Church-sponsored benevolent societies provided antebellum women with a socially-acceptable "border crossing" between the private and public spheres, and because women undertook these efforts under the mantle of the Methodist Church, I claim the Methodist Church as both an important space and sponsor for American women's rhetorical development. Moreover, I argue that women's efforts pursuing benevolent causes enabled nineteenth-century women to emerge from the domestic sphere to expand their realm of influence and engage in social activism through their roles as fundraisers, organizers, and spokespersons.

My proposed research project—traveling to the Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew University this summer to examine their extensive collection of materials on operations, fundraising, and the programs for benevolent societies including, Female Missionary Societies, Dorcas Societies, Female Bible and Tract Societies, Mite Societies, and Women and Children Aid Societies—will delve deeper into the activities of female benevolent organizations and the rhetorical skills members acquired. As participants in benevolent societies, women practiced leadership and managerial skills. They also took minutes, wrote reports, kept financial accounts, fundraised, and practiced grassroots organization. I will use this archival research in a scholarly article I am writing that argues that the church provided a primary site for antebellum women's acquisition of professional skills and their rhetorical development. My research at the Methodist Archives will also provide me with the contextual material I need to complete a book chapter and a chapter outline for a book proposal that I will submit at the end of this summer.