Foreword

One important advantage of scholarly edited collections is that although the chapters are linked by a common topical thread (or threads), a reader can nevertheless experience a wide range of sub-topics, perspectives, research strategies and conclusions from the work of the varied contributors. Often, this allows for a wider view of the topic as a whole, while at the same time offering interesting specificity as each author examines his/her particular area of research. This big-and-small picture view is perhaps even more important for rhetorical studies of digital technologies, because of the myriad combinations of tools, spaces, users and texts that can come into play in different electronic settings. And yet, digital spaces do make use of specific technologies that enable certain similar kinds of interactions, which means that our use of these digital spaces binds us together in ways that are interesting for their commonalities as well as their differences. Thankfully, the plethora of different digital settings available in *Online Credibility and Digital Ethos: Evaluating Computer-Mediated Communication* offers both *specificity*, as authors offer details about their different research settings, and *commonalities*, as the editors have worked to create an overall look at the different ways that human beings (individually and in groups and institutions) work to shape their ethos in these different types of electronic settings.

In terms of its topic(s), *Online Credibility and Digital Ethos* is a collection that centers on the production of ethos and credibility in online spaces – possibly one of the most critical topics for scholars, teachers, and citizens as we continue to move into ever-more complicated digital spaces for our work and leisure. These issues move well beyond simple notions of individual rhetors establishing ethos with their audiences through spoken or written prose (even digital prose). Instead, the chapters in this collection tackle extremely complicated issues related to how credibility is built through interactions between authorial agencies (examples include individuals, collaborative non-professional contributors, combinations of commercial and non-commercial contributors and various types of other corporate entities) and the affordances of the technologies and spaces they use.

The breadth of the research in this collection, and the different sites the authors present, leads me to a brief discussion of a common (I believe) disadvantage to collections on digital tools and technologies, which is that sites, software, and tools move in and out of use so quickly that some collections risk becoming outdated before they are even published. However, I believe that *Online Credibility and Digital Ethos* avoids that pitfall, because the focus of the collection is not on specific technologies or tools, or even (necessarily) on particular digital spaces. Instead, the text as a whole surrounds and intersects with issues of meaning-making that are inherent to digital spaces generally. Indeed, various chapters in the collection consider these issues from multiple angles: how readers decide what to believe, how authors do (and can learn to) present themselves as believable/ethical, and how different authors or collaborations of authors work to build or contribute to ethos in larger and more complicated productions such as

Wikipedia or major news sites. As consumers and producers of digital content, we are all embedded in these issues – we make these kinds of choices on a daily basis, and we are affected by the productions of ethos and credibility that we encounter online.

As scholars interested in these issues, we must also work to track changes that are taking place in our human understanding of ethos and credibility precisely because these issues haven't remained static – digital productions present complications in such critical areas as communal/private resources, personal/public personas, expert/non-expert contributors and social/political interactions. The distinctions that used to be more visible (at least in certain socially constructed ways) between these dichotomous areas are at present extremely unstable – interconnected in ways that create moral and legal complications that impact both our access to information and the ways we are expected (culturally) to use it. This collection provides useful discussions of locations where these distinctions are actively in flux.

For teachers, this collection offers perhaps the most valuable resource. The varied articles and sub-topics presented, along with the different research approaches represented throughout the collection, make the text a useful resource for approaching the important topics related to online identity, ethos, and credibility. Additionally, the articles deal with a range of online spaces that can be connected directly to different digital teaching scenarios, which means the text could also be useful for discussions of digital pedagogy – in particular the ways that teachers can promote and support more nuanced understandings of digital spaces and the decisions about credibility that readers/users must make as they work and live in these spaces.

Joyce Walker
Illinois State University, USA

Joyce Walker *is an Associate Professor at Illinois State University in Normal, IL. She is the Director of the Center for Writing Research and Pedagogy and the Director of the Illinois State University Writing Program. She teaches both graduate and undergraduate courses in Rhetoric & Writing Studies. Her research is primarily concerned with the ideas, productions, and communities that can be developed and facilitated through interactions between humans and their composing tools. Her recent article with James Purdy (Duquesne University), "Valuing Digital Scholarship: Exploring the Changing Realities of Intellectual Work," which appeared in MLA Profession 2010, won the Ellen Nold Award for best article from the Computers & Composition Conference in 2011. She is currently at work on a book-length project with Kevin Roozen (Auburn University), Tracing Trajectories of Practice and Person: Sociohistoric Perspectives of Literate Activity.*