



# University of Pittsburgh

*Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences  
Department of English*

526 Cathedral of Learning  
4200 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260-0001  
412-624-6506  
Fax: 412-624-6639  
[www.english.pitt.edu](http://www.english.pitt.edu)

Dr. Nina Barnett  
300 Jay Street  
Namm Hall 512  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

12 February 2018

Dr. Barnett,

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in Composition and Rhetoric at the New York City College of Technology. I am currently a Ph.D. Candidate and Lawler fellow completing my doctorate in Composition, Literacy, Pedagogy and Rhetoric at the University of Pittsburgh. I will defend my dissertation in June of this year.

In the fall of last year, I taught a pre-transfer level writing course in which the students were all football players at the university on athletic scholarship. Many people suggested that I have the students read and write about football, but when I asked them about it, the students said they had no desire to think any more about the sport than they already had to. To my surprise, however, they asked if they could write poetry. They said they felt like poetry helped them think about language in new ways; they didn't feel tied down by someone else's rules. Their poetry was innovative and alive in ways their essays were often not, so when I was asked—by the athletic and English departments and the students themselves—to teach the same group of football players second semester in their transfer-level English course, I worked to develop essay assignments that implemented some of the same play with attention to structure and diction that we used in our low-stakes poetry assignments, the outcome of which I discuss in my dissertation. While I'm on fellowship this year, the athletic and English departments have continued the year-long football English course that I developed, and I'm still in weekly contact with both the athletic advisor and the instructor of that course.

Mine is a pedagogy of supported autonomy, which is to say that the students have maximum input in readings and topics while I still provide an environment of scaffolded experiments that help them reach their (and the University's) writing goals. At Pitt, along with teaching multiple sections of pre-transfer level and transfer level Composition, I've taught upper level Written and Professional Communications courses for engineers, co-created and co-facilitated a graduate level digital pedagogy symposium, and done teacher training for incoming graduate student instructors. Before coming to the University of Pittsburgh, I was an adjunct in several community colleges in California and at San Francisco State University. There, I taught Basic Reading and Writing, Composition, Literature, and Critical Thinking. I've also taught Creative Writing and bridge programs for at-risk youth in Oakland, California. While an adjunct at Foothill College, I helped develop an Integrated Reading and Writing pathway which is still being taught.

In my dissertation, *The Boredoms: How the Economics of Attention Affect Literacy*, I take as my central premise that the ways we learn to pay attention and the ways we perceive attention are not solely neurological, but also cultural, and as such, perceived failures of attention like distraction and boredom are not failures at all, but rather mismatches of attention structure that comment on the power relationships out of which they arise. With this in mind, I investigate the ways cultures, institutions and language itself affect the circulation and demands of attention and the ability to fulfill those demands. I speak of boredom not as one thing, but of “the boredoms” as a family of feelings separate from apathy-- not deficits, but distributions of attention that might not neatly fit the situation at hand. This dissertation focuses on oppressive boredoms—those that arise from trauma or feeling trapped in an educational environment, for example, or even feeling trapped in a cycle with technology—and how these boredoms affect literacy learning.

I compare studies on boredom and attention in cognitive neuroscience and literacy research in order to better understand the cultural constructs of attention, both in the research itself and in the rhetoric used to deliver that research. Reading student writing as a teacher, I examine the assignments and structures that give rise to essays that sometimes appear bored or boring. As a rhetorician, I close read these same student essays, looking at what the student has done instead of what they’ve failed to do. If Gertrude Stein can confound readers with repetitions and obfuscations and be called a genius commenting on the drudgery of the capitalist machine, perhaps some of the same mechanisms are inadvertently at play in student work. Students, if they can see them, can use the powers of boredom to comment on and even challenge the machines (particular assignments, academia, Standard Written English, “addiction” to technology, trauma and so on) in which they feel trapped.

I’ve presented papers on this and related work at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Computers and Writing, Writing Research Across Borders, and the California TESOL Conference. My article “The Researcher on his own Route: Supported Autonomy and the Disengaged Student” was published in the journal *Reader* in September of last year. It describes the curriculum and rationale behind a “book club” unit in which students choose their own readings and, in large part, design their own assignments.

While at Pitt, I’ve also served on a number of committees, including the Composition Curriculum and Assessment Committees. I’ve given guest lectures in courses on pedagogy, affect theory, multimedia visualization and professional writing. I’ve judged writing contests, both at the graduate and undergraduate level, and as I mentioned above, I work frequently with the athletic and English departments discussing the needs of student athletes and other struggling writers.

Because I’m interested in the ways the sciences and humanites can inform and build upon each other, and because my experience is in engaging students who aren’t initially interested in writing, I believe I would be a great fit for City Tech. Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.



Carrie Hall, University of Pittsburgh