a culture where authority is centralized and participation is restricted to a select few. Outside the meeting, this situation can have consequences for morale, collaboration, and overall institutional culture, as it may contribute to a lack of trust, transparency, and inclusivity.

**Performing “On Camera”**

If being present as an off-camera participant denotes disembodiment, social isolation, and being randomly positioned yet relegated to the sidelines, then on-camera presence in the Teams senate meeting means something quite different. As noted previously, in contrast with the off-camera experiences of faculty, video presence represents authority, discursive control and regulation, agency, and liveliness, all of which are mediated through the visual representation of physical appearance. On-camera senate participants are more visible and identifiable to other participants, a situation which may enhance their perceived involvement and influence within the meeting, as they are more prominently featured and visually connected to other participants.

Centrally present within the senate meeting, on-camera attendees—typically committee and subcommittee chairs as well as “guests” (usually members of university leadership)—perform their presence in various ways. For example, they verbally acknowledge selected colleagues, attempting to facilitate informal conversation and commentary prior to the meeting and throughout its duration, determine when the meeting officially begins, and control a host of other meeting activities. These performances, including the visual
reactions and expressions of on-camera faculty, incongruently influence the tone, flow, and effectiveness of the meeting. While a similar dynamic can be said to take place within in-person senate meetings, there is a much more nuanced situation which emerges that is particularly to the Teams interface.

One aspect of on-camera performance which is likely to be overlooked yet exerts a substantial amount of influence over the Teams video environment is the act of looking at the camera itself. More than a technical consideration, the act of looking at the camera serves as a performative gesture that communicates engagement and presence to other meeting participants as well as influences how faculty are perceived within the meeting. This situation unfolds in a diversity of ways within Teams, one of which is illuminated by the screenshot below:

![Screenshot of meeting facilitators and camera positioning during Teams Senate.](image)

As displayed above, though both participants realize that they are spotlighted on the screen, they nevertheless are looking in different directions, whether downward or upward, yet not directly into the camera. This looking away may be due to the
positioning of the camera on the participant’s computer or another aspect of physical arrangement like the use of multiple computers to connect to the Teams meeting. For example, my experience as a senate participant has been that, while attending from an office space, the camera of my desktop computer mediates my visual presence among attendees, while my connected laptop mediates how I engage from behind the screen in the meeting events portrayed on screen. The act of looking away from the camera can be perceived by other meeting participants in a variety of ways. For example, the colleague can appear to be multitasking, in which case they are perceived as being disinterested in aspects of the meeting. In some situations, the colleague can be interpreted as more interested in watching themselves on screen than maintaining direct eye contact with peers. There are a variety of ways in which the performance of looking away can be perceived; regardless, the ambiguity which arises within this performance impacts the social environment of the meeting. Most clearly, it can undermine perceptions of attentiveness, professionalism, and commitment to the meeting, contributing to a sense of disconnect. Participants may feel less connected or valued if they perceive on-camera participants as not fully present or attentive, contributing to an environment of tension or mistrust. This situation is ironic, however, given the fact that most meeting participants themselves do not look directly into the camera but rather at the performing faculty on screen. Thus, on-camera participants may interpret their act of looking away from the camera and instead gazing at the Teams interface as an act of reciprocating engagement with attendees imagined to be on the other side. The camera, in this way, becomes a mere intermediary within a relationship imagined as existing between body, screen, and interface. This dynamic foregrounds the complexity of new multimodal forms of literacy.
introduced by virtual meeting genres, in which the physical presence of the camera can create a sense of separation between participants while the interface becomes a focal point for interaction and engagement.

Another interesting way in which on-camera performance impacts the discursive environment of the Teams senate meeting is through its intersection with the facilitator roles of those who appear on camera. These on-camera participants often seek to maintain a culture of inclusion by multi-tasking their on-screen dialogue with the moderation of chat activity, and this multi-tasking has consequences for the flow of conversation. For example, in one senate meeting, a university president appears on screen to deliver an update regarding issues previously voiced by senators. Mid-sentence, the president abruptly ceases her speech in order to address a tangential concern of a senator expressed in the meeting chat. While some would interpret this act as a sign of responsiveness and attentiveness to the concerns of individual senators, others may view it as a distraction from the main topic and indicative of a lack of focus on the issue at hand. Moreover, for those following the discourse of the video rather than multi-tasking their own engagement by attending to both video and chat, this abrupt change in topic can seem confusing as well as irritating, especially when the president does not return to the sentence she has left unfinished. The extreme of this situation is that the president’s failure to revisit the incomplete thought undermines the coherence of her entire message, potentially diminishing the impact of her performance and eroding confidence in her leadership. However, on the other extreme, updates given by on-camera speakers which entirely disregard the real-time comments and inquiries which occur in the chat risk alienating senate participants and fostering a sense of disconnect, as they may feel
ignored or undervalued. Even then, the happy medium of delaying responses to chat questions until the end of a meeting carries various consequences that can impact participants’ senses of engagement. For example, participants may lose the immediacy and relevance of their inquiries, leading to a diminished impact and perceived effectiveness in their concerns being heard. This delay can also result in decreased engagement. From my own experience as a Teams senate participant, I initially felt disheartened when my queries were not addressed promptly, and I became frustrated. Eventually, I adopted a disposition of disengagement and ceased to participate in subsequent meeting discussions. Additionally, waiting for my questions to be answered at the end of the central meeting discourse resulted in missed opportunities for clarification, and it felt like the opportunity for real-time, lively discussion had been missed. Often, I even forgot the nuances of original question and desperately tried to remember these by reviewing my notes or interactions in the Teams chat. This situation was exacerbated when questions were posed in the Teams chat rather than via the hand-raising feature. Nothing frustrated me more than when the animated thread of side-talk and emojis caused my questions to disappear from the screen and, sometimes, disappear as I awaited an on-camera chair or sub-chair to address my question. I ultimately felt neglected and lost faith in the meeting process as a whole, as I felt that my voice had not been heard.

The micro-practices of camera engagement as well as chat moderation discussed above illuminate how literacy activity within the Teams senate meeting is mediated by means of complex socio-material interaction among material objects, bodies, interfaces, and organizational structure. While much of this activity is facilitated by means of a hierarchical interface design and spatial arrangement, an additional dimension of literacy
emerges by analyzing the co-presence of participants who are permitted to (or accidentally) appear on video as embodied actors within the central space of the interface. Co-presence, within the context of the Teams senate meeting, is largely confined to the authoritative figures who dominate the space of the screen and appear on camera, as depicted below:

![Screenshot of guest speaker appearance during Teams Senate.](image)

In the screenshot above, the typical turn-taking etiquette of in-person interaction is disrupted by the interface design, which features both on-camera participants simultaneously on center stage. This is interesting for a couple of main reasons. First, it leads to participants accidentally talking over one another, at times, as they respond to their off-camera colleagues on the sidelines. This is due to factors like slight delays in audio transmission, less apparent verbal cues than with face-to-face communication, and occasional technological issues like audio lag and poor internet connection. Secondly, it brings into relief differences in material arrangements—whether physical environments or digitally generated backgrounds—which impact the perception of co-presence and the
dynamics of interactions, as these differences can influence how on-camera speakers are perceived by others within the senate meeting as well as how they perceive themselves in relation to the group. The following screenshot represents a few different ways in which juxtaposed backgrounds bring to the forefront concerns like professionalism, authenticity, and even institutional loyalty, all of which are enacted by various background choices:

Fig. 13. Screenshot of on-camera participant backgrounds during Teams Senate.

As demonstrated above, co-presence by means of the Teams video feature illuminates how those on camera choose to curate and present their identities within the senate meeting. Those above are aware that they are on camera and thus are able, if they so choose, to manage their impressions by carefully controlling aspects of their appearance, behavior, and surroundings. This performative aspect of their identity construction is driven by a desire to project values like professionalism, competence, and credibility among colleagues. Furthermore, the video feature may influence users to align their
identities with the norms and values of the academic institution or professional community to which they belong, as demonstrated by the participant on the right-hand side of the screenshot who utilizes a digital background of a university athletic field. On the other hand, it is also the case that some who join the senate meeting, whether temporarily upon logging on to the meeting or at some other point during the meeting, are not aware that their video is turned on. This lack of awareness can lead to the unintended visibility of their surroundings or actions. From personal experience as one of the “accidentally exposed” and one of the spectators of “accidental exposure,” I experienced embarrassment or discomfort during both scenarios. This is depicted quite well by the following excerpt from a senate meeting in which a committee and subcommittee chair accompany a university president who uncomfortably smiles at the screen as a senator logs on to a meeting, with his camera on, before realizing that his private environment, including his informal attire and multi-tasking cell phone call, are caught on camera and juxtaposed with more formal as well as blurred surroundings of his colleagues:

Fig. 14. Screenshot of unexpected on-camera appearance during Teams Senate.
In the instance above, the accidental presence of the multitasking meeting participant, presumably in his garage, matters because it disrupts the professional atmosphere of the senate meeting, potentially undermining the credibility and authority of the senator as well as the overall integrity of the meeting. It also challenges traditional notions of professional identity and decorum, blurring the lines between personal and professional selves as participants navigate the complexities of managing their online identities and controlling the visibility of personal information.

In contrast with the more agential form of performance described above, another more regulated form of on-camera performance occurs when participants are called upon to render themselves visible to administrative leadership. For example, the meeting represented above begins with a university president giving an update to the sea of profile icons meant to represent faculty. Before the president commences her speech, the committee chair asks, generally, that a few people (“it doesn’t really matter who”) turn on their cameras so that the president feels engaged visually by “an” audience. This scenario is interesting for a few reasons. First, it reaffirms that visibility within the senate meeting requires the visual presence of bodies, thereby implying that most participants with disabled cameras actually are not present. Secondly, it associates the visibility of these bodies with positive engagement, perhaps even a sign of respect for authority, while the invisibility of bodies is rendered negative, potentially implying disengagement, lack of participation, or even defiance of authority. These associations reinforce hierarchies based on visibility and presence. That is, participants who consistently demonstrate visible engagement are often perceived as more committed, knowledgeable, and influential, thereby enhancing their authority within the meeting. Their visibility can also
lead to increased attention and recognition from peers, granting them greater opportunities to shape discussions and decision-making outcomes. Conversely, individuals who choose to remain less visible or vocal may find their contributions marginalized or disregarded, potentially impacting their perceived commitment and influence. Moreover, the fact that it does not matter who appears on camera, only that bodies *do* appear, emphasizes the performative aspect of visibility rather than the valuing of individual identities or contributions of senators. This reduces participants—when they are permitted to appear on camera—to mere actors on a digital stage. Several scholars like Luebstorf, et al. have highlighted one aspect of this camera visibility by exploring the phenomenon of “Zoom fatigue” as it relates to camera usage in virtual meetings. These scholars note the “increased cognitive load” of camera usage, which requires additional effort as participants must send and receive nonverbal signals. However, as the Teams senate meeting makes clear, there is an additional element of “fatigue” which is noteworthy, and this pertains to the expectation of certain forms of social performativity via screen mediation, both on and off camera. As demonstrated by the concept of attendance culture, appearances and perceptions take precedence over authentic engagement and meaningful dialogue, and there are many potential consequences of this cultural shift. The most obvious outcome is an increased sense of competition and individualism as members of the academic community vie for recognition within the academic hierarchy mediated by virtual meeting environments like the Teams senate. Moreover, those who choose not to engage in this culture may experience feelings like social isolation or mistrust of colleagues, as superficiality and screen-consciousness seem to overshadow genuine intellectual curiosity and meaningful dialogue.
Negotiating Agency in the Teams Chat

While the Teams video screen within the senate meeting serves as a stage upon which a select few may perform and negotiate their identities, the majority of participants are visually marginalized, forced to negotiate their presence via the simultaneous meeting chat which appears on the right-hand side of the screen. Some scholars have examined the genre of online chats more generally, arguing that these are “a space conducive to working with ultra-fast responses, where communication with a group of people and communication with several groups of people simultaneously are also possible, so that the speed of reading has increased in proportion to the speed of response through the use of signs, symbols, and abbreviations, which allow for time efficiency” (Veytia-Bucheli et al.). Of course, this time efficiency, consistent with Microsoft’s Teams product rhetoric, may be viewed by some in a positive light, supposedly offering online meeting participants the ability to supplement and facilitate interaction with the dialogue of on-camera participants. It functions as a space in which commentary, dissent, expression, and a range of responses can both emerge in interaction with the central discourse as well as speed this discourse along by “getting to the point” of a more protracted meeting discourse. At the same time, within a collegial culture that values slower-paced, thoughtful engagement with ideas as well as consensus-based dialogue in which everyone has an equitable means of self-expression, the chat may seem disruptive.

In the Teams chat, the sense of human co-presence may seem even more diminished, as “communication [may seem to be] carried out more with characters than with people” (Veytia-Bucheli et al. 2). This shift in audience—from other humans to textual characters—may have several negative consequences for those confined to the
chat space, most significantly further reinforcing feelings of social isolation not only due to the intermediary barrier of text and character but also due to the accelerated pace of the chat conversation itself. Especially in a meeting as populous as the Teams senate, keeping up with the conversation topic and engaging in a timely manner can be quite difficult as a barrage of textual symbols and commentary continually move in a linear fashion until they disappear within the chat space confines.

In addition to the above, the dislocation of agency among off-camera participants to the meeting chat also changes the medium through which participants may express themselves and enact their identities as they engage with both colleagues and meeting content. Replacing visual cues and body language, emojis emerge as a sort of non-verbal shorthand deeply influenced by the social hierarchy of the meeting. In the disembodied space of the Teams senate chat, they also function as a literacy resource as well as a form of presence for off-camera participants, enabling them to convey meaning, emotions, and social cues through visual symbols. Particularly insomuch as they represent a departure from traditional academic discourse, emojis interact in interesting ways within the hierarchical Teams senate discourse. By incorporating emojis into their meeting engagement, participants are able to regain a sense of discursive authority while claiming their individuality and embodied presence in the meeting space. Moreover, some scholars have demonstrated that emojis, in academic contexts, may stimulate the development of “a pleasant environment, confidence, and empathy, in addition to expression emotions, feelings, and reactions” (Veytia-Bucheli et al. 2). In this way, the use of emojis by off-camera participants may contribute to the formation of discursive positions that shape new kinds of interactions and social relations which are, indeed, positive. They may also,
as Microsoft promises, create a sense of social togetherness by providing a supplementary means of visual and emotional engagement (Cundall). On the other hand, the use of emojis within the Teams senate meeting may also limit the participation of colleagues in the central meeting discourse, as those confined to the chat space may feel divided between engaging via emojis in the ongoing chat strand and participating in either the textual aspects of the chat or the main video events. In this way, the chat emojis may be viewed as extending the operations of the chat feature as a whole by diverting attention from the central event of the meeting, the content under discussion, and even the chat-based narrative itself, thereby disrupting the coherence and depth of the senate meeting as it unfolds. In addition to disrupting the central meeting discourse, emojis can also have negative implications for the marginalized chat discourse itself, for example by causing confusion as their meanings are not definite or diverting attention from a central idea. Moreover, as a form of communication which traditionally has been regarded as informal, as well as relegated in scholarship to the digital literacies of students, the fact that these comprise the few chat-based resources available to off-camera participants may feel derogatory in comparison with the expressive agency of on-camera colleagues.

Overall, the chat space of the Teams senate meeting—to which the majority of senate participants are confined—introduces both a unique form of communicative as well as social literacy which is worthy of further exploration. In the context of this chapter, it also brings into greater focus the power differentials inherent in literacies as they unfold within the Teams meeting space.
Conclusion and Implications

This chapter explored a network of emergent micro-practices in relation to the video feature of the Teams senate meeting, illuminating noticeable shifts in socio-material dynamics among participants as they navigate meeting etiquette enmeshed with the Teams interface, specifically the camera feature but secondarily the chat space. These features not only influence how participants construct knowledge and perform their identities but also shape particular kinds of embodiment and affective response, as evidenced by my personal experience recounted at the beginning of this chapter. It is important to note that the Teams camera, and indeed Teams itself, form only one part of what is undoubtedly a vastly more complex assemblage of actors which participate in evolving genre of the online senate meeting. As numerous digital platforms aside from Teams have emerged as actors within this assemblage, future analyses of the online senate meeting might engage these nuances as they seek to account for the specific entanglements particular to certain interface features. Likewise, many of the generic aspects mentioned in the Teams senate meeting likely connect to other kinds of faculty work which intersect with the online meeting genre more broadly. Thus, future studies might expand the range of work examined in relation to this emergent genre, for example mentorship with students, departmental meetings, teaching, and other forms of online meeting activity. Williams has begun this work, specifically in the context of student experience, explaining that video calling software like Zoom and Teams, emergent in the shift to a “more fully online university” in the midst of the pandemic, became central to their multimodal literacy practices (“Disruption” 155). Summarizing his interviews with students, he observes that “students, like all of us, found the video calling software, like
most new literacy technologies that begin to reshape genre conventions, both disruptive and creative, but for most of them it was clear that it played a distinctive role in shifting their relationships with digital media and academic work” (“Disruption” 155). The most interesting and relevant part of this assertion is the phrase, “like all of us,” because it reinforces the idea discussed previously in this dissertation that forms of literacy sponsorship overlap and are mediated through genre in similar as well as distinctive ways among a number of academic stakeholders. Though patterns of engagement with emergent digital activities like video calling likely differ across discourse communities, institutional contexts, and even individuals, the lens of genre offers the ability to make connections in how faculty and students, as well as many other actors within the university including staff, negotiate the boundaries of these evolving literacy contexts.

As scholarship and other forms of discourse surrounding digital literacy continues to evolve, there is a significant need to paint a fuller and more vibrant portrait of digital literacy practices by recognizing the shared as well as diverse ways in which individuals and groups interact with emergent, hybrid genres like the Teams senate meeting. This diversity is critical for “undoing” the homogeneous, corporate-influenced narratives of academic literacies which are circulated alongside and by means of new digital technologies. These narratives promise efficiency, togetherness, simplicity, and empowerment yet also deliver ideologies—“abstract systems of beliefs, values, and ideas that direct goals, expectations, and actions”—that are often felt yet unnamed and undertheorized (Bawarshi and Reiff 214). In relation to the previous chapter, the current one paid closer attention to how these ideologies unfold within a specific genre of literacy activity in the lives of faculty.
Over the past few decades, multidisciplinary scholarly conversation as well as public speculation about the future of higher education have noted the transformative role of new digital technologies. Many literacy studies scholars have contributed to this discourse, examining the relationship between specific technologies and processes of learning, systems of power, and perceptions of agency within our changing academic landscape, especially in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gourlay et al.; Williams). Joining these scholars, my own study highlighted—via an emergent digital epistemic object (Microsoft Teams) and practice (the Teams senate meeting)—that environmental disruption like that sparked by the COVID-19 lockdown provides unique insight into the shifting semiotic assemblages which comprise academic work. My study extended socio-material studies of student literacy as well as “pandemic literacies” more broadly, probing further the assumption that digital technologies are “reshaping” academia and, specifically, “calling into question traditional beliefs about the role of the professor” (Green, Eckel, and Barblan qtd. in Manning 4; Gourlay et al.; Williams). Much like Microsoft’s “Teams for Education” imagery discussed in Chapter Three, the grounded ways in which faculty engage with digital technologies are surprisingly omitted from the growing body of research on digital literacy. This omission has real implications for faculty, whose lived experiences with the digital are missing from the discourse.
(including institutional policies, structures, and expectations) which surround and inform their work. At the same time, an inadequate and oversimplified understanding of how faculty engage with the digital also has real implications for students, administrators, leaders, and potential new members of the academic community. It affects how technologies are integrated into pedagogy, administrative decision-making, collaboration, accessibility and inclusion, community building, and morale, among many other foundational aspects of academia. In essence, better understanding faculty literacy is vital for ensuring higher education’s continued relevance, resilience, and responsiveness to the needs of all its stakeholders in an increasingly digital world.

Understanding faculty literacy, in its fullest and messiest sense, is essential to conceiving a fuller portrait of how the digital—including specific digital interfaces and their corporate sponsors—intersect with academic work, values, and culture. Given the need to update conceptions of how faculty engage with the digital as well as digital literacy more broadly, my study grounded itself in one small part of the complex socio-material realities of those working day-to-day at the heart of higher education. It identified, questioned, and complicated corporate-sponsored as well as easily digestible (i.e. oversimplified) narratives surrounding both role of the digital in academia as well as how academics interact with the digital as they create and share knowledge. To reiterate Burnett and Merchant’s articulation of the relevance of a socio-material perspective, this lens enabled my study to “engage with the work being done by all sorts and categories of things—policy documents, frameworks, artefacts, and so on, including digital devices—as they enter relations with people and other things” (27). To avoid oversimplification and develop a more concrete understanding of faculty literacy activity, my study
examined a spectrum of “mediational means” through which faculty participate in a rapidly changing workplace (Bawarshi and Reiff 214). These included both semiotic systems of representation (linguistic, visual, etc.) as well as material objects which carry both affordances and constraints in terms of how faculty negotiate their agency and identities as members of the academic community. All-in-all, a socio-material framework enabled my study to offer a much more expansive view of faculty literacy than that which currently exists in our field, bringing into focus the vast network of genres, objects, practices, and narratives in which faculty are entangled.

Another significant way in which my study both diversifies existing scholarship on faculty literacy and opens the potential for future conversation is through its incorporation of genre. As discussed in Chapter One, genres—and genre systems—“do not just sequence activities; they also sequence how we relate to and assign roles to one another, how we define the limits of our agency, how we come to know and learn, and how we construct, value, and experience ourselves in social time and space” (Bawarshi and Reiff 90). This social nature of genre—and literacy—contrasts starkly with corporate and institutional rhetoric as well as public perception of the experiences of academic stakeholders whose literacy experiences often are siloed into various work and identity categories (e.g., student learning, faculty pedagogy, administrative decision-making). Such categories significantly limit how literacy is conceived, dividing literacy activity into clear-cut boundaries which, in fact, are not so clear-cut. Genre unravels these distinctions, as demonstrated by quite well by the Teams senate meeting as well as the online meeting discussed in Chapter Four. It “allows us to think ‘in conjunction or partnership with others’” (Bawarshi and Reiff 90). My study utilized a genre framework
to conceive of the university as an activity system in which discursive interactions are mediated by genres that maintain “stabilized-for-now, normalized ways of acting and interacting [which] produce consequential, recognizable outcomes” (Bawarshi and Reiff 210). Positioning the faculty discourse community within this much larger activity system, my study acknowledged that many aspects of their literacy activity overlap with others both within and beyond academia. Future expansions of my study might continue to trace the emergence of the online meeting as a genre system within academia that coordinates and enacts various other forms of faculty work as well as the work of other groups within the larger activity system of the university. The significance of this expansion might be a more holistic understanding of the ways in which this genre coordinates complex social actions over time.

Ehret and Leander remind us that, as academics, we tend to “traffic in representations of all sorts, but our moving human experiences with these representations somehow evade us, or evaporate, or become described in ways that don’t feel moving” (Ehret and Leander 8). Similarly, as scholars like Gourlay et al. have shown, “a closer, more ethnographic look at what academic work actually consists of reveals that a great deal of it—it—perhaps unsurprisingly—revolves around writing, reading, and speaking, and forms of communication around texts of various kinds” (378). My study argued that the COVID-19 pandemic, typified by changes in work and communication modality, brought this complexity into clearer focus. It examined a substantial collection of multi-genre texts as well as digital texts—including an object interface, corporate webpage content, and a video recording—in order to illustrate that any account of the increasingly multimodal literacies of faculty must similarly be rooted in multimodal analysis. At the
same time, my personal experience with variations of the genres under consideration also created a space in which the “movement” described by Ehret and Leander could inform my analysis. Though my study engaged with a few qualitative studies in Chapter Four, it is important to note that a practical limitation was the incorporation of additional human experiences with the Teams product, including most significantly those of faculty. Neither my personal account nor those referenced from other studies should be taken as representative of a universal “academic” experience, nor should any future qualitative study be conceived in this way. Rather, lived experiences of academics with digital objects should be conceived as additive to an interesting dialogue, the potential of which is unbounded. Extensions of my study should seek such dialogue to enrich as well as interrogate my claims of shared values, discursive norms, and social as well as psychological experiences with the Teams senate meeting. Ultimately, this ongoing analysis should importantly push back against systems of academic capitalism which seek to portray academic work as well as digital literacy as “increasingly homogenized and standardized” (Manning 52).

Finally, my study has many implications for the field of rhetoric and composition, especially as an interdisciplinary body of thought and practice. First, in noticing as well tracing corporate-sponsored forms of literacy and discourse, my study implicitly adopted a positioning of our field as uniquely responsible for engaging in ongoing critical inquiry into the ways in which language and discourse shape and are shaped by economic, political, and cultural interests. However, as highlighted by the invaluable insights of scholars from across fields like literacy studies, communication, organizational studies, and sociology, this analytical work is transformed by a more inclusive conversation
surrounding topics like digital and academic literacies. This analysis also demands the adoption of alternative models for making sense of the university and our position within it, acknowledging the human and non-human agencies which diversely impact disciplinary as well as institutional work yet coordinate this activity in shared ways, as well. My study combined a socio-material lens with one informed by genre in order to resituate faculty literacy in this way—that is, grounded in distinctive socio-material and historical conditions yet interconnected with a much broader range of activities which comprise the university. Analyzing literacy in this way illuminates the complex interplay of individual agency, institutional structures, and broader sociocultural forces, thereby offering an expanded way to collaboratively imagine the post-lockdown, digital university within and across disciplinary boundaries.
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PRESENTATIONS


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