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CENTRALIZED, DECENTRALIZED, DISTRIBUTED:
DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION,
FROM *SUNRISE SEMESTER* TO PRESENT-DAY MOOCS

by

ROSANNA NOELLE FLOUTY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

CENTRALIZED, DECENTRALIZED, DISTRIBUTED: DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION, FROM *SUNRISE SEMESTER* TO PRESENT-DAY MOOCS

By

Rosanna Flouty

Advisor: Dr. Nicholas Michelli

Lessons from early academic television courses from the 1950s guide an assessment of current disruptive technologies that shape Massive Open Online Courses (known as MOOCs) and other informal online learning opportunities today. This dissertation explores some of the unique contributing factors that led to the creation of *Sunrise Semester* (1957-1982), a popular network television program co-produced by New York University and CBS that offered college credit to viewers. Despite the fact that the show aired at dawn and rarely included one-on-one interactions with professors, *Sunrise Semester* aired for nearly twenty-five years and attracted a devoted viewership of over two million daily viewers at its peak. The show's earliest fans were largely female and revealed their identities as housewives, homemakers or "hausfraus" in fan letters written to their pre-dawn professors. Now housed in the NYU Archives, their letters reveal many of the complex contradictions between nascent feminism, television, and power in post-World War II era America. As present day practitioners look to utilize MOOCs as an outreach strategy to bring educational access to scale, innovations from the "golden age" of television offer crucial lessons in how to attract and maintain non-traditional audiences.

Keywords: education, technology, online learning, MOOCs, *Sunrise Semester*

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Thank you also to some of my earliest and unsuspecting audiences in Yeongwol, South Korea, as well as in Dallas, Texas, Minneapolis, Minnesota and New York City.

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From *Sunrise Semester* to MOOCs

Chapter 1: Introduction

I come to this topic as a researcher who is passionate about excavating overlooked histories of individuals who sought to redress, reconnect or reclaim aspects of their formal education in unexpected or unorthodox ways. My interest is in the study of learners who pursue their own systems of learning that transcend traditional boundaries of access to higher education, particularly if college was not an option in their teenage years. My academic work is contextualized by my professional practice, which involves the creation of informal learning opportunities in museums, such as public programs and workshops, which exist as their own systems of learning for varied audiences such as teens, seniors, adults and children alike. My research interest is in nurturing educational opportunities that move beyond simply expanding access to museums, but also exist as independent systems of learning that often produce unexpected outcomes and a love of life-long learning. As the research contained in these pages pertains most directly to a study of *audience*, many parallels may be drawn between the unexpected consequences of innovation and the overlooked stories of audiences which can be lost to history after education experiences come to an end.

When I discovered the existence of *Sunrise Semester*, a television show co-sponsored by NYU and Columbia Broadcast System (CBS) that aired nearly sixty years ago for a quarter of a century and was largely without precedent, I could not help but become curious about what motivated at-home viewers to pursue a college-level education. When I learned that the numbers of viewers were staggeringly large—nearly two million viewers tuned into *Sunrise Semester* at its peak in 1971—I could not believe that anyone had not yet written about nor researched this show. This dissertation is, to my knowledge, the first in-depth history of *Sunrise Semester*. At the core of

my analysis are the legions of fan mail writers who sent often articulate and passionate letters of gratitude to their pre-dawn professors. Recognizing that most of these fans were female and self-identified as housewives, homemakers or “hausfraus,” I saw the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* not only as an opportunity to explore and historicize some of society’s cultural assumptions about distance learners, but to address the complex contradictions between nascent feminism, television, and power in the post-World War II era.

Drawing on social theory such as Foucauldian discourse analysis as furthered by James Paul Gee, I construct a critical approach to the question of why an individual would seek to pursue educational achievement outside of a traditional university setting. By creating a discourse analysis toolkit, I shed new light on motivations behind the choice to learn through television in the first place. A historical look at the development of *Sunrise Semester*’s creation and subsequent years of production point to complex socio-economic forces at play behind the joint sponsorship of the show by CBS and NYU that continue to shape the complicated landscape of corporate and university ties behind the present day phenomenon of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). By using a selection of learner journeys that were discovered in the archive to guide my analysis of the impact of *Sunrise Semester* on its students, a careful reading of personal identities, ambitions, and significance contained in personal fan mail letters written directly to their pre-dawn television professors then lays the groundwork for establishing an un-established rationale to include learner perspectives in studies of distance and online learning. I hypothesize some of the reasons behind why MOOCs are perhaps destined to falter unless careful consideration of the learner perspective is incorporated into future studies. This research demonstrates that although the learner perspective is not easily accessed through formal or established channels today, other expansive efforts to gain

insight into learner journeys prove critical if the field is to move forward into establishing new connections for distance learners.

Background

One of the most radical, yet wholly understudied early experiments in distance learning was an experimental television series offered for college credit at an urban university in the late 1950s called *Sunrise Semester*. The Emmy-award winning television series aired for twenty-five years on Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc. (CBS), in conjunction with New York University's College of Arts and Science (NYU). Over one hundred courses on topics as diverse as Comparative Literature, Africa, and Death and Dying were delivered as thirty-minute long broadcast lectures and aired six days a week at six-thirty in the morning almost without fail. Nearly one hundred world-renowned scholars and professors delivered these semester-long courses between the years 1957 and 1982. At various times throughout the show's run, professors received hundreds of fan letters daily mailed from across the nation and Canada. *Sunrise Semester* reportedly attracted two million viewers in simultaneous broadcast at its peak, a number that compares with the reach of current-day Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs. Often a mere footnote, if *Sunrise Semester* is mentioned in historical texts about distance learning at all, it is usually in the context of failure. Based on anecdotal information contained in the University Archives at NYU, almost all of the screened episodes were originally recorded on kinescope for broadcast on CBS and then recorded over by other television producers that same day, further affecting our ability to understand the show within the historical context in which it was received. Although the series heralded the era of distance learning, solidified an unusually creative partnership between CBS and NYU, and pioneered the power of television as a medium to educate ("175 Facts About NYU," n.d.), the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* has been completely overlooked by history.

Opportunities for Study

This dissertation explores how a twenty-five year experiment between NYU and CBS contains many of the same overlooked successes and pitfalls as newer educational technologies today. Most current research on present-day learning technologies considers completion rate, learner attrition, ethical aspects of online learning, cost benefit analysis for their development, or learning analytics based on quantitative data such as click rate (Gašević, Kovanovic, Joksimovic, & Siemens, 2014). By placing *Sunrise Semester* in a historical context and by using methodologies unique to the archival study of film and television, my research fills a void in current literature that often fails to include a critical piece of the puzzle in understanding successful distance learning programs: that of learner perspective; and more specifically, the identification of internal and external factors that impact learner motivation. I conducted this extensive historical study of *Sunrise Semester* in order to better understand our cultural assumptions about distance learning from a historical perspective, and thereby more effectively theorize how these assumptions influence the present and future.

Sunrise Semester aired at six-thirty in the morning, six days a week, for over twenty-five years on a major national television station yet had roughly the equivalent of 2% market saturation in today's broadcast terms. In spite of this curious popularity for a pre-dawn program, extensive research conducted for this dissertation between 2012 and 2016 verifies that very little scholarship has ever been written about *Sunrise Semester*, other than a few dismissive paragraphs about its ability to educate (see: *The Failure of Sunrise Semester*, n.d.; *Is Sunrise Semester Flunking Out?* n.d.; Miller, 2000). It is possible that *Sunrise Semester* was not included in longer studies of television history because the early hour was marginalized as "fringe" airtime that was not attractive to advertisers. Perhaps another reason is because the cerebral content and markedly

intellectual tone did not allow it to fall neatly into other such gender-based studies of day-time television of the same era, such as day time soap operas, serials, cooking shows or game shows. It is also possible that because the show appealed largely to housewives, the phenomenon of non-traditional female learners was largely overlooked by history for the same reasons that many “other” perspectives are over-looked: history in the 1950s and 1960s was written pre-dominantly from dominant perspectives belonging to white, male academics.

The “invisibility” of women, and especially the invisibility of women as they enact domestic chores, labor, or leisurely activities in the home, existed in both society and historical study alike. Foucault’s notion of a “utopia” only exists in analogy, versus “heterotopia,” which exists in parallel as a counter-site, as outlined in his text *Of Other Spaces* (1984), is also useful here to consider in what appears in the official discourse of distance learning history as an invisibility. According to Foucault (1984), “utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or indirect analogy with the real space of Society” (p. 24), and contrast with “heterotopias.” For Foucault, a “heterotopia” is “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (p. 24). Many scholars have cited Foucault in drawing parallels between educational spaces like universities as a type of heterotopia (Beyes & Michels, 2011), and even the space of open online education has been likened to a “heterotopia of desire” (Gourlay, 2015).

I present the idea that the site of a 1950s home, as perceived and experienced by housewives watching *Sunrise Semester* for thirty minutes each morning before the sun was up and, more importantly, before the rest of the household was awake, offered a heterotopia that allowed housewives to explore concepts of power, access to cultural capital and access to a world-class education. Foucault also argues that “heterotopias” are connected to “heterochronias,” or breaches

of traditional experiences and uses of time (Foucault, 1984, p. 24). Through this lens developed by Foucault, the pursuit of higher education during the short slice of dawn could be viewed as a radical and subversive act in the 1950s home.

Research breakthroughs.

Mrs. Cora Gay Carr, a woman who participated in the first fall of *Sunrise Semester* as a credit-bearing course and sat for the final exam held on New York University's campus in January of 1958, is a figure who loomed large in a public telling of *Sunrise Semester's* success. She then followed eighteen more courses on *Sunrise Semester* for a total of 54 credits out of a possible 128 credits needed for graduation, allowing her to then earn a full degree from the University as a fully matriculated student by spring of 1962. I considered Mrs. Cora Gay Carr to be a *Sunrise Semester* power-user, and speculated that there were more than likely a few other women who had recognized the potential of earning a degree on television in the early mornings. The discovery of her story routed my research toward female empowerment, do-it-yourself (DIY) education and television as an emancipating combination in the post-World War II era. By evaluating this overlooked form of female empowerment against popular notions of the constraints of 1950s domestic life outside of American cities, I saw a need to re-frame established perceptions about opportunities beyond the television screen for a diverse group of women seeking connection and learning at home.

A second discovery of a phrase included in a seminal German distance learning text by Otto Peters from 1965 printed in Desmond Keegan's edited compilation (1965:1994) led me to develop the "ambitious housewife" paradigm as one that has many faces in today's era, and yet, in the context of distance learning in the 1950s, was unique to the era of the post-World War II suburban landscape. Peters' text points to the motivations of distance learners as sometimes seeking to

“remedy early wrong decisions,” and posited that the “ambitious housewife can also be a powerful source of motivation” (Keegan, 1994, p. 30). Peters was known for his contributions to studying the impact of technology and its developments at the beginning of the Industrial Age, not for a nuanced understanding of gender as it pertains to access and education. While Peters followed established contours and cultural understandings of his own era in locating distance learning motivation in an ambition for adults, predominantly males, to seek economic security or change from blue to white collar jobs, he noted that adults are able to judge “their life chances as more realistically than, say, students in secondary school. They are conscious of their educational goals and the consequences of reaching them” (Keegan, 1994, p. 31).

The “ambitious housewives” phrase stayed with me as I continued to study *Sunrise Semester* audiences as being equally conscious of their goals in pursuing an informal education on television, as self-avowed in the unsolicited fan mail mailed to the University. Many of the letters could be said to have been written by “ambitious housewives,” especially as these women described their parallel interests or areas of previous study. Even Avon cosmetics used the phrase as a job title advertised circa 1962 to attract “ambitious housewives” into their sales ranks:



Figure 1: Avon Ad, ‘Ambitious Housewife,’ April 27, 1962. Source: Toledo Blade, 1962.

The male presenters in *Sunrise Semester*, who were written about in the press at the time as “telegenic” or “eloquent” tutors may have been consciously selected to appeal directly to the “ambitious housewife” paradigm, but the trope of the “ambitious housewife” remains limited to my research of other contextualized studies of women in the age of television in the post-World War II era.

The third discovery that shaped this dissertation was the trove of original fan mail letters and excerpted and extracted texts preserved in the *Sunrise Semester* archive housed at the New York University Archive at Bobst Library in New York City. Throughout my research in the archive, it became clear that the producers of *Sunrise Semester* sought predominantly young, male, attractive professors that might appeal to an archetype of the “ambitious housewife” variety. Some of the success in their selection is documented in the tender exchanges between at-home learners and their professors in a collection of fan mail letters mailed to one Dr. Philip Mayerson, an NYU professor of Classics who also served as Dean and Acting Dean of Washington Square College of Arts and Sciences from 1971 to 1978 (“Guide to the Office of the Dean, Washington Square College and Washington Square and University College of Arts and Science (1951-1980) RG 19,” n.d.). The research methodology here has been designed to excavate less about what the fan letters say about their perceptions of the predominantly male *Sunrise Semester* presenters, but rather to infer what exactly drew so many viewers, male and female alike, to watch a show like *Sunrise Semester*. My interest was in documenting the ways in which the letter-writers disclosed personal information about themselves; namely, their previous levels of educational achievement, their motivations behind watching the show, and any unique ways in which the letter writers described the shapes and spaces of their learning over the course of several weeks, or for some – like Mrs. Cora Gay Carr – over many semesters and even many years.

A fourth discovery was the genealogy of televised learning and standardized content in radio broadcast, as radio first shaped the ways in which educational material was received for at-home listeners. Home improvement or “home service” shows that regularly dispensed household, child rearing and health information over the radio waves in the 1920s became the most popular types of shows for audiences of all types, and these programs can be viewed as the prototype for essential characteristics of the broadcasting schedule as it developed in general (Hilmes, 1997, p. 147). Radio programs also generated and received copious amounts of fan mail (Katz, 1950). While coding for gender, language and themes contained in the fan mail letters addressed to *Sunrise Semester*, an earlier study of fan mail from the days of radio by Jeanette Sayre (1939) greatly impacted my impulse to study information in the letters that exceeded traditional discourse analysis, and seemed to tread dangerously closer to formal analysis one might encounter in visual culture studies, or even art history. I was drawn to earlier radio-based techniques of mapping and rating the quality of the paper used for each letter, attempting to identify the writing implementation selected, the margin measurements maintained and the signatures of the letter writers. I realized that in recognizing my background as a museum professional, it was impossible not to become aware that I had leaned heavily towards treating the letters as objects themselves, as the study from photocopies or scans of the original letters proved fruitless for my research. My approach aligns with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and embraced all types of discourse, along with photos, non-verbal language, and other artifacts I excavated in the archive. Neither could I ignore the possibility that I was fetishizing the letters as both text *and* object, potentially diminishing my ability to adhere to one formal mode of discourse analysis in my approach to the impact of gender on the larger discourse surrounding *Sunrise Semester*.

Some of the problems of gender as perceived in the era of post-World War II television belied other types of biases in the history of *Sunrise Semester* that may be unique to the structures of the university setting. For instance, a lecturer that specialized in art and art history named Ruth Bowman was not an appointed professor at New York University, unlike the majority of *Sunrise Semester* professors, nor did she possess a doctorate degree. She taught Art History on *Sunrise Semester* as an art lecturer at The Museum of Modern Art. In some of the letters addressed to various officials involved with the production of the show at New York University, written praise about Bowman's selection for *Sunrise Semester* documented an unspecific appreciation of her physical appearance: she was described as "a real little lady" and fans frequently commented on her beauty and physical appearance, while praise of male presenters on *Sunrise Semester* specifically referenced praise of their chosen subject matter, their style of teaching or their choice of lecture content. The disparity between the two types of commentary aimed at male versus female *Sunrise Semester* lecturers caused me to wonder just how the lecturers were perceived by audiences in the time and era of early feminist impulses in the late 1950s, versus in the context of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, as re-inscribed and re-enforced by images of televised personalities. I became curious about what else I would discover about gender stereotypes as viewed through the television screen that allowed such disparities of perception or criticism between the genders. While this dissertation does not directly address the varieties of sexism and gender bias prevalent in both universities and the television industry during the twenty-five year run of *Sunrise Semester*, I could not help but become curious about inferences I could make about gender, television and power during specific time periods in my study of *Sunrise Semester* through close analysis not only of the language contained in the fan mail but the other objects often mailed along with these letters.

It was largely documented that the first *Sunrise Semester* professor to teach on the airwaves in 1957 was Dr. Floyd Zulli, selected in particular for his youthful, “telegenic” presence (Shapiro, 2015). While stories of the show eliciting more than one hundred fan letters per day abound in correspondence files throughout the New York University archive held at Bobst, only a handful of actual letters survived in their original form – except for those written to Dr. Mayerson, who taught a course called “Classical Mythology in Literature, Art, and Music” in the fall of 1971. If the male presenters in *Sunrise Semester*—described by the press at the time as “eloquent” tutors—were potentially selected appeal to the “ambitious housewife” paradigm, I needed to fully understand their exchange.

While it was tempting to research some of the mailed objects found in the archive in their original context indefinitely, I then returned to the first chronological question in my research scope: What prompted this show to develop between New York University and CBS in the first place? I know now that there were over one hundred other television shows that New York University was promoting through its then-newly formed Office of Television-Radio between 1952 and 1954, even though it was unclear if all of these were actual series or just locally-based, one-off broadcasts that would have happened following campus-based public programs. Clearly, *Sunrise Semester* was the only series that was offered for college credit to a wide public as documented in the archives, but there were aspirations to expand New York University’s offerings in other ways, too, including the formation of New York University College of the Air starting in 1954 and other such endeavors to transcend the boundaries of time, space and learning that far exceed the scope of this research.

Five Lines of Inquiry: *Contextualization, Historicization, Excavation, Feminization and Motivation*

My interest in *Sunrise Semester* is motivated by five distinct lines of inquiry in the larger field of distance education: the *contextualization*, *historicization*, *excavation*, and *feminization* of early educational television as studied against established discourse surrounding gender, power, television, and female fandom in the post-World War II era, as well as the *motivation* that guided these audiences' impulses to pursue an education over television. My pursuit of these lines of inquiry possesses a sense of urgency. With many respects to gender and fandom, the fans I "met" through the *Sunrise Semester* fan letters were intertwined within the unique history of *Sunrise Semester* itself previously understood as a faceless, inscrutable at-home television viewer in the literature. The history I tell uses historical analysis and a methodology unique to archival research, and seeks to address gaps in extant literature that leaves out some of the most unique facets of these learners based on motivation that is also linked to gender. The development of five distinct lines of inquiry and a theoretical framework for each inquiry was critical for the analysis to give both a voice and a face to the learners of *Sunrise Semester*.

Contextualization.

My primary interest in conducting research on *Sunrise Semester* was to contextualize the show within a much longer history and broader context of distance learning, as this television show in particular and tele-courses in general have been largely ignored in the literature on adult education and distance learning, as outlined in the literature review in Chapter One. This rich history follows the story of the non-traditional learner seeking to move beyond his or her means or current status, beginning in the Industrial Age and through the present era. I wanted to first study *Sunrise Semester* within the larger discourse of distance education in efforts to shed new understandings about present-era MOOCs and other forms of online learning. I chose to access an archive located at New York University as my primary site of research, as I quickly discovered that

few recorded kinescopes survived their morning broadcasts in the era of television production in the 1950s and 1960s.

Historicization.

The second line of inquiry surrounded the history of *Sunrise Semester*, and an exploration of the unique set of historical conditions that allowed such a show to emerge from a partnership between a major television studio and a major university in the first place. While the history I excavate begins in the mid-1800s, the full genealogy is rooted in Aristotelian and Platonic debates surrounding the formal lecture and the talking head, explored in the literature review of Chapter One. I trace the discourse around pathways forged by non-traditional learners as the field first takes shape during the Age of Enlightenment. The field of distance education evolves into correspondence courses dating back to the 1750s, again attracting further non-traditional learners in the Industrial Age, as miners and draftsmen sought to ready themselves for advancement in managerial positions, and women sought to seek new positions to escape domestic life as more of the population settled in cities. The history of the non-traditional learner follows new technologies and trends in learning and education, ending within these pages in our current era, with the advent of present-day MOOCs. Few existing histories of distance learning have sought to examine the power of television as a medium to educate, and almost none of these studies have addressed how *adults*, rather than children, have reacted and responded to opportunities to learn for free and in their own homes.

As a lifelong educator interested in new technologies myself, I found myself wondering about the nuts-and-bolts of producing such a show. Why was the show created, and what were the people behind the show hoping to achieve? Who were the viewers, and what motivated them to get up so early and watch this show? How did the professors get selected to teach on television? Who

helped them build their syllabus and study guide? Did they have full ownership of the materials? Was it broadcast live or pre-recorded? And how was teaching on television different from teaching in front of a live classroom with students? These questions and more have been answered by the research contained within these pages, but more remained.

Excavation.

The third line of inquiry motivating my research belongs squarely within the shifting landscape of distance education and cultural studies, and surrounds the fan mail that I first discovered in the NYU University Archive in 2013. Documented throughout the NYU University Archive are descriptions of the sheer volumes of fan mail, which represents, for the most part, wholly positive viewer feedback captured throughout the show's run. As I unearthed some of the archival material surrounding *Sunrise Semester*, it was also impossible to ignore the heartfelt letters sent by multitudes of viewers of the show over time and the typed and individualized responses sent back to the fan letter writers by the professors themselves. Often the senders of the letters were de-identified, and the content of the letters was typed up and collated by the city and state of the sender for the purpose of grant proposals. The original letters were presumably discarded, as the letters that were submitted for grant applications do not exist in their original format in the University archive.

In my description of the power of television as a means to educate, I also could not ignore the yearnings and inabilities for those seeking funding for *Sunrise Semester* to understand who constituted their viewership. Redacted text that included "bathrobe-scholars, prison inmates, and ~~farmers milking cows~~" in a grant application that I discovered back in 2013 pointed to inabilities to name these audiences, and resonated with so much of the current literature that I saw reflected in current-day online learning initiatives. I used historical analysis to explore ways in which the producers of the show struggled to identify who, exactly, their audiences were. The fan base was

nation-wide but nebulous, and measurement of audiences using Nielsen ratings - or ARBITRON ratings, as it was called in the 1950s – were not conducted at such an early hour. Fan mail was often cited as a problematic corpus of text to analyze as indicative of a show’s audience (Sayre 1939; Katz 1950) for reasons that often called the letter writer’s stability of mind into question, and thus I was intrigued by its study.

While, at first glance, the letters themselves seem to symbolize superficial fandom on behalf of an at-home viewer in the “golden age” of television, careful analysis of the language the writers used and the themes that repeat throughout the letters point to much bigger issues about access, equality and education that I had never imagined when first embarking in this research. One single folder of original letters from a *Sunrise Semester* course on “Classical Mythology, Art Music and Literature” taught by a certain Professor Phillip Mayerson served as the primary source of data for the fan mail letter analysis in this study. Professor Phillip Mayerson, who also served as Dean from 1971 to 1978, received fan letters thorough the year 1975 for his course that ran in fall 1971, as evidenced by the collection of letters that have been preserved by University archivists. Nearly seventy-five original letters presently exist alongside Professor Phillip Mayerson’s typed and timely responses, revealing a tender and individualized exchange that seemed to capitalize on his own micro-celebrity.

Even more compelling was an examination of some of the objects that were mailed to *Sunrise Semester* professors over the course of a semester broadcast: objects that ranged from chocolates, perfume, picture postcards, artwork and poetry. One mailed perfume bottle of “Dante” cologne from a housewife, sent in mild flirtation to a professor that had taught Dante’s *Divine Comedy* on television, included the handwritten note in effusive cursive: “‘An apple for the teacher.’ The two Dante’s have nothing in common but the name. But it’s the best I could come up

with. So if you care not at all for this Dante, give it to your favorite enemy - if it arrives safely.”

Other handwritten letters contained evidence of outright statements of love in the fan mail that often poked fun at the early broadcast hour: “I love you, if it were possible to fall in love at 6 in the morning...” began one such letter.

By analyzing the fan letters sent to one professor during one single course using techniques developed in the 1930s for fans and letter-writers from the days of radio, I was able to recognize themes that led me to connect leaner journeys to larger themes of gender, power and learning. By coding for themes, and then theorizing about how the themes inserted themselves into historical evolutions in education and domestic space in the 1950s and 1960s, I was then able to contextualize the show within a much wider discourse of female empowerment, television and educational aspirations in the post-World War II era.

Dr. Floyd Zulli, the first professor that taught on *Sunrise Semester* in 1957, reportedly received over one hundred letters a day, and many of the thirty-odd professors in the first fifteen years between 1957 and 1972 continually received enormous amounts of fan mail as well. Some of the phrases include expressions of love and intimacy that was not usual for this particular genre of unsolicited letter-writing, and studies dating back to the age of radio in the 1930s have been used here to help contextualize why the study of fan mail is slippery and fraught, as the writers themselves are both unsolicited and possibly not indicative of the larger audience (Sayre, 1939; Katz, 1950).

Feminization.

The fourth line of inquiry was about the *feminization* of audiences as conceived within the context of distance learning and educational television, especially along the lines of gender rigidities in post-World War II America. My fascination early in the research process lay primarily

with the handful of fan letters that survived in the archive, which, as preliminary analysis revealed, were sent predominantly by women in their forties and fifties and self-documented innovative and surprising ways these women sought to advance their education through the medium of television. I used techniques based in radio fandom from the 1930s to analyze a sample of excerpts of the fan mail letters that had been collated and de-identified for grant-writing and press purposes, which allowed me to code for gendered language in a pilot study before turning towards the full letters mailed in 1971-1972 to Dr. Philip Mayerson. By examining fan mail letters in depth that were selected at random from a single file and their typed responses from Dr. Mayerson, I was able to identify themes that pertained to gender and age as well as disclosures about previously attained levels of education and insights about the “shapes” of learning pertaining to learner motivation. I argue that *Sunrise Semester* presented a version of today’s “DIY-University” made popular since the sudden burst of interest in 2008 in free online learning, but crafted specifically for the post-World War II suburban housewife through the medium of television.

An initial historical analysis outlined in Chapter Three documented more than anecdotal stories that supported the assumption that *Sunrise Semester*’s audience was roughly 70% female, as there was at least one formal but unpublished study conducted by the Sociology Department of NYU in 1959 that corroborated a 30% male versus 70% female make-up of the general audience during the show’s first year. Beyond these numbers, the letters themselves contain highly descriptive language that point to deeper yearning and a passionate motivation to learn. The discovery of the fan mail as a body of text that documents the learner experience pointed to a clear and urgent need to examine *Sunrise Semester* as a learning phenomenon born out of an era that was heavily influenced by television in the post-World War II era that was unique to the female experience.

The story of *Sunrise Semester* connected to a larger and more dominant discourse surrounding how radio was used for “cultural and educational uplift,” particularly for housewives of the era. If the medium of radio was seen as unique because it “could come to you” while not interfering with the demands of household domestic life such as cooking and cleaning, as radio broadcast gave way to television, many advertisers looked to exploit the new televisual medium for its efficiency in delivering messages at specific times of the day or evening. There was no more marginalized screening time than 6:30am, and the production and broadcast of *Sunrise Semester* at such a pre-dawn and early hour certainly did not present a conflict of scheduling for the CBS network, as the success of many of its other shows such as “I Love Lucy” hinged on strategic daytime timeslots that followed many other morning shows aimed at women watching from their own homes. The content of *Sunrise Semester* was a challenging sell for advertiser’s dollars, and yet the early hour was previously dead air time for CBS. *Sunrise Semester* differed from other daytime programming in the way that it was cerebral, challenging viewers and even offering them a gateway into the academic world. *Sunrise Semester* sought to mimic a liberal arts education, which was possibly what many of these women reportedly gave up during World War II or during the Great Depression. The analysis of the *Sunrise Semester* fan letters thus necessarily departed from other constructs of female fandom related to programming like soap operas, game shows, or daytime serials.

While the entire phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* is and has been viewed as a “proto-typical MOOC,” as I argue in Chapter Seven, the earliest fan mail letter-writers themselves could also be viewed as displaying early feminist impulses in the context of education and free will. While the promotion of gender consciousness flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, when feminism sprang vocally to life, the movement was soon “subverted by its own rhetoric of freedom and

choice by advertisers to promote traditional domestic values” (O’Neill, 1990, p. 140). While television was reportedly one of the single largest perpetuators of gender norms and stereotypes, there was something so compelling about outlining *Sunrise Semester* against the backdrop of other available programming in the same era. As Marsha Cassidy argues in her book *What Women Watched* (2005), the birth of television networks in the 1940s were born out of radio’s earlier fixation on the female spectator: “in pursuit of daytime viewers, television at its inception offered up multiple representations of postwar womanhood and tested myriad ways the unknown dimensions of a new feminine sphere” (p. 27). As such, this angle of analysis for *Sunrise Semester* folds into other conceivable discourses around education, upward mobility, gender stereotypes and media studies, holding ramifications for new insights in distance and online learning.

Motivation.

The question of learner motivation loomed largest throughout my study of *Sunrise Semester*, especially when compared against some early theories that have emerged with the increased popularity of present-day MOOCs. What inspired or motivated someone in the 1950s to pursue an education over television, and how have these factors shifted over time as viewed from our current era of online learning? Internal and external factors such as self-interest, authenticity, attendance, impacts on everyday life, satisfaction and projected outcomes as well as perceptions of “exaggerated opportunity or threat” (Keegan, 1993, p. 261) have all been cited as critical in a greater understanding of learner motivation, which is a critical component in understanding learning effectiveness. Motivation, when present in sufficient intensity, has also been cited for its ability “to compensate for a range of structural and design deficiencies,” as well as inadequacies in learning materials or associated support (p. 262), especially in training-based distance learning. It

was my belief that learner motivation superseded any shortcomings of *Sunrise Semester*'s low and slow to evolve production quality, or its oppressively early pre-dawn screening time.

I was eager to see if there were any insights from the particular factors pertaining to learner motivation in *Sunrise Semester* students that could be applied to the study of present-day MOOCs. I found several studies that were conducted to verify the effect of learner characteristics and motivation in traditional classrooms, but very few surrounding online learning research, and even fewer pertaining specifically to MOOCs. Rather, many of the studies I located followed the impact of traditional training models aimed at professional development, posing both concern and also opportunity for the emerging researcher interested in learner perspectives and learner motivation. My analysis of current research in learner motivation and motivational theory along with lessons that can be applied to present-day MOOCs are described in Chapter Five.

Limitations for this study

Researching fan letters and *Sunrise Semester* in general through an archive was both challenging and uneven because access to an archive is rarely transparent and what a researcher finds there is rarely unambiguous (Treanor, 2005). I needed to assume that every sheet or paper, every article and every news clipping held some kind of latent or potential meaning for the project, yet such treatment in a state of perpetual, heightened awareness was time-consuming. Treanor (2005) points to one of the biggest challenges of working and researching in an archive, as the focus of study in one area of an archive necessitates the possible omission or ignorance of the existence of other areas:

Both archiving and accessing the archive are essentially hermeneutic tasks.

Contrary to common belief, there is no clear line between preservation (memory) and destruction (forgetting). An archive is rarely, if ever, black or white, true or

false. Another way of saying this is that the archive exists at the intersection of the visible and the invisible; it is, in Derrida's terms, spectral [...] The invisibility or inaccessibility of the archive is a function of archiving, in which inclusion and preservation of some elements means the exclusion and neglect of others (Treanor, 2005, p. 291).

While most of the original letters cease to exist at all, I was able to locate over seventy "pairs" of original letters mailed to one *Sunrise Semester* professor, and matched them with the mailed response sent in reply or in acknowledgment of the letter. While it is hard to definitively identify the gender of each of the letter writers beyond an analysis of first name and whether the writer signs a name with "Mrs.," fifty-two (or 69%) of the letter writers have been coded as female based on signatures and other identifying information contained in their letters, and twenty-three (or 21%) have been identified as male (see Table 4). Excerpts from these letters have been examined using discourse analysis methodologies and then coded for feminized language, and insights about learner motivation and then coded for revealing expressions of gratitude, self-disclosure on learning habits, and other traits unique to at-home viewers learning at a pre-dawn hour. These themes are explored in the Findings section of this dissertation in Chapter Five, but are by no means exhaustive. There may be other letters that exist in other archives, and there will be countless other interpretations of the validity and importance of "fan mail" (see Sayre, 1939; Katz, 1950 for more on the topic of fan mail).

The intimacy of language, and the revealing expressions used by the letter-writers serves as a much needed compass that points to new ways to assess the cultural importance of *Sunrise Semester* beyond a mere footnote or quirky anecdote of a failed experiment in distance learning. While I had wondered to myself whether this topic warranted research at all, the discovery of the

exchange of letters and the language contained within helped me see that few scholars had connected *Sunrise Semester's* measurable impact on its fan base. With the use of historical methods and theoretical frameworks to examine the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester*, I had to wonder about *Sunrise Semester's* omission in the history of distance learning as pointing to some of our larger assumptions about the “distance learner” writ large. That there were women who sought to further their education through the medium of television, and did so in an everyday domestic setting such as the home, and then later became full professors or educators or teachers in their own right, asks us to rethink the common characterization of distance learners as But in no way did it seem that the university saw these stories as remarkable – at least, their stories were only documented in a brief exchange of letters that pointed to their fandom, and made me see how clearly these women’s stories needed to be told. Every time I Googled the name of a *Sunrise Semester* fan writer born in the last century, only to find that they had passed away just five or six years ago, my heart sank. These women were running out of time to know their stories were being told, which far exceeded the scope of this dissertation. I saw my role as researcher as bearing responsibility to share their stories, and I was also running out of time because they were quickly dying.

Indications that the archive held untold yet remarkable stories were first revealed when I originally viewed the archive back in 2013. My first viewing of the archive of letters underscored the importance of telling these women’s stories. A later discovery in 2015 of some of the women’s journeys—from *Sunrise Semester* television viewer, to enrolled college student, to graduate student and sometimes then on to scholar and professor—in an age in which women were not often seeking academic achievement after raising a family. The discovery of these stories pointed to a need to include a discussion of the power of television as a medium to educate in the post-World War II era, which forms the basis of my historical analysis of the show in Chapter Three. The discovery of

themes contained in the language of the letters themselves led me to consider the possibilities of gender and domestic space as variables along the continuum of what it means to be a motivated learner, which I elaborate in Chapter Four.

I have studied *Sunrise Semester* because I am passionate about figuring out what motivates people to learn, especially those who would not or could not go to college, and other learners that I refer to as “non-traditional learners.” My research points to a strong gender bias in the viewership of *Sunrise Semester*, which was at least 70% female and over forty years old (many viewers revealed themselves to be even older, divulging in their fan letters that they were born before World War I, and some even earlier, with birthdays in the late 1800s. In using discourse analysis to research the ways in which fans of the show expressed themselves in long letters to television producers or to the professors themselves, I uncover a range of evolving identities that stemmed from the viewer’s connection with the program, and document how many struggled to articulate just what, exactly, motivated them to get up at an ungodly pre-dawn hour.

As problematic as the genre of fan mail may be, the letters and “fan mail” in *Sunrise Semester* point to how viewers fell in love with learning and why. Since no one has studied this television show at close range before, despite a more recent growing interest in the archive itself, I am studying it to understand our cultural assumptions about distance learners so we can better understand online learning in the present and future.

Another challenge was a limitation of time and access in the archive, as the question about whether the fan letters could conceivably be protected under a privacy act like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) was raised by NYU when I was already deep into the archival research. Future scholars eager to petition such a restriction should note that “Audience Feedback” is the term used throughout the archival documents and also in the subject folder

whenever fan mail was transcribed in the archive, and the content demonstrates that these letters were clearly written by fans and enthusiastic viewers, not enrolled students. Additionally, the number of actual enrollment pales in comparison to the reported number of “casual” television viewers that numbered anywhere between 90,000 and two million, as documented throughout the files. Furthermore, the extremely low reported *Sunrise Semester* academic credit enrollment numbers support case for scholarship access, as the registered students numbered around 177 or lower, even at the peak of *Sunrise Semester*’s popularity (1957-1963). By the mid-1970s, only roughly forty-four students were enrolled to take the course for credit.

Because the letters were written in an age of profuse loquaciousness within letter-writing in general, the process of disqualifying each fan mail letter for scholarship access, based simply on whether or not the letter writer named what course they were viewing, it was not possible to discover whether the letter-writer was or was not enrolled for credit. Future scholars should argue that inclusion of the course name in a fan letter would not fairly provide an assessment about whether they were actually enrolled in the course or if the letters qualify as student records. Many of the fan letter-writers did name the course or the professor by name, but the student rarely claimed to be enrolled in the course for credit. To my knowledge, no formal student records ever survived for *Sunrise Semester* to check if the names were enrolled, but the fan mail content unlocks some of the clues that they were only casual viewers (i.e., “I have recently discovered your program...”) or they were not specific about the course at all. The regulations required a written agreement with the organization that also enrolled students at affiliate colleges that contained mandatory provisions intended to guard the privacy of student records. The regulations also provided institutions with detailed, required provisions aimed at preventing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) from ending up in the hands of persons or entities not intended or permitted to receive them, and so there

is great difficulty in gathering student records of *Sunrise Semester* students at other colleges or universities, too. As I coded for themes about gender, learning and appreciation, looking at the full letters in the manner in which they were written was vital to my research, which was why I held out for viewing the original letters. As per research protocol outlined in my Internal Review Board (IRB) application, I decided to tell these women's stories using fake personas and made-up names as outlined in CUNY's restrictions of using de-identifiable data, with the exception of Mrs. Cora Gay Carr, whose story was documented by *The New York Times* and other news outlets. I worked with NYU to make sure I adhered to all of the guidelines for access; additionally, all PII was redacted from my notes. However, the delays in access to the full letters until late December 2015 limited my scope of research. I truly hope access to these viewer fan letters are viewed as a special case in the future, rather than mired in the creation of access policy mid-stream. As much as I suffered the consequences of delay while conducting this research, I was glad that access was resolved in favor of future scholarship on such an important milestone in NYU's formative history supporting non-traditional learners.

Statement of the Problem

Although general research about distance learning and distance learning theory dates back to the mid-1880s, very little research and theory currently exists concerning early educational television of the 1950s and 1960s. Even less research has been oriented toward gender studies and home-based learning theory within early educational television history of the same period. Very little substantial critical research has been conducted into the history of *Sunrise Semester*, even as television as a whole emerged as one of the "most influential, largely unacknowledged educators in the country" (Schiller, 1989, p. 106) by the mid-1980s. Just as television's role in education has

been underestimated and unacknowledged, it is my belief that lessons from the “golden age” of television have not been properly understood.

Meanwhile, cultural assumptions about distance learners, especially non-traditional learners such as women, point to some of the paradoxes inherent in contemporary studies of informal education. How this history was lost, where this history might be found, and what else has been said about educational television as a method of instruction in engaging non-traditional learners in atypical environments must be fully embraced, or else newer educational technologies will be doomed to repeat the same failures in the near and distant future.

Scholarship on the use of and development in advertising in radio and television along with the integration of these media into the domestic space aimed at women supports the predominant discourse that television was more intrusive in the home and perpetuated gender stereotypes, especially in the decades immediately following World War II. Advertising discourse, and its efficiency and efficacy as a medium aimed directly at female audiences as they cleaned or cooked in their own homes, also underscores how radio was more adept delivering advertising messages than television, since radio did not cause women to become visually distracted from the domestic chore at hand (Hilmes, 1997). As early morning scheduling was completely non-existent until *Sunrise Semester* first aired in 1957, it was unusual to have a break in the domestic routine that allowed for a chance to sit and watch television for thirty minutes, uninterrupted. Clues about how audiences embraced unusual morning routines in which they shifted or changed their morning habits to accommodate the reception of pre-dawn lessons on *Sunrise Semester* abound in secondary sources, such as newspaper articles after the show’s debut. Yet the potency of education delivered by television and the changes that the show caused in every-day lives also point to larger understandings about how at-home, informal education functioned. This dissertation therefore uses

historical methods, critical discourse analysis and social theory to examine some of the personal stories and learner perspectives contained within the archives at NYU pertaining to *Sunrise Semester*, and then traces the lineage of informal learning through the history of distance learning using the lens of gender.

Questions Guiding This Research

In many ways, the five research questions that have guided the trajectory of this study have not changed from the proposal stage of this dissertation, but rather reflect a growing concern that the learner perspective has been largely ignored in educational research on distance learning. The first research question embodied my desire to set *Sunrise Semester* within a longer and larger context of distance learning and adult learning history: What lessons can be learned from looking at the past before theorizing about the future of learning? How can we gain new understanding of the challenges faced by distance learners in the present era? The second research question, on the historicization of *Sunrise Semester* to understand fundamental interpretative attitudes surrounding the birth of the show, explores how a historical analysis of untold stories and histories from *Sunrise Semester* and other early experiments in distance education can be utilized to gain deeper insights into online learner behavior today: How do claims of “disruption” made by proponents of today’s MOOCs compare with previously made claims within the longer historical context of distance education ‘experimentation’ over the last century? The fourth research question is concerned with questions surrounding power, gender and television within this history: What are some of the implications and assumptions about age, gender, and previous education levels about the early cohorts of *Sunrise Semester* students that can be excavated from the archives at NYU? And how have recently reported shifts in gender, age, and previous education levels in MOOC participation changed since *their* early years, beginning back with their start in 2008? The fifth

question surrounds the elusive qualities of motivation when pursuing a degree in informal or distance learning settings: what attributes were shared by *Sunrise Semester* students and other types of distance learners, what factors were unique to *Sunrise Semesters*, and how can parallels be drawn between groups when the modalities of measurement or study are rarely shared nor comparable?

And finally, a meta-question that has guided the research: considering our understanding of early distance education and MOOCs, what are the implications of these findings for projecting the future of distance education? Some of the current implications of online learning have worked to destabilize previous assumptions about the perceived “worth” of university degrees, without guidance on how new and emergent opportunities for adult online learning environments should be assessed more rigorously in the future. Stories and learner perspectives from the golden age of television along with an analysis of an understudied education landscape are used to bring new understanding and insight to challenge previous assumptions about the perceived success and failure of today’s MOOCs.

Rationale for Study

The overarching goal of this research is to demonstrate how historical analysis of untold stories and histories from *Sunrise Semester* and other early experiments in distance education can be utilized to gain deeper insights into online learner behavior and explore implications for distance education in the future, especially for non-traditional learners in atypical learning environments. I wanted to situate *Sunrise Semester* as a prototypical MOOC, given the show’s large numbers of participation and its extensive geographic reach through broadcast television, to understand the socio-historical context for its reception by various audiences. I located *Sunrise Semester* within the context of distance education starting in the 1800s with the postal correspondence course, then followed the trajectory of maturing technological advancements that created televised learning in

the 1950s and networked learning by the 1960s, finally bringing some of the learnings from *Sunrise Semester* into dialogue with computer-based learning current to date through the year 2016.

By conducting a deep analysis of a series of fan letters buried throughout the archive at NYU, I was able to examine the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* through all five lines of inquiry mentioned in this chapter. Historical examination surrounding learner motivation and desires of upwards mobility beginning over one hundred and fifty years ago that I establish in Chapter Two have set the stage for some of the erroneous assumptions made today about what motivates an individual to learn. *Sunrise Semester*, overlooked and understudied within the longer context of distance learning, offered a unique case study—though certainly there have been many other understudied experiments in learning, as explored in the literature review.

Ultimately, by linking subjects that emerged from historical research surrounding *Sunrise Semester* with learning themes coded in the show's selected fan mail analysis, I was able to connect these topics to existing research in present day MOOCs. By utilizing a series of existing learner data made public by the MOOC provider Coursera and other MOOC providers I was able to surface some of the theories addressing why MOOCs have not yet proved as successful after they first launched on a commercially-massive scale and how gender disparity continues to propagate within online learning structures. Careful analysis of why past studies have largely overlooked learner motivation as a key factor in low completion rates, and why this gap in the literature has resulted in immature analysis of the “success” of MOOCs and other widespread efforts to bring accessible education at scale, is continued in Chapter Six.

In today's terms, MOOCs and other massive open online courses have generated a considerable amount of press coverage since the term was first used in 2008, resulting in an urgent need to examine the past before charting new territory for learning into the future. After the *New*

York Times voted MOOC to be the “word of the year” in 2012 (Pappano, 2012), the online evolution of MOOCs in the last five years since a lofty claim to their importance in education have been both quick and laborious. The MOOC phenomenon has shifted as swiftly as a start-up (Haber 2014), but has also been slow to evolve in that very little attention has been paid to the learner perspective, with wide media attention focused instead on low completion rates, speculative possibilities for monetizing, and other considerations surrounding click rates and learning (Gašević et al., 2014). In fact, much of the publicly available data has largely ignored any consideration of socio-economic status, externally validated learning opportunities, or learner motivation (Bates 2014; Ho et al., 2014).

On one hand, the dip of near-record level of attention and subsequently faded hype surrounding MOOCs may have altered higher education leaders’ perceptions and plans for other online offerings to focus on participation numbers, rates of attrition, and possibilities for revenue, while diminished attention has been paid to the learner perspective. On the other hand, the rapid evolution of a still-nascent form of learning like MOOCs presents its own problems for research, too.

Distributed models for online learning that form the basis of MOOCs have been posited directly as alternatives to mainstream public education and as “disruptive” forces within the university system looking to expand its reach, thus furthering the need to examine the past before staking claim on the future of educational technology. As presented, this dissertation seeks to redress some of the current-day hype surrounding MOOCs (albeit faded) by contextualizing the phenomenon of massive, open courses within the longer socio-historical discourse of distance learning by privileging the learner perspective gathered from archives surrounding an experiment in educational television from 1957. Using historical methodology to analyze library archives and

primary documents pertaining to *Sunrise Semester*, and five lines of inquiry to contextualize, historicize, excavate its history through an exploration of gender and motivation, this study is designed to gather and analyze learner stories and personal journeys to reveal new implications for the future of distance learning, including and beyond present-day MOOCs.

Working Definitions

The following are eight terms that will be used throughout the course of this research that serve as a shortlist of emerging themes guiding the research (organized in alphabetical order):

Centralized, Decentralized, Distributed: The terms “centralized,” “decentralized,” and “distributed,” first used by Paul Baran (1954), parallel a pendulum shift from the beginnings of education in the United States from a bureaucratic model that places power in the hands of government to a community-driven organizational model that places power in the hands of individuals.

Disruptive Technology: In his 1997 best-selling book, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, Per Christensen separates new technology into two categories: sustaining and disruptive. Sustaining technology relies on incremental improvements to an already established technology. In contrast, disruptive technology lacks refinement, often has performance problems because it is new, appeals to a limited audience, and may not yet have a proven practical application (Rouse, 2014).

Disruptive Technology in Education: Christensen’s theory of disruption provided researchers, practitioners, and policy makers with a new perspective on increasingly affordable and accessible educational opportunities in society. From this perspective, disruptive innovation is a dynamic form of industry change that unlocks gains in economic and social welfare (Christensen, 2000).

Distance Education: This phrase is used to simply describe the process of providing education where the instructor is distant and geographically separated from the student.

Distance Learning, also dlearning, or D-Learning: A mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom. Distance learning provides “access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both” (Gallagher and McCormick, 1999).

Distributed Learning: A general term used to describe a multi-media method of instructional delivery that includes a mix of Web-based instruction, streaming videoconferencing, face-to-face classroom time, distance learning through television or video, or other combinations of electronic and traditional educational models. Although distributed learning can be executed in a variety of ways, this proposal privileges peer-to-peer exchange and mentorship.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs): Since the term’s first use in 2008, very narrow definitions of MOOCs have emerged in the media as well as in both scholarly and unscholarly definitions (Farmer, 2008, 2013). A MOOC is a course of study made available over the Internet to a very large number of people, often without charge. There are hundreds of MOOC providers in 2016, but some the major MOOC providers today are the following: Coursera, Udacity, edX, Udemy, FutureLearn, and PSPU (Peer to Peer University).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historians of education have devoted very little attention to distance education, even though hundreds of thousands of college students have used one or more correspondence courses to further their progress toward graduation (Pittman, 2003). Higher education in general has been primarily concerned with the education of young adults in residential settings rather than with distance learning programs primarily organized through stable correspondence programs that attract diverse age groups (Hanna, 2003). Although distance education has existed in various forms for centuries, there has been a recent, rapid and explosive development of interest in and discussion about the field, primarily driven by educators and other professionals enthusiastic about the potential applications of interactive computer-based technology (Moore, 2003), including MOOCs. The challenge lies in assessing just how, where and why learning in alternative and online-networked environments takes place.

This chapter outlines and contextualizes the struggle to define distance learning and adult education historically while examining our cultural assumptions about distance learning over time. While MOOCs themselves are new, the concept of distributed learning is not: some of the earliest correspondence courses boasting significant enrollment numbers pre-date MOOCs by over 150 years (Adams, 2007; Elias & Merriam, 2005; Masters, 2011). Correspondence courses, radio shows, and summer-based performative theater originating in Chautauqua, New York are some of the examples explored in the pages ahead that are used to contextualize *Sunrise Semester* within a longer history of experimental distance learning.

If educational researchers studying conventional brick and mortar classrooms struggle to operationalize variables like achievement and attrition in traditional settings, it is doubly difficult to

do so for MOOCs (Breslow, 2013, pp. 13-25). This literature review and the next two chapters of this dissertation situate the history of the show *Sunrise Semester* as a prototypical MOOC to assess its reception within a larger socio-historical context of distance learning and learner perspectives.

Adult education defined.

Before embarking on a historical analysis of adult learning and its evident experimentation to attract wide audiences throughout the ages, it is essential to address some of the disputes among adult education scholars of the term's rightful use, which illuminate a schism among critical revisionists since the 1960s (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. 5). The term "adult education" is historically fraught with meaning, and even the introduction of the phrase itself in various contexts is said to have caused controversy, primarily for its religious or remedial connotations (Stubblefield & Rachal, 1992). In a historical book from around 1700 to the mid-1980s, Stubblefield and Keane (1994) examined some of the polarizing language surrounding the introduction of the term "adult education" within socio-economic and political contexts. They found that the term has always had meanings that related to objective perceptions against free choice and agency: "In many respects, adult education continually became a more open and expansive system; however the social realities of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion restricted access to these opportunities" (p. 313).

Similar questions arose concerning the use of "adult education" as a term when it was first introduced as "andragogy" in 1968 by Malcolm Knowles, who proposed "a new label and a new technology" of adult learning distinguishable from pre-adult schooling (Merriam, 2001, p. 5). In his seminal text on the subject of adult learning called *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, Knowles originally defines andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn," which was in contrast to "pedagogy, the art and science of teaching children" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). An increase in the number of teachers of students of various ages reported that they had experimented with

applying the concepts of andragogy with youth learners and found that “in certain situations they were producing superior learning,” which led Knowles to develop a spectral model of possible assumptions about learners and their capabilities (pp. 44-45).

Knowles also noted that the term adult education was practically unknown in the United States “nor conceived of as a delineated field” until the founding of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) in 1926 (Knowles, 1980, p. 25). A then-contemporary observer of the birth of adult education, Morse Cartwright, observed that “prior to 1924, the term ‘adult education,’ while well-known in England, was not current in the United States” (Cartwright, 1928, p. 99). In 1929, Cartwright, by then the elected Executive Director of the AAAE, noted that “when the founders [of the AAAE] assembled at Chicago for the birth of the American movement, the term ‘adult education’ itself was so novel as to be subject to attack at their organizational meeting” (Stubblefield & Rachal, 1992, p. 107). By exploring not only the problem of the origins of the term itself, additional historical analysis is required to surface what “adult education” and other competing terms like “andragogy” and “continuing education” also conveyed. However, some of yesteryear’s somersaults with semantics extended even further than the turn of the 20th Century, and have haunted today’s studies of present-day MOOCs and online learning.

Naming the Field: Adult Learning

While systematic study of adult education is generally thought to have started in the 1920s (Elias & Merriam, 2005), the term “adult education” and its similar reference of “adult learning” has many meanings and often confounds scholars, philosophers, practitioners and the general layperson alike since its inception; not least today. Contentious histories surround the very area of study designated by adult education – when it was first used, how it was first used, and what it meant was also equally fraught. Early evidence surrounding *how* and *where* adults learned

throughout history that preceded the last century was speculative at best, which is why our understanding of systems of learning in adults online have also proved elusive.

Some of the problems pertain to certain euphemisms that the word “adult education” actually referred to, pointing to an expansive misunderstanding of where the learning actually happened. The term *adult education* may have been code in various contexts for the concept of “undereducated,” or may have referred to the equally vague concept of “continuing education,” which implied a person’s longer journey of learning that extended from “early education” and “formal education” onto something else. Even the boundaries of adult education were not certain: “at one extreme, adult education is considered to include all life experiences through which adults learn, and at the other, it only includes organized learning experiences” (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. xiii). It is unclear from the early literature on this topic whether adult education was used to describe efforts of self-improvement or meeting groups or professional associations formed by learners around shared interests, as was common throughout the formative years of adult education at the turn of the last century.

Another complication in defining adult education stems from the difficulty of pinpointing when childhood ends and when adulthood begins in an individual’s education. Assumptions about not just age but also psychological maturity or even one’s role in society needed to be considered: according to Elias and Merriam (2005), “age, psychological maturity, and social roles appear to be the essential variables for such a definition, but the priority of these variables often depends upon the context of the discussion” (p. 8). Furthermore, adults that were not served by systems that required them to be “additionally motivated” with “an enhanced level of metacognitive awareness, knowledge and skills” (Abrami et al., 2011, as quoted in Gašević et al., 2014, p. 168).

It is important to note here that distance learners have been culturally misunderstood as historically marginalized populations. Additionally, existing systems of distance education were, at least up until the 1970s, largely criticized for not having robust systems of checks and balances against malpractice in the field, at least not in the same way that universities had been scrutinized:

Until 1970, distance education was roundly criticized for the malpractice of some practitioners, and one could argue that such criticism is often still founded today. The move from private to public provision in the years between 1973 and 1993 has largely muted these criticisms but others have appeared: that it alienates students, that it is contrary to... tradition, that it cannot give a full university atmosphere, that it is characterized by the evils of industrialization and their theoretical underpinnings are noted for their fragility (Keegan, 1993, p. 2).

The knowledge explosion about adult education after World War II contributed to a greater awareness of new possibilities for education that exceeded the constraints of childhood. The pre-dawn of the knowledge economy, augmented by the speed of access and networking that gave way to the proliferation of more data analytics in an information-based society, fully matured with the advent of the Internet and pushed learners towards even greater systems of access and learning. The diffusion of electronic communication called for new ways of thinking about education for adults (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. xi).

The term “home education” was Milton Dewey's preference, but did not gain wide acceptance (Stubblefield & Rachal, 1992), likely due to its specificity of site as being in the home. The term “popular education” was a generic term that was more frequently used (Stubblefield & Rachal, 1992). By 1901, Herbert Baxter Adams, who a decade earlier had used both “adult education” and “popular education,” popularized an even more complicated term, called

“educational extension,” and explained its historical development and present status in a historical-descriptive monograph, *Educational Extension in the United States* (Adams, 1901, as quoted in Stuppelfield & Rachal, 1992, p. 110). The highest recognition of the term educational extension and its relation to the still-evolving educational landscape came in 1904 with the publication of the two volume *History of Education in the United States* (Stubblefield & Rachal, 1992) by Edwin Grant Dexter, who seems to be one of the first and few authors of such a study by a researcher who also held a degree and background in education and pedagogy. Many previous studies seemed to be conducted by researchers with backgrounds in any other area besides education. By 1912, the term “adult education” had been used in the United States context to convey various concepts from contexts as different as “scientific societies, public free school lectures, library activities, university extension schools, and farm demonstration work” (Stuppelfield and Rachal, 1992, page xxii). Only since the 1920s have scholars studied educational activities conducted by individuals or offered by a sponsoring agency as part of a larger phenomenon called “adult education” (Stubblefield and Keane, 1994, p. 1), indicating a dearth of scholarship that does not cover some of the more experimental practices in adult education such as correspondence schools, tele-courses and early online learning covered in the first part of this chapter.

Although the concept of distance learning education has been analyzed extensively in recent philosophical literature, the concept of education has not been so clearly delineated. Moreover, an attempt to define adult education presupposes philosophical questions, as the term “adulthood” further confounds the defining of adult education (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 8). According to Otto Peters, one of the preeminent scholars and theorists working in Germany since the early 1950s, a didactic analysis of distance learning in education has been missing for a very long time (Peters & Keegan, 1994), despite the fact that the mode of instruction itself had already existed for over 150

years (Otto Peters in Keegan, 1994). Research on distance education has been subject to harsh and consistent critique (Saba, 2005), and some feel rightfully so. Michael G. Moore (1985; 2003), for one, offered that the field suffers from a massive volume of amateur, unsystematic, and badly designed research, producing little value for the field. By the year 1980, a new concern emerged alongside the rise of learning technology and whether the definition of the field might actually be more adequately called “flexible learning” or the use of computers in schools as “educational technology” or some other type of arrangement (Keegan, 1993, p. 3).

Definition of Distance Education

Just as “adult education” is as vague as the sum of two parts, because neither “adult” nor secular “education” are discrete in their definitions across the landscape of learning, the phrase “distance education” has multiple meanings, too. To make clarification further unattainable, the term “distance education” has been applied to a tremendous variety of programs serving numerous audiences across a wide variety of media, and often does not stress the importance of the types of technical apparatuses that connect the distance between learner and teacher.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (in Bruder, 1989) defines distance education as “the application of telecommunications and electronic devices which enable students and learners to receive instruction that originates from some distant location” (p. 30). To Rudolf Manfred Delling, distance education (*Fernunterricht*) is “a planned and systematic activity which comprises the choice, didactic preparation and presentation of teaching materials as well as the supervision and support of student learning, which is achieved by bridging the physical distance between student and teacher by means of at least one appropriate technical medium (Schlosser & Simonson, 2009, p. 3). For Hilary Perraton, founding director of the International Research Foundation for Open Learning, distance education is “an educational process

in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner” (Perraton, 1988, p. 34), which is open to a range of interpretation.

In most distance learning environments, the learner is also given opportunities to interact with the instructor or with the program and its materials directly, and is given some ways of direct access to the instructor throughout the course (Schlosser & Simonson, 2009). Otto Peters emphasized the role of technology in defining distance education: “a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes rationalized by the application of a division of labor and organizational principles and by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they may live” (p. 6).

The History of Distance Learning: Earliest Beginnings

Correspondence study, a method of learning via postal mail, was one of the first forms of distance education (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Many historians of distance learning go back as far as the invention of the printing press and the Bible in the Age of Enlightenment as evidence of some of the earliest examples of distance learning, but this literature review has been limited to the scope of informal and formal learning aimed at adults. One such record of a distributed educational learning opportunity dates back to an advertisement in the *Boston Gazette* on March 20, 1728, posted by Caleb Phillipps, self-professed “teacher of the new method of short hand,” who promised teaching shorthand writing to anybody with access to a mailbox (“History of Distance Learning,” 2014). His advertisement guaranteed that any “Persons in the Country desirous to Learn this Art, may by having the several Lessons sent weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston” (Battenberg, 1971, p. 44).

The birth of correspondence study is commonly ascribed to Sir Isaac Pitman, founder of a correspondence course also offered in shorthand writing that utilized the free penny postal system in England in the year 1833 (Baker, 1908). An advertisement in a Swedish newspaper dating back to 1833 touted the opportunity to study “Composition through the medium of the Post” (Holmberg, 1986, p. 6) as well as Pittman’s contributions to the method of writing in shorthand. Another early example of distance learning that is far less commonly evoked as the “mother of correspondence schools” is Anna Eliot Ticknor, daughter of a Harvard professor, who founded The Society to Encourage Study at Home for twenty years starting in 1873, aimed specifically for women who “would fain obtain an education, and who had little, if any hope for obtaining it” (*Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Founded in 1873 by Anna Eliot Ticknor*, 1897, p. 4).

As documented by an unknown author writing about the Society in 1897, Ticknor observed first-hand the aspirations of women who were moved to pursue an education, especially as many colleges and universities opened around the country at this time. Ticknor saw an opportunity to develop a system of correspondence study that nurtured learning for women who lived far from centers of higher education. She launched her school to some two hundred pupils, mailing books, engravings, photographs and maps that augmented study by correspondence (p. 5-6).

In the year 1916, Dr. Lee Galloway, professor of Commerce and Industry at New York University, conducted a survey of over thirty advertisements of various schools offering instruction by correspondence. The courses advertised in just one single issue of a “popular magazine” of the day represented an incredible array of topics:

The courses covered nearly every known human activity ranging from raising poultry to training engineers. They include instruction in accounting, law, electrical engineering, meter engineering, signal engineering, wireless operating, automobile

driving and repairing, lettering and designing, drawing and cartooning, drafting, advertising and selling, public-speaking, watch repairing, executive management, English and even ventriloquism. A person may be made into a traffic inspector, a detective, or a musician—all by mail (Galloway, 1916, p. 202).

Galloway asserted that the best way to measure influence of such schools was “the numbers of students enrolled and the amount of money spent in preparing the course of instruction,” as well as the amount of effort spent advertising them (p. 203).

Until the twentieth century, print was the only medium available for distance education, and the first distance education courses leading to college-level degrees were offered by mail in 1873 (Hanna, 2003). At that time, Illinois Wesleyan University, a private institution, developed a curriculum leading to bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees (Bittner & Mallory, 1933). Within a few decades, distance learning enrollments had grown to an almost mind-boggling level (Adams, 2007). By the end of the Civil War era, three distinct national systems diffused knowledge and culture through organized adult education activities: the public lecture movement, which survived the Civil War in the form of community-based lyceums; the Chautauqua Institution, which provided a liberal college education for laypeople; and university extension, which connected the public to scientific research and advanced studies produced by universities (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. 135).

The Chautauqua Institute.

The Chautauqua Institute was founded in 1874 as an experiment in out-of-school, vacation learning, yet rarely is included in current standard indexes and dictionaries related to instruction and education. After its launch by founders Lewis and Vincent, it was broadened almost immediately beyond courses for Sunday school teachers to include academic subjects, such as music, art and

physical education. Callison (2003) and others argue that this concept was so inspiring for lifelong learning that it “should be a part of our modern information literacy vocabulary” (Callison, 2003, p. 35). The Chautauqua movement correlated with the increase of leisure time and vacation days for the middle class. Begun inauspiciously as a two-week summer institute for Sunday School teachers at Fair Point, New York in 1874, Chautauqua evolved into a highly robust summer residency program for adults. By 1876, two founders, Sunday school advocate John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller, an Ohio inventor, expanded and eventually evolved into the *Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle* (CLSC) and anticipated many of the same arguments for adult education made later, in the post-World War I period and beyond (<http://ciweb.org/about-us/about-chautauqua/our-history>). In fact, Stubblefield (1981) argues that a substantial case can be made for presenting the Chautauqua Movement of 1886 as the first modern theory of adult education in the United States.

One of the two founders of the Chautauqua Institute, John Vincent, asserted that “adulthood was the best time for intellectual improvement,” and that “education could occur at any age and any place, not just in relation to traditional school systems of learning as governed by schools, teachers, and examinations” (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. 137). Vincent’s philosophy was located in the “sacredness of all knowledge, in self-culture, and in the universal right to knowledge, and he insisted that continued learning in adulthood as both sacred and secular obligation” (Stubblefield, 1981, p. xx). Progressive ideas in civic, cultural and scholarly life birthed nation-wide imitators of the New York Chautauqua system, and by 1910 a new model began touring around the country from town to town to provide “cultural improvement and moral uplift” (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p. 138). By the year 1920, twenty-one companies operated ninety-three circuits in the United States and Canada and presented programs in 8,580 towns to audiences that numbered over 35,449,750 (McCown, 1984).

Having a Chautauqua became a source of community pride, but the phenomenon of the Chautauqua circuit had reached its peak by World War I. By 1922, radio programs modeled on the Chautauqua circuit curricula provided a consistent daily schedule of educational and informative material for women in the home concerning “household interests, such as housekeeping and cooking, market reports, and care and hygiene of children, cultural topics such as the use of correct English, musical programs and drama and book reviews” (Hilmes, 1997, p. 147).

Correspondence Schools in the Industrial Era.

Although there were many localized efforts to extend a collegiate education by mail, the first formal correspondence program with global, rather than national, reach was the International Correspondence School (ICS), founded in 1890 by a newspaperman named Thomas J. Foster (Holmberg, 1995). ICS provided continuing education predominately for miners and draftsmen and, by the mid-1890s, boasted enrollment in the hundreds of thousands across the country (Clark, 1906). Many early enrollees were looking for advancement and upward mobility. Countless others, realizing that their basic levels of previous education did not equip them to pass nor to advance the rising ranks of middle management in technical fields like engineering, were eager to pass new tests and achievement regulations stipulated by growing industry (Bower and Hardy, 2004). The ICS first enrolled approximately 2,500 new students in its founding year and attracted over 72,000 newly enrolled students by the year 1897, with an estimated total enrollment of over 900,000 students by the year 1906 (Clark, 1936; Noble, 2002). Most of these students were adult learners seeking certification and vocational training in technical fields like engineering (Bower and Hardy, 2004). Foster recognized that working adults who held personal ambition to “better themselves” needed a convenient way to attain advanced skills. By 1894, ICS offered courses to students in Mexico, America, and Australia (Bower and Hardy, 2004).

In an early article printed in *Science Magazine* titled “The Correspondence School – Its Relation to Technical Education and Some of Its Results” (1906), J.J. Clark cited an annual meeting of the *Society for Promotion of Engineering Education* in Columbus, Ohio, as evidence of the impact of then-nascent distance education. The paper aroused considerable interest, prompting the appointment of a national committee on industrial education. It seemed clear that there was concern about the regulation of such new types of education. As recounted by Clark (1906), it was impossible at that time to furnish reliable figures in regard to the work being accomplished, as the field was evolving so quickly. Consequently, both the paper and the report of the committee “were, in some respects, unsatisfactory and unjust to the correspondence school” (Clark, 1936, p. 328). Nonetheless, the dramatic jump in annual attendance reported in the paper demonstrates just how quickly ICS had spread in the first few years of the twentieth century. By the time his paper was delivered in 1905, the total number of students enrolled in the ICS was about 80,000, and, at the time, the committee reported student enrollment at roughly 181,000. After 1899, the school had consistently enrolled new students at the rate of more than 100,000 per year, and the total number of ICS students including through June 27, 1906, was 902,906, again reflecting consistent increase of over 1,156% in less than ten years (Clark, 1906). Below are examples of study materials mailed from ICS:

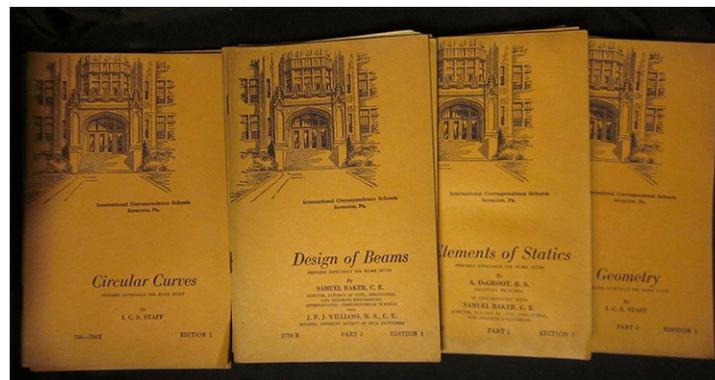


Figure 2: Construction study materials – International Correspondence School (ICS), circa 1931. Source: ebay.com

Even in those early days of distance learning, attrition was of great concern, as very few learners that started the course actually completed it. Efforts cited to rewrite study materials to increase the rate of completion were only hopeful at best:

During the last three or four years we have been very busy in rewriting all of our older courses. These new courses will cover the subjects more completely than the older ones did, and there will be a larger number of subjects than were included in the former courses. Inasmuch as the new courses will meet the demands of our students better than the old ones did, we expect that there will be a great increase in the number of students finishing such courses, or, at any rate, in the number of students studying a part or all of the courses (Clark, 1906, p. 334).

Despite rates of high attrition in its early years, ICS is still in existence today. The school is now known as Penn Foster and currently has over nine million registrants globally, according to its website (<http://www.pennfoster.edu>).

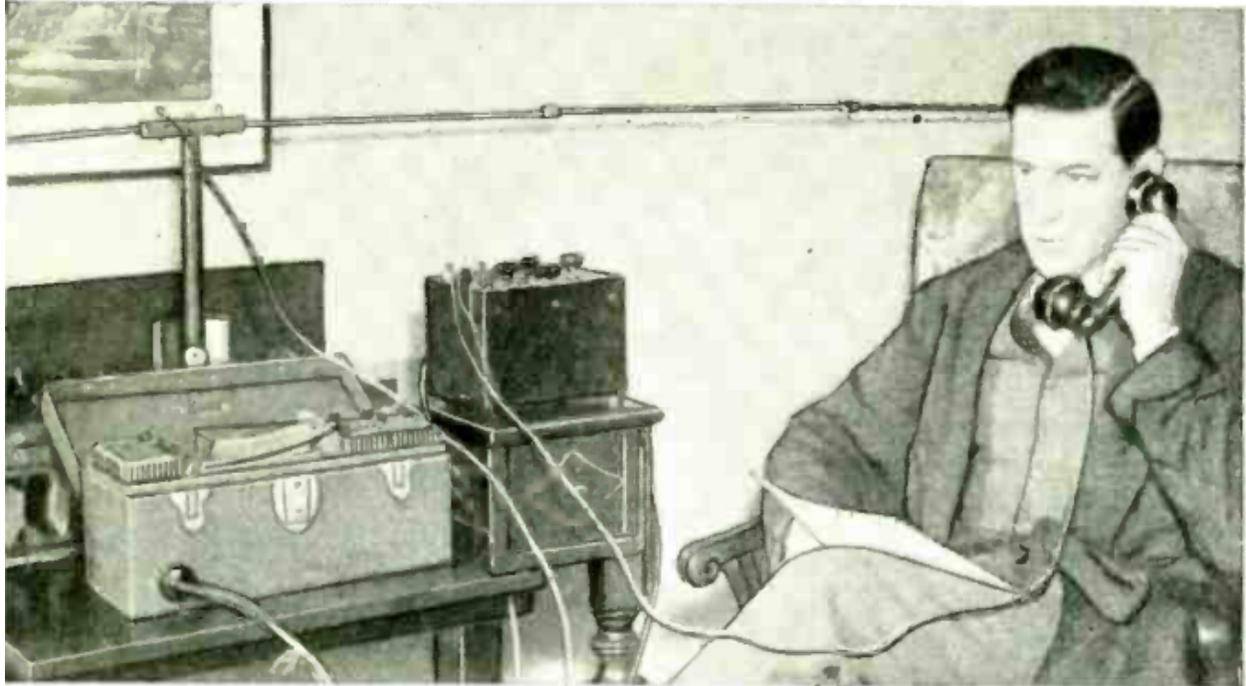
The Rise of Radio in Education.

Postal system limitations such as time delays, lost mail, and cost eventually led to the use of radio transmissions and audio recordings to teach students at a distance. By the 1920s, almost two hundred American radio stations delivered distance education to the masses (Bower and Hardy, 2004). The onset of World War II led to an increase in the use of the airwaves for communication to those people cut-off from the Allied countries, which meant a decrease in the number of airwaves available for educational purposes (Sorensen, 2010, p. 14). The “advent of stringent federal regulation, the rise of national commercial networks, and their use of inexperienced faculties were the chief factors promoting their failure” (Saettler, 1990, p. 204), and these three factors became the

most prevalent reasons that established radio educational programs eventually had to fold, giving way to a new generation of educational radio that was established after World War II.

As early as 1935, NYU debuted a radio show broadcast of college courses pioneered by a professor named C.C. Clark (“Teaching by Short Radio Waves,” 1935, p. 712). However, just as the postal service had its limitations in the previous century, the medium of radio also faced obsolescence. Factors such as increased broadcast costs, lower audience attention rates and an inability to translate “lecture-hall brilliance” into radio waves may have contributed to its demise:

Many university stations began [radio] operations with high hopes of bringing education to the masses, but soon faltered as broadcasting costs increased, audiences diminished, and professors demonstrated that lecture-hall brilliance did not always translate into good radio technique. These problems were quickly reflected in an unfavorable allocation of frequency or broadcast times, sending many of these stations into a downward spiral to oblivion (Craig, 2000, p. 68).



*Figure 3: A professor at NYU conducting class from his home via short-wave radio, 1935.
Source: Short Wave Craft Magazine, April 1935.*

By the early 1940s, radio was ubiquitous and even corporate stations embraced the potential for radio's ability to democratize education with a mixture of utopian and dystopian expectations. NBC alone produced over twenty-five programs throughout the 1940s under the auspices of the *NBC University of the Air* that were specifically designed to both educate and entertain using radio licenses that were strictly reserved for educational purposes by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (Jones, 2015). The shows were incorporated into high school, college and university curricula throughout the U.S and Canada, often for college credit (Walker, 2004). In 1948, the program was retooled as *NBC University Theater*, and then later as *NBC Theater*. The 110 programs featured thematic discussions and radio plays of "Great Works" of literature written by authors as varied as Ernest Hemingway, Voltaire, Aldus Huxley and Edgar Allen Poe (Jones, 2015, para. four). But growing belief that "intellectualism somehow fostered communication or socialism was fueled by reactionary and fascist elements of Atomic Age America" ("The Definitive *NBC University Theater Radio Log*," 2009). The power of radio as an educational medium soon

gave way to its role as a platform for entertainment and a vehicle for advertising, particularly as it competed for growing audiences against the medium of television (Walker, 2004).

The Rise of Television in Education.

The next technology that held new promise for education after radio was television. Before it became known as the “idiot box,” television was seen as the best hope for bringing enlightenment to the American people (Novak, 2012). When television finally came to America in the late 1940s, few could disguise their fascination with what some dubbed the “home screen” (Baughman, 1993), a notable precursor to a landing page or “home screen” of a web page. Television sales took off in the late 1940s following the start of individual stations in the largest cities, for, only in such heavily populated places was the relatively high cost of establishing and operating a station considered economically viable (Baughman, 1993).

In 1933, the University of Iowa became the first American university to broadcast TV. The first public demonstration of television in the state had occurred just two years earlier at the 1931 Iowa State Fair, where there was tremendous excitement by scientists at the University of Iowa to see what it could accomplish (Novak, 2012). Television set ownership thus initially possessed a big-city or, more accurately, metropolitan-area bias. Issues of access were likely a key contributing factor in whether television learning was embraced in rural areas of the United States in its formative years as an educational medium. However, there are clues in the NYU archives that point to widespread adoption of television learning by the mid-1960s, including the formation of NYU’s University of the Air by 1966 after much internal planning that started in the 1950s.

By 1948, at least eight colleges and universities were using and producing instructional television programs. The first commercial telecast originated in February 1940 in Detroit, Michigan. Throughout the 1940s, educators worked with local commercial stations to produce and

disseminate televised educational programs (Dille, 1991). By 1953, the first educational television station in the nation, KUHT, was licensed to the University of Houston and started broadcasting (Dille, 1991). By the end of 1958, there were 35 educational television stations on air (Cambre, 1987). Many large state universities, attempting to deal adequately with huge enrollment increases, experimented with closed-circuit television courses in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Meanwhile, The Fund for the Advancement of Television (TFAT) supported a variety of television shows and institutional approaches of teaching by television at different educational levels, including the transmission of fifth grade American history lessons by Montclair State College, New Jersey, to nearby schools; state-wide instructional television in Alabama; a major university program at Pennsylvania State University; the state-wide Texas experiment in a series of programs designed for teacher education institutions, the National Program in the Use of Television in the Public Schools, the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, and even *Continental Classroom*. (Saettler, 2004, p. 374). Many of these programs simply transmitted the professor's voice and image to additional classrooms on campus via television monitors, resulting in the "talking head" style of instructional television that made such a poor impression on learners and critics alike. Critics even condemned these early instructional television programs as simply "radio with pictures" (Zigerell, 1986, p. 7).

As the popularity of television grew, stations discovered that advertisers preferred to support the higher-rating entertainment programs that attracted larger viewing audiences (Dille 1991, p. 14). As a result, the number of instructional or formal educational programs on commercial network television slowly decreased and eventually moved to public television stations.

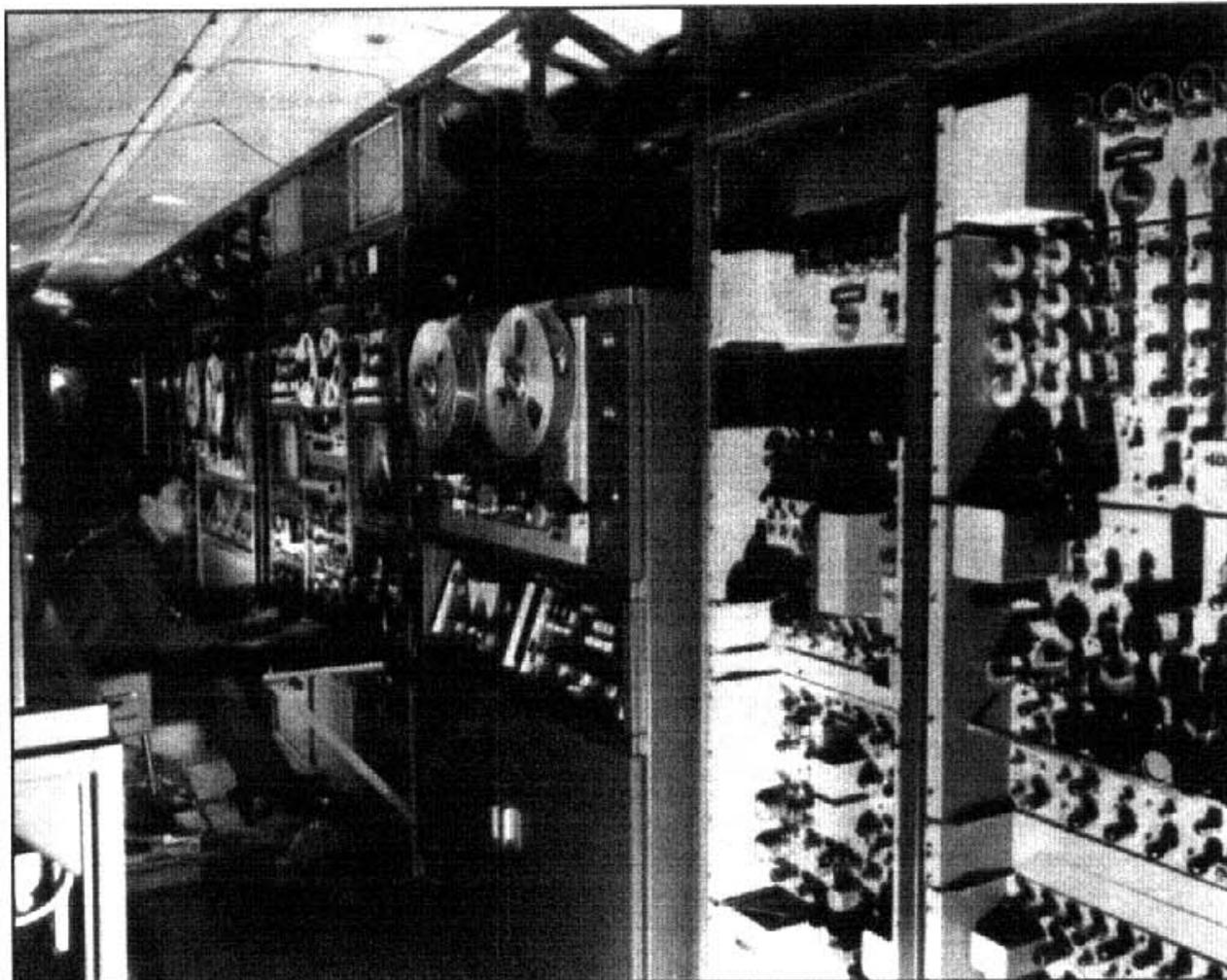
Television schools: *Continental Classroom* and learning by air.

Continental Classroom ran on the NBC network starting in 1958, one year after *Sunrise Semester* aired on CBS. *Continental Classroom* provided a chemistry course, a physics course, and a fundamental mathematics course for college students and others looking to receive college education by television, but abruptly discontinued broadcasting after funding from the Ford Foundation ran out (Carlisle, 1974). The purpose of the lessons were to bring high school teachers up to date on recent developments in physics, especially atomic and nuclear physics, thereby upgrading of high school science education (Derby, 1959, p. 651). At no time over the five-year span of *Continental Classroom* did more than 5,000 sign up for actual credit in a course (Carlisle, 1974). Even so, Lawrence McKune of Michigan State believed that first series was unique for its early foray into synchronous learning across hundreds of miles: “For the first-time in the history of education, 4,905 students... in all parts of the United States, studied precisely the same course with the same teacher at the same hour, using the same outlines and the same texts” (quoted in Carlisle, 1974, p. 50).

Another early example of televised education delivery was that of the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction (MPATI) founded by Purdue University in September 1961. Supported by primary funding from Westinghouse Corporation and the Ford Foundation, this university program utilized a DC- 6 aircraft equipped with state-of-the-art television transmission equipment (Sorensen, 2010, pp. 16-17). The classes were broadcast to classrooms in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The plane would lower a 24-foot antenna and broadcast the classes at the same time each day while the plane flew in a figure-eight pattern 23,000 feet above Indiana:

MPATI airborne television offered several advantages to school classrooms in the Midwest, where instructional resources at the time consisted mainly of chalkboards, textbooks, filmstrips, and 16mm films. Hundreds of thousands of students could be reached simultaneously through this single television transmission facility. Master teachers, selected via a national search and evaluation process, could reach the most geographically isolated schools as well as those located in urban areas. High need, specialized courses were offered to expand the curriculum offerings of schools. Foreign languages were offered to elementary school students; while out of the ordinary languages such as Russian were part of the secondary school MPATI curriculum. Advanced math and science courses were provided in addition to classes in social studies and the arts. So MPATI was a groundbreaking effort in equalizing education via distance education technology.

MPATI was also viewed as one vehicle to bring America's educational program up to the level of the Soviet Union's, whose math and science curriculum was credited (by some) for the USSR's early successes in the space race. One could make the argument that Russia's launching of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 was a main force in helping America to launch the MPATI DC-6 in 1961 (Gibson, 2001, p. 22).



The Flying Classroom was an elongated TV station with 6.5 tons of equipment.

*Figure 4: Image of the interior of “The Flying Classroom,” also known as MPATI
(Midwest Program on Airborne Television)*

*Source: Dave Gibson (2001), *The Way We Were... Education on the Fly**

The DC-6 was certainly an expensive means of broadcast, and experienced a relatively short lifespan. Unsurprisingly, some of the recordings that were broadcast were created by WCET and WTTW in Chicago, as well as by NYU. While the roster of broadcastings does not survive to my knowledge, it would be fascinating if *Sunrise Semester* was one of the programs delivered by airplane.

Advent of the Telecourse and the birth of the Internet.

Gradually audiotapes and lessons sent through the mail in correspondence courses fell out of favor, replaced by the late 1970s and 1980s with videotaped lectures, which became standard in university and professional courses, until they, too, were replaced by transmission via the Internet and compressed video (Valentine, 2002). Several changes in online education over the years have continued the debate regarding the characteristics of instructional quality of online education, as online education itself has moved from a relatively minor, alternative means of learning by correspondence to the center of life at most universities (Gaytan, 2007). In Britain, the Open University was founded in 1964 and accepted its first students in 1971, as science-based experimental home kits and late-night television broadcasts gradually gave way to telecourses as the basis of teaching instruction (*"About the OU," n.d.*).

In the United States, California emerged as a leader in distance education, funding a two-year task force to design the television course or "telecourse" of the future in 1970 (Freed, 1999). Authorized under the Title I community service provision of the U.S. Higher Education Act, the project involved all California community and state colleges along with the University of California, and, by 1972, the task force predicted many of the technological innovations that today taken for granted today, including development of the digital compact disk (Freed, 1999).

Birth of the Internet.

While the invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and computer set the stage for unprecedented integration of capabilities for communication, the Internet revolutionized communication (Leiner et al, 2009; Cerf et al, 2012). The Internet is as much a collection of communities as a collection of technologies, and its success is largely attributable to both satisfying basic community needs as well as utilizing the community in an effective way to push the

infrastructure forward (Leiner et al, 2009, p. 29). The birth of the Internet also contributed to widespread adoption of online learning in later decades that continues to the present day.

Early MOOCs.

Stephen Downes, senior research officer at Canada's National Research Council, and George Siemens, then working at the University of Manitoba and currently a professor in the School of Computing and Information Systems at Athabasca University, created the online course *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* in 2008. Widely regarded as the first true MOOC (Parr, 2013), this online course had over 2,200 initial participants in its first year. It has long been an ambition of mine to time the completion of this dissertation with the demise of MOOCs, and it seems extremely likely that MOOCs will soon be also relegated to a quaint sidebar in the development of a longer history of online learning within just a few more years. Notably, it is important to note that George Siemens himself proclaimed the "end of EdX" in 2015 (see <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/technology-and-learning/moocs-and-end-courses>). His argument is that the traditional course narrative will eventually be understood as an anachronism in an age of non-linear and chunked learning.

However, evidence suggests that an early online course existed in the mid-1990s as a proto-MOOC: University of Pennsylvania Professor James J. O'Donnell possibly taught the first MOOC-like open course in 1994 on the analysis of the texts of early Christian theologian St. Augustine of Hippo to several hundred people who learned about it through a listserv (Novak, 2012). Interestingly, despite the perception of heavy emphasis on the sciences and STEM-based learning in the MOOCs that emerged after 2008, O'Donnell's early MOOC-like course was squarely focused on the Humanities and was not vocational in focus or scope. The discovery of this proto-MOOC from 1994 points to a need to further research early efforts in distributed learning environments.

MOOCs as ‘Disruptive Technology’

Today, the term MOOC has become commonplace. Hundreds of universities have developed MOOCs, and the organizations that have established platforms to host them—such as Coursera, edX and Udacity in the United States and FutureLearn in the UK—have become increasingly well known (Parr, 2013). The platform is regularly cited as a disruptive technology in education (Calter, 2013), but this is subject to debate as a distinct division has emerged between those who believe that education is a quantifiable experience and “those of us who believe it is too deeply human for measurements to guide our direction” (Parr, 2013).

A report compiled by KnowledgeWorks called *2020 Forecast: Creating The Future of Learning* posited that, over the next decade, the most vibrant innovations in education are likely to take place outside traditional institutions, a claim that stretches back into the history of distance education. The report, dating from the same year as the first MOOC, asserted that many of our fundamental relationships—with ourselves; within our organizations; and with systems, societies, and economies—are being re-imagined and re-created in ways that will disrupt the status quo and challenge usual assumptions about learning and education (“2020 Forecast: Creating The Future of Learning,” 2008). Meanwhile, as claimed participation in MOOCs has continued to grow, with millions of students worldwide registered for classes in topics ranging from physics to history to aboriginal worldviews (Jacobs, 2012), the time has come to assess just how new the claims for MOOCs really are. But many scholars believe that quality is undermined when business becomes the prevailing model of distance programs (Gaytan, 2007).

Per Christensen first coined the phrase ‘disruptive technologies’ in 1997 in his groundbreaking book *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*. He showed that almost all the organizations that have “died” or had been displaced from their

industries because of a new paradigm of customer offerings could see the disruption coming. Many did not act until it was too late: companies assessed the new approaches or technologies and framed them as either deficient or as an unlikely threat—much to the managers’ regret and the organizations’ demise (Christensen, 1997). In the same vein, MOOCs have been hailed as disruptive technology in education, while some have begun to wonder if the MOOC revolution was truly as disruptive as previously imagined (Kolowich, 2013). Jonathan Haber, in his Degree of Freedom project, in which he perused the equivalent of a full-time Bachelor’s degree using MOOCs, uses Gardner’s Hype Cycle to suggest that MOOCs have not yet matured into their full potential because they have not yet reached maturity as an innovation (Haber, 2014, p. 9). The data currently collected by MOOC providers and some of its implications for future online learning is explored in depth in Chapter Six, as we have only just begun to see its impact. Many also recognize that old-fashioned political reform along with changes in policies and regulations that put more market pressure on the higher education industry to push out underperforming institutions are critical for change, as Silicon Valley innovation cannot be the sole source of innovation in education (“The End of the MOOC Moment? Not So Fast,” September 22, 2015).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The research methodologies employed for this dissertation were **historical methods** and **discourse analysis** to analyze primary and archival documents pertaining to *Sunrise Semester*. Materials that were pertinent to my study are available for public access at the NYU Archives. Research and analysis were conducted on-site at the archives between fall 2013 through spring 2016. This study fills a gap in the literature on distance learning that has overlooked the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* as a prototypical MOOC and outlines how the show sets a precedent for longer historical analysis of experimental education for adults in the present era. In this chapter, I outline primary and secondary sources and explicate how each was used to build an understanding of *Sunrise Semester* as a cultural phenomenon. I then present five interwoven theoretical frameworks developed for each of the lines of inquiry mentioned in the Introduction as the critical underpinnings for my research: contextualization, historication, excavation, feminization, and motivation.

Appropriateness of Research Design:

The Archives of *Sunrise Semester* Using Historical Methodology

Historical analysis methodology is commonly used in social research as an introductory strategy for “establishing a context or background against which a substantive contemporary study may be set” (Jupp, 2006, p. 136). One goal in comparing and contrasting data sets from early educational television starting in the 1950s and MOOCs today is to summarize the “types” of subject areas addressed in both learning environments to surface new ideas for innovation in education. By looking at the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* as a learning opportunity that was unique to the conditions of domestic life in the post-World War II era, particularly for women, I am

able to examine the show's impact in order to understand some of the cultural assumptions made about distance education in the past, and then unpack how past assumptions about distance education influence the present and future.

Analytical challenges abound in the study of television, and not only because the genre was once considered unserious of study. Although the first commercial station began broadcasting under a regular schedule in 1939, a wartime freeze on commercial broadcasting and postwar equipment shortages halted large-scale introduction of television sets in the home until 1948 (Luke, 1990, p. 61). The maturity of television between the years 1948 through 1951 resulted in a dramatic increase of published research on the subject of television and younger audiences during the 1950s, because "children were seen as a special group in relation to the new medium that would be profoundly influenced in their socialization, value and attitude formation" (Luke, 1990, p. 62), but little to no historical studies existed on adults and learning from the same era. By 1951, television was considered to be established in the American household and "ceased to be a relevant research question" by the year 1954 (Luke, 1990, p. 63).

Historical methodology seeks to make sense of the past through the disciplined and systematic analysis of the "traces" it leaves behind, ranging from the analysis of everyday ephemera, artifacts and visual images (Jupp, 2006, p. 135) to the collection of evidence from primary sources, secondary sources, observation and recollection (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). This methodology, together with methods appropriate for study in a library archive, has been used to examine the traces left behind from *Sunrise Semester*. History has the power to "challenge dominant assumptions because it records, if in much less detail, the activities of the overlooked and the marginalized as well as elites," as cited by Jupp (2006). Historical analysis has proved particularly valuable to those researching "gender, 'race' and other oppressed groups, and for those

interested in developing alternative models of social change” (Jupp, 2006, p. 135), which is why looking for specific evidence of women’s lived experiences of learning throughout archival documents like fan mail was critical for this study.

Historical Analysis of Moving Image Artifacts

For those seeking to build a stronger conception of historical analysis in television and video, this type of methodology is viewed as “a pervasive and necessary technique in its own right, without which no account of phenomena in the present may be properly understood” (Jupp, 2006, p. 137). In this more substantial form, historical analysis is often combined with other methods to engage social research questions. For a comparative historical analysis study, one early *Sunrise Semester* study conducted on the 1957 cohort by Charles Wentworth, professor in New York University’s Sociology Department, is used to shed light on a body of text collected from fan mail that was scattered throughout the archive, allowing for new interpretations of evidence about the impact of the show as it was viewed in its own time. Studying a show that was once seen on broadcast television but that can no longer be viewed in any of its original entirety today through archival materials presents its own unique set of challenges, and not just because the researcher is limited to studying only what still exists and was preserved. The study of television and film requires the historian to recognize “that the event under study is not a one-dimensional ‘thing’ but the point of convergence for various lines of historical force” (Allen & Gomery, 1993, p. 17).

Moving image documents are not “materials” in the same sense as the manuscripts and documents that historians are more used to working with (O’Connor, 1990), because the conditions of viewing often significantly influence the ways that they communicate. Moreover, media such as television and film utilize a visual language that appeals to the viewer’s unconscious psychological and/or emotional response, as well as to the intellect. Wherever possible, analysis of full episodes of

Running Head: FROM SUNRISE SEMESTER TO PRESENT-DAY MOOCS

Sunrise Semester were used in this study, but quality recording of full episodes from the show were seldom found, and the research often focuses on episodes that never existed in the NYU archives in the first place. The lack of accessible episodes in the archive prompted the decision to approach the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* through its fan letters, especially as some of the letters were detailed in their response to specific episodes.

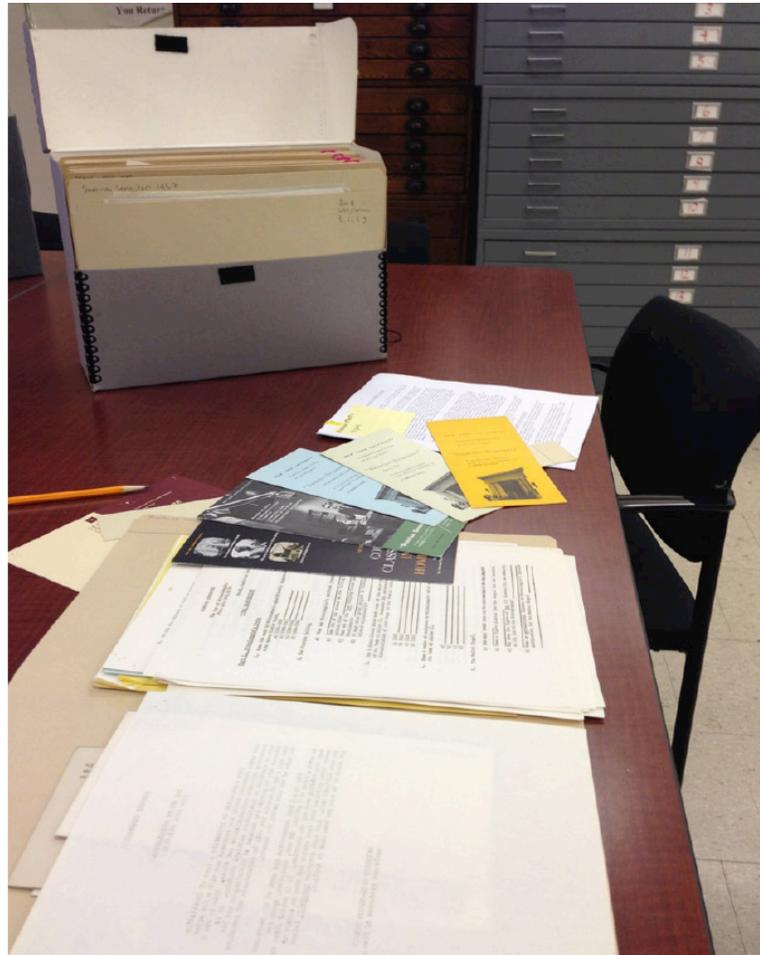


Figure 5: NYU Washington Square Campus *Sunrise Semester* archives, 2014. Photo by author.

O'Connor (1990) advocates two stages of historical analysis to examine a moving image document that could be applied to a television show such as *Sunrise Semester*. Stage one involves gathering information on the content, production and reception of a moving image document. While certain data is evident at first viewing, accessing deeper aspects of the document for historical

analysis requires “a close study of the content of the film itself, such as considering how the images on the screen and the soundtrack are brought together to convey meaning” (O’Connor, 1990, p. 6). Stage two involves the use of O’Connor’s four frameworks for historical inquiry. General analysis of each document I found in the archive—including close viewing as well as research around the social, cultural, political, and institutional background of the production and the conditions under which the show was made—allowed me to glean as much information as possible from the original or primary source, helping, me to understand the ways in which *Sunrise Semester* was understood by its original audiences.

The second stage is to gather as much data and information from stage one to endow the documents with meaning in relation to one type or another of historical inquiry. O’Connor proposes four frameworks of historical inquiry that are meant to address different types of historical investigation, and can be used in any combination (O’Connor, 1990, p. 7-19). The first, Framework 1: The Moving Image as Representation of History, is concerned with secondary documents that provide deeper awareness of historical issues, while O’Connor’s other three frameworks pertain to the use of primary sources (p. 9). In Framework 2: The Moving Image as Evidence for Social and Cultural History, films and television provide evidence for social and cultural values (p. 7), which was particularly applicable to *Sunrise Semester*, especially as I sought to contextualize the development of the show as educational television. Framework 3: Actuality Footage as Evidence for Historical Fact requires special focus on the language and editing of images and Framework 4: The History of Moving Image as Industry and Art Form argues for the critical use of film theory and scholarship (p. 8).

The use of O’Connor’s stage one was key after I found one episode of *Sunrise Semester* online, while stage two was critical before I began to approach the *Sunrise Semester* archives at

NYU. Taken together, both of these stages facilitated the formation of a coherent methodology to this study of *Sunrise Semester* while allowing enough flexibility for the use of grounded theory after I began perusing the archive. While the use of stage one of O'Connor's process illuminated important aspects of careful examination of individual documents when first undertaking this study, it was helpful to limit my use of only one framework when examining the content, production and reception of *Sunrise Semester* in its earliest years. When I moved to the second stage of analysis, specifically under Framework 2: The Moving Image as Evidence for Social and Cultural History, I was able to gain new insights about the learner perspective that was pivotal to my understanding of the show's impact, exposing social and cultural values of the era.

Archival Research in Film and Television

Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery (1993:2001) warned extensively about the limitations of a rift between formalists drawn to research television and film specifically to outline its differences from other types of media and traditional historians that are prone to use the artifact of film for evidentiary purposes. Despite the fact that there has been nearly one hundred and thirty years of cinema and eighty years of television history, the authors outline how there has been very little theory developed until the mid-1990s in how to study film and television, and urge both formalists and historians alike to re-consider how research is conducted in the dawn of the new century:

Within film and television studies, there is a central cleavage between formalists who ponder philosophical questions about what distinguishes cinema and television from other media in terms of generating meaning, and historians who think of film and television as evidence. Film studies has its historians but they long have been in the minority. I argue that it is time to recognize that film and television historians are not only methodologically kin

to traditional historians, but media historians can contribute to history, not just television and film history (Gomery, 2001, para. 2).

Allen and Gomery (1993) optimistically recognize some of the unique opportunities afforded by the archival study of film and television as the field of media studies enters into a *golden age* of its own, urging historians to “think about film and TV as both sources and as institutions whose histories need to be written in the context of social, cultural, economic, and political history more generally” (Allern & Gonery, 1993, p. 38). They cite the example of television news—both network and local—that has long offered “the dominant means of visually portraying war, elections, and scandals.” As this form of communication never remained static in time, it represents a history “that needs to be written” (Gomery, 2001, para. 3).

Archival Access: The New York University Archive

The NYU Archives are located at Bobst Library on the campus of Washington Square. The archives are open for use without restrictions, but permission to photograph or copy archival materials needs to be obtained in writing from the head librarian. The materials must then be combed through by an archivist to make sure there is no identifying student records or restricted files that contained budgets or other confidential information. It is not possible to photograph documents with a camera phone, although I was granted permission and was allowed to take “process photos” of files laid out on the table in the library when I was examining the archive in 2013 for the purposes of process documentation for this dissertation. Scanning documents was prohibitively costly and sometimes took a few weeks. When I returned to the archive in 2015, I found that there had been great advances in photography permission and also that the cost of scanning pages had been reduced to ten cents a page, which allowed me to be able to access files after my research time in the physical archive had ended. The files that could not be photographed

well for this research were primarily the fan letters themselves, as simple photography rendered the text illegible, especially as many of the inks had faded over time.

Archival data.

The *Sunrise Semester* archive consists of twenty-five linear feet of boxed material that includes primarily audio recordings of selected courses dating between the years 1955 and 1982. The archive documents are housed in acid-free boxes and the documents are arranged by folders that are identified by numbers and a brief, general description of the contents in each folder. There are also two related study collections that pertain to the *Sunrise Semester* archive in the NYU Archives: RG 7.3.1, and Series I and II for the *Office of Radio and Television Records*. The consultation and use of RG 7.3.1, Series I and II for the *Office of Radio and Television Records* associated with *Sunrise Semester* held the highest amount of directly accessible paper documents pertaining to the creation, production and evolution of the show. The study guide for the *Sunrise Semester* collection, roughly 149 pages in all, constitutes a summary of the materials contained in the archive, including a brief, two-page history of the *Sunrise Semester* program written by Van Wart (2011) that discusses subsequent attempts for the show's revitalization in the early 1980s, followed by a listing of all of the shows that exist as an audio recording on reel-to-reel tape. The list of audio files make up 140 of the 149 pages for the study guide, indicating that the bulk of the collection exists on reel-to-reel tape. I have included a complete listing of all recordings, news articles and other cultural ephemera pertaining to *Sunrise Semester* in Appendix E.

There were several key documents that led to the formation of the five lines of inquiry outlined in the Introduction, which are described in depth in this chapter in the pages ahead as well as key theories that helped develop each of the five themes into fully-fledged theoretical frameworks. These documents included a list of available courses that were offered on *Sunrise*

Semester between the years 1957 and 1982; a folder of roughly seventy-four original letters written to *Sunrise Semester* professors that documented learner perspectives and personal stories as shared in fan mail and fan correspondence between 1971 and 1975; an undated compilation of de-identified fan letters organized by state presumably for press or grant-writing purposes; student feedback (sometimes solicited by professors who taught on *Sunrise Semester*) between the years 1958 and 1959; and various documents of general correspondence, meeting notes, and other non-circulated university papers highlighting historical tension between university officials and television executives in sustaining the endeavor of *Sunrise Semester*.

Fan letters.

In an archive, no detail can be too small nor unworthy of study. Sometimes archival documents that did not seem pertinent to my study were revealed to be extremely important after I attained a greater understanding of the full archive and available records. Multiple trips to the same research files over many years have yielded the greatest amount of useful data in my search for information about *Sunrise Semester*. Sometimes reviewing the same materials after reading different texts and histories resulted in new perspectives and insight not gained previously in trips to the same archive. This caused me to return to the archive for three months between November 2015 and January 2016 to look at every item afresh, and pour over every detail down to the last postmark of every document related to my subject of study. This close examination was conducted even after prolonged, multi-month studies conducted in both 2013 and 2014. My return to the archives was largely motivated on a documented fact that Dr. Floyd Zulli received over one hundred letters a day during the earliest broadcasts of *Sunrise Semester* in 1957 and 1958, but did not hold onto them, and so this fact caused me to start to look for more fan mail letters that still existed in the archive. I found several de-identified and edited or truncated compilations based on a

“random sampling” through the show’s run, presumably often compiled for trustees, news journalists or potential funders. I trusted only my gut that there could be original letters and that the letters held the key in unlocking deeper meaning and longer-term impact of the show, and was rewarded by their discovery in late December 2015. I have included the full excerpts that were used for coding under Appendix A, the full excerpts that were used in the pilot study in Appendix B, and a random sampling of the full letters that were used for the full study of fan mail mailed to Dr. Philip Mayerson in Appendix C.

Original course catalogs.

I had previously assumed that no course catalogs existed for the complete offerings between 1957 and 1982, and, in a sense, this is true. There was a complete listing that includes all of the courses that ran from 1957 through 1974 included in the archive, and I was able to use this list to build a complete course roster for *Sunrise Semester*. My attempts to reconstruct full course listings to build a greater understanding of a focus to offer Humanities courses versus Science courses to fulfill the core standard of a Liberal Arts education are included in Chapter 4. The full course roster is included in Appendix D.

Original recordings.

There were other types of primary sources as suggested by Schutt (2009) that I was able to screen, including two full thirty-minute episodes of *Sunrise Semester* at The Paley Center (formerly The Museum of Television and Radio), located in midtown Manhattan. The two episodes were from Dr. Neil Postman’s 1976 course called “Communication: The Invisible Environment.” This course was designed for teachers who were concerned with increasing their students’ awareness of how they were being transformed by “media-created environments,” and outlined a strategy to use

the classroom as a “consciousness-raising environment” (*Lakeland Ledger*, 1976). The course description was one of the few that were accessible online, and outlined several technologies and areas of study relating to media ecology:

This course will point out how... our lives are being changed by new media and technology: television, computers, transistors, movies, digital clocks, LP records etc. And the natural environment, it will be shown, recedes in the face of ‘mediated’ environments which increasingly govern our ways of seeing, knowing and valuing - and yet we are only minimally aware of the nature of our transactions with these new forms of information and communication. What will be proposed in the course is that the classroom be used as a ‘consciousness-raising environment.’ (*Sunrise Semester* brochure, 1976).

It was one of the only fully preserved episodes I could locate beyond a series of *Sunrise Semester* uploads on YouTube that could not be verified. As of January 2015, I was able to access a complete set of digitized audio files from this same course taught by Postman. However, since, Postman references a large amount of visual material that presumably would have been screened while he lectured on television and none of the visual material was preserved with the audio recording, an analysis of this course was not possible. A complete list of available videos accessible online as of March 2016 are included in Appendix E.

Student rosters.

Creating a student roster was more problematic, as NYU protected the names of any enrolled students under FERPA, even though it was difficult to prove that students that were writing in were enrolled, and even though this piece of legislation pre-dated the courses under study for this

research. Instead of a student roster, I decided to create three vignettes based on the fan mail. In one instance, a lengthy thank you letter from a “Mrs. Alba See” received on March 21, 1967 and preserved in the archive prompted me to research her name and others to see if they were still alive and where they live now, which, in turn, led me to track the number of students that went on to receive degrees later in life. The first letter from Mrs. See was a discovery that nearly caused me to tear up in the archive, because I was able to locate her obituary that stated she was born in 1913 and died in 2011, having “received her degree from NYU at the age of seventy-one,” according to her obituary. This discovery caused me to begin to track multiple addresses from the fan letters to see if I could build a micro-database of some of the student names that had otherwise been erased and de-identified in the NYU Archive. The fact that the names of the non-matriculated students have not been tracked through other means has greatly limited this research. The names cannot be made public because NYU does not reserve the rights of control for any materials mailed directly to the University. The three vignettes are included in Chapter Four.

Sunrise Semester Newsletters.

One late but exciting discovery made in the archives was of a series of *Sunrise Semester* newsletters dated between spring 1960 and spring 1964. The existing copies of the newsletter that have been preserved in the archive include Harold Klein’s name as the editor. Articles for the paper were often written by *Sunrise Semester* professors, and often highlighted some of the fan mail letters under a column called “From the Mailbag.” The newsletter also mentioned if the television show had been featured in more widely circulated periodicals such as *The New York Times*.. The column “New Facts About Old Friends” provided readers with updates about previous *Sunrise* professors, just as a college campus newsletter might report. Room announcements for final examinations and

receptions after the course conclusions for both students and *Sunrise Semester* professors were often announced through the newsletter, too.

Secondary Sources

In addition to primary sources, secondary sources relating to *Sunrise Semester*, such as news articles, TV guide listings, cartoons, and personal accounts and recollections of the original broadcast, were located and used to build a greater understanding of the cultural context surrounding the show. As Thedca Skocpol (1984) has remarked, the use of secondary materials is not systematized, and “comparative historical sociologists have not so far worked out clear, consensual rules and procedures for the valid use of secondary sources as evidence” (Skocpol, 1984, p. 382). As such, secondary sources have limitations and need to be used with caution. Very few secondary sources exist in present day searches for news articles about *Sunrise Semester*, yet original news clippings that were preserved in the archives along with information with the publisher or source information were later located on microfiche at the New York Public Library.

News articles.

Although several articles point to hundreds of articles on *Sunrise Semester*, few of these exist in contemporary indexes or journals that can be easily located today. Many such articles were published in local papers that did not have wide circulation or digitized databases that were accessible at the time of this research. Newspaper clippings that were preserved in the archive provided the clearest examples of evidence for the show’s reception in the time of its original broadcast. As few if any such articles showed up in contemporary searches online, I have included a listing of the articles I located during my research in Appendix E and have added them to a

publically accessible database on Zotero to be accessible for future scholars interested in *Sunrise Semester*.

Personal accounts and recollections.

While few devotees from the earliest days of *Sunrise Semester*'s original broadcast are alive today, I was able to locate several personal accounts of early memories from the show on YouTube and also on other bespoke websites dedicated to the fans of early television. During the collection phase of the research, I built hypothetical student and professor rosters for *Sunrise Semester*, since having some idea of the students and their narratives proved instrumental to picture in my mind who these students actually were, especially in the 1950s where so few records actually existed. As I do not have permission to publish real names in this dissertation, their names have been changed but their stories of personal learning journeys have not. All of these documents that I used as an aid to map my understanding of Sunrise Semester are included in the Appendix.

I also missed my window to speak with actual learners from the first few broadcast years of *Sunrise Semester* by just five or ten years. If many of the learners were in their twenties or thirties in 1957, they were in their mid-nineties by the year 2013, which was the year I started this research. It was immeasurably helpful to be able to research their names online or through student records held at NYU. If they were deceased, I attempted to locate their obituaries online whenever possible. If they were women, I also scoured their obituaries for their dates of marriage and whether they would have had children that had already "left the nest." Many of the women enrolled in *Sunrise Semester* did have children that would have been likely to have left the home to start families of their own, even though this was impossible to prove.

Cartoons and parodies.

I also collected some cultural ephemera such as YouTube videos and cartoon dailies from the era of *Sunrise Semester*, discussed at length in Chapter Four, under the subheading “Cartoons and Parodies.” I was able to locate four different cartoons that underscored my belief that *Sunrise Semester* was a phenomenon that permeated the “air” at the time of its broadcast, even if few pieces of evidence of the show’s popularity exist today. Both cartoons and parodies were included in my study of *Sunrise Semester* as secondary sources, because both elements used humor to point to the show’s cultural relevance and impact during the time of its original broadcast.

The four cartoons were located during the research phase of the dissertation related directly to the *Sunrise Semester* show. Three of the cartoons have captions and text that relate directly to the title of the show. Two of the cartoons were credited to *The New Yorker* artists and were printed in two different issues of the magazine. The first was drawn by Frank Modell and was printed on October 12, 1957, roughly one month after the show’s debut on CBS. The second was drawn by Mischa Richter and was printed in *The New Yorker* on December 2, 1972. The third cartoon I located was included in the series “Telly Laffs” and was included in the archive without a date or a source attribution, but likely was printed in a local New York newspaper. The last cartoon I found in the archive had no date, no caption, and no attribution, other than a clipped logo of a *TV Guide* that was glued and attached to the same page as the image. It likely was also drawn by Mischa Richter, although the signatures are not alike. All four of the cartoons are reproduced, described and interpreted at length in the following chapter on findings about *Sunrise Semester*.

There were also several accounts of roughly twenty short *Sunrise Semester* parodies currently available online and viewable on YouTube that were not included in the NYU archives. They were created by a Canadian-based sketch comedy offshoot show created in the late-1970s

called Second City Television (SCTV). The show ran from 1976 until 1984, and the parodies of *Sunrise Semester* mimic the opening sequence of the original show. The SCTV versions of *Sunrise Semester* include instructional topics like how to talk like a “real” New Yorker, as well as various how-to lectures on cooking, gardening, do-it-yourself dentistry and other esoteric and sometimes sarcastically-delivered lessons, often by impersonators imitating famous actors from roughly the same era. One of these episodes is described in Chapter 4, along with a description of some of their contrasting aspects to *Sunrise Semester*’s delivery and tone that underscore the humor.

Research Methods

As this is a study of distance learning conducted across two time periods, I used historical-comparative research methods as suggested by Kreuger and Neuman (2006) and Schutt (2012). There are four major methods that researchers use to collect historical data. These are archival data, secondary sources, publically-available running records, and recollections (Schutt, 2012). As discussed by Schutt (2012), there are four distinct stages used to evaluate materials gathered as evidence to conduct systematic qualitative comparative studies using historical methods. The first step is to develop the premise of the argument and to gather any surrounding events, concepts or theories that may explain the phenomena. The next stage is to then choose the cases, including the region and location of the phenomena in which they occurred. The third stage is to use what Skocpol (1984) terms “interpretive historical sociology” to examine similarities and differences across time.

The researcher’s point of view.

As cited by Krueger and Neumann (2006), in any historical-comparative and field research methodology, the researcher’s point of view is an unavoidable part of the study, as so much of the process of data collection involves interpretation which necessarily introduces “the interpreter’s

location in time, place and worldview” (p. 424). Just as the researcher’s reading of historical or comparative evidence of the past is influenced by his or her own perspectives, it is impossible to ignore the fact that she is drawn to specific elements or aspects of an archive that is biased in focus or scope. Another challenge lies in the fact that historical and archival research requires the examination of a diverse array of data, which is necessary to gain an “empathic understanding of events and people” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 424), but can lead to a lack of focus for the area of study at hand.

Discourse Analysis

Data that informs this study also includes fan mail of roughly 154 letters that currently exist in analog (paper) format within the NYU archive, as well as extensive correspondence between producers at CBS, NYU, trustees, board officials, funders and other key individuals who were invested in the program’s success. Funding opportunities, including grant proposals and other documentation pertinent to the precarious nature of such experiments in learning in the first place, were used to shed light on how *Sunrise Semester* came to be, how it became a success for twenty-five years, and why it eventually was cut from the CBS roster in a surprise decision in spring of 1982.

Theoretical Framework

The development of a theoretical framework that examines the discourse of education through the lenses of power, gender and television was developed using the work of Michel Foucault (1984) and James Paul Gee (2010), starting with an examination of radio and advertising discourse and ending with the present era. As my aim was to understand how these findings can be useful in contemporary studies of present-day MOOCs and other systems of learning online, it was helpful to develop these models after my study of the fan mail that I had gathered for Corpus A and Corpus B,

and to use them before embarking on my study of Corpus C. In this way, I was able to get closer to my goal of “seeing through the eyes of those being studied” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 423).

Grounded theory.

By using grounded theory to guide my research, I gave myself permission as the researcher to examine the data without beginning with a fixed hypothesis. I was able to develop and modify my lines of inquiry and applied theory through a dialogue with the evidence (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 425). I was then able to be open to new possibilities of translation of the evidence I had collected over a length of time that I had allocated for data collection.

The Intersection of Power, Gender and Television in Education.

Social theories since World War II have been important grounds on which educational debates, policies, and scholarship have focused. Brennan and Popkewitz (1997) use Foucault’s methodologies for the study of power to re-examine and re-envision the foundations of critical traditions in education that were inherited from nineteenth century European forbearers (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997, p. 287). Using his wide-ranging studies of knowledge, madness, prisons, sexuality and government, they recognized the means in which “Foucault’s historical philosophy interrogated the conditions under which modern societies operate,” as well as how his notion of the subject “constituted in power relations forms an important contribution to recent social theory, providing methodological and substantive challenges to the social sciences” (p. 287). The politics of “identity,” as witnessed in the theoretical and historical study of the phenomenon of *Sunrise Semester* and the surrounding socio-political framework of gender and domestic space impacted by the introduction of television into the home, parallels an interest laid forth by Brennan and

Popkewitz as they chart a “sea-migration of critical traditions of social science since the World War II period” (p. 288).

The authors’ intent is not to suggest a single movement of ideas from continental Europe, but to recognize a certain globalization of ideas that unified Foucault’s philosophy within a larger intellectual tradition that organizes problems and methods of study. Their use of the word “critical” places the work of Foucault in a field concerned with issues of power and domination in traditional forms of schooling, whereas I was interested in the intersection of power and domination in non-traditional forms of schooling, such as educational television. On one level, it should be argued that their use of the word “critical” also refers to a certain mode of questioning the ways in which power works through the discursive practices and performances of schooling (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997, p. 288). In the case of *Sunrise Semester* and the “ambitious housewives” that sought ways to pursue their education against the backdrop of disempowering circumstances and isolating domestic spaces, particularly in post-World War II suburban environments, I saw the intersection of power, gender and television as playing a critical role in my understanding of that same ambition.

Popkewitz and Brennan acknowledge that their interest is in Foucault’s construct of “knowledge as a social practice that generates action and participation” (p. 289). If the housewives of *Sunrise Semester* were seeking what might be considered a Liberal Arts education through the medium of television, I was looking for answers to how and why they were pursuing this kind of education using such unorthodox means, and in what ways their quest for knowledge could be also traced to power in a proto-feminist way. Popkewitz and Brennan argue that “we think of critical educational research as a social room in which different groups of people compete to be noticed” (p. 289), and I could not help but think about the ways in which social norms played out in domestic space. The power of modernity,” or as one “embodies changes in the construction of power in

modernity” (p. 289) in *Sunrise Semester* functions as a heterotopia that is located both in the home and on the TV broadcast network is also a hybrid site, both physical and televisual, “of which intellectual work is an important part” (p. 290). The authors also argue “that since the nineteenth century there has been a reestablishment of control over social practices as older boundaries of social trust and security were eroded through processes of modernization” (p. 292). And yet in the case of *Sunrise Semester*, we see new trust values placed in the medium of television, presumably backed by trust in the name “New York University” as a counterbalance to the perhaps entertainment-only association of CBS as a network (though this can only be inferred from letters mailed to *Sunrise Semester* professors saying that the show ran counter to other “types” of programming on television at the time). It was clear from the fan mail that there was already disillusionment with the lack of television programming as early as 1957. It is also possible that *Sunrise Semester* altered the ways in which an audience, and especially a gendered audience, formed a relationship with television in the home. Watching television to learn became transactional, rather than a passive viewing experience for pure entertainment. *Sunrise Semester* taught housewives to contribute to conversation about books, literature, ancient texts, and current affairs. To borrow a phrase from Bourdieu, access and devotion to the show helped housewives gain “cultural capital” at home, amongst their friends, and in their marriages.

Methods

Gathering the Evidence

My first methodological step when gathering the evidence was to spend several weeks combing through the subject files and the image files on *Sunrise Semester* located at the NYU Bobst Library. I did this step before turning towards the archive materials to identify materials that could be used to construct a history of *Sunrise Semester*. Working in an archive is challenging in

that some decisions to work at length with certain text always come at the risk of ignoring others, as noted by scholars such as Treanor (2005). This challenge was doubled by my inability to access the archive in short bursts of roughly three months per year over three years, due to personal restraints of time that could be allocated for such in-depth study. I returned to the subject files many times over during the research phase, as it was helpful to see some of the more accessible materials on *Sunrise Semester* while waiting for the arrival of other types of materials that were located off-site.

Little of the material is organized chronologically, except chronologically by individual boxes, and sometimes folders were misplaced or pulled due to containing “restricted” or classified information according to NYU policy, such as budgets. As much of the material did not reside on-site at NYU, a lag of several days of waiting time between requests in order to gain access to specific materials often did not result in the same real-time ability to draw connections between materials across parts of the archive. The policy of accessing “one box at a time, one folder at a time” that is a normative policy for archival research collections also hindered comparisons between documents across the archive.

Organizing the Evidence

For the fan mail analysis, I first divided the extracted text that I collected during the data collection phase into three groupings, and then made decisions about how to analyze each group of text based on how the letters had survived in the archive (see Table 1). If the letters were only collated for a press release and I could not identify the course that the writer had been following nor the year in which the letter had been written, I placed them in Group A. If I only had an excerpt of a letter that had been de-identified and excerpted, but I was still able to confirm the course and the year of *Sunrise Semester* that the letter writer had been following or writing about based on materials in the archives, I put it in Group B. Often these were found in the archive collated with

other similar letters and typed onto a single sheet of paper with the header, “Audience Feedback” with the date. If I located the full letter in its original format, meaning the full and original handwritten or typed letter had been placed directly in the archive with no attempts to excerpt or de-identify it, I added it to a list along with measurements of the margins, notation of the paper quality, the ink or typeface used, and included it in Group C. These types of letters were usually preserved in the archives alongside with their original envelopes with a date stamp of its receipt. I was able to locate seventy-five instances of this kind of letters in a single folder (RG 19, Box 25, Folder 19, NYU Archives).

Table 1.

Three Types of ‘Sunrise Semester’ Fan Mail Available in the NYU Archive

<u>Fan Mail Text</u>	<u>“Group A”</u>	<u>“Group B”</u>	<u>“Group C”</u>
<u>Source:</u>	Fan mail excerpted and collated for press releases or included in public documents.	Text excerpted in full and organized by course or by date; unpublished.	Full-length, original letters preserved in the archive; unpublished.
<u>Course or Date:</u>	No date and no course information.	Includes date or course information.	Includes date stamp and course information.
<u>Presence of personal identifiable information (PII):</u>	Does not include PII.	Does not include PII.	Includes PII.

After dividing the letters into three groups, I assessed which groups were the most complete and therefore best to be used as evidence, and organized them into three corpuses (see Table 2). I also sought to construct my own documents to organize disparate parts of the archive, including a complete course roster, a hypothetical student roster of names of students that participated in the program, and copious notes pertaining to each box and each folder so that the source could be identified and properly cited at a later date.

Table 2.

Three Corpora of Sunrise Semester Fan Mail Used For Analysis

<u>Group Name:</u>	<u>“Corpus A”</u>	<u>“Corpus B”</u>	<u>“Corpus C”</u>
<u>Source:</u>	Ten (ten) fan mail text excerpted and collated for press releases or included in other public documents.	Fifty-three (53) text excerpts in full and organized by course or by date; unpublished.	Twenty (20) full, original letters preserved in the archive; unpublished.
<u>Course or Date:</u>	No date and no course information.	Includes date or course information.	Limited to two Fall 1971 courses: “Classics: Literature and Art of Greece and Rome” or “Studies in Style”
<u>Presence of personal, identifiable information (PII):</u>	Does not include PII.	Includes letter writer’s state or country, and occasionally job or occupation.	Includes PII, including name, address, marriage status, and occupation.

Evaluating Quality of Evidence

I then conducted a macro-level analysis of distance education systems from the 1750s to the present. This helped me to build a historical context for the study of *Sunrise Semester* within a longer narrative of experimental, technological and an examination of meso-level management, organization and technology in distance learning environments that were embraced by women or female audiences to be included within the full literature review. It was clear that few if any stories of women that led or organized distance learning programs prior to World War I survived in the

literature on distance learning, but the discovery of a few original texts such as the example of Anna Eliot Tricknor (1897) leads me to believe that there are others.

The historical analysis was followed by a micro-level examination of individual learner stories of three *Sunrise Semester* students that I had found in the archives. I used these three vignettes to test my hypothesis that *Sunrise Semester* offered a learning experience that was unique to the post-World War II era but offered important lessons about motivation still relevant for today. By conducting the literature review first, I was then able to adequately recognize teaching and learning styles, technological advancements in television production, and eventually develop a theory of learner characteristics surrounding motivation during the twenty-five year run of *Sunrise Semester* on CBS.

To conduct the discourse analysis of original letters found in the archive, I used James Paul Gee's *Discourse Analysis Toolkit* (2010) to guide my analysis of a series of themes contained in fan mail letters mailed to *Sunrise Semester* professors between the years 1957 and 1971 that I had divided into three corpuses for study and analysis (see Table 1 through 3). I used the software package Dedoose (www.dedoose.com) to develop, track and annotate the text.

Fan Mail Analysis

It was crucial to use Corpus A to test the existence of themes in the fan mail as a pilot study, and then identify four emergent themes in the fan mail letters after examining Corpus B. The four themes consist of the following: 1) Pre-dawn Commitment, 2) Expressions of Gratitude 3) The Shapes of Learning and 4) Anxiety About the Show's End. There were also themes that did not repeat through more than a handful of letters, such as specific stories about how the letter-writer planned to make a radical new career choice after watching the show. One of the most elusive yet fascinating themes of all, The Shapes of Learning, involved the use of descriptive language to try

and place the unique experience of learning over television into words. Chapter Five describes all of the themes used to code the fan mail letters.

Case studies.

By following three learner journeys belonging to Mrs. Cora Gay Carr, “Mrs. Alba See” and “Mrs. Eleanor Rose” (not their real names), it was hard to ignore that some of the devotees of the show had later pursued graduate degrees or even had later taught at NYU, as in the case of Mrs. Cora Gay Carr. “Mrs. Alba See” and “Mrs. Eleanor Rose” also sought higher-level degrees later in life, and quite possibly had been inspired by their experiences with *Sunrise Semester* to pursue additional degrees. These three learner journeys are included at length in Chapter Five.

Pilot study.

The use of a pilot study in nonreactive research is not an established practice in historical or archival study; however, as so little existing literature on *Sunrise Semester* was available to me at the time of study, I believed it was important to engage in a test case two months before digitizing and analyzing the rest of the fan mail letters. I first used “Corpus A” in a pilot study to test whether the letters were long enough to use for analysis and to identify key themes (see Table 2). In order to test whether my hunch that the content of the letters contained crucial insights into at-home learners during the *Sunrise Semester* broadcast run, it was preferable to perform the pilot study with a corpus of already de-identified letters that were collated for press purposes. I conducted this pilot study before turning to longer excerpts that were collected and de-identified and then labeled with the state or country of the letter writer, because I was unsure if I would locate full letters until I had perused the entire records on file in the archive.

After identifying themes in the pilot study, I then used these methods on fifty-three excerpts of letters that were all mailed between 1966 and 1967 to two professors during two different classes

on *Sunrise Semester*, known as Corpus B. After working with Corpus B to confirm that the letters contained the same key themes, I then moved on to analyze twenty full-length letters that dated from roughly fall 1971 through winter of 1972, all addressed to a single professor that taught a class on Classical Mythology, named Dr. Philip Mayerson, which I collected in Corpus C (see Table 4). These full letters were also paired with their typed responses. It was necessary to digitize the full-length letters from the archive so that the text could be used for analysis in Dedoose and also by hand, as using OCR software often missed elements unique to handwritten letters.

Data processing and analysis.

To process the data, it was first necessary to digitize the text. All of the fan mail located in the archive was not digitized. The process of re-typing by hand had allowed me to code the themes in real-time, and so I often used both automatic optical character recognition (OCR) software as well as voice recognition software such as DragonDiction. During this process, it was easier to read the letters into voice recognition software so that not only key elements contained in the handwriting were not missed, but also so that I did not become too distant from the original text contained on the page in this study.

The step of digitizing the letters was also critical for future research on this topic, as so very few artifacts from the *Sunrise Semester* archive existed in any type of digital format at all. My hope is that I can now make some of the sections of the letters publically available, while also protecting the identities of the letter writers themselves and their next of kin. Full findings from the analysis are described in Chapter Four.

The question of “motivation.”

Motivation and an examination of the motivating factors that compelled non-traditional students through the medium of television between the 1950s and the early 1980s also guided the development of a theoretical framework for my study of *Sunrise Semester*. One motivational science perspective on student motivation in learning and teaching contexts offered by Paul Pintrich (2003) explores three critical themes for motivational research, including “the importance of a general scientific approach for research on student motivation,” the “utility of multidisciplinary perspectives,” and the “importance of use-inspired basic research on motivation” (p. 667).

According to Pintrich, motivational theories “attempt to answer questions about what gets individuals moving,” what he calls “energization,” toward what activities or tasks, which he calls “direction” (Pintrich, 2003, p. 669). He argues that generalizations about motivation are often “fragmented and diffuse” (p. 667) and that to develop a useful framework for future research on motivation, the term *science* must be added to signal that the approach is from a scientific perspective (p. 667). He also argues that future research must be guided by seven substantive questions: 1) What do students want? 2) What motivates students in classrooms? 3) How do students get what they want? 4) Do students know what they want or what motivates them? 5) How does motivation lead to cognition and cognition to motivation? 6) How does motivation change and develop? and 7) What is the role of context and culture (pp. 669-681)? As Pintrich outlines, these seven questions are meant to guide new directions for current and future motivational science research efforts today, and are also explored further in the context of MOOCs in Chapter Six. How does the thread of “motivation,” both intrinsic and extrinsic, follow within a historical analysis of distance learning from *Sunrise Semester* to present-day MOOCs?

Ethical Considerations

While historical research methodologies share many of the same ethical concerns found in any type of non-reactive research techniques, historical research does bear its own burden of ethical considerations that are unique to the archival study of primary sources and documents. According to Kreuger and Neuman (2006), there are special ethical issues that are unique to archival study. First, it is difficult to replicate research based on primary material, because the “researcher’s selection criteria for use of evidence and external criticism of documents places a burden on the integrity of the individual researcher” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 452). Another challenge lies in the possibilities of infinite interpretation when examining such a large volume of unpublished materials. Finally, as all archival studies are as unique as the institutions or organizations that house them, true access is never really given, but is only partially glimpsed in fragmented examination, one folder and one box at a time. If a future researcher were to trace my steps and my research path through the materials housed at NYU Archives at Bobst Library at a later date, he or she may make totally new discoveries; some that may be at odds with mine. The burden of being amongst the first to research *Sunrise Semester* and audience reaction to the show at length is that all errors are entirely my own.

Chapter 4: *Sunrise Semester*: 1957-1982

NYU and CBS's radical experiment in early television

Sunrise Semester was an American television series co-produced by NYU and CBS from 1957 through 1982 that offered viewers college credit at a rate of seventy-five dollars per semester. The courses were initially carried on the WCBS-TV (now known as CBS) network in the greater New York metropolitan area. The show aired six days a week for over twenty-five years, Mondays through Saturdays, and by the late 1960s was carried by hundreds of local networks and university campuses across the nation. The show was so named because it aired daily between the morning hours of 6:30am and 7:00am (Van Wart, 2011).



Figure 6: NYU's Dr. Floyd Zulli, Jr. taping an early episode of *Sunrise Semester* at CBS studios.
Source: NYU Archives, *Sunrise Semester* Subject Folder.

The first courses offered by New York University in 1957 were not physics or mathematics, but “Comparative Literature 10: *Modern Fiction from Stendhal to Hemingway*,” followed by “Comparative Literature 20: *Contemporary Realism to Existentialism*,” added in spring 1958. “Comparative Literature 10” included close readings of novels by Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, James Joyce and Marcel Proust, while “Comparative Literature 20” included texts by Edith Wharton, John Steinbeck, and F. Scott Fitzgerald (RG 19, Box 12, Folder 7, NYU Archives). Both courses were offered as seventy-six individual broadcast lectures lasting thirty minutes each, and were taught by Dr. Floyd Zulli, a then relatively unknown assistant professor of Romance Languages at University College in fall 1957, fall 1958 and spring 1959 (RG 19, Box 8, Folder 4,

NYU Archives). To date, no academic study of *Sunrise Semester* exists nor has been undertaken.

This chapter explores some of the precursors to the show, a few of its early successes, and reasons for its eventual demise.

From Ridicule to Romance

The announcement that WCBS-TV and NYU planned to air a straight college course for credit, five days a week, at the “dubious” hour of 6:30am was unanimously ridiculed in the press. It was suggested that NYU’s proposed delivery of “seventy-five dollars’ worth of education over the air, with no opportunity for contact between teacher and students, was a fraud” (Murphey & Wright, 1958). At the time, no one could predict viewer reaction for a television show offered for college credit. The first book on the reading syllabus, Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*, caused almost every bookstore within a thirty mile radius around New York City to sell out of the publication. In the semesters that followed, the mere announcement of the reading lists for each course caused bookstores to run out of their stock for certain titles (Gould, 1957).



Figure 7: Opening credit image from *Sunrise Semester*, circa 1958.
Source: Screen-grab from Dr. Floyd Zulli YouTube Video (uploaded January 2011).

In 1959, the Associated Press quoted a then well-known advertising executive as naming *Sunrise Semester* as “the most exciting, off-beat thing that’s ever happened to New York TV” (*Television Literature Course Attracts Wide Public Interest*, n.d.). In its first year of broadcast, over 10,732 inquiries were received and more than 700 applications were pending for degree credit offered by NYU. In the first semester of fall 1957, 177 students enrolled for the credit-bearing course, and 132 students travelled to New York University’s campus to complete the final examination (Van Wart, 2011). By 1958, Dr. Zulli was awarded four Emmy nominations for his dawn television appearances (Murphey & Wright, 1958).

Precursors to *Sunrise Semester* at NYU

There were several distance-learning experiments conducted by NYU that informed the direction of *Sunrise Semester* when the show launched in 1957, and pre-dated this particular show by several years. The Office of Radio and Television (Office of Radio-TV) was created in 1952 at NYU to oversee the development of university-sponsored and university-produced radio and television programs. In addition to producing educational programs, the Office of Radio-TV advised NYU faculty members on developing their prospective programs. The office also acted as a liaison between NYU and the media, and frequently issued press releases announcing forthcoming courses as well as excerpts and quotes from devotees of the show underlining *Sunrise Semester*’s success.

The archival collection held at NYU includes information about administrative functions of the Office of Radio-TV, primarily its connection to the University Press Office and its relationship to the production and planning of *Sunrise Semester* along with a collection of other shows that ran both before and after *Sunrise Semester*. Between its establishment of the Office of Radio and Television in July 1952 and a press release issued in February 1954, the Office of Radio-TV

prepared more than one hundred television programs and placed several hundred members of the University family on television (“Study Guide to the Office of Television and Radio,” p. 3). The archival documents include planning documents and announcements for several shows, including *Masterbuilders of America*, *University*, *Today’s English*, and *Our Goodly Heritage*. The existence of these shows and more evidence NYU’s concurrent interest in expanding its use of television as an educational medium prior to 1954, and are examined below for clues in the early development of *Sunrise Semester* in 1957.

The show *Masterbuilders of America* was a short-lived joint effort between NYU and NBC that ran from 1963 to 1964, and focused on the history of engineering in the United States. NBC evidently established a contract with NYU that did not allow for the show to be re-broadcast and the studio destroyed the tapes after their release. Thus, as with *Sunrise Semester*, the paper files at NYU provide some of the only access to a present-day understanding of these early shows. Another show from roughly the same era as *Sunrise Semester* was called *Our Goodly Heritage* (1954), which starred Dean William Bush Baer of University College in a discussion about the Bible from a literary perspective on television (Shapiro, 2015). Another show that was broadcast locally with WPIX and recorded directly at NYU included a single course on television called *Today’s English* that aired in 1952. Despite being only a single televised course, the success of *Today’s English* is credited by NYU as later directly leading to the development of *Sunrise Semester*, which in turn is credited as one of the earliest forays into continuing education at NYU (“New York University School of Continuing Education: Seventy-Five Years of Education, Excellent and Education,” New York University, n.d., p. 12).

“University.”

Another program that seemed to greatly influence the successful launch of *Sunrise Semester* was called *University*. First broadcast in 1954 in cooperation with WATV, *University* was designed to maximize both the “educational and public relations functions of radio and television at New York University” in order to gain greater visibility for the institution in general. Documents included in the archive collection seemed to reflect program management activities as well as administrative functions of the office. According to the notes attached to the study guide for the collection, many of the educational programs and talk shows that were broadcast from the university between the years 1950 and 1954 “emphasized an urban theme in keeping with the University’s emphasis on building a positive public image as an exciting urban campus” (“Guide to the Records of Office of Radio and Television RG 7.3.1,” n.d.).

University was a show crafted to explore seemingly esoteric questions about the aims and contributions of a university in today’s world. In the description for the show’s first press release, the writer asked open-ended questions such as, “What really goes on in a university? What are its aims? What is it doing for the benefit of mankind? How is it serving society?” and perhaps rather presumptuously concluded that “these questions and their answers are especially pertinent today in a world that desperately needs knowledge and understanding, which form the basis for New York University's proposed television series called *University*.” The press release details how this story will be told through the faculty and resources of NYU, but in such a way “that the viewer will infer that universities across the land are serving their own communities and the nation in the same manner (‘NYU Press Release,’ February 1954, *Office of Television and Radio*, Box 22, Folder 44).” The script for the first episode of *University* that aired on February 22, 1954 was written to “show how universities develop leaders in the arts and sciences, help enrich our culture, enhance the

nation's productivity, and further human understanding" (para. 9)." The press release continues with an explanation of the definition of a university, as if to explain its role in society through its importance:

A university is an assembly of scholars, dedicated to the discovery of knowledge and its dissemination. It is a living force in society, containing and releasing to everyone who wishes it the whole body of knowledge from the past and the whole promise of the future. To realize that promise, education must be understood and appreciated and supported by the people whom it serves. We hope our program will contribute to that end--in the interests of all people" ('NYU Press Release,' February 1954, *Office of Television and Radio*, Box 22, Folder 44, para. 11).

In reading this press release from over fifty years ago, one cannot help but pause to think that it is ambitious to claim that a television show that aired from New York could provide an understanding what happens across universities all over the nation. United by this generalized theme of the "University," episodes covered such diverse topics as "archeology, atomic energy, fashion, law, music, philosophy, and research in the biological, physical and social sciences" (Van Wart 2011; Friss, 2012).

New York University College of the Air.

Another initiative that predated the successful launch of *Sunrise Semester* in the fall of 1957 was not a television show but an initiative called "New York University College of the Air," first proposed in the early 1950s and documented by one strategic planning document that survives in the archives in a folder dated "1954", although the document itself is undated. Contained in the planning document for the New York University College of the Air are many of the same varied concerns and agreed-upon challenges for the success and survival of *Sunrise Semester* beyond its

initial year.. Clearly, the success of the smaller-run broadcasts of various lectures that were being produced at the time by The Office of Radio-TV starting in 1952 had created excitement for a bigger presence on the airwaves, and it seems that the New York University College of the Air did eventually come into being about a decade later. Scant evidence of its reach or its successful launch exists in the archive, but NYU's later formation of the extension school of continuing education is often traced to several 1950s-era developments ("New York University School of Continuing Education: Seventy-Five Years of Education, Excellent and Education," New York University, *n.d.*, p. 12). It is possible that the College of the Air launched in the late 1960s, despite rigorous planning in the 1950s.

In the Office of Radio and Television Records between 1953 and 1985 held the NYU archives, there is one single document that outlines the proposal for a new entity on campus designed to "capitalize on this buzz on a national scale and to the widest audience possible," referring to the buzz around television ("New York University College of the Air, *n.d.*, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 4, NYU Archives). The objectives are interesting to read in the context of subsequent planning for such an initiative, as they were all objectives that the later initiative behind *Sunrise Semester* eventually met, albeit through an outside, corporate partnership with CBS.

According to this undated planning document, the purposes of New York University College of the Air was five-fold:

- 1) To provide, primarily through television, educational resources of highest quality to a maximum number of participants.
- 2) To explore the most effective methods of televised instruction for various levels and purposed of educational effort.

3) To demonstrate the economic validity of television as an effective medium for high quality instructional activities commonly provided by other means.

4) To demonstrate the effectiveness of television as a medium for encouraging and supporting individualized study and growth.

5) To demonstrate the educational and economic values of the interinstitutional collaboration, in sharing and joint use of high quality and scarce educational resources.

(‘New York University College of the Air, *n.d.*, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 4, NYU Archives).

While clearly looking to capitalize on the advent of the age of television as an educative means, NYU also outlined plans to create a new “arts and science college,” which also presumably later became the College of Arts and Sciences, although this is an area for further research and cannot be determined at this time. The planning faculty that would be tapped to create this new college would consist of four specific types of personnel:

1) One small group of full-time, tenured personnel competent to

a) plan educational objectives of an arts and science program,

b) translate the objectives into instructional experience needed for their attainment;

and, c) provide those experiences through television and accompanying activities;

2) One group of visiting professors from all over the world to provide the distinguished, authoritative performances needed for instructional experiences consistent with the objectives of the arts and science program

3) One group of full-time staff members skilled in group discussion, individualized student consultation, and evaluating student growth;

- 4) One group of specialists in developing visual aids for televised instruction equipped with special skills in working with academic personnel, on the one hand, and with television personnel on the other hand.

According to the planning document from 1954, the “NYU College of Air” was to attract students of three types in the metropolitan area that clearly also became the targeted audience for *Sunrise Semester*: “1) those who take the course for credit as part of a NYU degree program 2) those who take the course for credit, but are not enrolled in a degree, 3) those who audit the course and receive a certificate of participation.” (p. 6). The tension between the requirements of serving these three audiences was also loosely addressed, but as the document evidently was merely created to garner support for the initiative and articulate its mission, these needs were not wholly resolved.

Based on some of the struggles of mailing or sending kinescopes, New York University College of the Air proposed to provide “kinescopes, course outlines, syllabi, reading lists and materials, as well as live telecasts, on a nationwide basis” (‘New York University College of the Air, *n.d.*, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 4, NYU Archives). A variety of arrangements were to be explored, including course credits through other institutions, and correspondence credits. Hopeful language located throughout the strategic planning document suggests that the New York University College of the Air might serve as the hub in which a national education television network might be developed. With its expectations and apprehensions, the document provides a fascinating precursor into some of the proposed and speculated challenges that lay ahead for such an endeavor like *Sunrise Semester* just three years later.

As outlined by the proposal, the first two years of an arts and science program were to be offered to the public, but the goal seemed to be to later expand into a program offering all requirements for a fully-fledged arts and science degree offered at NYU. As soon as possible after

its launch, it was proposed that “supplemental telecasts for graduate instruction and specific programs for adult education should be developed,” pointing to a larger need for professionalizing the smaller version of the program before it became a national entity. The author(s) of the report rightly speculated that national news coverage and other means of publicity “would greatly facilitate progress in this development” (‘New York University College of the Air, *n.d.*, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 4, NYU Archives).

The arts and science program offered by New York University College of the Air was to be divided into major areas and/or divisions, along with relevant objectives for each area and a set of pre-established understandings, skills and values. Studying both motivation and student learning behavior—what we would call *learning analytics* today—was advocated by the report in order to gain new insight into what the author(s) called “the self-learning drive, skill and rewards for participants” (‘New York University College of the Air, *n.d.*, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 4, NYU Archives). I could not help but read the desires to track motivation and student learning behavior as efforts to also quantify the outcomes of such a massive proposal in order to also provide greater insight and learning for the entire university.

As so many of the same concerns surrounding New York University College of the Air likely resonated for the producers of *Sunrise Semester*, it was curious that no such planning document for the latter existed in the archives. In light of considerations cited above, a key problem in the planning process for New York University’s College of the Air was to conceive of the types of supplemental “guides and tools for learning” – evidently the same tools that were mailed to any learner or fan of *Sunrise Semester* that requested them and that later became the instruments for independent self-study by non-credit-seeking students of *Sunrise Semester*.

The development of such new materials seemed daunting to the author(s) of the New York University's College of the Air strategic planning report, as "the proper selection and use of existing materials, and suggestion of 'outside' experiences within the range of and available to participants, will all be as essential parts of the total program as the televised activity itself" ("New York University College of the Air, *n.d.*, NYU Archives). Somehow, course material production did not seem to be an issue during the launch or duration of *Sunrise Semester*, as the professors undertook the burden of creating such materials themselves with the assistance of both NYU and CBS liaisons. The professors were compensated for the time it took to create reading lists, syllabi, study guides and final examinations. It is wholly possible that so much of the difficult planning work was executed internally for the New York University College of the Air in the early 1950s but such an endeavor did not get off the ground until CBS and NYU approached one another for a proposed partnership in early 1957. In all the ways that *Sunrise Semester* was radical in offering college credit over television, the existence of the New York University College of the Air planning document proves that the original ambition for the proposed reach of a televised university course was even greater.

The Launch of *Sunrise Semester*

Numerous press releases and articles document the initial speculation preceding the first broadcast of *Sunrise Semester* at 6:30am on the morning of September 23, 1957, followed by praise for the show's triumph by mid-morning of the same day (LeSeve, 1975). Institutional pressure to monetize the course did not seem to dissuade viewers looking to earn college credit. The price for

three points of university credit was seventy-five dollars¹ (roughly the equivalent of \$600 in 2016),² which included a nonrefundable application fee, registration, materials and examination fees. Viewers who did not wish to receive degree credit could receive a “certificate of completion” for thirty-five dollars (Course Registration Application, RG 19, Box 12, Folder 13, NYU Archives). Course requirements for full college credit included one term paper, two “mailed-at-home” examinations, and a final written examination administered on NYU’s campus “with special arrangements made for physically handicapped students” (Course Registration Application, RG 19, Box 12, Folder 13, NYU Archives).

Despite the early broadcast hour, by 1958 surveys estimated that over 120,000 viewers (including 62,000 families) tuned in daily during the first semester. Enthusiastic at-home viewers outnumbered the students taking the television course for college credit by nearly 700 to one. By 1959, discussion meetings organized on the Washington Square campus brought viewers together in person, and students were offered opportunities for private consultation with course professors by telephone or in person (RG 19, Box 12, Folder 14, NYU Archives). Letters from viewers indicated that even a number of high school students had become “early risers” as a result of a “commendable desire to get a foretaste of college instruction” (Murphey & Wright, 1958).

Journalists speculated on the range of individuals tuning into the course in 1958. As one report suggested, “working men and women, housewives young and middle aged, grandmothers, high-school seniors, elderly couples and whole families watched as regularly and as conscientiously” as the registered students. “Motivated by no prospect of gain except a better

¹ It is unclear how this price per credit compared with tuition for fully matriculated, on-campus students, but on Sept. 17, 1967, *The New York Times* reported that New York University’s annual tuition topped \$2,000 for the first time in school history. See: <http://nyunews.com/2012/11/13/tuition>

² See <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>

understanding of sixteen classic novels and the pleasure of meeting a perceptive mind, they had nothing to lose but sleep” (Murphey & Wright, 1958).

No formal headcount of *Sunrise Semester*'s viewership was ever conducted, as Nielsen ratings did not track data that early in the morning in 1957 (Arbitron.org). Yet CBS executives and NYU officials estimated that roughly two million people watched daily at the peak of the show's popularity. By 1973, between eighty-five and ninety local stations broadcast the show throughout the United States and Canada. In an early draft of a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities during the show's sixteenth anniversary, NYU administrators attempted to make educated guesses about the diverse make up of their audience:

SUNRISE SEMESTER reaches... countless people in all walks of life: businessmen who want intellectual stimulation, school teachers who regard *SUNRISE SEMESTER* as providing refresher courses and refreshment of the intellect, housewives who sometimes organize groups to discuss the morning's lecture, people in isolated areas, men shaving, women preparing breakfast, people drinking coffee or [~~farmers~~] milking cows, viewers lying in bed but awake. We have had correspondence from, among many others, a bank president, an executive vice president of one of the nation's largest stores, a vegetable store-owner, numerous professional people. (Unpublished draft of *Sunrise Semester* press release, *n.d.*)

There were also very few ways to know who was included and who was excluded within such a devoted audience without examining student records and tracking individual names and “education journeys” over time, a research project that exceeds the scope of this dissertation but one that would greatly benefit the field of education and provided a greater understanding of *Sunrise Semester*'s impact and reach.

Unsurprisingly, ways to measure teaching efficacy through the medium of television was also difficult to extract, especially as the mode of delivery was so new. In an early article from *The Gazette*, some important research questions raised by journalists surfaced as early as 1959:

The value of a course should be gauged by its effectiveness, and while that is not easy to determine, the attempt should be made. Various research questions were raised in the television show's first year: what degree of understanding and appreciation was shown by the students in their examination papers? Did the examination papers show wide difference among the students in what they apparently got out of the course? If so, did age, or educational background, or occupation, or the degree of 'household distraction' have considerable bearing on whether the student derived little or much from the course? How many of them would have derived more benefit from being face to face with [the professor] in a lecture room? Was concentration an important factor, and if so, were some of them better able to concentrate in front of their TV sets than they would have been in a classroom? (*The Gazette*, 1959, para. 6).

All of the above questions could be leveled against present-era online initiatives, with little to no agreement in the field about the clearest way forward.

A Struggle in Mission

Issues of accountability and credibility have been part of any significant discussion around formal and informal learning in education since the 1950s, and arguably even earlier. "Education" in this context is meant to refer to non-classroom, informal learning. While some of the subjects and learning described here may have strong roots in traditional academic disciplines, the crux of alternative online education is that it must be free and accessible to everyone. *Sunrise Semester* was

one of the first examples of a massively-enrolled open course, and could be considered a prototypical MOOC in its struggle to bring intimacy in learning through the distributed medium of television. But a pressure to monetize, coupled with inability to describe its impact and success, may have been just two of the factors leading to its downfall.

The scope and social purpose of *Sunrise Semester* was also constrained by the struggle to market its mission, as documented by a failed National Endowment for the Humanities Foundation draft of application in Folder 1 in RG, (NEH Application, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 1, NYU Archives).

It has become increasingly apparent that the modern individual should be aware of the technological issues that confront him. The understanding of these should be on a level that to which he/she possesses of the social, economic, and political aspects of our society. And yet such understanding is, by and large, simply not forthcoming: intelligent adults, most with poor educational backgrounds in the physical sciences, often find themselves at a loss to comprehend the basic scientific concepts which lie behind so many important technological aspects of our lives. Nor can one claim that there is an easy or better way to correct this situation. A straightforward course such as the survey of the physical sciences, or even a Physics for Poets course, does not in general command a high priority on the leisure time of the busy adult. The response is more favorable if, with each step, the connection to important contemporary programs which directly impact on their lives is made, or when they can see a connection between the science and important historic events. It is for these reasons that an approach that is best described by the term 'Physics and Society' offers the most promising way of reaching such an audience.

Tellingly, this excerpt was the last piece of evidence I found of a large-scale effort to fundraise for *Sunrise Semester* as documented in the archives. After this date, little to no evidence points to any further endeavors to fundraise for the show, and only marginal efforts to update its production level to meet new audience expectations in the early 1980s.

Gender and Housewives: An Area for Further Study

The earliest participants in distance and correspondence courses at the turn of the last century were predominantly female (Casey, 2008); a trend that may prove consistent with the viewership of *Sunrise Semester*. A feature article in the *New York Times* on May 19, 1962 congratulated a housewife and mother of two for completing a Bachelor of Science of Arts degree at NYU, a story unremarkable in every way except for the fact that the student completed 54 of the 128 credits required for her degree by watching *Sunrise Semester* (Riddle, 2013). The student, Cora Gay Carr, was 37 at the time of enrollment. She planned to become a teacher with her new degree, but cited challenges in balancing both home and scholarly demands:

Her husband, a lawyer, glances at the television courses on his way to work, but has never become involved with them. ‘But he thinks it’s fine because I’m up so early and can finish so much of the housework in good time,’ she said. ‘The only time I had difficulty was when I had a 6:30am course on TV at home and a 9am class at college. I was in quite a rush’ (Shepard, 1962, p. 55).

As evidenced in the above quote, Carr balanced her household morning chores between studying on television and on NYU’s physical campus, all at once. This brief excerpt exists as a keyhole view into the domestic interplay between husband and wife in a changing era for women’s roles at home in the early 1960s.

Few studies exist that examine gender within early educational television audiences. In studies of distance learning theory from the era of early experimental educational television of the 1950s, gender is often discussed predominantly from the male perspective; one education theorist even used the term of the “ambitious wife” to describe one of the various motivations for pursuing distance education, with this particular motivation assumed from the perspective of the male who was seeking to advance from a blue-collar to white-collar jobs (Peters, 1965, p. 30). My interest is in the phenomenon of homemakers with previously deferred dreams of higher education after the Great Depression who, in the pursuit of a college degree by any means available, turned to television in the 1950s to achieve their goal. Due to the lack of data on the motivation behind the quest for an informal education through the medium of television, I am studying this phenomenon through fan mail letters and secondary news articles that cite the show’s popularity with homemakers and self-proclaimed housewives. New research is needed to explore some of the implications and assumptions about age, gender, and previous education levels within the first cohort of *Sunrise Semester* students in 1958–1959 vis-à-vis more recently reported shifts in gender, age, and previous education levels in MOOC participation.

Decline of Sunrise Semester

Despite many efforts to effectively register and promote some of the successes and achievements of the show, and ongoing campaigns to raise funds to support its production, by 1982 the show was slated for cancellation. *Sunrise Semester* ran on the CBS schedule for almost twenty-five years, but, by the early 1980s, declining ratings and lack of funding from outside sources almost certainly caused its dissolution. Some of the last-ditch efforts to revive it were vividly captured within ongoing correspondence still held solely in the NYU Archives.

Pressures to monetize.

Meanwhile, the rise of public television in the United States, which had evolved from the same educational broadcasting movement that first gave birth to *Sunrise Semester* in the 1950s, further contributed to the program's demise. Even as college campuses nationally began to explore possibilities to monetize online learning in the 1980s, the fact remained that education simply could not compete with entertainment television, and soon *Sunrise Semester* was replaced by morning talk shows and other lighter fare. By the mid-1980s, educational television also became synonymous with children's television.

One young scholar named Debora Shapiro, an archivist working at the same NYU Archives where I conducted my research, shared my fascination with *Sunrise Semester* and penned a blogpost about the program in September 2015 for Bobst Library called "The Archivist's Angle: The Sunrise and Sunset of 'Sunrise Semester'" (Shapiro, 2015). She posited that the reason that the show came into existence was because Sam Cook Digges, then head of CBS, frowned upon "fringe time" (Shapiro, 2015). A CBS executive at New York's local station in the 1950s, Digges believed there must be a way to give meaning to those early morning hours—perhaps, even, something of educational significance. His vision extended as far as the university level. In 1957, he sought out a university willing to test his idea to fill that early hour airtime slot: college-level lectures delivered over television, for credit (Shapiro, 2015). While it is true that Digges frowned upon "fringe time," my research has shown that motivations were more complex from the perspective of NYU's officials, as evidenced by items in the *Sunrise Semester* archives that pertain to the struggles of funding. The fact that there were over one hundred other television shows by the year 1952 that originated at NYU and were broadcast, as cited in a press release nearly four years prior to the announcement of *Sunrise Semester*, underscore the University's commitment to the medium of television as a means to educate.

By 1980, the Office of Radio-TV set its sights on improving the visual appeal of the program. In 1981, the budget was still roughly around \$25,500 per semester, which was the equivalent of \$63,400 (www.dollartimes.com) for the planning, recording, production and broadcast for two semester-long courses of forty classes each. The new Director of Educational Technology planned to emulate the production quality of a few of the show's contemporaries, *Live at Lincoln Center* and *Wall Street Week*, themselves products of the *Sunrise Semester* model (Shapiro 2015). Despite efforts to draw upon on the full resources of the university and a wide range of curriculum planning, fundraising, higher production qualities, emphasis with renewed “dynamism” and the courses selected on “their potential for visual appeal attracting guest lecturers” for “sparking student-faculty dialogue in the classroom” (Rourke, 1982) the contract was not renewed for another year after the last broadcast in 1982. *Sunrise Semester* never did go high-end on its production value, and eventually CBS cancelled the show in 1982 to air early morning news broadcasts, a move that parallels a shift towards profitable airtime at the dawn of the twenty-four hour news cycle.

Notwithstanding all stated ambitions to scale up and small attempts improve overall production quality through the use of guest speakers, *Sunrise Semester* evidently never did undergo a systematic analysis, revision and updating process that would have been necessary to salvage the show. Documents in the archive evidence a frustration that permeated meeting minutes throughout the early 1980s. The new director was tasked with enhancing the production quality within the limitations of a modest budget, while other the NYU administrators that were charged with revitalizing *Sunrise Semester* in step with shows like *Live from Lincoln Center*, *Wall Street Week*, and even the science-based program *Nova*. Such programs utilized the medium effectively without incurring enormous production costs.

***Sunrise Semester* cancelled after twenty-five years.**

“Some students are sleeping a little later now that *Sunrise Semester*, joint program of NYU and CBS, is no longer on the air after 25 years of broadcasting college courses” was the lead sentence for one story about the end of *Sunrise Semester* (Rubin, 1982). The network cancelled the show seemingly out of the blue, when network evaluation conducted in July of 1982 suggested that its expired contract should not be renewed (NYU Newsletter, ‘Sunrise Turns Silver’ 1982, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 6, NYU Archives). George Schweitzer, CBS’s Vice-President of Communication said in a press article that ran in *Washington Square News* that an internal study had showed CBS officials that “in recent years, cable television and PBS outlets have gotten into the tele-course business,” presumably pointing to the fact that *Sunrise Semester* was no longer the sole contender in the educational-television sector, even though there were few if any shows that targeted adult audiences. He added that an additional factor in CBS’s decision to end the show was that “only 42 to 200 network affiliates picked up the program feed and only 41 students registered last year” (NYU Newsletter, 1982, RG 19, Box 25, Folder 6, NYU Archives). It is worth noting that the rate of viewership was still largely undocumented but that this was roughly the same rate of academic enrollment for nearly twenty of the twenty-five years and throughout the entire history of *Sunrise Semester*.

While it was true that academic enrollment was low, this number did not reflect the number of casual viewers. Therefore, CBS’s efforts to expand into the business of morning news was clearly more pressing. Schweitzer confirmed in a quote that the expansion of morning news into *Sunrise Semester*’s 6:30am time slot was “a must” for CBS. Associate Dean of Faculty Ann Burton said in the same *Washington Square News* article that she was surprised by the decision made by CBS, and that the network appeared “to be short-sighted and *Sunrise Semester* may have been

caught in the re-shuffling of priorities there....” (Rubin, 1982). Sadness about the show’s cancellation was prevalent. Burton herself did not seem to be as prescient about the future of early morning television programming, adding: “They failed with the cable television experiment and I highly doubt the success of the news expansion” (para 5).

History Professor Richard W. Hull, an expert on African history who taught courses on *Sunrise Semester* for two semesters, pointed to specific ways that the show lacked in necessary resources and institutional support for expansion, despite the its value and reputation. In his mind, “for the national exposure, NYU fed the show a small amount of money. Not nearly enough was put in and the university treated it like a step-child. A budget for guests and greater use of the ‘new technology’ would have improved the program” (Rubin, 1982).

Sunrise Semester lives on.

Beyond one formal study of the show’s viewership in 1958-1959 conducted by Westhoff located in the archives (*Sunrise Semester Study, n.d.* Box 12, Folder 3, NYU Archives), a handful of passionate anecdotal stories, several folders of official documents and correspondence, and folders of fan mail stored in the NYU Archive are all that remain of *Sunrise Semester*’s short-term impact. Due to the fact that broadcast television that was often conducted in real-time, kinescopes were often re-recorded over in the same afternoon of the original broadcast, effectively destroying visual evidence of the show’s existence on the same day that it was created. Several boxes of reel-to-reel audio that preserve the studio sound recordings of *Sunrise Semester* have yet to be digitized and are currently inaccessible. And yet, *Sunrise Semester* lives on in two ways beyond the boxes of archives at NYU: through cartoons and parodies that directly reference the show, and also on YouTube.

Cartoons and parodies.

Cartoons published in *The New Yorker* and other periodicals at the time offer an insightful look at some of the gender dynamics at play in the era of *Sunrise Semester*. Cartoons and parodies were necessary to include in my study of *Sunrise Semester* as secondary sources indicative of the mass appeal of the show. In other words, I turned to comic renderings circulated in popular media to demonstrate that *Sunrise Semester* was not simply a phenomenon confined to bored housewives or prisoners but was something “in the air.” The cartoons and the parodies described here used elements of humor and sarcasm to treat the show’s cultural relevance and impact during the time of its original broadcast, suggesting that the show was broadly understood as a considerable force within television in its own time.

There were four cartoons related directly to the *Sunrise Semester* show that I located during the research phase of the dissertation. The first cartoon was drawn by Frank Modell and was printed on October 12, 1957, roughly one month after the show’s debut on CBS (see Figure 8). The image includes two figures: at left, a man with a doctor’s lighted head mirror on his head, leans over his desk in front of his diplomas and his medical pad to address a female figure, also seated, who is looking at him through half-closed eyes. Wearing a brimmed, rather crumpled hat with pearls around her neck, she is portrayed as middle-aged and exhausted. She holds her gloves in her hands slumped over the chair, with her posture also emphasizing how tired she is. The doctor addresses this lady, who is presumably his patient: “There’s no question in my mind. You either have to give the ‘Late Late Show’ up or give up ‘Sunrise Semester.’”

The joke is that she is so tired from watching television that she needed to see a doctor to tell her to watch less. A program by the same name as “The Late Late Show” actually did not

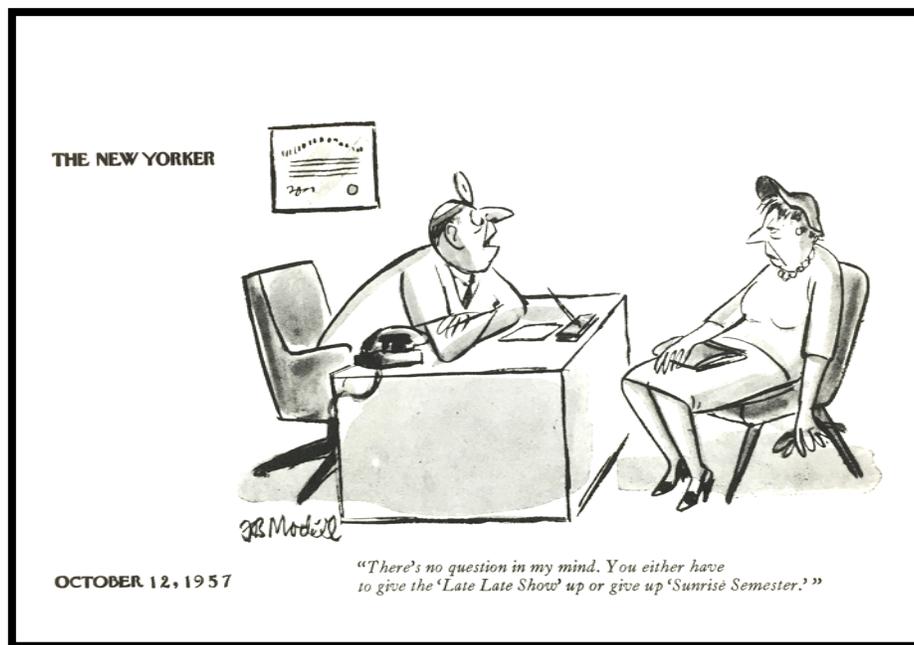


Figure 8: *New Yorker* cartoon by Frank Modell, October 12, 1957

air until January of 1995 (<http://www.cbs.com/shows/late-late-show-guest-hosts/news/1003635/>), so the reference must be a slight exaggeration of an umbrella term that was used to describe an array of broadcasting introduced in the mid-1950s that started at 10pm, and included evening entertainment such as singing, dancing and interviews with special guests. Another, more likely possibility is that the caption is meant to poke fun at the beginning of a new era of television that aired on CBS that started with Johnny Carson’s original “The Johnny Carson Show,” which aired from 1955 to 1956 and then was later revamped to become “The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson” by 1966. The short-lived 1955-1956 series served as a precursor of what would come later for Carson, planting the seeds for sketches he would eventually perform on the “The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson” such as “Mighty Carson Art Players,” but the 1955-1956 version of the show flopped in the ratings and was quickly cancelled (<http://www.cbs.com/shows/late-late-show->

guest-hosts/news/1003635/). No matter what the actual reference was for this caption, it was clear that the pre-dawn screening time of Sunrise Semester was interfering with the daily lives of its devotees as they pledged their commitment to tune into their television sets at such an early hour. The jest is that the interference of the show on daily life was so detrimental that it required a visit to see a doctor, as indicated by the female patient in this cartoon, and that could be so severe that someone would need to be prescribed something as obvious as cutting back on both late night and early morning television.

The second cartoon that I located in the archive was drawn by Mischa Richter and was printed in *The New Yorker* on December 2, 1972, nearly two decades after the debut of *Sunrise Semester*. The setting is presumably a late-night party, with a table full of glasses and a group of people conversing the background. In the foreground are two figures: a woman stands over a man splayed on the floor beside a spilled drink (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: *New Yorker* cartoon by Mischa Richter, December 2, 1972. Source: New Yorker Online Collection.

The woman, presumably his wife, looks like she is about to slap him across the face to wake him up and get him off the floor. She says, "Ken, oh Ken, *Sunrise Semester* tomorrow!" as a way to motivate him to get home in time to sleep, and presumably to be able to get up early enough the next day to watch the show.

The third cartoon I located was from the series "Telly Laffs" and was included in the archive without a date or a source attribution, but likely was printed in a local New York newspaper (see Figure 10). In the cartoon, a "fan" sits in front of his television set with what looks to be a homemade campus banner with the words, "Sunrise Semester." He is wearing a collegiate-looking sweater with the letter "S," presumably standing for *Sunrise Semester*. Behind him, a woman looks to be receiving two bottles of milk from a milkman, and the sun is just rising behind them, marking the time of day as dawn. The female figure is speaking, and the caption below reads, "He's even calling the front yard 'the campus.'" We are meant to understand this image as showing the reception of *Sunrise Semester* in yet another domestic home setting, with the wife speaking

somewhat incredulously of her husband's devotion to the show to an external observer - in this case, the milkman.

Telly Laffs



"He's even calling the front yard 'the campus!'"

Figure 10: Telly Laffs cartoon by Cliff Rogerson and Janet Burns, n.d.

It is interesting to note that although the established fan base of the show was predominantly female and several news articles of the day corroborate that fact, two of the three figures in the three above cartoons that play the part of "the fan" are depicted as male. Below is a fourth cartoon, included in this study despite some mystery surrounding its true meaning. The image was found in the archive as a news clipping, and it has yellowed over time. The source looks to be from "TV Guide" as the masthead was also clipped and glued to the page, and includes the date "Feb 27. - Mar 5.," but not the year. The image is signed at bottom left with the name "Richter," and could also be the

signature of Mischa Richter, author of the cartoon in Figure 9. The setting of the image is meant to be in a bar. There are three seated figures with drinks poised in front of each. At far left, a young woman is wearing a sweater with the words “Central High” and an ice cream dessert in front of her. She looks to be youthful and likely we are meant to understand that she is still in high school. In the middle, there is a male figure who looks to be somewhat older with a drink containing two straws, perhaps indicating it is a cocktail. He is wearing a sweater with a prominent “B.” Both of the two younger figures are smiling. There is a female figure seated at far right wearing a sweater also with prominent text, with the words “Sunrise Semester” emblazoned across her front. It is unclear what she is drinking. It may be hot tea, or it could be a martini. She looks to be older than the other two figures. Her expression indicates that she is minding her own business, or perhaps she is merely enjoying some rare moments of free time on her own. Unfortunately, Mischa Richter died in 2001 (Lorenz, 2001). Both the “B” on the male’s sweater and her cocktail are cultural references that may be lost to us over time, yet I am hopeful that the inclusion of the image in this manuscript will encourage more informed interpretations of its actual meaning (see Figure 11).

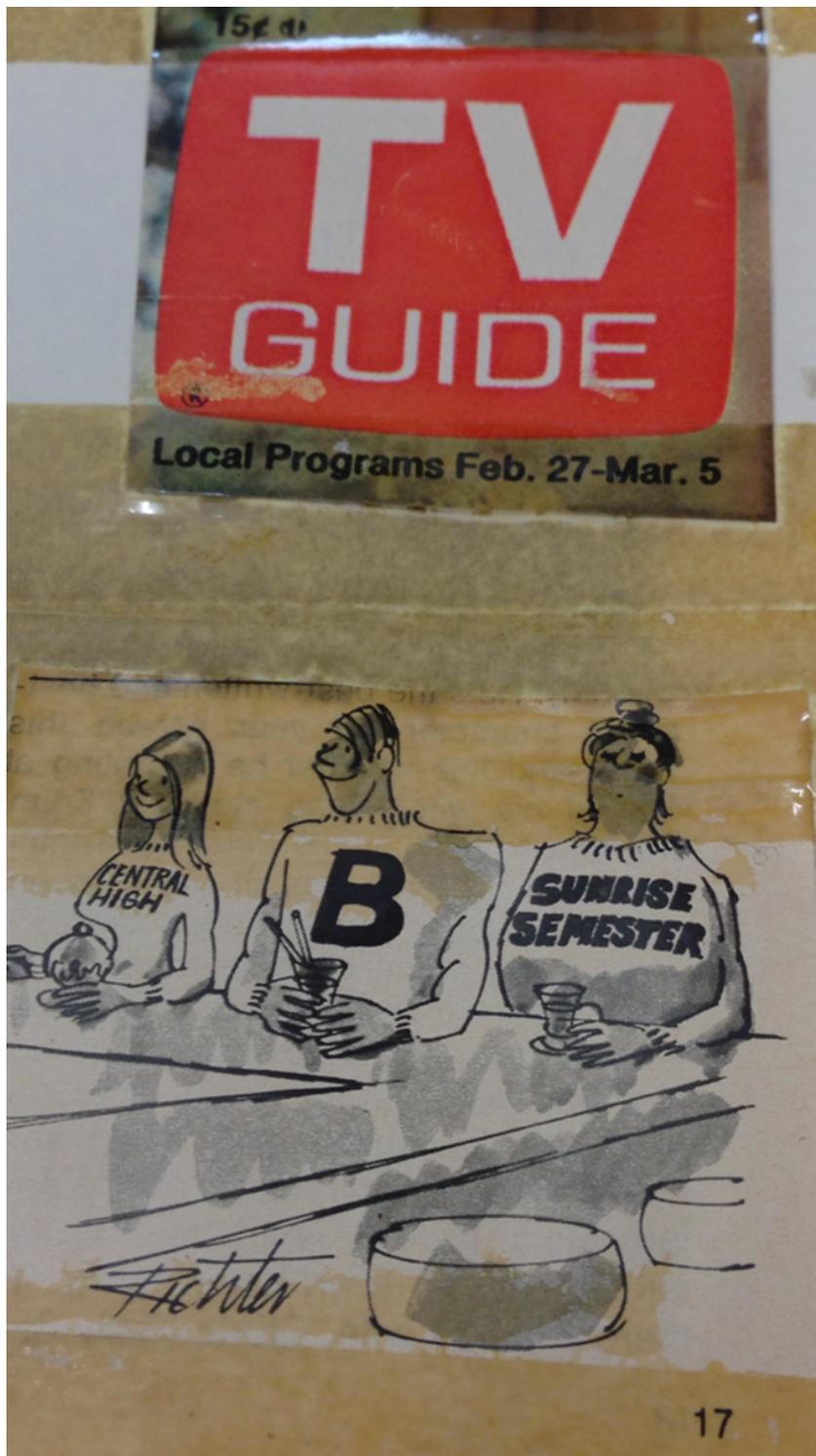


Figure 11: TV Guide Cartoon, n.d.

Sunrise Semester on YouTube

The long-term impact of *Sunrise Semester* remains equally unmeasured to its significance in its time. During the course of this research, I was struck by various enthusiastic recollections I received anecdotally by an older generation of television watchers that remembered the show with reverence. It was not until I turned to YouTube in 2013 that I was able to locate a full-length and undamaged recording of an early 1958 *Sunrise Semester* episode that featured Dr. Floyd Zulli posted by a user named [name forthcoming] in [year forthcoming]. Relevant comments that were posted sooner after, between June 2011 and March 2016, below this one rare YouTube video recording echo some of the passionate fan mail received by NYU in the 1950s and 1960s, and were important to include as evidence of the show's lasting relevance.

In response to the YouTube posting, one commenter named [name forthcoming] writes:

Distance learning in the 50s! I used to watch this all the time when I was about four. I was planning on going to university (there was a university nearby with a great radio station I used to listen to all the time -- that's what gave me the idea) and thought I should get a head start. This show gave the basics of things like philosophy, biology, foreign languages, and math, explained so simply I could understand a lot of it even at that age. I hope you can upload more episodes.

Note that there is no way to calculate the year that this user may have actually viewed *Sunrise Semester* or guess how old she or he could be now, as it is hard to assume that they were actually watching in 1957, 1958, or 1959 as sometimes people include exaggerations of recollection. Below are several more user comments that were collected in December of 2015. As of January 2016, there are at least a dozen new YouTube comments that have populated below the one entry on the video for Zulli's electrifying reading of Marcel Proust's *A La Recherche du Perdu*

Temps. The commenters range from someone claiming to be Zulli's half-brother to other early fans of the show that were eager to see more episodes uploaded to the same channel. One such poster identified as "Jon Goldman" added the following comment below the original posting:

My father was a Great Books participant (actually a leader of his group) and had me get up with him at 6.30am weekdays to watch and record (on 7 inch reels of audio reel-to-reel tape) all of Zulli's lectures. I actually read several of the classics that Zulli discussed but as I was in high school I didn't really get some of them until I re-read them later on. Not Proust however. Few of my peers were reading Stendahl and Balzac. Sometimes I just went back to sleep after starting the tape recorder for him. He did re-listen to some of the lectures and take notes. Zulli had such a cultured tone that you couldn't help but be impressed. I still have the tapes and recently acquired a working reel-to-reel machine so I may listen again. Are all the filmed lectures still around? CBS should put them up on youtube for others to learn once again. This was really early MOOC from the days when the networks and stations not only had a statutory obligation to present public service programs but often did it voluntarily even if it was in the wee hours or Sunday morning.

Jon Goldman, YouTube user, 2014.

Another user named "zee fish" posted at the end of 2014 claiming his relationship to Zulli:

The speaker in this show is Professor Floyd Zulli jr. I happen to be his half brother. I was thrilled to find this on YouTube. I was very young when this show aired but certainly do remember it. My brother was a professor at NYU in New York and I visited his home in Washington Square many times. Thank you for posting ("zee fish," 2014).

And a user named "NYBredBamaFed" posted the following request for more uploads, with hopefulness that the show might live on:

I hope you have more Sunrise Semester episodes to show on YouTube. I never did get to watch this show growing up because it was on so early in the morning. NBC also had a show similar to this called *Continental Classroom* which was on from 10/6/58-12/18/64 (“NYBredBamaFed”, 2015).

Casual, online conversations in comments such as these point to the further need for a researcher to get in touch with others that have vivid and fond recollections of *Sunrise Semester*. Due to the protocol boundaries against speaking to live human subjects established for this dissertation, I have not contacted these YouTube commenters to complete my analysis of *Sunrise Semester*'s impact and reach. And yet such a vivid recollection today warrants careful consideration: would anyone recall participation in a MOOC with such passion fifty or seventy years from now? And if not, what can education practitioners do to fortify and expand online learning opportunities in MOOCs? I leave such efforts for future research to be conducted by me and by others, and instead turn to an analysis of the fan mail sent during the show's original broadcast in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Fan Mail Analysis

This chapter explores the hypothesis that a careful examination of fan mail sent to the professors and producers of *Sunrise Semester* answers critical questions about who watched the show, the impact of *Sunrise Semester* as a learning phenomenon, and what the program meant in the lives of its audience members. How do fan mail letters lend a face and a voice to the non-traditional learner? How do the letter-writers express their own motivation to learn on television? What other lessons can be learned from fan mail analysis that can be applied to present-day MOOCs? From a methodological standpoint, James Paul Gee's work on critical discourse analysis as outlined in the Methodology chapter was imperative for my study of the letters mailed from devotees of the show to professors during *Sunrise Semester* vis-à-vis these overarching questions. Specifically, Gee's discussion of the construction of multiple identities such as wife, homemaker, or student helped me to build a system of research that could explain some of the intricacies of multiple, overlapping, and non-competing identities of a *Sunrise Semester* learner.

Fan Mail Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities

Much of the early literature on radio fandom has proved critical for assessing how to study the fan letters of *Sunrise Semester*. Fan mail in itself was known as "one of the curious facts concerning the radio industry," and has been considered important both as "an index of size of audience and as an index of audience like or dislike of the program" (Sayre, 1939, p. 272). Despite its early role as an index of audience, fan mail has also been regarded with suspicion. In a study conducted of radio fans as early as 1939, fan-letter writers were believed to be "the neurotics, the deviates, the abnormal among the listeners, and so it has been cautioned that fan mail should be disregarded as an index of anything" (Sayre 1939, p. 272), while Katz (1950) cites another 1930s

study by William Durant as characterizing radio fan mail as “written by invalids, lonely people, very aged, very youthful, hero worshipers and mischievous children; and few from ‘the average man or woman’” (Katz, 1950, p. 5). While these studies undermined the importance of fan mail analysis as a marker of a program’s success, others approached the phenomenon as unique to broadcast media as audiences presumably struggled to transgress the barrier between themselves and a broadcasting company that was presumably impersonal and also not penetrable (Sayre 1939), and therefore a significant component of studies of reception.

The fan mail contained in the *Sunrise Semester* archive engages issues raised in the literature on radio while posing new questions about the specificity of television audiences and developments in distance learning. One question that arises, for instance, is whether these letters, which were sent directly to professors or producers or addressed to the numerous administrative offices of either CBS or NYU during the broadcast of *Sunrise Semester*, are representative of a core audience. Arguably, people who were moved enough by a television show to write in the first place may instead constitute a “fringe” audience—echoing the early suspicions of radio fan mail. To be sure, that the *Sunrise Semester* letter writers were more than enthusiastic than the average audience viewer, and more than just committed in following the courses each semester on television, already may have marked the act, and by extension, the writer, as exceptional and not the norm.

In his use of radio fan mail for a 1950 study about happiness, Katz claimed that, despite the uncertainty surrounding how representative fan mail letters are of a total listening audience, the letters may in fact be more credible than the more commonly-used interview process to gain insight about listener perspectives. Rather than using a process in which the researcher obtains information about the listener experience by asking for it, as in an interview, the production of a body of data drawn from the listener’s “own reports of their listening experiences” as a form of “direct response

to the stimulus” circumvents the chance that the listener created data just for the benefit of the “interviewer middle man” (Katz, 1950, p. 5-6). Katz uses Dr. Herta Herzog’s pioneering audience study, “What Do We Really Know About Daytime Serial Listeners” from 1942 as an example of collecting audience characteristics through listeners’ “own listening experiences.” He notes that Herzog’s study fell into the trap of relying on data that is not drawn from the direct stimulus of the radio show (Katz, 1950, p. 6). As a pioneering work of the uses-and-gratifications approach and the cognitive revolution in media research, Herzog’s study traced the “gratification” that women derived from daytime serials, claiming that they “were so complex that there was no guide to fruitful observations except for the actual experiences of the women listening to these programs” (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1944, pp. 3-24). Katz’s critique exposed the limitation in the study’s research design; Herzog’s efforts, he argued, were thwarted by her attempts to get her subjects to re-tell and reenact their experiences rather than relying on direct and unsolicited reports, such as those contained in fan mail.

Questions about the letter writers themselves also abound. Are the letter-writers any different in their views than the other non-writing type of listeners, aside from possessing the impetus to write? Or is the fact that they are letter-writers in the first place somehow an indicator that they are not the “usual” type of learner? The fact that the “fan” had written a letter in the first place possibly meant that they may have held exceptional qualities that may not be generalizable for all *Sunrise Semester* learners, but the remaining letters themselves still hold unique qualities that create new knowledge about distance learning in general and tele-courses in particular.

Even more difficult to ascertain than writer profiles is why certain letters were saved and others discarded. At points throughout the show’s popularity, some *Sunrise Semester* professors reportedly received over one hundred letters a day (*Office of Television and Radio*, RG 19, Box 12,

Folder 2). Therefore, the surviving letters represent a fraction of the fan mail that may have been sent throughout the show's twenty-five-year-long run. Simple requests for course materials, reading lists or book title requests were kept on record in the archive only if, for instance, the request was from someone that was noteworthy in some way for the University, or if the request was from someone connected to possible funding streams to provide financial aid. If the letter contained additional praise or content that could be considered expressions of gratitude for the show, the professor, or the lectures themselves, those letters were often either preserved or else replied to and thrown away. If the letter-writers were merely requesting reading materials or the *Sunrise Semester* study guide and did not include any other content, then it could not be considered fan mail in my study. In fact, it would seem that most of these requests were not preserved for the archive, as the requests were merely fulfilled and not kept by NYU officials. (See Table 1 in Chapter Three for a complete description of how the letters were organized into each corpus for this study).

Three Learner Journeys

There were three learner journeys belonging to Mrs. Cora Gay Carr, “Mrs. Alba See” and “Mrs. Eleanor Rose” (not their real names) that were discovered as a direct result of the fan mail letter discovery. Mrs. Cora Gay Carr had been featured in the New York Times for her achievement of a degree from NYU in which she had fulfilled many of the requirements through coursework on *Sunrise Semester*. I also was able to locate a photograph of her speaking to Dr. Floyd Zulli likely taken during a reception that was held in January 1958 immediately after the final exam held at NYU, below.



Figure 12. The central figure has been identified as Mrs. Cora Gay Carr. She is speaking to Dr. Floyd Zulli at left during *Sunrise Semester* final reception at NYU, January 1958. Source: NYU Archives, *Sunrise Semester* Subject Folder.

It was hard to ignore that some of the devotees of the show had later pursued graduate degrees or even had later taught at NYU, as in the case of Mrs. Cora Gay Carr. Her obituary names her as achieving a masters degree in English and a professor at NYU. “Mrs. Alba See” and “Mrs. Eleanor Rose” also sought higher-level degrees later in life, and quite possibly had been inspired by their experiences with *Sunrise Semester* to pursue additional degrees. According to her obituary, “Mrs. Alba See” retired from Eastman Kodak Company after 29 years and received her masters in Liberal Arts in 1984 from NYU at the age of 71, which was also a remarkable achievement. While her obituary does not cite *Sunrise Semester* as one of the ways in which she earned graduate credit at NYU, she was certainly enrolled in the course, and apparently also mailed her professor a crystal specimen in 1967. The professor acknowledges the gift in a thank-you note preserved in the archives, noting that he “hoped to see her at once of the receptions:”

March 21, 1967

Thank you very much for remembering me and for sending me a beautiful crystal specimen. Both my daughter and myself are enjoying it very much. Hope to see you at once of the Sunrise Semester receptions.

Cordially yours,

Philip Mayerson

Professor of Classics

(Letter to “Mrs. Alba See”, Box 12, Folder 3, “1957”)

As the receptions were only for enrolled students following an exam, it is more than highly likely that she was earning credit on *Sunrise Semester* in 1967. By 1984, two years after the end of the show’s run, “Mrs. Alba See” would have earned enough credit to graduate with a masters degree at the impressive age of 71.

Fan mail and gender

Discourse analysis to understand the structure and phrasing of the letters also revealed a gender bias against the content contained in the letter, based on Gee’s work on identity outlined in Chapter Three. In an effort to discover what use, if any, can be made of fan mail in my study of *Sunrise Semester*, I used an earlier study by Jeanette Sayre, a research assistant for the Princeton Radio Research Project, called “Progress in Radio Fan-Mail Analysis” published in 1939. Sayre’s report informed my own approach to the role of gender. One important clue about gender in the study was to analyze the information included with requests that were mailed into a radio show called “America’s Town Meeting of the Air” during the 1937-38 season. Sayre found that the women who wrote “were much more likely than the men to add gratuitous comment: The men

merely requested the bulletin; the women added some word of praise or blame” (p. 276). Sayre continues with a statement about gender bias amongst letter writers, in general:

Goode, in a recent book on fan mail, says women’s letters run as high as five to one, almost always three to one, as compared with men. Taking into account the fact that many of the “unknown” writers signed themselves with the last name and one initial, a shortcut gesture usually attributed to men, the proportion is likely to be higher than this in actuality. If we can infer from this that more men listen than women, we have an interesting and useful commentary on the program (Sayer, 1939, p. 276).

Sayre named a still-in-progress study dealing with motivation in fan-letter writing, but frustratingly, both the Goode reference above and the 1939 study remain lost in time and do not contain citations. Extensive interviews were by conducted by Sayre with fan-letter writers of various types to discover what characteristics, if any, they have in common. Sayre argued that “until such motivational studies are completed, and until much more work has been done comparing fan mail with other indices of popularity of programs, fan mail can best be used for such inter and intra-program comparison” (Sayre, 1939, p. 278).

Fan Mail and Social Status

In an effort to divide the remainder of the fan mail according to some criteria which would be fairly objective and reliable when used by other analysts, the following criteria were used to classify letters according to the social class or sophistication of the writer that were also influenced by Sayre (1939):

- (1) Paper: quality-cleanliness-letterhead;
- (2) Forms: spacing of writing-punctuation-form of salutation-signature-spelling;

(3) Content: words and phrases used. If a letter fell down on two of the three counts, it was put into the “low” social grouping; if on only one, it went in the “high” class.

4) Under “paper,” the quality was also ranked. Such types of paper such as kitchen memos and ruled paper were considered “low,” while engraved letterheads and personalized stationery were considered “high.” Under “form,” poor spacing, as when the entire letter was written in the top inch of the page, or when the salutation was inches away from the first letter, was considered “poor” (Sayre, 1939, p. 277).

Data descriptors

It was important to develop descriptors to organize the data that I pulled from the archive to classify the identity of the letter-writers. I used a code system developed by Elihu Katz in a study of radio fan mail from the late 1940s called “The Happiness Game: A Content Analysis (Katz, 1950) to develop four types of descriptors: gender, marriage status, geographic origin, and course title.

Gender Descriptor

If the letter writer did not include a “Mrs.” before her signature but the name was understood to be a female American name (such as Kate, Jane, Elizabeth), the letter was coded as “female.” If the name included “Mr.” it was coded as “male.” If the name did not include a “Mr.” but was an American name that was commonly understood to be male (such as Robert, Peter, Jonathan), it was also coded as “male.” If the name could not be commonly understood to be male or female, it was coded “gender-indeterminate.” (Katz, 1950, p. 31),

Marriage Status Descriptor

A writer was coded “married, children indeterminate” if she signed herself “Mrs.” The majority of letters that were examined as complete letters and were included in “Corpus C” fell into this

category. If the letter writer made specific mention of children, the letter-writer was coded as “married, with children.” If the letter writer made specific reference to being married and also made specific reference to not having any children, the letter was coded “married, no children.” If there was no name and no information pertaining to marriage status contained in the letter, the letter was coded as “indeterminate marriage status”. The majority of letters that were examined in “Corpus A” and “Corpus B” fell into this category.

Geographic Origin Descriptor

All three bodies of text included some geographic information from the letter writer. “Corpus A” and “Corpus B” had all PII pre-de-identified in the archive. “Corpus A” had the most uneven amount of geographic information, as the press excerpts were generally only created to highlight the superlative nature of the letter. In “Corpus B,” the excerpts were each listed by state and sometimes city, so that a writer from California simply had the text “From California” as the only way to identify the letter-writer. In “Corpus C,” the geographic origin of the letter-writer was included on the return address included at the top of the letter, or could be ascertained by the postal mark, but generally the actual address of the letter writer was preserved in its entirety. After collecting the text for each corpus, all three bodies of text were then divided into seven sub-categories: New York Metro, Northeast, Southwest, West, Southeast, Midwest and Canada. There were no other countries included in the letters contained in “Corpus A,” “B,” or “C” beyond Canada, which is also the extent of the broadcasted reach of the CBS network during the same time period between 1957 and 1982.

Corpus A: Pilot Study on Excerpts from Fan Mail Compiled in the Archive

Group A consisted of text fragments from fan mail scattered throughout the archive, and ten fragments were selected at random for a pilot study. For my analysis of Corpus A, I used a collection of dated and undated press releases from NYU and CBS that included fragments and quotes from fan mail from the first year of *Sunrise Semester* in 1957 through the last full broadcast year of the show in 1981. Corpus a consisted of ten excerpts from *Sunrise Semester* fan mail included in a collection of collated quotes used primarily for press and promotional purposes. Besides superlative language that was culled from a handful of letters, an unusually high amount of biographical information was included in the fragments, including the writer's occupation, likely as best understood from non-excerpted content contained in the letter (such as business-related letterhead) and other personal information that related to gender, marital status, and city or state of geographic origin.

One of the earliest examples of such a document was compiled under the header of the old CBS headquarters at 330 Madison Avenue in New York. While this particular press release was filed with the date "September 1974," most of the letters were mailed during a *Sunrise Semester* course called "Astronomy and Astrology, the Heavenly Twins" led by Dr. Engelbert L. Schucking in 1973. The document begins with a teaser: "There is ample evidence that not only Dr. Zulli had personal impact on their 'student-viewers' during the course of the 45 lectures that make up a Semester's course," before revealing some of the rather personal fan mail excerpts (RG 19, Box 44, Folder 22, NYU Archives).

One such example begins with the phrase: "Last year, when Dr. Engelbert L. Schucking conducted a course on 'Astronomy and Astrology, the Heavenly Twins,' fan mail came from far and near, and from unexpected quarters." For instance, one letter from an "an 80-year old widow from Greenfield, Illinois" wrote that the show was one of? "the most interesting and informative

lectures have ever seen or heard... a wonderful experience.” Such a small fragment contained a remarkable amount of data, such as the writer’s gender (as “female”), her marital status as “formerly married,” (“a widow”), her age (“80”), and also her geographic location as the Midwest (“Greenfield, Illinois”). As my research questions were particularly focused around the marital status, age and gender of the writers, it was a surprising discovery to find how much information could be gleaned from only brief excerpts of fan mail. A simple act of tracking biographical information from each writer led me to believe that the small fragments could further illuminate more specific aspects of unique *Sunrise Semester* viewing experiences, despite the fact that the fragments were clearly collected for promotional purposes and not scientific study.

The emergence of themes in the letters relating to sentimental or emotional reaction to *Sunrise Semester* also became very apparent from the press excerpts. For instance, another example of information I gathered from a press release fragment included “a chiropractor on Long Island [who] was quoted as writing sadly when the series ended: ‘I knew that this day would eventually come and that the season of “The Heavenly Twins” would end. I enjoyed them immensely... Bless you.’” This small fragment included both geographic information (“Greater New York Metro Area”) and sentimental information (perceived sadness about the end of the show). I noted the sentiment as echoing some of the other letters that I had seen elsewhere in the archive, especially towards the end of the show, which led me to believe I could track the fragments for themes and for thematic co-occurrence.

A third fragment in the same press release reportedly citing a “former chiropractor” noted: the show’s marked difference in intellectual content who caught only part of the lectures simply because she turned on the TV news a bit early, and revealed that she saw an ironic

contrast: She wrote, ‘thank you for giving a moment of light, an indication of man’s possibilities, as a prelude to the morning’s grim news.’

Here, I coded the letter-writer as “female,” the occupation as “former chiropractor,” and noted the sentimental comparison she made between *Sunrise Semester* and the content of other television shows, another theme that I had seen in the press articles and other secondary sources about the show. Again, it was fairly simple to track this as one of the themes throughout the other fragments I found.

Corpus A also features fragments of letters that were mailed to one Dr. Morris L. Stein, professor of psychology at New York University, while he taught a concurrent course in 1973 titled “Personality, Theory and Creativity.” The press release explains that NYU had received letters that came from “church pastors, psychiatrists, senior citizens, surgeons, all sorts of bathrobe scholars.” These letters also contained similar praise for specific aspects of the lecture or treatment of the materials, and in a corresponding 1974 press release were described as “some of a most personal nature” (*Office of Television and Radio*, RG 19, Box 12, Folder 19). For instance, an author and illustrator mailed a letter to say that he had “never ‘received such direction in my creative life,’” and indicated that he “would soon change his career direction, then promised to send Professor Stein a woodcut he was making as a token of appreciation.”

In addition to snippets of letters addressed to Schucking and Stein, Corpus A includes letters that were included in a separate NYU Press Release - Press Office (n.d.), presumably compiled circa September 1981, as it is filed in RG 19, Box 44 and Folder 22 with other materials from 1981, although the actual date is not apparent. “These dawn people have not only been sold on ideas and ideals but they have got to be the last of the dedicated letter writers...” exclaims the press release. It continues:

“There have been accolades from teachers, job offers, critics of performance and applause, personal comments and love letters. Just for the record here are a pair of billets doux: To Prof. James Carse – ‘I have fallen in love with you - if one can fall in love at six o'clock in the morning.’ And to Professor Jill Claster from a Navy man – ‘If the guys knew I got up at 6:30am to watch you, I’d never hear the end of it. Don’t write back!’ (She never did)”
(Office of Television and Radio, Box 44, Folder 22).

The 1981 press release further documents that even the CBS-TV mailroom was unaccustomed to such positive letters, as most people were known to write in to the station directly when they were not happy with what they had seen on television: “The CBS-TV Mailroom gasped, ‘We’ve seen a lot of letters in our time, but never any from people who were so grateful.’”

While further analysis into many of the themes contained in Corpus A are developed and explicated in the pages ahead, a sample of the excerpts that are contained in the 1981 press release reveal the complexity in the relationship between learner and student that is unique to the medium of television. One such example starts, “‘I’ve granted you a big A plus for the way you emerged from the stiff, scared, teacher into a charming warm personality.’” This particular excerpt reveals some of the playful ways in which fans responded to the unique power dynamic between teacher and student that can sometimes also become flipped when a professor allows himself to be critiqued as a television personality.

Some of the *Sunrise Semester* professors admitted that it took a fair amount of time to become accustomed to the structure of teaching on television (*Office of Television and Radio*, RG 19, Box 12, Folder 14, NYU Archives). Another letter writer wrote in an assessment of the professor’s presumably charming good looks that the writer related to a famous movie star of the era, yet those same good looks conflicted with his air of authority on television: “‘Unanimously, we

have agreed that you sound like Cary Grant, look like a bank president, and have the disposition of a swamp adder.” Still others added that they had felt previously lonely, and that the show gave pleasure that was hard to formulate into words: “My life has been extremely lonely this past year, and when I derive such wonderful pleasure as I do from this program, I’m afraid I cannot express my gratitude.” And finally, the most emotional text contained in Corpus A included the farewell letters that came in at the conclusion of the show. “This was a sad morning,” began one self-proclaimed New York-based public relations man, and “God bless you and keep you well,” was the way a California school teacher concluded hers. An intense letter from Hollywood was mailed to a professor of Middle Eastern Civilization and Literature, Dr. Peter Chelkowski, that described the way that the course had changed her: “Haunting music... dreamlike Persepolis... magical mosques... winged gods... all, all leaving an indelible imprint. I could not close this remarkable 15 weeks without letting you know the depth of my gratitude. As a writer, I have been enriched, as a woman, touched” (“Personal Fan Letter,” RG 19, Box 25, Folder 5, NYU Archives).

Themes

It was also important to develop and track emergent themes in a pilot study with the fragments in Corpus A before embarking on the full study of Corpus B and Corpus C.

Three themes that were developed in the pilot study using Corpus A were the following:

- Theme #1: “Thanks and Praise” was a code used for any expression of thanks, praise, or general gratitude aimed at the professor, at NYU, or at the CBS Network. This code was easy to use as a general marker when applied to small fragments of text such as the fragments found in Corpus A.

- Theme #2: “Commitment” was a code that included any reference to the commitment of following the show over several weeks or to awakening early enough to catch the screening hour.
- Theme #3: “Anxiety about the Show’s End” was a code that included any reference to worry or upset caused by the anticipation that the show would soon end. Corpus A did not have specific dates that could be used to ascertain if the level of anxiety went up as the end of the semester approached. However my assumption was that if I could track this code in a general collection of fan mail, then it would be possible to also track it in a complete collection of fan mail from one course. It also became clear that this code could be used to understand the impact of the show on viewers without knowing if the letters were only sent towards the end of the semester.

Pilot Study Findings

Out of ten *Sunrise Semester* fan mail press fragments selected at random and collated into Corpus A, there was a surprising amount of ascertainable information about gender, marriage status, geographic location and occupation (see Table 3). Half of the letters, or 50%, included information about the year or the course in which the letter-writer participated in *Sunrise Semester*. Thirty percent of the letter-writers were male, 30% were female, and 40% did not contain any information about gender, and were therefore coded “gender = indeterminate.”

Table 3.

Sunrise Semester Fan Mail Pilot Study: Corpus A

ID	Year	Highlight	Age	Gender	Location	Occupation	Marital Status	Theme
1a	1973	"...the most interesting and informative lectures I have ever seen..."	80	F	Midwest	<i>I</i>	Married (Widow)	#1
2a	1973	"I knew that this day would eventually come..."	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	New York Metro	Chiropractor	<i>I</i>	#3
3a	1973	"...never 'received such direction in my creative life..."	<i>I</i>	M	<i>I</i>	Author / Illustrator	<i>I</i>	#1
4a	1981	"I've granted you a big A..."	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	#1
5a	<i>I</i>	"As a writer, I have been enriched, as a woman, touched."	<i>I</i>	F	West Coast	Writer	<i>I</i>	#1; #2
6a	<i>I</i>	"This was a sad morning,"	<i>I</i>	M	New York Metro	Public Relations	<i>I</i>	#2
7a	<i>I</i>	"God bless you and keep you well..."	<i>I</i>	F	West Coast	School teacher	<i>I</i>	#1
8a	<i>I</i>	"I'm afraid I cannot express my gratitude..."	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	#1
9a	<i>I</i>	"Unanimously ..."	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>

10a	1974	"I enjoyed your recently concluded television course..."	<i>I</i>	M	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	#1
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Notes: N=10; Under "Gender," F = "Female," M = "Male" and *I* = "Gender Indeterminate;"

Theme #1 = "Thanks and Praise;" Theme #2 = "Pre-Dawn Commitment," Theme #3 = "Anxiety About the Show's End."

Thematic findings were also successfully articulated through the pilot study. Out of ten letters, nine had at least one discernible theme. Seven of ten letter fragments, or 70%, contained Theme #1, Thanks and Praise, two letters, or 20%, contained Theme #2, Commitment, and one letter, or 10%, contained Theme #3, Anxiety About the Show's End. The only letter fragment that did not have a discernible theme that matched the three indefinable sentiments used in the pilot study was the following: "Unanimously, we have decided that you sound like Cary Grant, look like a bank president, and have the disposition of a swamp adder." This fragment also had no information about the letter writer (or letter writers, as the fragment contained the pronoun "we"), and therefore had the least amount of useful information for the pilot study. These findings were sufficiently conclusive to demonstrate that fan mail fragments contained both trackable viewer sentiment as well as audience demographic information. The same methodology was therefore applied to Corpus B and Corpus C using longer excerpts with more identifiable information provided by the letter writers about themselves and the *Sunrise Semester* show they were following on television.

Corpus B: Audience Feedback from 1966-1967

While Corpus A was used to surface themes and build an analysis of de-identified letters that were scattered throughout the archive and assimilated into press releases for use by NYU and the media, a subsequent return to the archives in fall and winter 2015 led to the discovery of fifty-

three de-identified letters dated between the years 1966-1967 that were mailed to NYU and received individually by Professors Walker Gibson and Kai Nielsen (RG 19, Box 25, Folder 4, NYU Archives). These professors taught “Studies in Style” and “Philosophical Analysis,” two Humanities courses that ran on *Sunrise Semester* for the 1966-67 fall term, respectively. The fan mail letters located in RG 15, Box 25, Folder 19 were likely collated because NYU officials believed that samples of audience response to the *Sunrise Semester* courses might be illuminating to interested people both at New York University and CBS Television, as well as presumably useful for future grant applications. The letter fragments are organized by course and professor; the senders’ names were not retained in the paper file. All of the letters in Corpus B are de-identified and do not include PII. They do, however, include the name of the state or country from which the letter writer originates, and occasionally include information about the writer’s occupation, allowing for a greater understanding of the regional scope of *Sunrise Semester* by the mid-1960s. See Appendix B for the full excerpts of these texts.

Because these letters were sent during a concurrent semester of two *Sunrise Semester* courses, and as they are identified by course, professor and the state in which the letter writer resided, I believe that the letters in Corpus B are a more representative and indicative of the general audience; whereas the letters in Corpus A were likely cherry-picked to be noteworthy or unusual, and do not originate from any one course. As a random sampling, Corpus B also may be viewed as evidence of the show’s national and international reach by 1967, as some of the letters were mailed to NYU from as far away as Canada.

Using grounded theory to code for emergent or *in vivo* themes after completing the pilot study on Corpus A, Themes 1, 2 and 3 were expanded from the pilot study to include deeper sentiment analysis in Corpus B in the following ways:

- Theme #1: “Thanks and Praise” was a code used for any expression of thanks, praise, or general gratitude aimed at the professor, at NYU, or at the CBS Network. This code was easy to use as a general code when applied to small fragments of text such as the fragments found in Corpus A. However, this code tree needed to be further developed into deeper sub-codes as Corpus B fragments were longer and more specific about *why* the writer was communicating their thanks or expressions of praise. The sub-codes established under “Thanks and Praise” included “Admiration,” “Gratitude,” and “Appreciation,” as well as “Praise – Teaching and Pedagogy” (if the writer was specifically writing to praise the style of teaching of their professor) or “Praise – Subject” (if the praise was about the specific aspects of the subject lesson). Theme #1 had the greatest number of sub-codes, and many such sub-codes that emerged *in vivo* were later combined and eventually merged when applied to this corpus.

Theme #2: Non-Traditional Learner: This theme included any information about prior education levels that was developed after the pilot study to track information that the writer included about him or herself. This helped consolidate biographical and demographic information.

- Theme #3: “Pre-Dawn Commitment” was an expansion of the theme “Commitment.” This theme was revised to include specific reference to the early screening hour or references to personal challenges in making the show’s early broadcast time, and was re-named “Pre-Dawn Commitment” to only track instances of commitment that related to the early hour, but did not reflect sentiment that related to enjoyment to the show over time. This was done to decouple passing reference about generally

following the show over many weeks, versus expressions of commitment to getting up or watching the show at an early hour, which was a unique aspect of *Sunrise Semester* followers. Often, expressions that were coded under “Pre-Dawn Commitment” also included any kind of special accommodation that the watcher made to allow him or herself to wake in time—such as colorful language around setting an alarm clock earlier than normal, sleeping in front of the television set, or revised coffee routines.

- Theme #4: Shapes and Intimacy of Learning, included all instances of attempts for the letter-writer to describe what it was like to learn on television or in his or her own home.
- Theme #5: “Anxiety about the Show’s End” was a code that included any reference to worry or upset caused by the anticipation that the show would soon end. Corpus A did not have specific dates that could be used to ascertain if the level of anxiety went up as the end of the semester approached, and my assumption was that if I could track this code in a general collection of fan mail, then it would be possible to also track it in a complete collection of fan mail from one course (such as in Corpus C). It became clear with the continued use of this code that fragments could be used to also understand the impact of the show on viewers, despite not knowing if the letters were only sent towards the end of the semester.

Findings from Corpus B:

The collection of Corpus B was analyzed using codes that were gathered, compiled and tested in the pilot study. There were five dominant themes that I coded for in the pilot study, that were later refined when applied to each of the other corpuses. In coding for Theme #1, “Thanks and

Praise.” I tracked all instances of praise, thanks, and gratitude. The Theme #2 “Non-Traditional Learner,” included any reference to age, gender or prior education. For the theme #3 Pre-Dawn Commitment” I tracked twelve out of fifty-three letter writers, or over 22%, that documented their struggles with their pre-dawn commitment in a similar way, often alluding to small or even big changes in their morning routines to accommodate being ready to watch the show when it started at either 6:00am or 6:30am every morning. Often the writer would cite specific ways in which he or she altered or adapted a personal schedule to be ready for the show’s pre-dawn broadcast, which was also coded as Theme #3. For text coded under Theme #4: Shapes and Intimacy of Learning, I tracked all instances of attempts for the letter-writer to describe what it was like to learn on television or in his or her own home. For Theme #5, Anxiety About the Show’s End, I tracked any reference to feelings of sadness, anxiety or despair about the end of the show’s run.

Theme 1: Thanks and Praise

Under “Thanks and Praise,” this code was used to track the number of times writers included expressions of gratitude, appreciation, or thanks included in the letters. I used a weight of 1 to 5, ranking them with a low weighted score as this was the type of general text that I expected to find in fan mail letters, and a high weighted score if the remark had high emphasis. This ranking also corroborated with earlier studies of fan mail (Sayre, 1939; Katz, 1950) in the days of radio show. The code Thanks and Praise included any type of general notes or expressions of gratitude that included more general praise of the show without any other type of qualifiers attached, such as:

I am writing to extend to you my appreciation for this wonderful program. (ID3; ID5)

I want to thank you for your most interesting talk... (ID22)

as well as more general expressions of thanks, such as ending a letter with a simple expression of thanks, or letting the phrase stand on its own, such as:

Thank you (ID5; ID7; ID21; ID30)

Thank you so very much (ID10)

Also within the Thanks and Praise category, I included any type of specific praise about aspects of the performance of the professor or his or her teaching style. If the praise was about teaching style, I used the parent-code Thanks and Praise and then listed the type of praise by using a unique identifier for the sub-code. For example, I tracked the number of words related to thanks, gratitude or praise for the course and the number of instances that word was used throughout the fifty-four letters. I coded this text under the code Thanks and Praise and added “Teaching” as the sub-code. In Corpus B, there were a total of thirty-two instances of words related to any of the sub-codes that were included under Thanks and Praise, including the words “thank you” (twelve instances) or “thanks” (seven instances); “appreciate” or “appreciatively” (six instances); “delight” or “delighted” (five instances); “glad” (one instance); or “enchanted” (one instance).

Additionally, there was more specific praise included in the letters that pertained to lecture content, revealing a dynamic range of more precise approbation relating particularly to pedagogy and teaching style or to subject references. These types of specific praise included anything from admiration for the use of music in the lectures to the emulation of witty language, such as a clever metaphor or pun, which the letter-writer quoted back to the instructor. Two examples that were coded under the Thanks and Praise sub-code “Subject Reference,” for example, where the letter-writer included very specific praise about aspects of content from the morning’s lecture:

I’m writing to tell you how much I am enjoying your lectures on prose style. I’m getting a particular charge from your discussion of like as a conjunction. (ID16)

As one of the courses was called “Studies in Style,” there was particular attention to the use of grammar and pun, alluding to the general wry wit and turns of phrase to allude to double-meaning

that the professor often carried throughout the course, as well as general thanks or praise of the teacher, in general:

Thank you for reminding me that there are still some real, dynamic teachers. (ID10)

Thank you for giving me so much pleasure and writing help. (ID36)

Theme 2: Non-Traditional Learner as Self-Identification

The code, “Non-Traditional Learner as Self-Identification,” tracked instances in which the letter-writer included biographical information about previous education levels, or life experiences that could lead the reader to infer that he or she was a “non-traditional learner.” This code was problematic in that as asserted in the literature review, the bifurcation between “traditional” and “non-traditional” learners are not discrete distinctions. After coding for “Non-Traditional Learner as Self-Identification” in the pilot study using Corpus A, it was clear that nearly all of the followers of *Sunrise Semester* could be deemed “non-traditional,” simply because of the nature of learning through the medium of television. In the pilot study, this code was expanded to track all instances of language in which the letter writer included data about themselves that could not be deemed merely biographical but also descriptive in nature, such as:

The last 35 years I have lived alone on my farm. (ID5)

As one who struggles with youth on the inside and age on the outside... (ID10)

The code “Non-Traditional Learner as Self-Identification” was then used in Corpus B for all instances in which the letter-writer included personal *and* biographical information, and then sub-coded if the phrase was a “reveal” that included information about any of the five sub-themes: **gender, education, marital status, occupation** or **age**. I used the code “2a” to track “age reveals,” “2e” to track “education reveals,” “2m” to track “marital status reveals,” and “2o” to track “occupation reveals.” The integrated use of these five sub-codes to track gender, education, marital

status or occupation reveals emerged as vital in understanding general demographic information from small fragments of text.

Gender reveal.

Gender reveals in both Corpus A and Corpus B were rare because the shorter fragments rarely contained information about gender or marital status beyond phrases that could also reveal both, such as:

My husband and I are two of your interested viewers on 'Sunrise Semester' (ID17)

In this case, the letter writer would be assumed to be both female and married and coded “married,” “female.” The majority of letter writers in the pilot study conducted on Corpus B included very few such phrases, and the gender was coded as “indeterminate” in the descriptor field.

Education reveal.

Many of the letter-writers included information about prior education levels, usually including the name of the university that they had attended, such as:

I got my degree from New York University (ID16)

Age reveal.

Similar to education reveals, letter-writers often included the year in which they graduated from high school, college, or graduate school, which allowed an approximation of age and birth date to be made. For instance, sometimes the letter-writer included information that allowed the reader to make an inference about his or her age, such as:

Even though I am kept up by tenth grade homework...(ID3)

*Although I received my MA degree from Teachers College Columbia in
1928...(ID15)*

Or, in an example of co-occurrence between two sub-codes, this letter writer included both an age reveal and an education reveal in the same fragment:

I got my degree from New York University way back in 1908! (ID16)

Attempts to date the ages of the letter-writers were not conducted in the pilot study with Corpus A because the dates of receipt for the letters were impossible to locate in the truncated text. Dating the birthdays of the letter-writers in Corpus B was more successful, because all of the letters were received around the year 1967. In the case of the example excerpt from ID16 above from Corpus B, if the letter-writer received a degree from NYU at age 20 in 1908, which was a common age for graduation with a bachelor's degree, he or she was likely born roughly in or around the year 1888.

Theme 3: Pre-Dawn Commitment

I used Theme #3: Pre-Dawn Commitment to track sections in the fan letters that cited ways in which the writer was making either an effort to watch every day, and often cited the specific days and hour that the show was broadcast in his or her region, such as:

We're listening to you at 6:30am MWF (ID4)

Just to express my appreciation for Sunrise Semester, even at 6:30 in the morning (ID27)

The chore of rising at 6:30am each morning during the past semester, in order to be at my teaching post at 8:00, was made most pleasurable by you (ID31)

It was a worthwhile pleasure to rise to be ready at 6:30am over many months... (ID39)

Sometimes the letter-writer also cited a type of morning ritual in his or her day to ensure that he or she was awake early enough in the morning, often with a reference to coffee:

*...Even though it means getting up early to insure the coffee's being ready
by class time (ID13)*

Out of fifty-three letters that were analyzed in Corpus B, there were twenty-six instances of “Pre-Dawn Commitment,” with twelve individual letters containing specific references to “6:30am,” referring directly to the specific broadcast hour, and twenty-three references to related words such as *morning* (fifteen), *early* (six) or *arise* (two).

Theme 4: The Shapes and Intimacy of Learning

The final theme that I used to code “Corpus B” was Theme #4: The Shapes and Intimacy of Learning. In the initial analysis, this genre of letter fragments was the hardest to categorize. I began to notice certain patterns of phrasing that defied the categories of code I had developed. These patterns seemed to cohere around attempts to articulate either the unique ways in which television learning occurs and unfolds in a domestic space or the uniquely personal or “intimate” connections formed with a television personality. It was only after the conclusion of the pilot study that I understood what the letter-writer was trying to do: it was an attempt to place the distinctive yet unfamiliar ways in which one learns on television in the home into words.

The viewer is allowed to enter the lecture room amid the peace and quiet, and then is permitted the luxury of listening to, assimilating, coordinating, and remembering the facts.
(ID5)

Here the viewer metaphorically describes “entering” a “lecture room,” possibly referring to the letter-writer’s own living room. S/he notes the ability to learn amid “peace and quiet” and uses the word “luxury” to describe his or her own learning. In the below quote, which was also the quote that first inspired the named identification of this theme in the first place:

It is a delight to see your plan for this course unfold. To me it is shaped in three dimensions, like a cone. Wherever you lead us during the next couple of months, we know we will be generously awarded. (ID12)

But many of these types of disclosures about the intangible ways in which the course “unfolded” over time also included some kinds of allusions to the intimacy of the experience of having a professor “enter” the domestic space:

You have been coming into my small apartment for months now. I feel as though I know you personally. (ID14)

While disclosures of intimacy were relatively uncommon and occurred in three of the fifty-four letters (or 5.4%), this slim margin is unsurprising as Corpus B represents only a small section of previously-excerpted fan letters that were collated for press purposes and other types of uses that were meant to be public.

Theme 5: Anxiety About The Show’s End

There were many letters in both Corpus B and Corpus C that included co-occurrence of intimacy while also alluding to anxiety or even dread about the show’s end, such as:

It was with shock that I learned you will not be on next semester... (ID14)

We are certainly not looking forward to the conclusion. (ID12)

One can infer that such anxiousness about the show’s end also meant that the letter-writer enjoyed the show, and did not want it to end. It seems worth noting that these letters did not appear to correlate with the actual end of the show, but were included in letters that were mailed throughout the semester.

Additional Sub-Codes

In addition to five sub-codes under “Theme 2: Non-Traditional Learner,” I developed a series of sub-codes that were used to trace nuance and some of the more unclassifiable expressions that arose out of the pilot study, but were not deemed worthy of pursuing further in the analysis of full length letters contained in Corpus B. One such sub-code, named “Grasping for words,” was predominantly used in tracked letters originating from the Midwest, in which the letter writer included admissions about the difficulty of putting their “fandom” into words, such as:

The limits of language prevent me from expressing my deeply felt gratitude and excitement over your lectures and collateral reading. (ID6)

It is impossible to say--in this “lineal manner” ... (ID13)

This was different from “shapes of learning” because the phrases reflected a struggle to place their gratitude into words, rather than an attempt to describe the way they were learning. Another sub-code used to track ambitions or evidence of change in a person’s life vis-à-vis their education goals was called “Aspirations:”

For many years, I have day-dreamed of going to Columbia, but since hearing you, I think now I would like to take some courses from you. (ID14)

And finally, one of the last sub-codes that was significant for the larger study of fan mail was that of “Comparison-Making.” This group was later broken down into two specific types of comparisons: “Comparisons With Other TV Programs” and “Comparisons With College Experience.” In the first example, the letter-writer cited comparisons between *Sunrise Semester* and the other types of shows that were on television, such as this one, written by a letter-writer that claimed to be in high school:

Even though I am often kept up late by tenth grade homework, I always try to be at the television set the next morning. All too often, I realize, the well done goes unappreciated. CBS must bow to public opinion and place "Captain Kangaroo" at a better period. While the good captain has its merits, I believe your show to be one of the best on the air at the present time. (ID3)

In examples in which the letter-writer compared *Sunrise Semester* to the experience of following a course on television against the experience of attending college or university, these were included under the sub-code, "Comparisons with College Experience," such as:

I have enjoyed the telecast of the New York University 'Sunrise Semester' better than those of the Columbia professors (ID15)

It was important to note that there were not many instances of such collegiate comparisons, but when there were, they were highly specific.

Corpus C: Letters to Dr. Philip Mayerson, Fall 1971

Rather than relying on the entirety of all seventy-seven original letters that were found in the archive, I opted to randomly select a sampling of full letters to include in Corpus C that are indicative of the entire collection. Out of seventy-seven letters, twenty-three were coded as "male" and fifty-two were coded as "female," while two were coded as "indeterminate" because the gender was not clear by name or by clues contained in the letter alone. I therefore randomly selected six letters that were from male letter writers and fourteen that were from female letter writers to reflect roughly the same percentage of 31% versus 68% of male versus female found in the total collection. I did not use either of the two letters coded with an indeterminate gender status. While the selection of the twenty letters included in Corpus C was made at random, special care was used to make sure that the ten letters also included a wide range of "types" of backgrounds, reflecting the wide range

Running Head: FROM SUNRISE SEMESTER TO PRESENT-DAY MOOCS

of geographic origin, biographical information and perspectives found in the entirety of the *Sunrise Semester* collection.

Before conducting the analysis of the randomly selected letters that comprise Corpus C, there were some cursory observations that are worth mentioning here, as they pertain directly to Sayre's 1939 study of paper quality and weight as correlated to gender: in an examination of all seventy-seven letters, male letter-writers generally used official letterhead from a corporation or place of business, while female letter-writers generally used plain paper, lined paper, or fancy stationary (see Figure 13, below).

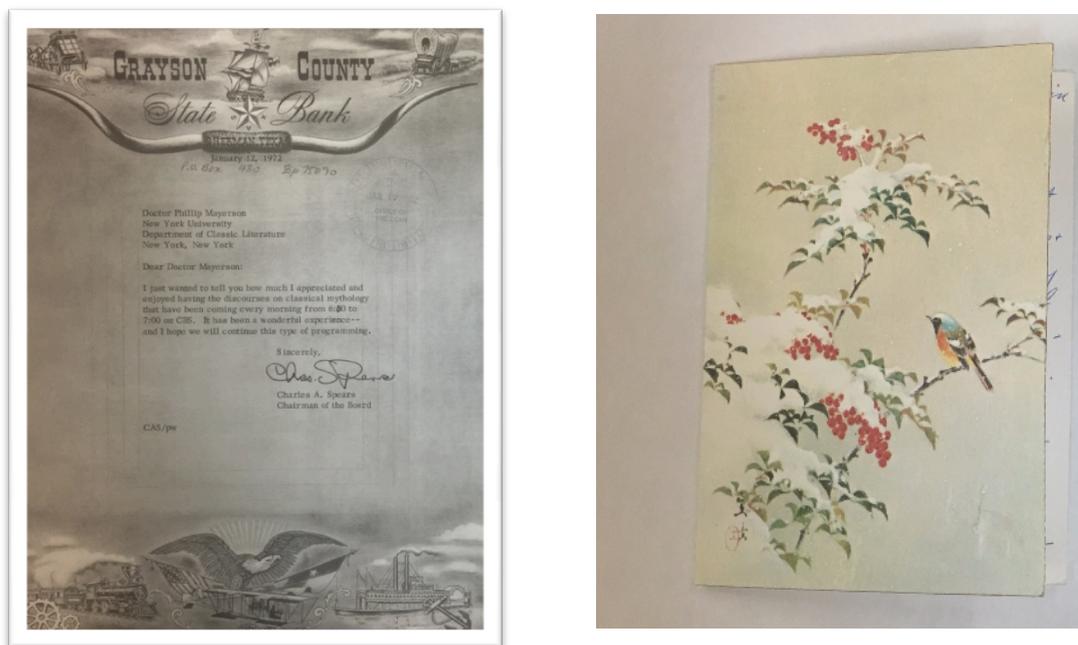


Figure 13: Two Examples of Stationary from Fan Letters in Corpus C. At left, an example of letterhead used by a male letter-writer, versus example on the right as an example of card-stock stationary used by a female writer, both from "Corpus C." Photo: Courtesy of the author.

Female writers often used stationary or cards such as the example on the top right, while men often used business stationary. Male letter-writers generally included some type of written request along with short praise for the show: a book suggestion, a reading list, a recording of a

previous lecturer, or further information about one of the upcoming courses. Women generally did not include a request, and often merely included praise and thanks, along with some personal information about why or how they enjoyed the course. Occasionally, female writers included a physical gift that was mailed with their letter of appreciation – such as a crystal, a poem as in the case from the vignette that was inspired by a letter sent by “Mrs. GJ,” or other objects such as a bottle of perfume, chocolate or postcards.

It is possible that other types of intimate or even inappropriate language was included in letters that were not included for public consumption, including this excerpt from a letter that included a bottle of Dante perfume that was not included only in Corpus C for this study as it was not indicated of the larger body of fan mail letters. It is somewhat of an anomaly. This letter was also not included in the collated body of texts that were mimeographed and placed in the archive but singled out in a different collection (RG 19 Box 25, Folder 5, NYU Archives).

The letter opened with a rather cryptic phrase in quotes: *An apple for the teacher*, underscoring the pronouncement that the bottle of cologne was meant to be received as a gift from the student, who happened to be female:

June 17, 1966

Dr. Mayerson

Dear Sir,

“An apple for the teacher.” The two Dante’s have nothing in common but the name. But it’s the best I could come up with. So if you care not at all for this Dante, give it to your favorite enemy - if it arrives safely. Thanks again for adding much to an otherwise dreary winter.

Sincerely,

Mrs. A_E_

(‘Letter to Professor Mayerson,’ June 17, 1966, RG 19 Box 25, Folder 4, NYU

Archives)

Attached by paperclip to the original note was the professor’s response, typed and mailed over a full month later, was a terse yet professional response from Professor Mayerson in 1966 with an apology for the delay in response. The reply exists in a carbon copy to the original, preserved on onionskin:

July 26, 1966

Dear Mrs. E _____,

Please forgive the delay in my acknowledging your kind note and your gift. I have been most busy with a heavy summer teaching schedule.

I am glad that you enjoyed my Sunrise series. As for the cologne, I have no enemies, so I kept it for myself.

Thank you for your thoughtfulness.

Sincerely yours,

Philip Mayerson

Associate Professor of Classics

Until I located copy of the cologne bottle in question, the reference was unclear to me how the reference to Dante was connected to the show, until I located this image from the same year as the letter and as the broadcast, circa 1967:



Figure 14: 1967 Men's Fragrance Ad for Dante After-Shave & Cologne
Source: Published in Ebony magazine, April 1967, Vol. 20 No. 6, online edition.

In the above image of a vintage 1960s magazine advertisement for “Dante,” a men’s after shave and cologne printed in Ebony Magazine in 1967, the tagline also helps to clarify the mystery of why a fan would mail such a bottle to her televised professor. The tagline reads, “The glory of Rome in a classic cologne and after shave,” and thereby made the reference to Mrs. A’s gift clear: she connected the name of Dante, referring to the 13th century writer and poet with the advertising reference to Greek and Roman mythology, which was the subject of Professor Mayerson’s course on *Classical Greek and Roman Mythology in Literature, Art and Music*.

While the above example is somewhat of an anomaly, there were other several traits that were unique to gender. For instance, female writers tended to start a letter with an expression of thanks framed as a question, rather than a statement more often than male writers. In the case below, the question was then followed by a lengthy, almost pen-pal-like introduction, or at the very least assumed to be from someone who is intimately known to the receiver:

As an informal participant of your TV Mythology course, may I thank you for the opportunity you are giving us, to learn more than we otherwise would? [...] As a relatively uneducated, middle-aged Hausfrau, married more than a quarter-century, I have taken time for reading something every day, and mythology has been my highest interest from the beginning. (ID_12c)

As demonstrated by the excerpt of text from the full letter above, the letter begins with a “thank you” phrased as a question, followed by two different disclaimers coded here as reveals about prior education level (“*As a relatively uneducated...*”) along with a colorful descriptor (...*middle-aged Hausfrau...*”) followed by a reveal about the letter-writer’s marriage status (“...*married...*”) and a partial reveal about her age (“...*more than a quarter-century,*”). All of the data except the partial reveal about the letter-writer’s length of time in her marriage can be coded for data about this particular listener. While not as specific as the types of reveals that were found in many of the letters contained in Corpus B, as the letter-writer did not include an actual date of birth nor cite the actual level of prior education attainment, this is an example of a letter found as a completely preserved, fully-intact letter that was mailed to Dr. Philip Mayerson, alongside the professor’s response back to her.

The co-occurrence of age disclosure and prior education disclosure along with other types of “reveals” about occupation was relatively common in Corpus B among female writers, while the male writers usually do not include such reveals. Out of the six male letter-writers included in the study, only one writer included information about his occupation, and no male writers included information about marital status (see Appendix C: Corpus C Fan Mail). An indicative example of a fan mail letter excerpt used for analysis in Corpus C includes the following direct phrasing of such

a request for more materials, and perhaps a passing inclusion of information about how he “listens” to the show:

Enjoy your television lecture through earphones while running around a track at the YMCA in Omaha, Nebraska. On Thursday, November 4th, your program in Omaha mentioned a reference from T.S. Elliot’s “Cocktail Party.”[...]. In case the program is from a script and it would be possible to pull the two or three sentences wherein you explained how the doctor mentioned that we only understand each other through periodic contacts which we have with one another, and it seems to me there was a mention of a death reference. Would certainly appreciate a copy of those few sentences. (ID_6c)

In the above case, the letter-writer also included money with his note to “cover the cost” of his request.

Also related to gender differences in styles of writing, many of the female writers include notation of other interests pertaining to the show, and related requests for more information. In the case of “ID_12c,” the letter writer continues with a history of her active interest and pursuit of knowledge in mythology and classical texts:

Without a tutor until now [meaning ‘Sunrise Semester’], my search for an explanation of the language of my mythology was more like a detective, searching for nearly invisible clues. For the amount of reading I did, however, I found the amount of “clues” frustratingly meager. Quite a few individuals I approached for explanations to serve me in understanding literature better informed me that the meanings I sought were lost in antiquity. I could not accept this, not only because I occasionally found a “nugget” in some book I read, but also

because I felt that Keats, Shelley and others could not have written work worth saving...(ID_12c)

While the type of request she seeks becomes unclear towards the end of the letter, as she mainly just includes praise for his teaching style and the content of his lectures, it would seem that Mayerson replied to her letter with the assumption that she sought more worthwhile texts about mythology: All pertinent selections of the ten letters used in the analysis are included in Appendix C.

Lastly, one of the most surprising findings was that letter-writers that hailed from the Midwest also wrote the longest letters. This was true across both genders. Although $N = 20$, and this is arguably a small sample size of only seven letters out of twenty (or 35%) that were written from writers that hailed from the Midwest as opposed to the five other geographic areas that were tracked as part of this study, this finding also correlated across findings from Corpus A and Corpus B writing from the Midwest, too.

Findings from Corpus C:

Corpus C, the collection of twenty full-length fan mail letters selected at random, was the text used in the final analysis for this study. The study used the same codes that were gathered, compiled and tested in the pilot study with Corpus A and the codes were further developed and refined after they were applied to Corpus B. While sub-codes were omitted, geographic, biographic, demographic and psychographic information was included and can be viewed in Appendix D. The full letters were analyzed using the following five themes: Theme #1: Thanks and Praise, Theme #2: Non-Traditional Learner as Self-Identification, Theme #3: Pre-Dawn Commitment, Theme #4: Shapes and Intimacy of Learning, Theme #5: Anxiety About the Show's End, and Theme 6:

Requests. Table 4 below summarizes all of the audience data collected from the sample size of twenty fan mail letters.

Table 4.

Corpus C: 'Sunrise Semester' Audience Data From Fan Letters Mailed Between 1971-1972

<u>ID</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Geographic Location</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Total # Themes</u>	<u>Word Length</u>
1c	<i>I</i>	Female	NY Metro	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	5	79
2c	90	Female	Southeast	<i>I</i>	Married	3	72
3c	<i>I</i>	Male	I	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	3	62
4c	77	Female	Midwest	Retired	Unmarried	10	142
5c	<i>I</i>	Female	West Coast	Retired	Married	4	137
6c	<i>I</i>	Male	Midwest	Store Executive	<i>I</i>	2	115
7c	<i>I</i>	Male	West Coast	Professor	<i>I</i>	3	95
8c	<i>I</i>	Female	Midwest	<i>I</i>	Married	2	58
9c	<i>I</i>	Female	West Coast	<i>I</i>	Married	1	76
10c	80	Female	Northeast	<i>I</i>	Married	4	126
11c	<i>I</i>	Male	Midwest	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	4	216
12c	<i>I</i>	Female	Midwest	'Hausfrau'	Married	2	379
13c	<i>I</i>	Male	Southwest	CEO Banker	Married	2	48
14c	<i>I</i>	Male	Midwest	Professor	<i>I</i>	1	142
15c	<i>I</i>	Female	Northeast	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	3	88
16c	78	Female	Southeast	<i>I</i>	Married	4	95
17c	<i>I</i>	Female	Southeast	Mother	Married	1	114
18c	<i>I</i>	Female	Southeast	Univ. Employee	<i>I</i>	1	269
19c	<i>I</i>	Female	Midwest	<i>I</i>	Married	1	21
20c	66	Female	West Coast	<i>I</i>	Married	4	115

Notes: N = 20. ID = are assigned at random. *I* = Indeterminate. To calculate word length = this number did not include addressee information or the signature line, but did include valedictions such as "Sincerely," "Respectfully yours," etc.

Theme #1: Thanks and Praise

Under Theme #1: Thanks and Praise, there were twenty-four instances in which the writer exclaimed thanks for the show, ranging from simple to profound to the general:

Meanwhile, many thanks for a most pleasant course. (15_c)

My heartfelt thanks to you. (ID_4c)

As the range of praise did not differ greatly from the same thematic findings in Corpus B, they are not interpreted here. But it is interesting to note that there were many more specific types of subject-based praise, especially for interesting aspects of the course.

Theme #2: Non-Traditional Learner as Self-Identification

Under Theme #2: Non-Traditional Learner as Self-Identification, there were thirteen examples that were coded, including sub-codes such as “#2e” for education, such as the following:

I have studied geology and eight semesters of Spanish at the University of Minnesota in 1952 and audited the Sunrise Semester lectures for five or six years, starting with World Art History. These courses keep an old lady 78 alive. (ID_16c)

Some of the thirteen instances of Theme #2 also included statements of age, as well as types of “age reveals” that allowed for a simple calculation of actual age, such as this one coded as “#2a” for an “age reveal” sub-code:

I have loved mythology ever since Mrs. Gray taught us from Gayley’s Classic Myths in the 9th grade in Berkeley around 1919 or 1920! (ID_20c)

Theme #3: Pre-Dawn Commitment

Coded under Theme #3: Pre-Dawn Commitment, there were eight unique references to the early hour of the show, or some other reference to ways in which the fan writer was able to get up in the morning. Often, the reference merely stated the time of broadcast hour, as in the findings with Corpus B. More remarkable was when the letter writer started a note with the exact time, to the minute, that she sat down to write:

7:03 am Saturday

This is my most beautiful card, so I'm sending it to you to thank you for your excellent course on Sunrise Semester, 6:00am Tuesday and Thursday and 6:30am on Saturday.

(ID_20c)

The time stamp at the top of “her most beautiful card” is a particularly touching example of the Theme “Pre-Dawn Commitment”, as she clearly wanted to make sure that the professor knew that she was sitting down to write the moment the show had finished its broadcast on television.

Theme #4: Shapes and Intimacy of Learning

Under Theme #4: Shapes and Intimacy of Learning, there was only one instance that was coded to describe an unusual.

The Flagstad aria was great in your first lecture, but after all the “good learning,” it was overpowering. I am grateful to you. I am thankful that such learning came into my home and that I had the wit to appreciate it. (ID_4c)

The phrase, “*I am thankful that such learning came into my home*” is interpreted here to reference the way in which the professor’s “good learning” broadcast came to her in her own domestic space. A finding of only one single instance of Theme #4 may merely underscore the fact that the collated text fragments in Corpus B were selected precisely for their esoteric language.

Theme #5: Anxiety About the Show's End

Coded Theme #5: Anxiety About the Show's End were three instances of text pertaining to anxiety about the show's end, such as:

I was dismayed to hear you announce this morning the completion of your course! (ID_15c)

Theme #6: Requests

While not central to this study, I thought it would be interesting to code the number of direct requests that were included in Corpus C, under the Theme #6: Requests. There were ten instances of requests contained in the twenty letters, including requests to send information, sometimes with money enclosed, and even to settle a score. Five of the ten requests were for lecture notes or some other aspect of materials that were referenced from the course, especially if the writer had missed a lecture:

I would like to know if it would be possible to obtain a transcript of your lectures of November 2nd and 4th. I was away on vacation, during that week, and missed your knowledgeable information. (ID_1c)

Similarly, this request was penned to the University, with a promise of exchange for money to cover the cost:

You might want to tell Prof Mayerson how much I especially enjoyed his telling about Asclepius and the myth around the origin of the Caduceus. [...] However, I've been trying to procure a copy of the text. Where might I obtain one? If you distribute them, could you please send one and bill me accordingly? (ID_7c)

While this below request is very directly related to content that was presumably covered on the show, it is actually a request to “settle a score” amongst family members. A number of other pieces

of information was included in the text about marriage status and also a reference to a child at home:

Would you please settle a small disagreement for us. My husband insists he was taught that Achilles was covered all over with armor and leather and only his heel exposed, therefore rendering his only vulnerable point. My 12-year old insist she was taught that Hera dipped her son into some sacred river holding him by his heels and made him impenetrable or unable to be killed. She said he would have been protected from being killed even if he were naked or not wearing armor except at his vulnerable point which was his heels.

Which is correct? (ID_17c)

Perhaps most incredible of all is that Professor Mayerson individually responded to each of these letters, demonstrating the power of personalized exchange in the age of television. In many ways, these letters function as evidence of how the show existed as a heterotopia for the audience viewer, demonstrating the power of exceptional content that could be taught on television.

The above example is also somewhat of an anomaly, as the letter-writer (ID_17c) almost certainly expected a direct reply to the question to settle a family score. This is not the norm. As Katz pointed out in his study of radio fan mail in the 1940s, “fan mail is a natural response to interest in a particular program, and reflects that threshold where passive interest is converted into active listeners—the desire to respond (Katz, 1950, p. 116).

There is something profound and touching located in the personal detail that is contained in the letters themselves, as if the writers reach out and make a personal connection. It was likely rather surprising for each of these letter-writers to receive a personalized response back from their televised professor, often mailed within just a few days. That Professor Mayerson’s *Sunrise Semester* course on ‘Classical Mythology, Art, Literature and Music’ evoked the need among a

certain percentage or proportion of television viewers to express themselves in writing can be deemed a worthy measurement of the show's success. And yet the fact Professor Mayerson, or any of the other professors on *Sunrise Semester*, saw their role as teacher, and television performer, but also "pen pal" and cared enough about their student-fans to write back directly with an individualized response each time is remarkable. This fan-letter exchange sets the show apart from other early distance learning experiments of the twentieth-century, and can be deemed evidence of the show's success.

Chapter 6: MOOC Comparisons

While at least fifty years separate the start of *Sunrise Semester* starting in the year 1957 and the dawn of MOOCs in 2008, there are several direct comparisons between the present-day phenomenon of online education and the earlier era of distance learning through television that are worth addressing here. When first embarking on this research, I noted that quite a few articles about the dawn of MOOCs used exclamatory phrases like “it’s Sunrise Semester all over again” (Riddle, 2013; Doom, 2014;). This chapter starts with a comparison between *Sunrise Semester* and present-day MOOCs to surface key similarities and differences between these two episodes in experimental learning, before attending to the dominant discourse behind MOOCs and their projected evolution as free and equitable learning platforms.

At first glance, the resemblances between the two types of learning environments are striking. Firstly, Sunrise Semester and MOOCs were systems of learning that relied on the dominant form of technology of the day to exist—both capitalized on existing platforms of television and the Internet to expand into the area of education, which was not the primary use of the technology that they relied upon. Secondly, both *Sunrise Semester* and the earliest MOOCs sought to offer free access to an education for learners of all ages. Thirdly, both Sunrise Semester and MOOCs were similarly ridiculed in the press before launch. The list of correspondences continues: both Sunrise Semester and some of the earliest known MOOCs sought to develop in experimental ways that seemed to depart from any extant models. In many ways, *Sunrise Semester*—which would have been termed a “disruptive technology” in the field of education, if that term had existed in the 1950s—paved the way for the concept of present-day MOOCs to exist.

Sunrise Semester and present-day MOOCs are also alike in the ways in which they capitalized on partnerships to develop content and launch to wide audiences. Both platforms were born from partnership beyond university walls, and, in fact, both *Sunrise Semester* and MOOCs required a partnership between a commercial enterprise and a university to exist. In the case of *Sunrise Semester*, a partnership was formed between NYU and CBS. NYU had access to highly esteemed professors, content and a credentialing system, thereby establishing the necessary credibility for earning a higher education on television. CBS had access to vast audiences and the necessary equipment to enable broadcast. Current-day MOOCs have attracted top-tier professors highly established in their fields, and likewise rely upon partnerships between corporate partners from the start-up world and Silicon Valley and established universities to facilitate accreditation and access to vast audience numbers.

Sunrise Semester and MOOCs sought to attract diverse learners “from all walks of life,” yet both platforms were created without knowing in advance what kind of learner the platform would attract. As the programs evolved, the key players and thinkers behind *Sunrise Semester* and present-day MOOCs relied on fragments of information to glean information about their audiences. In the case of *Sunrise Semester*, fan mail provided fragments of information about viewers. For a MOOC, much more data is collected to measure engagement as well as demographics, and can be collected and quantified whenever a student posts on a chat forum, watches a video online, or shares insights about the course through myriad social media channels.

This is where stark differences between *Sunrise Semester* and present-day MOOCs begin to emerge. Fan mail is a discrete type of reaction that had historical precedents in terms of measurement and importance, and was the only way to receive tangible audience feedback beyond estimated numbers of television viewers. Present-day MOOCs generate so much data across many

different formats that the field has, by necessity, become somewhat reductive to mere “clicks” in terms of actual measurement.

Another difference has to do with gender: just as *Sunrise Semester* was reported to attract an audience base that was 70% female and 30% male, recent studies of present-day MOOCs have demonstrated a nearly-flipped percentage of gender disparity. According to a University of Pennsylvania study by Professor Ezekiel Emanuel on gender percentages and MOOC participation on the Coursera platform, it turned out that MOOCs were not blowing off the doors of audience diversity; in fact, the predominant audiences for MOOCs in his study were predominantly male, with an average age of 26.2 years, and already had acquired an undergraduate degree (Emanuel, 2013). Additionally, Emanuel noted that many of the MOOC learners in the study already had high school degrees, bachelor degrees or Masters degrees, and were using the platform primarily to gain additional credentials for employment.

This discovery led to the formation of one more pressing question to explore before closing my research on *Sunrise Semester*: given all the other similarities between *Sunrise Semester* and present-day MOOCs, do learning platforms attract one type of gender over another due to the historical nature of the medium as a “gendered” technology itself? More to the point, do present-day MOOCs attract more men because it is a platform that has been designed to exist on the Internet, just as *Sunrise Semester* was a platform designed for television that attracted more women due to its earlier connection to radio? If radio and early television were spheres that attracted women to learn, was learning on the Internet a dominantly male space for learning?

Before exploring the question about gender distribution in the audiences of *Sunrise Semester* and present-day MOOCs, I needed to explore whether television actually served to enfranchise women. Could television really be a source of empowerment, or did it merely serve to re-inscribe

gender roles at home, as suggested by shows like “I Love Lucy”? In 2013 Dr. Elihu Katz, writing nearly sixty-five years after his 1950s graduate study on radio fan mail and happiness, co-authored a study with PhD student Rowan Howard-Williams titled, “Did television empower women? The introduction of television and the changing status of women in the 1950s.” The study focused primarily on the temporal coincidence of the very rapid update of television in the late 1940s and 1950s that was followed by the emergence of a new feminist consciousness in the 1960s, and looked at the medium of television as a technological and cultural form within the home as an agent of change. Katz and Howard-Williams argued that the arrival of the television as a “particular apparatus in the home, and through various interactions of its content and changes in patterns and routines that it brought to the domestic space” served to crystallize and reinforce broader social trends that were already underway (Katz & Howard-Williams, 2013, p.9). I wondered if it could therefore be possible that present-day MOOCs have merely crystallized and reinforced broader trends in learning that attract men into higher education, just as *Sunrise Semester* had attracted more women because television was a medium that was directly marketed to women in a domestic space.

MOOCs and equity.

Several studies have emerged since 2013 that point to a dominantly male enrollment in MOOCs. Echoing the results of Emanuel’s study, researchers found that most of these students were young men who were already well educated and were looking for new skills to advance their careers (Ihsen, Jeanrenaud, Vries, & Hennis, 2015). Further support for this claim comes from global studies of gender across many different educational platforms. At the height of the hype surrounding MOOCs, many assumptions and predictions were offered about how they functioned and what they might achieve if they were truly going to be equitable spaces for learning; more recently, controversy has swirled around the issue of equity and access.

When Macleod, Haywood, Woodgate and Alkhatnai created their first MOOCs in 2012 for the University of Edinburgh, they entered into relatively uncharted territory with respect to designing a course for unknown learners. An early question the group asked themselves resonated sharply with early questions voiced by *Sunrise Semester* learners: “just who are the tens of thousands of individuals who sign up to learn on short, free, online courses?” In turn, the challenge of studying an emergent form of learning also resonated with the “unusualness” of *Sunrise Semester* fan mail letter-writers: “as these are among the first MOOCs to exist, are they attracting an ‘unusual audience’, and if so, will a stable audience arise and if so, when?” (Macleod et al., 2015, p. 57). It was also difficult for the researchers to test what they could measure:

Alongside the bold proclamation that MOOCs signal ‘the end of higher education as we know it’ (Kolowich, 2013) were some more testable statements, including outreach of digital education to the disadvantaged (Coughlan, 2014); global uptake of online learning (Martin & Walter, 2013); growth of an ‘educational imperialism’ (MacGregor, 2013); ‘MOOCs are for male geeks’ (Straumsheim, 2013), and ‘a transformation of traditional ways of teaching and learning’ (Ebben & Murphy, 2014). We, and a small number of other education researchers, began to gather data to test these predictions (Macleod, Haywood, Woodgate, & Alkhatnai, 2015, p. 56)

The fact that MOOC audiences are global and have attracted a wide swath of active and engaged learners has been well documented in both the press and in current-day MOOC research, but what else do we know about MOOC learners in 2016, now that platforms have matured in the last five years? Now that the market has become less speculative and more mainstream, what new learnings can researchers claim that approaches MOOCs less as a force of “disruption” and more as an experimental platform that can be truly equitable for both genders? One could argue that

MOOCs are not truly disruptive but have merely shifted the conversation of free and open access to education—which I have argued was already well underway during the era of *Sunrise Semester*—into the parlance of Internet culture. If we examine the MOOC phenomenon as one more new technological development within the centuries-long evolution of equitable access to education, what else can we say about what the future holds for this latest form of distance learning?

Controversy surrounding issues of gender in MOOCs has fallen on both sides of an ongoing debate about access and global reach. One active blogger on the subject of MOOC participation recently researched whether the percentages of female and male students in MOOC courses merely reflect the same gender differences in traditional university course subjects (“MOOC Moochers,” 2013). By using information about gender-based participation from six MOOCs offered in 2013 by the University of Edinburgh, and comparing gender-based data on traditional learners from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA),³ it became clear that gender disparities merely paralleled the same distribution that occurred in brick-and-mortar campuses. The study looked at the percentage of female and male students who had studied in the same fields during the same year (2009-2010, using students at all levels of higher education) for which data was available. The two data sets served as a useful source to build a comparison between male and female participation in MOOCs and traditional courses.

The data for the MOOCs, and their related HESA subject areas, was as follows:

³ HESA collects higher education statistics on participation throughout the United Kingdom.

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Edinburgh MOOC Course	%female	%male	Related HESA Subject Area	%female	%male
Artificial Intelligence Planning	19	80	Computer Science	19	81
Astrobiology and the Search for Extraterrestrial Life	44	54	Physical Sciences	43	57
Critical Thinking in Global Challenges	54	45	Medicine & Dentistry	59	41
E-learning and Digital Cultures	59	39	Education	75	25
Equine Nutrition	87	13	Veterinary Science	78	22
Introduction to Philosophy	49	50	Historical & Philosophical Studies	53	47

Figure 15. A Comparison of MOOC Data and HESA Data According to Gender. Source: [MOOCs @ Edinburgh 2013 – Report 1](#) and [HESA Table 7, Qualifications obtained by level, gender and subject](#).

Similarly, Coursera conducted a global demographic survey of over 250,000 of their students in 2014, and estimated the fraction of these students in each country who are female (see Figure 15):

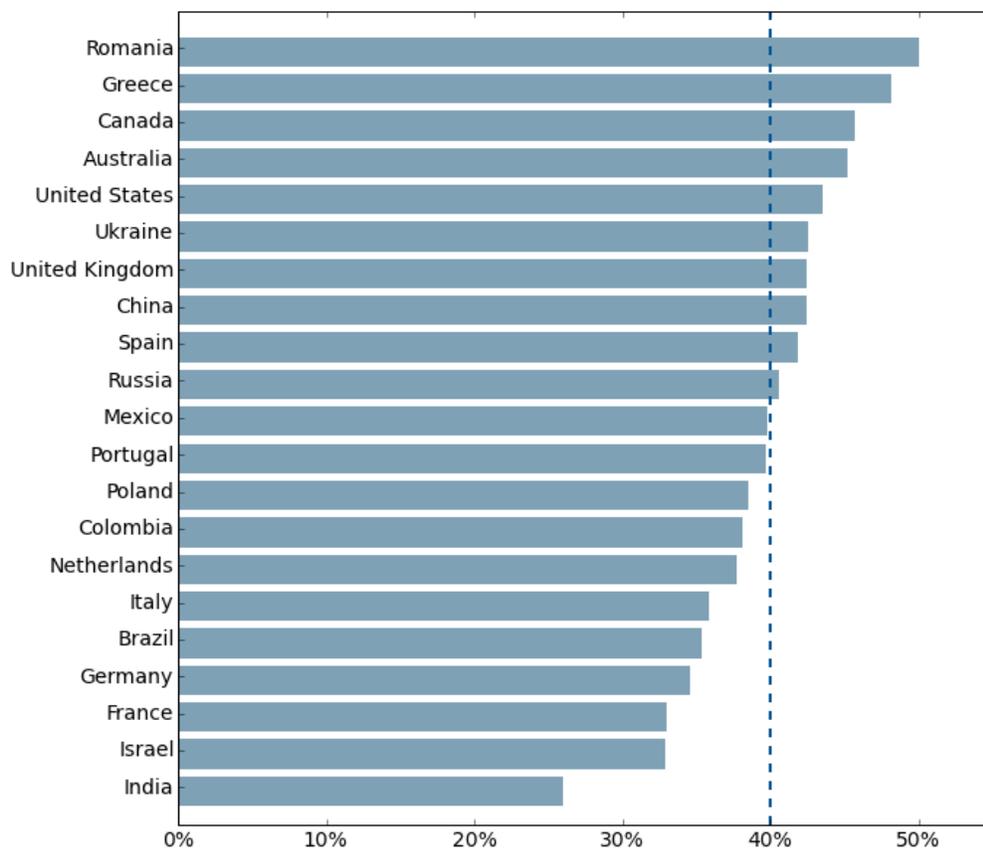


Figure 16. Fraction of female students by country, with estimated proportion of female students from each country in the Coursera user base. The dotted vertical line indicates the estimated proportion of female students overall. Source: Emmanuel (2013).

Overall, female students comprise 40% of the Coursera user base in 2014. On a global scale, Romania was the only nation to hold an equal split between men and women. On the opposite end of the spectrum, only 26% of Coursera's students from India are female.

Writing for *Inside Higher Education* in 2013, Carl Straumsheim remarked "despite the talk about how massive open online courses, or MOOCs, will dramatically alter the landscape of higher education, the courses have in some ways taken academe back -- to the days of huge gender gaps, when senior scholars overwhelmingly were men" (Straumsheim, 2013, para. 3). Straumsheim found that the gender disparity of the MOOC student population also extended to the faculty demographic. In 2013, he conducted an unofficial count and tallied that only eight of the sixty-three courses listed on edX's website were taught by women, while an additional eight are taught by "mixed-gender groups" (Straumsheim, 2013). Of Coursera's 432 courses, 121 feature at least one female instructor and only seventy-one, or 16% were taught exclusively by a female professor. Similarly, Udacity listed 29 courses on its website in 2014, and only two are taught by women, while "many of them were created by female course developers" (Straumsheim, 2013, para. 4). While spokespeople for edX and Coursera refused to answer for comment when contacted by the author for the *Inside Higher Ed* article, a slow uptick in female to male professor ratios has been evident since the article was published in 2014. It is possible that online courses provide "a more inviting learning environment for women who have been acutely aware of their status as minorities in face-to-face classrooms, and who are intimidated by the sense, whether right or wrong, that their male classmates have more advanced technology skills" (Koller, 2016, para. 5). But there is much work to be done in terms of attracting more female professors to teach in STEM courses. By March 2016, according to Coursera's website, Daphne Koller, one of the founders of Coursera, concedes that total female enrollment in STEM courses offered on Coursera continually hovers only around

25% female and 75% male (Koller, 2016, para. 6). Unless MOOCs dedicate more resources toward making sure that future learners see female teachers and leaders in the field at the head of the classroom, the gender divide is unlikely to change anytime soon.

MOOCs and motivation.

In a recent examination across many MOOC research studies, pronounced interest in topics related to self-regulated learning have emerged (Winne & Hadwin, 1998; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000), as the consideration of self-regulated learning in design of online education has been already recognized in historically-located studies. Several students have found that the learner must be “additionally-motivated” to pursue distance or online learning in the past (Yuan & Powell, 2013). Many researchers now ask the question: what does it mean to be “additionally motivated” in the present-era? As cited by Gasevic et al, “to study effectively in online learning environments, learners need to be additionally motivated and have an enhanced level of metacognitive awareness, knowledge and skills” (Gašević et al., 2014)

In present-day MOOCs, motivation has been studied through quantitative measurements of student engagement through discussion forum entries, web traffic and social media, and analysis of student retention numbers over time (Gašević et al., 2014). These findings presumably indicate behavioral patterns that point to *evidence* of motivation, yet further analysis of current MOOC research did not reveal studies that measured internal or external factors that impact motivation. The researchers’ conclusion that to study effectively in online learning environments, “learners need to be additionally motivated and have an enhanced level of metacognitive awareness, knowledge and skills” leave much to be designed in terms of how to help learners become additionally motivated. The authors also concur with other researchers (such as Abrami, Bernard, Bures, Borokhovski, & Tamim, 2011) “that such learning conditions may not have the same level of structure and support

as students have typically experienced in traditional learning environments” (p. 168), pointing to a failure to fully grasp what impacts student motivation, metacognitive skills, learning strategies, and attitudes, despite the fact that this is of paramount importance for useful research in the practice of learning and teaching within MOOCs.

An article by Hartnett et al. explored two existing research models about motivation in online learning environments as being “either fixed or evolving,” and points to failures in “acknowledging the impact of the learner within the online environment” (Hartnett, St. George, & Dron, 2011). The authors outline how earlier, trait-like models “tend to view motivation as a relatively stable, personal characteristic of the *learner*,” contributing to the notion that online learners are intrinsically motivated. The alternative view that the authors explore concentrate on the design of online learning environments that encourage optimal learner motivation. Yet neither approach acknowledges a contemporary understanding of motivation that emphasizes the “situated, mutually constitutive relationship of the learner and the learning environment” (p. 20). Therefore, the authors employ self-determination theory (SDT) to explore learner motivation of preservice teachers in two different online distance-learning contexts outlined how learner motivation can be “complex, multifaceted, and sensitive to situational conditions” (p. 30).

Another insight from (Gašević et al., 2014) is that the connection with learning theory has also been recognized as another important feature of recent research proposals on MOOCs. Likely responding to the criticism surrounding the MOOC wave throughout 2012 that the courses were not thought to be driven by rigorous research and theoretical underpinnings, the researchers submitting to the MRI initiative used established frameworks from educational research and the learning sciences. Of special interest were topics related to self-regulated learning (Winne & Hadwin, 1998;

Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000), and the consideration of self-regulated learning in design of online education.

MOOCs and Gender

Penn (2013) surveyed nearly 35,000 students from more than 200 countries and territories who participated in the thirty-two MOOC courses it distributed through Coursera, which is the largest provider in the field with over five million students. The researchers found that most of these students were already well educated, and most of them were young men looking for new skills to advance their careers. As with many other studies conducted between 2013 and 2016, Emanuel (2013) found that MOOCs are not reaching disadvantaged audiences. Men account for 56.9% of all MOOC students and 64% in countries outside the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2015 (Emanuel, 2013, para. 5). The majority of students following MOOCs are also already highly educated compared with the general population. Most tellingly of all, prior educational standard among MOOC students across the world far exceeds that of the general population in their own countries (see Figure 16, source: www.barrolee.com).

This educational disparity is particularly stark in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, all of which are touted in the press as prime candidates for MOOC education. In those countries, almost 80% of MOOC students come from the wealthiest and most highly-educated 6% of the population, demonstrating that MOOCs serve to provide access to an already well-served demographic. Ezekiel J. Emanuel, the author of the study, argues that MOOCs have yet to live up to their claims until the digital divide is closed:

Far from realizing the high ideals of their advocates, MOOCs seem to be reinforcing the advantages of the ‘haves’ rather than educating the ‘have-nots.’ Better access to technology

and improved basic education are needed world-wide before MOOCs can genuinely live up to their promise (Emanuel, 2013, para. 6).

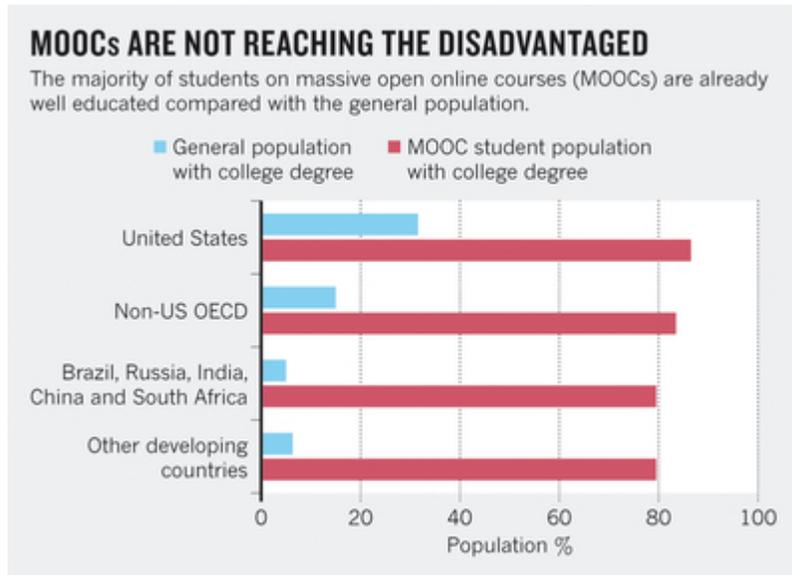


Figure 17: A Comparison of Students on MOOCs According to Education. Source: Emanuel (2013).

In a 2015 study by Ihsen, Jeanrenaud, deVreis and Hennis called “Gender and Diversity in Engineering MOOCs, a first Appraisal” (Ihsen et al., 2015), some of the questions about gender and why MOOCs are predominantly male-enrolled were connected to STEM learning and the humanities. Lisa L. Martin, professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, argued in 2013 that “gender role stereotypes could be causing female professors to avoid larger classes in general, let alone MOOCs in her paper “Gender, Teaching Evaluations, and Professional Success in Political Science” (Martin, 2013).

In her study, Martin examined student evaluations of political science professors at a large Southern public university, and discovered that as the size of a class grows, so does the chance of a male professor being rated higher than a female colleague. Men only scored one-tenth of a point

higher on a five-point scale in classes with ten students, but the deficit grew to six-tenths of a point in classes with more than 200 students. “Differences like this are large enough to catch the attention of promotion and tenure committees, award committees, and the like,” claimed Martin. “For universities that offer even larger classes... the cumulative effect would be massive” (Straumsheim, 2013, para. 13). While Martin’s paper mainly underscores the drawbacks of using student evaluations in Political Science, it also contains a word of caution about how MOOCs influence the role of the instructor: “Course sizes can become enormous, and individual interaction between instructors and students during lectures is eliminated,” the paper reads. “In a peculiar way, the movement to MOOCs reinforces a mode of learning that otherwise was coming to seem dated, with one authoritative figure lecturing to large groups of passive learners” (Martin, 2013, p. 13).

Strikingly, a small percentage of completion rate versus applicants also correlated with the number of initial inquiries into *Sunrise Semester* after its initial launch in 1957: the first course drew over 10,000 inquiries about admission that resulted in only 700 that qualified according to the standards of admission to receive college credit as laid forth by NYU. Out of 700 that were accepted into the course, only 144 students completed the final exam held in January of 1958 on NYU’s campus to be awarded college credit.

In a data set that was released by EdX in partnership with MIT and Harvard (www.edx.org), there was also evidence of many learners who merely clicked around or perused the content online, but seemed to never seek completion for the course. According to the data set, an additional 35,937 registrants explored *half or more* of course content without seeking certification. A total of 469,702 registrants viewed less than half of the content, and 292,852 registrants never engaged with the online content at all after registering, with only a total of seventy-six individuals that earned five or more certificates from the first seventeen courses (Ho et al., 2014).

As with Emanuel's 2013 study of Coursera learners at the University of Pennsylvania, the most typical course registrant was male with a bachelor's degree who is 26 or older (Ho et al, 2014). Ho et al were careful to point out that "this [male] profile described fewer than one in three registrants," at 222,847 males or 31%. A total of 213,672 (29%) registrants reported their gender as female, which means that a large percentage, or nearly 30%, were not revealed to be male or female in the study. This is a very large margin of error for a data set in its measurement of gender, and further research should be conducted into why edX learners did not or perhaps chose not to report their gender. As with Emanuel's 2013 study, 234,463 (or 33%) reported a high school education or lower. Over two-thirds of the audience, or 66% reported to have an educational attainment level that was higher than high school or a high school equivalent.

This breakdown of a highly-education learner also is very similar to the levels of prior education attainment held by *Sunrise Semester* students over fifty years earlier. According to a study conducted by Dr. Charles Westhoff between the years 1958 and 1959, which is the only existing qualitative and quantitative study conducted by NYU on the show throughout its entire twenty-five year run, the average Sunrise Semester student that registered for credit or for a certificate had been out of school for eleven years (Westhoff, n.d., p. 6). In terms of previous educational attainment, the range for Sunrise Semester students that were enrolled for credit or for a certificate ranged from "less than high school to an advanced degree, including two certificate candidates that also had medical degrees" (p. 6). Out of a total of 133 Sunrise Semester students that were included in the study and registered for either certificate or course credit, or a total of 56% of all Sunrise Semester students reported other forms of education or additional training, mostly of "a vocational nature" (p. 7). Incidentally, 27% of the credit students were registered with entrance deficiencies noted on their record, according to Westhoff's study. It seems to be a trend that people

with high prior attainment levels are drawn to attain more education. More to the point, the appetite for learning draws an even bigger appetite for more learning, and one cannot underestimate an overall appetite for excellent course content, no matter what the time period.

As far as reaching a global audience, one of the largest claims often made as one of the biggest successes for MOOC platforms, only 20,745 (2.7%) had IP or mailing addresses that were also countries listed on the United Nations list of 48 Least Developed Countries.⁴ Most of the countries that were represented in the data set also represented countries with the highest gross national product (GNP) or other measurement of high development and national wealth. It is also important to note that despite citing small percentages within this MOOC study, especially in the context of very small market saturation in they are not also small numbers (Ho et al., 2014) because the original, raw data set was so large: 2.7% still represents a large number of individual learners and are numbers not to be ignored.

There were also varied differences in average demographics across courses, in terms of gender (13%-49% female), college degree attainment (54%-84%), median age (23-30 years), and percentage of participants from the US (16%-36%) (Ho et al, 2014). This leads me to believe that there would be a similarly wide range of distribution across age, gender and socio-economic status for *Sunrise Semester* courses, too, if the data even existed at all. Such ranges make sweeping statements about student profiles difficult to define in either case. The authors also point to these diverse differences across courses as ‘attributed to the intentions of the instructor teams, and the outreach and dissemination efforts of course teams’ (Ho et al., 2014), which are also difficult to measure if they were not tracked at the onset of course launch. Outreach for *Sunrise Semester* was

⁴ See <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/ALDC/Least%20Developed%20Countries/UN-list-of-Least-Developed-Countries.aspx> for the complete list of all 48 countries identified in 2015 by the United Nations as Least Developed Countries.

far harder to track because the course was only publicized in print and through the media; other forms of course referral would have been conducted by word-of-mouth.

The authors admit that a simple comparison of grades and viewed content showed thousands of users that would fit a range of profiles, and “new metrics, far beyond grades and course certificates, are necessary to capture the diverse usage patterns in the data” (Ho et al., 2014, p.32). I argue that the analysis of the equivalent of fan mail in present-day MOOCs—such as more rigorous study about the exchange between and amongst students and professors, and between other types of informal peer-to-peer learning opportunities online—is the next frontier of research in answering the question: how can individual stories and learner perspectives be used to bring new understanding and insights to challenge previous assumptions about perceived successes and failures of MOOCs?

In an age where there is so much data available to the present-day researcher, I argue that the field needs to move away from the quantitative measurement of mere “clicks” and turn towards the qualitative analysis of exchanges between learners and educators. Such exchanges may need to be tracked over time—though an analysis of how learning evolves throughout participation in a MOOC, and throughout the participation in many MOOCs over many years. Only then will we be able to see if MOOCs contribute towards higher levels of learning and exchange in ways that nuance the argument that the present-day MOOC learner is male and already highly educated. In the absence of quantitative measurement in the years of *Sunrise Semester*, there was still ample opportunity to approach the question of viewership in a more substantive fashion. This study of fan mail changed the way I understand the Sunrise Semester learner beyond a simple demographic profile. This type of analysis can further provide an alternative approach to understand MOOC students. Another question for future research might be: what soft skills of connection or higher

levels of thinking may be enhanced through a re-design of the MOOC platform? In many ways, the “talking head” professor in present-day MOOCs are formally similar to the same “sage-on-a-stage” teaching style that was adopted by NYU professors as they taught on television during *Sunrise Semester*. There may be even more use of experimental networked environments that will help enrich our understanding of the identity and motivations of distance learners in the future.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This dissertation examines previously untold histories from the earliest days of distance learning at scale—beginning with early correspondence courses offered in Great Britain and the United States in the mid-eighteenth century (Bowery & Hardy, 2004) that prefigured educational television shows hosted by colleges dating back as early as the mid-1930s in rural Iowa (Novak, 2012)—and uses this history to inform new and emergent opportunities for informal, adult learning that have gained momentum since the 1950s. In many ways, *Sunrise Semester* marks one of the earliest pioneering ways in which learning-at-scale utilized new technological means. This discovery offers an overlooked historical measure to predict the rise, success, and the eventual demise of MOOCs as merely one chapter in the long history of experimental distance learning. My research also explores the factors that led *Sunrise Semester* to attract predominately female audiences in the post World War II-era. While the popularity of *Sunrise Semester* may have anticipated the rise of MOOCs, the show's particular appeal to women is strikingly at odds with the a strong male gender bias in MOOCs nearly fifty years later, an inconsistency which I address in my last chapter.

I developed five lines of inquiry to analyze and demonstrate how *Sunrise Semester* allows for a new, historically grounded understanding of the challenges faced by distance learners in the present era. The first line of inquiry, *contextualization*, focused on *Sunrise Semester* as merely one instance of an unexplored and largely undocumented experiment within early distance education history. This line of inquiry sought to answer my first research question: What lessons can we learn from looking at the past, before theorizing about the future of learning? These explorations throughout history, as explored throughout the literature review in Chapter Three, point to

uncharted territory in examining some of the smaller yet pioneering experiments in distance learning that have long been overlooked by history.

The second line of inquiry, *historicization*, was designed to understand fundamental interpretative attitudes surrounding the emergence of the *Sunrise Semester*. This approach explores how an historical analysis of untold stories and histories from *Sunrise Semester* and other early experiments in distance education can be utilized to gain deeper insights into online learner behavior today. By writing the first concise history of *Sunrise Semester* as told in Chapter Four, I trace the unique developments in NYU's history that led to the birth of the show, its tremendous success, and its eventual demise over twenty-five years. In Chapter Five, the excavation of fan mail from the archive at NYU provided a thematic analysis of previously undiscovered learner stories from *Sunrise Semester*, upending traditionally held cultural assumptions about distance learners.

The third research question guiding my project was: how do claims of “disruption” made by proponents of today's MOOCs compare with previously made claims within the longer historical context of distance education “experimentation” over the last century? As outlined in Chapter Six, present-day MOOCs offer groundbreaking ways to attract massive audiences beyond television broadcast, and yet somehow have only re-inscribed similar trends towards engaging populations that are dominantly male and already have demonstrated access to traditional modes of education.

My fourth research question was concerned with questions surrounding power, gender and television within this history: what are some of the implications and assumptions about age, gender, and previous education levels about the early cohorts of *Sunrise Semester* students that can be excavated from the archives at NYU? This line of inquiry, which I termed *feminization*, is followed across several chapters, beginning in Chapter Three throughout the literature review, as stories of systems of learning that were designed to attract specifically women across a variety of media and

throughout history are told. It is also told within the history of the *Sunrise Semester* show itself, through some of *The New Yorker* cartoons and other anecdotal information featured in Chapters Four and Five. The story of the program's female audience is developed through the analysis of *Sunrise Semester*'s fan mail, written by individuals who proudly called themselves "hausfraus" or housewives while also describing their fandom of the show. A look at how over-reported shifts in gender, age, and previous education levels in MOOC participation have changed since *their* early years is told at the end of Chapter Six. Yet these shifts belie more recent tallies of courses taught on MOOC providers such as Coursera, demonstrating that there are still parallels between gender disparity and representation online—mirroring inequities within brick-and-mortar universities today, too.

The fifth line of inquiry surrounds the elusive qualities of *motivation* when pursuing a degree in informal or distance learning settings: what attributes were shared by *Sunrise Semester* students and other types of distance learners, and what factors were unique to *Sunrise Semester* students? How can parallels be drawn between groups when the modalities of measurement or study are rarely shared or even comparable? This is a question remains to be answered in future studies, because while there are certainly ways in which an "ambitious housewife" might be additionally motivated in the post-World War II era, the rationale motivating online learning today is not as clear-cut across either gender.

Findings and Implications

The study of an archive is never transparent (Treanor, 2005), and much effort was made to track some of the earliest courses offered on CBS in preparation for this dissertation. But as CBS erased tapes of *Sunrise Semester* immediately following each broadcast, I needed to look towards other means to measure the impact of *Sunrise Semester* on its audiences. Archived correspondence

between fans and CBS executives and other primary documents located in the NYU Archives of dating between 1958 and 1982 traced the frustration in which professors and administrators alike addressed their inability to access prior shows after they were aired, and as a researcher working nearly fifty years later, I share their despair that tapes of the original broadcasts no longer exist as a complete collection. I have learned since completing this dissertation that there is a collection of recorded courses that was captured by a *Sunrise Semester* fan from his home television set on super-8 film, and I hope to return to view those recordings when they are eventually digitized by NYU. My effort to create a course roster for the entire run of *Sunrise Semester* and included as Appendix D here is but one small contribution that I have submitted to NYU for inclusion in their archives, in hopes that others may become curious to track down other such “amateur” recordings of the show for study in the future.

Fan mail collected from participants in the 1950s and 1960s through the end of the show’s run and beyond hint at anecdotal evidence that traces the impact of the show on individual learning. While *Sunrise Semester* was predominantly female in a split of 70% women and 30% men, recent studies conducted in 2013 demonstrate that MOOC participation is dominantly male, sometimes as high as 70% male and 30% female, representing a gender-percentage flip in participation ratios. Just why MOOCs attract a pre-dominantly male audience of learners is also an area for further inquiry.

The study of gender, especially through the use of primary documents, is often problematized by the very “gendered” nature of those same documents. For instance, that three times more women wrote fan letters to the show perhaps did not simply mean that there was many more female fans, but that letter-writing in general was thought to be a feminized practice by the end of the Second World War. Furthermore, in the case where I was able to verify the gender of the

letter-writer through language revealed in the text itself (such as in the full letters known as “Corpus C”), I do not claim to make generalizations for all of the audience of *Sunrise Semester* through this analysis. Instead, I am merely using the available text to make certain inferences about the pleasures and rewards of learning on television. The analyses contained in these pages merely document the small triumphs of discovery and identity change in learning, and the ways in which learning by television was unique in the post-World War II era, especially for women. *Sunrise Semester* is just one story that can be told through these letters and the fragments of letters preserved in the NYU Archives. But this is not the only story; each of the letters marks a single perspective and one facet of distance learners in specific point in time. Taken together as a body of text, they represent the ways in which a learning platform can attract an audience across many miles and many age groups, male and female alike.

The research contained in this dissertation seeks to form the basis for an historical analysis that includes previously overlooked accounts of *Sunrise Semester* and other early experiments in distance education from the *learner perspective*, in order to gain deeper insight about online learner behavior today. A primary goal in building the socio-historical context in which to view some of the current movements in online education, such as MOOCs, online courses, and other new methods that use technology to connect learners separated by distance and time is to reveal more data about how people learn in distance education environments – not the professor’s perspective, or the university’s or administration’s perspective – but the *learner’s* perspective.

I ended this research on *Sunrise Semester* in the last chapter with an exploration of the biggest research question of all: namely, how can individual stories and learner perspectives help form new understanding and insights that challenge previous assumptions about perceived successes and failures of MOOCs? By examining some of the wide-reaching claims made by

proponents of *Sunrise Semester* and MOOCs about the success and impact of these learning platforms, I am able to examine how those assertions compare and contrast with some of the expectations staked within the longer historical context of distance education over the last century. But other questions remain, and will need to be further explored by future researchers. For instance, how have some of the current implications of online learning worked to destabilize previous assumptions about the perceived “worth” of university degrees? How can new and emergent opportunities for adult online learning environments be assessed more rigorously in the future? And how have changes in attitudes towards gender equity impact the learner perspective throughout the history of distance learning, if at all? These questions are shaped and inflected by a personal and professional need to explain why a seismic shift may be needed to move education conversations away from “fixing” schools and towards more equitable models and DIY systems of radical learning.

The five distinct lines of inquiry that guided my study of *Sunrise Semester* were by no means self-evident at the outset and evolved throughout the course of my research, but have now emerged as possible areas of exploration to guide future systems of experimental learning. By using a grounded theory approach while conducting my historical analysis in the archives themselves, I left myself open to the possibility that any single article of paper or any single memo or note may have unlocked a piece of *Sunrise Semester*’s history that could help me shed light and new understanding. While my primary goal was to examine the past in order to inform approaches to the present and future of learning, a parallel goal is to one day see this research contribute towards a more expansive definition of traditional, school-based education that takes the learners’ perspective into account. Distance education, online learning, and many of the models for learning that are still yet to come will one day be viewed as multiple paths among many to advance in society, rather

than forcing a university degree as the only option of achievement accepted by society. This dissertation and its focus on one long-standing yet previously unexplored television show called *Sunrise Semester* seeks to examine expectations that are historically held about learning in general, and about informal learning, in particular, toward the larger goal of transforming the process of learning.

Each of the criticisms and questions that were leveled against *Sunrise Semester* are easily applied to present-day MOOCs. The field of education will need to move beyond audience feedback in order to more expansively analyze the impact and awareness of experimental learning platforms. Vigorous efforts to contextualize experimentation into a longer history of the past will only further aid in the formulation of new and improved opportunities for future education platforms. Whether participants in today's MOOCs or in *Sunrise Semester* could learn more effectively, or "derive more benefit" in a classroom, online, or in front of a television set is nearly impossible to answer, chiefly due to too many interdependent variables surrounding how people learn in diverse educational settings and at various stages of their lives. Without including analysis of the learner perspective in the longer socio-historical context of distance learning, it may be possible that we can only know only slightly more about the millions of registered MOOC participants now than we could know about those two million viewers in the earliest days of 1950s television.

As I had access to only one historical study of *Sunrise Semester* (that was also unpublished) and located scant research about the program beyond secondary print articles, my own interpretation of the data assumed much in the way of Google searches conducted online for news articles, graduation information and obituaries for some of the *Sunrise Semester* students that I

could locate. Notwithstanding these methodological compromises, locating value in the thematic interpretation of fan mail led to a profound understanding of the show's impact.

My direct experience in conducting this research points to a need for further and more sophisticated development of critical discourse analysis designed to address non-verbal signs and signifiers contained within fan mail of the past, such as margin size, paper quality, and other clues contained in handwritten letters as they relate to gender, class, socio-economic status and power. Furthermore, as many historical studies of fan mail largely discount the validity of the "fan" as a legitimate audience member worthy of study in the first place, my research points to a larger need for new methodologies for analyzing unsolicited audience feedback such as the fan letter. Just as technological advancements such as email and Twitter have increased audience interaction since the dawn of the last century, today's connected world requires many more modalities and methods of contact to express pleasure, gratitude or complaint. If critical discourse analysis can be used in non-structured texts that occur on Twitter in the modern era for sentiment analysis, then surely such analysis may be conducted on such highly structured text as fan mail using the same criteria applied to digital artifacts in online courses such as chat forums and emails to professors.

Scholars have noted that radio's neglect as a field of study is precisely due to its feminized past. A "close analysis of radio began to unravel the mask that U.S. commercial media had created for themselves, as a naturally arising consensus-shaped and unproblematic reflection of a pluralistic society," rather than one of "a conflicting tension-ridden site of the ruthless excursus of cultural; hegemony" (p. xviii) also led to its demise. Hilmes (1997) argued that broadcasting history in both television and radio was shaped by the same consensus narratives and channels of meaning that "promoted and idealized simplistic representations of American life in the post-World War II era" (page xv). But just as consensus narratives were promoted and upheld, other narratives were cut off

and pushed to the sidelines (p. vxi), Hilmes urges future researchers to “look for those elements that are silenced and muffled within the thread that speaks loudest” (p. xviii). Will the Internet fall prey to the same pitfalls, just as other media such as television and radio have before it? If so, what will come next, and how can educators plan for a new future of learning?

As radio emerged as the unifying force by the 1920s, allowing “assimilation, ‘Americanism,’ and the complex functions of ethnic and racial ‘difference,’ along with the “rise of commercialized mass culture and its creation of a preferred yet feared buying audience of women” formed the backdrop of radio’s earliest definitions and practices (p. xviii). Hilmes (1997) problematized the study of radio as a unifying force that unified the nation in the 1920s, but used the utopian predictions for radio as a “unifying and culturally uplifting medium that collided with dystopian fears surrounding its unique ability to transcend traditional boundaries of time and space” (p. xx), as well as with the social distinctions that these boundaries maintained.

Some may ask the rhetorical question, “Why study history, if the goal is to design for the future?” One answer can be found in philosopher George Santayana’s famous proclamation, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Wyche, Sengers, & Grinter, 2006). This quotation is widely used to argue that exploring the past helps us understand who we are today and where we are going. The importance of studying the motivation and feedback from learners as “fans” of new technologies cannot be overstated. In the rapidly evolving field of education, historical awareness offers a more profound understanding of the context future educators are designing for, and “history can spur designers to expand their own imaginations by revealing the contingency of the present situation, rendering it less obvious and inevitable” (Weyche et al 2006, p. 37). Using history to de-familiarize the present supports designers in envisioning future domestic

life less constrained by present-day cultural assumptions about distance learners that are pre-embedded in technology.

But I also conclude this dissertation with hope. Just as soon as online learning gives way to another platform, and another method, we will soon experience another totally new way of connecting people across space and time in their personal quests for learning. For instance, one new frontier for learning in the future could include non-temporal educational experiments in virtual reality inspired by John Dewey. My hope is that more research into fandom will be conducted and the elements that inspire and motivate learners and educators alike. I hope that the field of education will also become more curious about research into other early technology-based experiments in distance learning from the past, and to explore their impact from the learner perspective. In order to move the field of education forward, we must be better informed about incorporating the learner perspective, and become more open to rich facets of motivation and gender in the field of distance and online learning as they continue to evolve.

Appendix A: Corpus A, Complete Fan Mail Text

ID	Year	Full Excerpts
1a	1973	An 80-year old widow from Greenfield, Illinois” wrote that the show was “the most interesting and informative lectures have ever seen or heard... a wonderful experience.”
2a	1973	A chiropractor on Long Island was quoted as writing sadly when the series ended: ‘I knew that this day would eventually come and that the season of ‘The Heavenly Twins’ would end. I enjoyed them immensely... Bless you.’”
3a	1973	An author and illustrator mailed a letter to say that he had “never ‘received such direction in my creative life,’” and indicated that he “would soon change his career direction, then promised to send Professor Stein a woodcut he was making as a token of appreciation.”
4a	1981	“I’ve granted you a big A plus for the way you emerged from the stiff, scared, teacher into a charming warm personality.”
5a	<i>I</i>	Hollywood was mailed to a professor of that described the way that the course had changed her: “Haunting music... dreamlike Persepolis... magical mosques... winged gods... all, all leaving an indelible imprint. I could not close this remarkable 15 weeks without letting you know the depth of my gratitude. As a writer, I have been enriched, as a woman, touched.”
6a	<i>I</i>	“This was a sad morning,” began one self-proclaimed New York-based public relations man.
7a	<i>I</i>	“God bless you and keep you well,” was the way a California school teacher concluded hers.
8a	<i>I</i>	“My life has been extremely lonely this past year, and when I derive such wonderful pleasure as I do from this program, I’m afraid I cannot express my gratitude.”
9a	<i>I</i>	“Unanimously, we have agreed that you sound like Cary Grant, look like a bank president, and have the disposition of a swamp adder.”
10a	1974	“I enjoyed your recently concluded television course on logic and reasoning much.”

Appendix B: Corpus B, Complete Fan Mail Excerpts

From Oklahoma:

“Your TV lectures on 'Studies in Style' are most entertaining as well as educational. As an amateur student, long interested in semantics, let me express my appreciation for having this opportunity to learn more about the use of words. You give me a bright start to my day.”

From Canada:

“Monday morning (the session on "play" that ended with the quotation from Robert Oppenheimer) was the best 30 minutes packed into years of television. My deepest thanks for putting so well the heart of the matter -- one might even say, the heart of our universe.”

From Colorado:

“I have recently discovered your program, ‘Studies in Style,’ and I find it delightful. Even though I am often kept up late by tenth grade homework, I always try to be at the television set the next morning. All too often, I realize, the well done goes unappreciated. CBS must bow to public opinion and place "Captain Kangaroo" at a better period. While the good captain has its merits, I believe your show to be one of the best on the air at the present time. I am writing to extend to you my appreciation for this wonderful program. I especially liked the first offering I saw, on honorific and pejorative meanings. Please, continue to broadcast the high qualities you have observed in the past. Your presentation is warm, your material educational, and your explanations clear. Who could ask for more?”

From Illinois:

“If anyone could show us how to be creative in our language, you could do it. You who have been so creative yourself. Only you could waken a class at 6:30am. All in all, you have what it takes. Prof, guff is everybody's biz. We all gotta talk unless we're a bunch of dummys. Anyone that gets us there day after day like you do, he's a good talker and can tell the guys he's talking to a thing or two.

Now when my buzzing muse
Doth summon me to day
It's tomorrow -- my televised
Apollo's sung his lay”

From Wisconsin:

“I'm very glad you are giving this course on Style. These *Sunrise Semester* programs have been the best thing on T.V. The viewer is allowed to enter the lecture room amid the piece and quiet and then is permitted the luxury of listening to, assimilating, coordinating, and remembering the facts. The last 35 years I have lived alone on my farm. Content? Happy? Yes? Give me a sheet of paper, a fairly cooperative pen and one good idea and I have a good time for hours. Words have wonderful possibilities. Perhaps this note explains in a small way why these lectures of yours are so much enjoyed and appreciated. Thank you.”

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From Missouri:

The limits of language prevent me from expressing my deeply felt gratitude and excitement over your lectures and collateral reading. For a moving intellectual and esthetic experience, many many thanks and warmest good wishes.

From Arizona:

"I am certainly enchanted with your unique approach to life and literature. The idea of indeterminacy, play, etc is truly grand. I thank you for your point of view and its infinite possibilities."

From Florida:

"I haven't missed a session of your talks about Style, reluctant though I am to get out of bed at six-fifteen. I haven't been so stimulated by anything since i graduated from Swarthmore during the First World War."

From Texas (Dean of a Women's College):

"We're listening to you at 6:30am MWF and being much pleased with what you are doing and saying. A good many of our students are early risers, too, so there are Walker Gibson fans here, all of whom remember your lectures on our campus in April. You will find among the students who have not registered, of course, our staff members."

From New York City (Principle of a public school):

"As one who struggles with youth on the inside and age on the outside, I appreciate your suggestion of 'stay young with metaphor.' Your course is wonderful--well-worth getting up for, are the lectures available in print? I do hope they will move your course to a different time. It deserves a wide, wide audience. Thank you so very much for reminding me that there are still some real, dynamic teachers."

From Ohio:

"Your recent lectures concerning the use of conjunctive 'like' have been so delightful that I felt impelled to write to tell you so. My thanks to the University and to you. "

From New York City:

"It is a delight to see your plan for this course unfold. To me it is shaped in three dimensions, like a cone. Wherever you lead us during the next couple of months, we know we will be generously awarded. We are certainly not looking forwards to the conclusion."

From Illinois:

"It is impossible to say--in this "lineal manner"--what it means to start the day with a discussion, say of McLuhan. Even though it means getting up early to insure the coffee's being ready by class time. Appreciatively."

From California:

"You have been coming into my small apartment for several months. I feel as though I know you personally. It was with shock that I learned you will not be on next semester. You have met a need for me. I have always been interested in writing: I have heard that Columbia has a

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course in short story writing, and that everyone who takes this course manages to sell. So, for many years, I have day-dreamed of going to Columbia, but since hearing you, I think now I would like to take some courses from you. Thank you for giving me so much pleasure and writing help.”

From Missouri:

“Although I received my MA degree from Teachers College Columbia in 1928, for the past year I have enjoyed the telecast of the New York University *Sunrise Semester* better than those of the Columbia professors.”

From Ohio:

“I’m writing to tell you how much I am enjoying your lectures on prose style. I’m getting a particular charge from your discussion of like as a conjunction. I got my degree from New York University way back in 1908!”

From North Carolina:

My husband and I are two of your interested viewers on *Sunrise Semester*. We are not enrolled for credit; however, we have your outline and two of the textbooks. Thank you for a very stimulating lecture at 6:30am three times a week. I was formerly an English teacher and never cease to be interested in the points covered by your courses.

From New York City:

“I don’t usually write fan letters. But if you’ve got a fan club, I just joined it.”

From Massachusetts:

“I just finished watching you early this morning on TV on Channel 5, Boston. To say you fascinate me is putting it mildly...”

From Indiana:

“After watching your TV series ‘Studies in Style,’ I thought that I should write you and express how very much the lectures impress me. TV is an excellent medium and there are few truly educational programs. You are doing a fine job, and I wanted to let you know that someone in that vast group watches and is interested, though not a student.”

From California

“A few of us listen and learn from your ‘Studies in Style’ and discuss the programs during our coffee breaks when we get together. I am the only registered one, so when I can compose a question in a half-way adult style (see what you’ve done!), I intend to write a few. Your TV programs have not only broadened our horizons and awakened our interest, not only in better reading and communication, but in other things. and we thank you and the University for this.”

From Connecticut:

“I want to thank you for your most interesting talk, in the early mornings. I had a wonderful time after our talk on metaphors, clichés, etc.--I looked up Mr. Fowler’s “Hackneyed Phrases” and enjoyed them again. You stand out among speakers, as you have no tripey phrases, evidently. Best regards and many thanks for good things to think about and look forwards to.”

From Pennsylvania

“I find the early morning visits and discussions (WCAU-TV) mighty interesting and provocative. Particularly a recent session on 'God-words and devil-words.' I had never realized how easily--and how unconsciously--we add so much slant and bias to our written and spoken communication. May I say, Dr. Gibson, that I find your own style of communication to the TV audience very smooth, friendly, and urbane. Television instruction is here to stay and those who instruct must cultivate their own styles. Your ‘Studies in Style’ are splendid.

From California:

“Your lessons, if put into practice, help to strengthen the bridge on which to get one's meaning across to the listener. Your simple yet penetrating presentation is not only effective, but your frequently quiet, humorous, way of doing it makes listening to you a real joy, so that I leave my T.V. not only with a sense of having increased my ability to use our American language, but with a truly happy feeling, You project something simply delightful, in addition to the educational value of the lesson, and I want to thank you for that, as much as for the instruction. I hope your course will be continued for a long time.”

From Indiana:

“I have thoroughly enjoyed your lectures concerning styles in writing, but for the first time today I disagreed with you...”

From Kentucky:

I am not one of your students although I haven't so far missed a lesson and have taken copious notes. May I say, sir, that at this point I have developed an incredible inferiority complex regarding the English language as written and spoken--by me.”

From a minister in Rhode Island:

“Just to express my appreciation for *Sunrise Semester*, even at 6:30 in the morning. People make me mad when they call the TV “the idiot box”-- even one half hour of DR. Kai Nielsen refutes this charge. TV needs more programs like this, and you need to seek out the intelligent and attractive (as Dr. Nielsen) to present these matters of the mind.”

From California:

“Recently returned from the US Foreign Service, we have just discovered the program but missed the introductory information and beginning lectures. We would like to get the text nook and do some of the other recommended reading also, as we find the lectures most interesting and enlightening.”

From Ohio:

“I've watched your philosophical analysis lectures for the past few weeks, on Sunrise Semester. It's the closest I'll ever get to college, and I enjoy it very much. Not only are you able to make a difficult subject understandable, you have a lecture technique that amazes me.”

From Philadelphia:

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“I enjoy your course on Philosophical Analysis very much, You are one of the clearest and most interesting teachers I have ever had. You used simple and direct English, and many illustrations we get the idea immediately and in concrete language. Your readings, too, are easily digestible... Thank you for your interesting course; I am sorry it is coming to an end, and wish you would teach again very soon. I attended Temple University Evening School for thirty years, and now a house and a business is all I can manage. The *Sunrise Semester* courses give me the joy of learning I always had, and I am most grateful.”

From Virginia:

“The chore of rising at 6:30am each morning during the past semester, in order to be at my teaching post at 8:00, was made most pleasurable by you and Professor Gibson. Many a nugget from your lectures was transmitted to my classes later in the day.”

From a professor in Ohio:

“It has given me a great deal of satisfaction to follow your series of lectures throughout the semester just ended. It is especially pleasing to be able to order that you plan book publication. The book will be my guide in that happy time when I pursue my interest further.”

From Virginia:

“I want to thank you for your lectures on Philosophical Analysis recently shown on our local T.V. station in Richmond, Virginia. I found the very incisive and penetrating and delightfully fair to all parties concerned, I hope you have written, or will write, a book on the subject so I may follow your reasoning at greater detail... you did a very thorough job and deserve congratulations... Thanks again for the many hours you spent trying to make Philosophy interesting. I think you succeeded admirably.”

From Rhode Island:

“For the last several months I have enjoyed *Sunrise Semester* through Channel 5, Boston, even at 6:30am in the morning. Allow me to commend you for a most attractive, intelligent, and forceful presentation. Philosophy might live again if this is the kind of thing that goes on in college classrooms you give me hope.”

From a doctor in New York City

“I wish to express my thanks and deep admiration for the series of lectures which you have just concluded in analytic philosophy. Your stirring peroration this morning was a fitting conclusion to the course. It is in my view a forceful credo for ‘Modern Thinking Man.’”

From a doctor in Missouri

“I have been watching (and listening to) your lectures in Philosophy and TB these past several weeks with a great deal of pleasure and wish to thank you for your efforts, as well as express appreciation for your excellent presentation. One difficulty arose: these programs come on here at an ungodly hour of the morning. In spite of my valiant efforts, and the special purchase of an alarm clock, I overslept a few times and missed a few lectures...”

From New York State:

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“...If I hadn’t turned on the television at 6:30 on morning I would have known nothing of Kai Nielsen. He seemed to be a nice fellow. I didn't understand all of the big words because I never went beyond high school. Not understanding, but with a desire to learn even at 45, I continued to watch every morning... I thought a great deal about this man. I became more concerned with his philosophy than with what he was trying to teach. He certainly made me think...”

From Ohio:

“May I say to begin with, that I am without vision, and without the advantage of the reading of text books suggested. Perhaps I have not even spelled your name correctly... I have listened to your lectures with great care, endeavoring to understand your arguments... I have wished that your lectures are recorded for Talk Book readers, that your thoughts could be followed though. I appreciate having heard your course, and I wish you well.”

From Hawaii:

“I wish to advise you that I enjoyed you and prof Walker Gibson's alternative instructive lectures. It was a worthwhile pleasure to rise to be ready at 6:30am over many months. I didn't miss a single lecture. I'm pleased that you are discussing the metaphysical exponents in your winding up.”

From California:

“I hear and enjoy your lectures on "*Sunrise Semester*"--at 6:30am. Are these lectures published? ‘Once over’ is not enough for me, and I feel the need to study your Philosophic Analysis more closely...”

From Colorado:

“I want to tell you how meaningful and satisfying your course is to me. I'm only sorry that I'm not taking the course for credit; nonetheless, I am working hard with it, have the texts, etc.”

From Connecticut:

“How splendid you are. If only it were possible to turn you on again, sight and sound, as one can a record player. So few, who are not obliged to arise before 6:30am, will do so for a lecture on philosophy. I am the only one I know who is in the first class, and how grateful I am for the privilege I gain thereby...”

From Illinois:

“I hear your talks on Philosophy on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings, and am absolutely fascinated, never having an opportunity to attend such before...”

From a professor in California:

“Congratulations on a superb course in philosophy. Unfortunately it was not the course i had when I went to college. I wish it had been... You changed a disbeliever in philosophy to a believer in a very short time...”

From Oregon

“It’s almost 50 years since my graduation from the University of California at Berkeley, and I find myself most interested and stimulated as I sit at breakfast and my coffee getting cold listening to your lectures at 6:30am to 7am in Portland, Oregon.”

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From a participating college in Wyoming

“At registration time in September the response to Philosophical Analysis, offered by N.Y.U. on TV, was gratifying. Some twenty-five students and adults entered. Many of them are wives of doctors, lawyers or businessmen, who have completed college and who are interested in philosophy... it has turned out to be the most exciting class I have ever conducted.”

From upstate New York:

“I am sending this letter to let you know what I have appreciated the opportunity of listening to your teaching on the TV over Channel 5, WHEN-Syracuse, though the fall and early winter. I did not want to do very much college work. My contact with institutions of higher learning was a hit and miss experience... You seem to give me something to think about. Thanks so much!”

From California

“I turn to your program each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings and enjoy it thoroughly. It is wonderful that CBS has a program such as yours--which would be objectionable to the dogmatic.”

From Michigan:

“My husband and I (both with university degrees) are listening with the greatest interest to your lectures on Philosophical Analysis at 6:30am on *Sunrise Semester*... We both are survivors of Nazi concentration camps, where we lost our families, all our closest and more distant relatives. Naturally we had to re-evaluate our beliefs and our philosophy of life. We are still in the process, and always will be, and therefore your lectures mean so acutely much to us.”

From a minister in Vermont:

“I have been watching your *Sunrise Semester* lectures for some time now and am fascinated by them. May I say how much I have appreciated your tremendous skill in presenting your position and how helpful I feel it would be particularly for clergy in enabling them to enter into a more meaningful dialogue with those who hold your very popular position.”

From Minneapolis:

I have to thank everyone concerned for the tremendous production of Dr. Neilsen's Philosophical Analysis. But, above all I wish to thank Dr. Nielsen. I hope this series may be repeated...”

From California:

“We arise at six in the morning to see and hear your TV seminars about philosophy and enjoy them to no end. They are wonderful.”

From a student in New York State:

“I just had to write and tell you how much I am enjoying the philosophy course... I am a graduate student in English and at present we are studying the existential school of thought and applying it to literature. The course you offer has been invaluable to me in my understanding of determinism and what freedom means. Thank you for permitting me to share your thoughts on these theories.”

Appendix C: Corpus C Fan Mail Data

<u>ID</u>	<u>Text Fragment</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Geographic Location</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Length</u>
1c	“Your deliveries are so concise...to miss any portion is to miss very much.”	<i>I</i>	Female	New York Metro (Iselin, New Jersey)	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	#6; #1 (x4)	79 words
2c	“I am nearly 90 years old when I went to school very long ago...”	90	Female	Southeast (Norfolk, Virginia)	<i>I</i>	Married	#3; #2a; #6;	72 words
3c	“Though I do not wish to enroll...”	<i>I</i>	Male	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	#1; #3; #6	62 words
4c	“I was in tears when you bid us farewell on Tuesday morning... I am in my seventy-seventh year.”	77	Female	Midwest (Kansas City, Missouri)	Retired; former reading teacher	Un-married	#5; #3; #1 (x4) #4; #3; #2o; #2a;	142 words
5c	“I wish to express my sincere appreciation for your Telecourse.”	<i>I</i>	Female	West Coast (Seattle, Washington)	<i>I</i> ; Senior Citizen	Married	#1; #2a; #1; #5	137 words
6c	“Enjoy your television lecture through earphones...”	<i>I</i>	Male	Midwest (Omaha, Nebraska)	Department store executive	<i>I</i>	#1; #6	115 words
7c	“I have been enjoying immensely the lectures by Prof Mayerson on Greek mythology.”	<i>I</i>	Male	West Coast (Costa Mensa, California)	Biology Professor	<i>I</i>	#1; #1; #6	95 words

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8c	<p>“I was very interested in your exposition on Hermes - Mercury. I hope you will continue into the relationship between this God and Switzerland...!”</p>	<i>I</i>	Female	Midwest (Gary, Indiana)	<i>I</i>	Married	#6; #1	58 words
9c	<p>“Though I do not want to take the course for credit (I am a graduate a UCLA graduate), I find Prof Mayerson most interesting and the course fascinating.”</p>	<i>I</i>	Female	West Coast (Los Angeles, CA)	<i>I</i>	Married	#2e;	76 words
10c	<p>“I greatly enjoy your lectures which I watch at 6am on the ancestry of the Gods - for many years (I'm now 80)”</p>	80	Female	Washington, D.C.	<i>I</i>	Married	#1; #3 #1; #6	126 words
11c	<p>“I want to express my sincere appreciation to You for Your extremely interesting course in ‘Classical Mythology in Art and Literature’.”</p>	<i>I</i>	Male	Midwest (Kettering, Ohio)	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	#1; #2e; #1; #1	216 words
12c	<p>“As a relatively uneducated, middle-aged Hausfrau, married more than a quarter-century, I</p>	<i>I</i>	Female	(Midwest) West Allis, Wisconsin	<i>I</i> ; “hausfrau”	Married	#1; #2e; #2a; #1;	379 words

	have taken time for reading something every day, and mythology has been my highest interest from the beginning.”							
13c	“I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciated and enjoyed having the discourses...every morning from 6:30 to 7am on CBS.”	<i>I</i>	Male	Southwest (Sherman, Texas)	CEO; Banker	Married	#1; #3	48 words
14c	“Could you tell me who the historian is and where he said this?”	<i>I</i>	Male	Midwest (Stevens Point, Wisconsin)	Professor	<i>I</i>	#6	142 words
15c	“I was dismayed to hear you announce this morning the completion of your course!”	<i>I</i>	Female	Northeast (Hamden, Connecticut)	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>	#5; #1; #1	88 words
16c	“These courses keep an old lady 78 alive.”	78	Female	Southeast (Winter Park, Florida)	<i>I</i>	Married	#1; #6; 2e; 2a;	95 words
17c	“After my husband leaves for work I watch your discussion on Greek mythology on TV”	<i>I</i>	Female	Southeast (Sandston, Virginia)	<i>I</i> ; Mother;	Married	#6; #6	114 words
18c	“This fall my daughters, who are in the fourth and sixth grade, joined me for watching occasional lectures.”	<i>I</i>	Female	Southeast (Winston-Salem, NC)	University employee; Mother	<i>I</i>	#1;	269 words

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19c	“My husband and I listened nearly every time...”	<i>I</i>	Female	Midwest (Hugo, Colorado)	<i>I</i>	Married	#1	21 words
20c	“...course end this morning.”	66	Female	West Coast (Berkeley, CA)	<i>I</i>	Married	#1; #3, 2a; 2e;	115 words

Notes: N = 20. ID = are assigned at random. Text Fragments = usually are only the first few phrases of each letter. Age = only when it was included in the text, or could be calculated easily based on other information in the text. For example, this phrase was used for an age calculation “Since I was in 9th Grade in 1919 or 1920” (ID_20c) = 14 or 15 in 1919 or 1920 = born in 1905 or 1906; aged 66 or 67 by 1972. Themes: #1 = “Thanks and Praise;” #2 = “Non-Traditional Learner; #2a = “Age Reveal”; 2g = “Gender Reveal”; 2e = “Education Reveal”; #3 = “Pre-Dawn Commitment”; #4 = “Intimacy and Shapes of Learning”; #5 = “Anxiety About the Show’s End”; #6 = Requests, for books or reading lists, etc

Wordcount = Did not include addressee information or the signature line, but did include valedictions like “Sincerely,” “Respectfully yours,” etc.

Appendix D: Constructed *Sunrise Semester* Course Roster

<u>Semester:</u>	<u>Course:</u>	<u>Professor:</u>
Fall 1957	Comp Lit 10: From Stendahl to Hemingway	Dr. Floyd Zulli
Spring 1958	Contemporary Fiction: Realism to Existentialism	Dr. Floyd Zulli
Summer 1958	The Tragic Dramas of Greece and Rome	Dr. Lionel Casson
Fall 1958	The Legacy of Greece and Rome	Dr. Casper J. Kraemer
Fall 1958	Literary Heritage I	Dr. David Greene
Fall 1958	Introduction to Mathematics**	Dr. Hollis R. Cooley
Fall 1958	The Governmental Process*	Dr. Morley Ayearst
Spring 1959	Literary Heritage II	Dr. David Greene
Spring 1959	History of Western Civilization I	?
Spring 1959	Man and Society*	?
Spring 1959	The Nature of Matter**	?
Fall 1959	History of Western Civilization II	?
Fall 1959	Outlines of the History of Art	?
Spring 1960	Outlines of the History of Art II	?
Spring 1960	General Psychology*	?
Fall 1960	Peoples of Africa*	?Hull
Fall 1960	Shakespeare's Major Tragedies	?
Spring 1961	Landmarks in the Evolution of a Novel	?
Spring 1961	Mediterranean Archeology	?
Fall 1961	Literature of Modern Ireland	?
Fall 1961	A History of Modern Russia	?
Spring 1962	A History of Modern Russia II	?
Spring 1962	Changing Institutions of Contemporary Africa*	?
Fall 1962	Labor Problems*	Dr. Emmanuel Stein
Fall 1962	Modern Literature, British and American	Dr. Walker Gibson
Spring 1963	Modern Literature, British and American II	?
Spring 1963	A History of Science	Dr. Henry Noss
Fall 1963	Introduction to Ethics	Dr. Sidney Hook
Fall 1963	Outlines of the History of Art	Dr. Jane Castello
Spring 1964	The Legacy of Greek and Rome	Dr. Lionel Casson
Spring 1964	Outlines of the History of Art	Dr. Jane Castello
Fall 1964	Russian Literature in Translation	?
Fall 1964	Mathematics in Western Culture**	Dr. Morris Kline
Spring 1965	Russian Literature in Translation II	?
Spring 1965	The Tragic Dramas of Greece and Rome	?
Fall 1965	Michelangelo	?

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Fall 1965	The Nature of Matter	?
Spring 1966	Classical Mythology	Dr. Philip Mayerson
Spring 1966	The Age of Rubens	?
Fall 1966	Studies in Style	Dr. William Gibson
Fall 1966	Philosophical Analysis	Dr. Kai Nielsen
Spring 1967	The History of the Early Middle Ages	?
Spring 1967	Man and Society*	?
Fall 1967	Russian Literature in Translation	?
Fall 1967	The Psychological Novel?	?Dr. Leon
Spring 1968	The Near East from Alexander to Muhammad	Dr. R. Bayly Winder
Spring 1968	Russian Literature in Translation II	?
Fall 1968	Theism, Atheism, and Humanism	?
Spring 1969	Contemporary French Literature in Translation	?
Fall 1969	The Dynamic Earth**	Dr. Alistair McCrone
Fall 1969	Adventures in Mathematical Thinking**	Dr. Albert Novinkoff
Spring 1970	The Social Anthropology of Africa*	Dr. John Middleton
Spring 1970	Iranian (Persian) Culture and Civilization	Dr. Peter Chelkowski
Fall 1970	Urban Man: His Work and Society*	Dr. Erwin Smigel
Fall 1970	Early Renaissance Art in Italy	Dr. Isabelle Hyman
Spring 1971	Language: An Introduction to Modern Linguistics*	?
Spring 1971	Fundamental Life Processes**	?
Fall 1971	American Urban Politics*	?
Fall 1971	Classical Mythology in Literature, Art and Music	Dr. Philip Mayerson
Spring 1972	The New Consciousness: Latin American Literature in Translation	?
Spring 1972	Earth, Air, Fire, Water... And DNA	Dr. Seymour Lewin
Fall 1972	Law and Morality	Dr. Graham Hughes
Fall 1972	Twentieth-Century American Art	Dr. Ruth Bowman
Spring 1973	Personality Theory and Creativity*	Dr. Morris I. Stein
Spring 1973	The Heavenly Twins: Astronomy and Astrology**	Dr. Engelbert L. Schucking
Fall 1973	Twentieth-Century Literature: Its Past and Present	Dr. Floyd Zulli
Fall 1973	Near Eastern Languages: The World of Islam	Dr. Francis E. Peters
Spring 1974	Practical Reasoning	Dr. Robert H. Gurland
Spring 1974	The Media in America*	Dr. John W. Tebbel
Fall 1974	History of African Civilization	Dr. Richard W. Hull
Fall 1974	The Meaning of Death	Dr. James P. Carse
Spring 1975	Music of the Romantic Era	Dr. Elaine Brody
Spring 1975	The Near East in Modern Times	Dr. L. Carl Brown
Fall 1975	?	?
Fall 1975	?	?
Spring 1976	Presidential Power and American Democracy	Dr. Louis Koenig
Spring 1976	Reading and the Individual: Diagnostic Teaching of Reading	Dr. George Manolakes
Fall 1976	Communication: The Invisible Environment	SS Tuition is \$250 by

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Fall 1976	Communication: The Invisible Environment	SS Tuition is \$250 by this point, versus \$371 for on-campus credits – Dr. Neil Postman
Fall 1976	The Novel and Theater of Contemporary France	?
Spring 1977	Teaching the Learning Disabled	Dr. D. Kim Read
Spring 1977	Religions and Civilization of the Near East	Dr. Bernard Lewis
Fall 1977	Discipline in the Classroom: Social and Emotional Problems	Dr. Lawrence Balter
Fall 1977	Man’s Place in Nature	Dr. John Buettner-Janusch
Spring 1978	?	?
Spring 1978	Teaching Critical Reading and Thinking to Children and Adults	
Fall 1978	The English Language Arts: Creative Teaching of Speaking, Listening and Writing to Children and Adolescents	Tuition is \$250 by this point, versus \$371 for on-campus credits - Dr. Charles Reasoner
Fall 1978	?	?
Spring 1979	?	?
Spring 1979	?	?
Fall 1979	Drama in Education	?
Fall 1979	Southern Africa: Civilizations in Turmoil	Dr. Richard W. Hull
Spring 1980	Learning to Write/Writing to Learn	?
Spring 1980	?	?
Fall 1980	The City in American Literature	?
Fall 1980	The Legacy of Israel	?
Spring 1981	?	?
Spring 1981	Women and Men in a Changing Society	Dr. Marilyn Young
Spring 1981	Radio, Television and the New Technology	Dr. L. Theresa Silverman
Fall 1981	Experiencing Sports – A Philosophical and Cultural Analysis	?
Fall 1981	Computers: Concepts and Cultural Consequences	?
Spring 1982	Issues in European Politics	Dr. Martin Schain

Notes: This information was compiled from course brochures, television guide listings or from lists located in the NYU Archive.

All courses were listed under “Humanities,” except courses followed by “*” or “**”

* = Listed under “Social Sciences”

** = Listed under “Natural Science and Mathematics”

Appendix E: *Sunrise Semester* Articles

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