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# Retrospective

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## KOMYSHA HASSAN

Komysha Hassan's article, "[Digital Literacy and the Making of Meaning: How Format Affects Interpretation in the University of Central Florida Libraries Search Interface](#)" was published in *Stylus* 5.2 in Fall 2014 and earned 2nd Runner-Up for the 2014 John C. Hitt Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing. It was republished in the *Knights Write Showcase Spring 2015 special issue* and the third edition of *Writing about Writing*, a composition textbook used nationwide. She also served as assistant editor for Issues 6.1, 6.2, 7.1, 7.2, 8.1, 8.2, and 9.1 as well as production editor for Issues 6.1, 6.2, 7.1, 7.2, 8.1, and 8.2.

As a journal of first-year writing, *Stylus* provides a unique and incredible opportunity for students to begin making an impact and seeing the value of their work at the very beginning of their college careers. That's what happened to me when my paper was selected by *Stylus*. Until then, I didn't think of my work as having much value outside of my class, and when the professor said, "Write to a wider audience," I thought that was just to get us to do a better job. But it became a reality. Publication showed me that I could impact others by my writing, and I could do the kind of serious work I never imagined doing this early in my college career. It changed my perspective entirely and how I approached my assignments from then on. With the help of my professor, I polished the research further and submitted my topic to one of the largest conferences in the field. It was accepted! Once there, as I met and discussed with the many professors and professionals I presented to, I was both overwhelmed and exhorted to do something more with this incredible opportunity. The conference was my own initiative, but the next thing that happened came without my doing. I was contacted by the publisher of UCF's required textbook for first year composition, *Writing About Writing*—they wanted to publish my paper in their next edition! Wait, what?! Suddenly, my research was part of a body of required reading for the entire first-year composition program in the second largest university in the United States. You may be reading this with the kind of amused detachment I often read things a little outlandish to imagine myself doing, but I was literally nothing more than a true freshman in a Comp 2 class trying for the best grade I could get. And UCF just happens to be the second largest university in the U.S. Whatever you're saying to yourself now, I hope it's, "I bet I can do better than that."

Of all the things that came from my *Stylus* experience, realizing what I did mattered was the lesson I carried with me thereafter. What I communicated could matter. The research I did and the topics I delved into could matter. I mattered. As a student among tens of thousands, that has weight. I was a political science major at the time and, largely based on this, I added a second major: writing and rhetoric. I pursued being a student editor with *Stylus*, which was very rewarding. It wasn't stuffy proofreading as I first suspected, but a chance to stay connected to the journal and the nascent brilliance shuffling through our university's comp classes. I joined the University Writing Center where I worked with students in every discipline (and even a professor or two!), encountering many different styles of communication and thought-provoking ideas. I *gave myself* so many opportunities to make an impact and encourage students to do the same; to pursue the goals they thought too lofty, right now.

Preparing research or writing that others would read meant approaching every communication with attention and the most skill I could muster. I wasn't an honors student, but as a result I wrote undergraduate honors theses in both of my majors, and I worked with my professors to continue developing research and publishing (on my own and as a co-author) beyond UCF, in disciplinary conferences, journals, and most recently a prestigious law review (I mention this because I'm so excited. . . and I'm pursuing law school FYI). Though *Stylus* is, as it is helpfully subtitled, a journal of first-year writing, it isn't just limited to the writing field. As a future engineer, mathematician, medical professional, artist, programmer, economist, or any of the many other awesome things you can pursue at UCF, quality and intention matter. The quality of your mathematical proofs, the keen observations in your lab reports, the intricacy in your engineering schematics, or the detail of your computer programming notes, all writing—read communication—made more valuable and meaningful when done with quality and intention. The intention to succeed, if only in your own class, and the intention to add value and exchange ideas, however limited the context seems. I hope, as you read this, you're thinking of how you can add to the scholarship in your field, challenge a questionable idea or argument, or present a new or better way of doing something. You never know who might see your work and say, "I would like to see that in the next volume!"

## **Komysha Hassan**

Komysha Hassan graduated from UCF in Spring 2018 with bachelor's degrees in Political Science, pre-law and Writing and Rhetoric, and a minor in Economics. She is currently using her TEFL Certificate to teach English online while studying for the LSAT. She's busy developing a media-oriented think tank that came about from her undergraduate thesis while awaiting word from one of the awesome law schools she has applied to. She insists, "I know how to have fun," and is still figuring out what that is on weekends.