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Writing Program Administration

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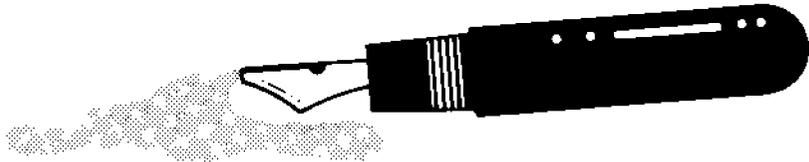
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Writing in the sciences¹

Thomas M. Dunn

I would not be surprised if readers of this journal who know my academic background wondered what a chemist is doing writing about English composition. My professional role is certainly not to teach writing. When discussions about writing and verbal aptitude began at the University of Michigan two or three years ago, I wondered about it too. Why should I, a scientist, take time and energy away from an already full schedule of teaching, research, and administrative duties to worry about writing?

In truth, my response was ambivalent, I was brought up in an atmosphere in which literature and languages were encouraged, so that when we were asked whether the university should do something about the level of student writing, my emotional response was an immediate and emphatic yes. I chair the Chemistry Department at a major institution of higher education, however, and in that role I am not allowed the luxury of deciding issues at the emotional level. For this reason, and for others, I began to ask myself if there could possibly be a rational basis for my immediate, positive response to suggestions that we pay more attention to our students' writing-including students in science. In the end I concluded that there is a rational basis, and my purpose here is to explain these reasons to those in my audience who may not respond at an emotional level quite as positively as I did to the possibility of a new emphasis on competence in writing.

I began my analysis of the problem by asking the following three questions:

1. Is good writing desirable-or perhaps even indispensable-for today's and tomorrow's scientists? Does a scientist really need to be able to write well in order to be a good scientist?

2. If my answer to this first and basic question were to be affirmative, should we then add writing programs and certification in writing competence, to what is already a crowded curriculum, in a demanding professional subject such as chemistry?

3. Even if it turns out that my answer to the curricular question is affirmative as well, do I really believe that the university and my own department can afford to pay for the extra courses and faculty time that would be required, especially in a period of growing competition for shrinking funds *and* when everything in the curriculum, new and old, has to be considered on its own merits?

In an attempt to answer the first question, I asked myself yet another series of questions. (For a time, I had many questions and precious few answers.) These were perhaps the most basic questions one can ask about writing: What is the function of good writing? Is writing a unique human activity? From the point of view of the scientist, is there any alternative to verbal communication and conceptualization?

I had reached, from my point of view, the heart of the matter. At this point, I recalled a Chinese saying by Chuang Tzu, and the recollection disconcerted me.

A basket-trap is for catching fish; but when one has got the fish, one need think no more about the basket. A foot-trap is for catching hares; but when one has got the hare, one need think no more about the trap. Words are for catching ideas; but when one has got the idea, one need think no more about the words.²

This tells us that ideas and conceptualizations may be completely nonverbal in character. I realize that there are at least two points of view on this issue, but it should at least *be obvious* from the existence of mathematics that nonverbal conceptualization is not only *possible* but frequent. My view has been strengthened by contact with other scientists over the past 30 years and, while not claiming that it is universal, I find that it is a point of view not always considered or understood by people who spend most of their lives in a highly verbal world.

Being a scientist and therefore only a part-time resident in that verbal world, I am not disturbed by the nonverbal nature of much scientific thought. From my point of view, what makes the idea of nonverbal thought easier to accept is, to go back for a moment to my Chinese proverb, what I understand by the word "catching." The proverb is not about the original conception or generation of ideas, which is the aspect of scientific thought most likely to be nonverbal. Baskettraps do not create fish. Basket-traps capture fish and place them in the hands of people who want to eat them. Likewise—the proverb tells us—words do not necessarily create ideas (or, correlatively, words are not always necessary to the generation of ideas). Words capture ideas and place them in the hands of people who want to know and use them. In short, our common concern in writing is the transmission of ideas rather than their initial conception. It is in this, the transmission of ideas, that the written word is so important to scientists and nonscientists alike.

What then is the function and purpose of writing? I am about to take a position here that may shock some of my *fellow* scientists and perhaps some of my colleagues in literary studies as well. My position is that in many respects *the* function and purpose of writing is very much the same in both literature and science.

In literature—that is, in fiction and poetry-writing seems to me to serve four functions. First, writing conveys perceptions from one person to another and thereby increases the collective experience of humankind without every individual having to have every possible experience him or herself. Second, I see writing as necessary in analyzing those perceptions so as to extract whatever may be universal in them. Third, writing serves as a kind of bait. It evokes the emotions that an idea is capable of generating. It involves readers by summoning up their emotions, emotions which resonate with similar situations, similar ideas, similar conceptual relationships experienced in the past. And fourth, writing is necessary in our attempt to tie all of these things together into some kind of coherent entity so that we leave the reader with an added dimension of understanding, an overall or gestalt sense of the subject at large.

So much for the purposes of literary writing. What about science writing? I would maintain, even in the face of considerable opposition, that science writing seeks to do much the same kind of thing, although not in exactly the same way.

Of course, the scientist seldom has the luxury of seeking to match the lyrical quality found in much of the best English literature, even that written by scientifically oriented writers. Take for example, this passage from the title essay in Aldous Huxley's collection, *Music at Night*.

Moonless, this June night is all the more alive with stars. Its darkness is perfumed with faint gusts from the blossoming lime trees, with the smell of wetted earth and invisible greenness of the vines. There is silence—but a silence that breathes with the soft breathing of the sea and, in the thin shrill noise of a cricket, insistently, incessantly harps on the fact of its own deep perfection. Far away, the passage of a train is like a long caress, moving gently, with an inexorable gentleness, across the warm living body of the night.¹

As beautiful as we may think this passage is, what scientist would write the same way in explaining the results of laboratory experimentation? On the contrary, the scientist must suppress the kinds of emotive responses which may prejudice the answers, or even the questions, that arise from the work. For this reason, scientific prose must be much more concerned with the precision and logic of language than with its ability to convey suggestive images and to woo us with sound. Precision and logic require no less mastery of vocabulary and syntax than does evocative writing.

It is difficult to choose a highly technical passage suitable for a mostly lay audience that will demonstrate my point. However, all of us in the sciences have at some time come across passages of unusual precision and depth of scientific understanding. Perhaps as an example I could quote some passages from Cyril Hinshelwood's *Structure of Physical Chemistry*, in which Hinshelwood manages to convey the approach he will take in describing natural phenomena in that book.

It is in this spirit that we shall examine the scope and achievements of physical chemistry and see what views about the nature of things it reflects. We shall attempt to show the subject in continuous development which reveals its structure and displays the relation of its parts. We shall therefore not pay much attention to the accidents of history, but we shall be very much concerned with the methods by which an enquiring mind can penetrate the secrets of nature. In this sense, the treatment may reasonably be called humanistic.

We shall find it necessary to keep before us what is meant by a scientific explanation: It is, in effect, the representation of the unknown in terms of the known, but we shall find that the idiom in which the representation is expressible has to suffer some remarkable transformations as we proceed. In the early stages, to employ (yet again) the metaphor of the picture gallery, we spend some profitable time in a school of primitives: presently we find that more abstract schools command our attention.⁴

I recall being impressed, the first time I read Hinshelwood's book, by his unusual economy of expression, his clarity of intent, and the striking imagery of

his presentation. He seems to use language to do everything Huxley uses language to do. He conveys his conception of scientific method to us, suggests its universal nature, involves us emotionally in his powerful sense of its significance, and leaves us with a sense of its relationship with still larger intellectual issues; and he does all this through language which is both logical and precise. This precision is even more evident in the more technical portions of the book.

Having made these remarks about the logic and precision of scientific writing, however, let me now dispel what I perceive to be some myths about scientific writing. First, scientific writing is not inexorably logical! In fact, by its very nature it cannot be. It is after all an attempt to describe, at least in the case of many fields of physical science, submicroscopic moieties such as electrons, protons, atoms, and molecules, in words which were, as often as not, invented to express the more concrete perceptions of everyday life. Many times in science writing we take over common words, strip them of their emotive content in everyday language, and use them in entirely different ways. For this reason, the scientific reader and the lay reader alike must be aware in advance that science writing may take such liberties.

In addition, just as the very best works of literature are often allegorical in structure--and here I have in mind such authors as Stendahl and Kafka--so is the very best scientific writing. The allegories of science, however, must be more precisely correlated to the physical world than the allegories of literary writing. They must precisely define the phenomenological constraints within which their truth lies. But otherwise, scientific writing must not seek to limit the imagination of the reader. In fact, it is impossible to believe that one person's concept of an electron or a molecule is exactly the same as another's. Modern physics and chemistry have shown us that there is a great deal of room for the imagination to maneuver within the limits set by these disciplines. We can go still further. It is true that most analytical arguments in science are flawed by their lack of completeness. What many lay people (and some scientists) do not realize is that evidence of completeness may often be confidently regarded as signifying the presence of a tautological argument. In some cases, the tighter and seemingly more all-encompassing the logic and precision of an argument is, the more likely it is ultimately to be proven false.

As for feeling in scientific writing, scientists do seek to evoke excitement and even wonder and awe in their work. One hopes though that these emotions do not run away with the reader and that writers do not evoke them in order to distract attention from conceptual weakness or an experimental flaw. The true excitement of scientific writing comes in the writer's ability to reduce our confusion about the natural world as we perceive it normally and enlighten us about it by managing, as Hinshelwood puts it, to "represent the unknown in terms of the known." To sum up, (hen, it seems to me that the role of writing is similar in science and literature in that both must faithfully transmit experiences from one person to another in a non-ephemeral and therefore analyzable way. These experiences may be the emotional ones of literature, or they may be scientific observations. Our obligation in either case is to transmit these experiences as faithfully as possible to others.

For scientists, this is a serious obligation. The continued health and well-being

of our disciplines depends on our discharging it. Scientists have been called the "new Mandarins." The "old Mandarins" were a cultured and sophisticated people whose society fell because they lacked the ability, or the resolve, to transmit their experience to those who were not privileged to share this high Mandarin culture and sophistication. If science and scientists have erred in the past--and they have been accused of many offenses to which I do not plead guilty--that error is poor communication with the community of enlightened and enlightenable people at large.

To my mind, this gap in communication can be bridged only by excellence in writing. Other media, such as television and film, can certainly help us, but their ephemeral nature makes them unlikely, in the long run, to satisfy an introspective and discriminating public. As compelling as they often are, they are capable of merely scratching the surface of scientific understanding. In my view, therefore, whereas scientific concepts and ideas may indeed be nonverbal in their creation and growth, transmission and broad communication of them is, and will remain in the foreseeable future, dependent upon precise verbal expression.

To my first question, then, "should scientists be able to write well in order to be good scientists?," my answer is an unequivocal "yes." To my second question, "should we make way for writing in the university, even at the upper level of our professional curricula?," my answer is also an unequivocal "yes," and I would add, *particularly* at the upper level. It is there, in the final stages of scientific training, that the mechanics of writing provided in the early years of school and college can at least be applied to the transmission of substantive ideas in a clear, effective manner both to peers and to a lay audience alike.

As to whether we can afford to add these dimensions to our university curriculum, the dialogue about the importance of writing now going on in many colleges and universities among people in all disciplines demonstrates sufficiently to me that we not only can afford to do so but that we cannot afford not to do so. Not to teach our scientists to write would, in my opinion, restrict the future of our nation and the future of the whole human race: it is that serious a matter. In the future we will need to make use of all the ideas we can get even if we are to survive, let alone survive with honor. Our survival will depend on scientific ideas being available to, and understood by, everyone. Only excellence in writing can ultimately achieve this universal understanding.

Notes

¹ This article appeared in another form in *Proceedings: English Composition Board Conference*. 12 May 1978, University of Michigan.

² Arthur Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Anchor, 1939). p. x. The passage quoted is from Chapter 26 or the "Chuang Tzu."

³ Aldous Huxley, *Music at Night* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1931), p. 40.

⁴ Cyril Hintedwood, *The Structure of Physical Chemistry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), p. 4.

Hiring composition specialists

Robert R. Bataille

One of the gravest threats to any writing program is the tendency of the profession to regard composition as a course that anyone can teach. We seem to inherit this attitude from our patrician past. Whatever its origin, and however relevant it may have once been, it is an attitude no longer appropriate to the needs of our profession. One of the most serious problems any writing program administrator or department chair faces today is hiring faculty who are truly competent to teach writing. And the problem is more than a practical one. It has a rhetorical aspect as well. If we do not challenge everywhere the tendency to hire poorly qualified faculty at low rank and salary to teach composition courses, we will continue to convey the message—to our higher administration, to our colleagues, and to our constituencies outside the institution—that composition teaching and research in related fields are, media propaganda notwithstanding, still relatively unimportant to a good college education.

But hiring highly qualified composition faculty, especially in a time of retrenchment, is a high risk enterprise. I would like to suggest a few ways to lessen that risk. The central questions are, What should a competent composition teacher know? and How can we tell whether he or she knows it?

Writing an effective ad. Perhaps the best place to begin a discussion of how to hire a competent composition person who will be both a teacher and a scholar is with the job advertisement itself. If we are seriously searching for the best trained person we can find, we must compose a precise description of the position and its requirements. The *MLA Guide for Job Candidates and Department Chairmen* (1975) gives the following advice: "describe the position in detail so that candidates will know whether or not their qualifications fit your needs" (page 19). The following is a typical example of the sort of advertisement to avoid. It is simply too vague:

Possible opening. Freshman and intermediate composition. Additional competence in technical writing or in screenwriting desirable. MA/ABD for instructorship, Ph.D for assistant professorship.

An advertisement like this one is bound to attract a host of minimally qualified candidates. A more specific description, like the one that follows, is more likely to draw only those whose qualifications at least come close to matching what is needed in a composition specialist. This means fewer letters to wade through and more letters and vitae received worthy of close scrutiny.

Composition specialist. To teach freshman and intermediate (expository) composition. Training or experience in reading (diagnostic and clinical), remedial writing or Garrison methods desirable.

Prefer Ph.D. specialist in composition with research direction for assistant professorship.

There are at least two clear differences between these two descriptions. The second spells out in unambiguous terms what the employer wants, which is not merely anyone to teach freshman English but rather a composition specialist. Then too, because the ad specifies research interest, the chances are reduced that desperate but unqualified people will apply. The specificity of the second description will also allow would-be candidates to infer that the department that placed this advertisement is indeed serious about composition.

Reading letters of application and vitae. Unhappily, even a clear, specific job advertisement is bound to be ignored by some candidates, so that the administrators of departments hiring composition staff for the next year must still expect hundreds of letters. Many of these will have been written by "closet" literature teachers trying to obtain positions as composition instructors. Now, I do not claim that either literary training or the prior teaching of literature automatically makes for an unhappy or incompetent teacher of composition. After all, most of us who teach composition today come from that very background. But it is also true that given the despair born of today's job market, many candidates who have no real interest or experience in teaching composition nevertheless try to persuade would-be employers of their total commitment to writing courses and writing research.

The strategies of these applicants are not unfamiliar to most of us who have had to wade through hundreds of letters of application. One strategy is to mention in the first paragraph of the letter of application the candidate's desire to teach freshman English exclusively, or if not freshman English, then intermediate composition, or if not that, then technical writing. Literature is mentioned in passing only briefly in the fifth paragraph of the letter as perhaps the candidate's third or fourth choice, welcome but reluctantly admitted to, only because the dissertation is likely to be on a literary subject. A second strategy is to list the candidate's experience teaching composition, experience which often turns out to have been teaching something called a freshman composition course in what really is a program in introduction to literature.

I do not want to seem cynical. But times are hard indeed, and they often breed desperate rhetorical strategies. Letters of application and vitae always are, or should be, carefully designed rhetorical pieces. They are all the more likely to be so today, since the times demand that applicants take a strong, persuasive stance. But for the same reason, readers ought to be on their guard. Applicants must make their best case; readers must decide how substantial that case is. How to cull the genuine composition applicant from that vast pile of letters would seem, then, a talent well worth developing, and, to that end, the *first step* is to *compare applicants' letters with their vitae* in order to ascertain whether or not the claims made by the letter are backed up in the vita. There are at least four areas in the candidate's vita itself that need to be scanned with care: 1. courses of study (some include this, others do not; if not, the full dossier must then be consulted); 2. the order of items in the section on teaching interests; 3. the section on publications and papers (this would include looking at research in progress and research pro-

jected for the future); and 4. the section detailing teaching experience.

1. *Courses of study.* I will have more to say about composition-related courses later, in discussing the dossier. For now, I will only say that many of the most attractive vitae list lots of independent reading, primarily because most dedicated composition students at the Ph.D. level have had to forge their own programs. This means that they have often had to *develop* their own courses as well.

2. The *order of items* in the section of the vita listing teaching interests can often be very revealing, particularly when it is compared with information found *in other* areas. Candidates usually list courses they would like to teach, roughly in the order of preference or strength of interest. If composition is not high on the list (quite literally!), then perhaps that candidate needs closer scrutiny.

3. On the other hand, if a candidate already shows a *research interest* in composition, by reading papers at meetings or by publishing articles, textbooks, and the like, the chances that such a candidate will prove to be genuine are obviously increased. Such a research interest is very important because it is extremely difficult for new staff members to publish consistently in an area other than the one they are to do the bulk of their teaching in.

4. The section of the vita that lists *teaching experience* must also be examined carefully, for it is not likely that a candidate without three or four years teaching experience in composition at the undergraduate level is going to know or care much about the subject or its clientele. Close attention to the kinds of composition courses taught is also necessary in order to make certain that what has been taught has been something more than a literature course. Care must be taken in weighing a candidate's claim to experience in advanced composition courses. We must beware, for instance, of a candidate's claim to have taught a technical writing course on a freshman or even sophomore level. Such a course is not likely to have been very substantial, because ordinarily a rigorous technical writing course can only be taught at a junior or senior level after the student has learned a technical discipline.

Perhaps some examples will clarify the generalizations I have been making. A section of a typically misleading vita might look like this:

Courses Taught	Teaching and Research Interests
Freshman Composition	British Fiction of the Nineteenth Century
Intermediate Composition	British Fiction of the Twentieth Century
Women and Literature	Women's Studies
American Literature Survey	Popular Culture Studies

In the letter accompanying this vita, the candidate wrote two long paragraphs on his composition experience and two short paragraphs, at the end of the letter, on his literary interests. But the vita revealed quite another set of priorities, a contradiction between what the composition job offers and what the candidate wants in his professional future. The teaching and research interests-and how crucial that word "interests" is-are at odds with the letter's emphasis and with the candidate's professed experience; nowhere in the list of interests is composition mentioned. We can only conclude that were this person to be hired for the

composition position, neither he nor his employers would remain content for long.

In contrast, another letter began by stating that the candidate was *an experienced teacher of writing*. The candidate backed that claim up with some specifics: "I am currently teaching a freshman writing course aimed at engineering and technology students and, in addition, a business communication course for juniors and seniors in the School of Management." The writer went on to provide some useful details about the courses she was teaching. She then concluded: "I have developed a course in technical writing.... This course was the product of six months of research during which time I consulted with many professional technical writers.... This research has also fed directly into my attempts to formulate a 'genre' theory of technical writing."

The promise explicit in this candidate's letter was reinforced rather than contradicted by the *vita*, where the candidate listed the following under "Teaching and Research Interests":

Freshman Composition
Business Communication
Technical Writing
ESL and the Problems of Native Speakers
Rhetorical Theory

Particularly important here are the last two items. An interest in rhetorical theory shows at the very least that the candidate will probably have some sound basis for pursuing research in writing, especially in her genre work with technical writing. The item dealing with applied linguistics tells us that the candidate is aware of what linguistics can tell us about the applicability of ESL methods to the remediation of native speakers, an area of composition that even many veteran writing teachers know little about.

Formal training. The *second step* in evaluating applicants' materials is to *examine closely the formal training of the applicants whose letters and vitae have survived this initial comparison*. I do not want to say much about letters of recommendation. Obviously, if a composition applicant is serious, he or she will have at least one letter written by the director of rhetoric or freshman English. Such a letter should comment not only on the applicants' teaching ability but also upon his or her promise as a scholar of writing. If there is also a letter from a composition specialist with a national reputation, so much the better.

But I believe the main attention should be paid to the candidate's course work, for, short of the interview, it is here that we can tell whether or not the candidate has received basic training that will enable him or her to teach and to do research in composition. What courses should these be? What follows may seem like a slightly mad, impossibly idealistic recipe for a training program for composition specialists. It is in fact a composite list of what I have found in the dossiers of good composition candidates.

Among courses related directly to composition, we might hope to find the theory of modern rhetoric, theory of composition, classical rhetoric, the major practical approaches to composition, and perhaps modern persuasion theory. Among linguistics courses might be structure of the English language, non

standard dialects, psycholinguistics, and perhaps a course or two in teaching English as a second language. This last is important because of the increasing numbers of students at many institutions whose first language is not English, and of the value of applying ESL strategies in teaching native speakers.

In addition, a course in statistics and another in research design surely might be expected in the dossier of the composition specialist. Research in composition is often undertaken on a large scale where the practical knowledge drawn from such courses would be of great value. And because of its growing importance, not only in writing clinics or centers but also in regular composition courses themselves, we might also expect a course on teaching reading to appear in the dossiers of full-fledged writing specialists. Finally, due to the influence of such theorists as Vygotsky and Piaget and the more general bearing that studies in cognition appear to have upon composition, a course in cognitive psychology might also help.

I should point out, in closing, that the steps and strategies I have just outlined are predicated on the hiring practice of a large university, where teaching and research are of equal importance and where narrow specialization even in writing instruction is both possible and necessary. Obviously, not all I have said would be applicable to the hiring procedure in a two-year school or liberal arts college. The two-year writing teacher, for instance, certainly needs to have some of the training I have mentioned, but he or she will also undoubtedly require some additional competencies in, say, the diagnosis of language dysfunction and oral communication, which an instructor in a large university is not so likely to need.

Large-scale testing

Editor's note. The following two articles by Robert Lyons and Allan Brick are the second set in the *WPA* series on large-scale testing of writing. The first set, on the California State University English Placement Test by Edward M. White and Alice Brekke, appeared in spring, 1980. In each set in this series, one article discusses a system-wide test from the perspective of the system as a whole, and is written, when possible, by the system's current or past director of testing. The second article in each set explores the effects and implications of system-wide testing at a local campus within the system and is written by a current or past writing program administrator at that campus. Every article in the series attempts both to describe the test and to discuss some of the issues that the test has raised. *WPA* is most grateful to these busy people for undertaking to explore this important topic with us.

III. The City University of New York Writing Assessment Test: A faculty-generated model

Robert Lyons

In November, 1977, the City University of New York asked 10 members of its faculty to accept responsibility for creating a test to measure the writing skills of every student entering the university's 17 two- and four-year colleges. The university's Board of Trustees and administration had already determined that students should be tested in three skills areas—mathematics, reading, and writing. Students who did not pass these tests by the beginning of their junior year would not be permitted to enroll in additional college-level courses until they had satisfied the requirement. Testing was to begin in spring, 1978, for the September freshman class. Students who did not satisfy university standards in math, reading, or writing, would receive skills instruction in that area and would be retested until they met the standard. Because of this retest provision, the university anticipated administering approximately 70,000 writing tests in the first year alone.

The group responsible for the writing test, officially called the CUNY Task Force on Writing, was very much a cross section of the university: six four-year colleges and four two-year colleges were represented. More important, every member of the task force was very much committed to teaching writing: nine of its 10 members were currently teaching freshman-level writing courses; the tenth was an expert in educational testing and measurement. The task force hoped to use its practical experience to create a test that would set appropriate standards of

competency suited to the needs of the university and, at the same time, given the serious consequences of the tests for the students' academic careers, to create a test that would be fair, consistent, and reliable.

Testing writing with writing. The task force made two major recommendations. The first was that the test consist of a single writing sample, produced within 50 minutes, in response to one of two topics. The task force made this recommendation in order to accommodate a university-wide testing program, a complicated schedule of tests and retests on many individual campuses, and a very large number of students. The decision to provide a choice of topic was a way of acknowledging the extraordinary diversity of background and experience that entering students bring to CUNY. The topics themselves were to consist of a short passage on some current subject likely to interest students followed by a set of instructions asking students to agree or disagree with the passage. Students would be asked to develop their essays with personal experience, observation, or information gained from reading. The task force believed that such an assignment, requiring students to assert a position and support it with some evidence, gave the best indication of how ready they were to cope with college writing requirements.

The decision to use a writing sample, and only a writing sample, in the CUNY Writing Assessment Test reflected the unanimous conviction of the task force that proficiency in writing should be measured directly by examining student writing. The task force rejected the alternative of having students demonstrate a more limited range of skills by selecting answers to multiple-choice questions on a standardized test. In addition, the task force expected that an essay test would have a significant influence on the priorities of students, faculty, and administrators of CUNY colleges and New York City high schools. Everyone would become aware that the ability to produce coherent writings of some length was essential to academic progress in CUNY. High school teachers concerned with the improvement of student writing could use the CUNY requirement as further evidence that school administrations should devote additional resources to composition and that faculty should reemphasize the importance of writing as part of the school curriculum.

The second major recommendation of the task force was that all CUNY essays be read centrally by a centrally trained staff of readers. While the university administration accepted the kind of test proposed by the task force, it rejected this second recommendation on both financial and logistical grounds. The task force, therefore, had to develop an alternative plan for scoring the essays, while continuing to urge the adoption of centralized reading. Under the alternative plan, readings were to take place at each CUNY college, and faculty readers were to be trained and supervised by someone at the college who had been trained in the methods and standards recommended by the task force. The degree to which the college readings remained consistent with CUNY standards was to be monitored through an annual university audit of essays obtained by random sample from all the colleges. Readers were to judge the student essays holistically but be guided by explicit criteria reflecting university standards of proficiency.

Evaluation criteria. Far from having completed its work when it created the test, the CUNY Task Force on Writing then had to establish a scale for scoring

the test and characterize the writing abilities each score could be expected to reflect. The group agreed to a six-point scale and required two readers for each essay. Each essay would then receive a combined score of from two to 12. A combined score of eight or better (two readings of at least four on the scale) met the CUNY standard. When two readers differed near the cutoff, a third reader would resolve the conflict. The task force chose this extended scale, more elaborate than needed for a yes-or-no decision determining proficiency, in order to make the test more adaptable to further use by the colleges for placement.

The most difficult and time-consuming responsibility of the task force was to describe and distinguish the levels of writing associated with the different points on the evaluation scale. The group used the term "minimal readiness" to describe the qualities of writing that indicated students were prepared to benefit from the kind of instruction customarily offered in a freshman composition course at CUNY. To define minimal readiness, the task force worked inductively, reading a great many sample essays contributed by the CUNY colleges and pooling their own teaching experience.

The criteria that emerged from these discussions were intentionally kept fairly short and general so that they could be quickly assimilated by readers but would not interfere with the readers' general purpose of rating essays on the basis of an initial holistic impression.' To supplement the scale and to give college faculty some additional preparation for their role as readers, the task force prepared a booklet with sample essays illustrating each point on the evaluation scale; commentary explaining the score accompanied each essay.' Currently, the task force is engaged in developing a writing curriculum model based on successive stages in writing development implicit in the test's evaluation scale. The purpose of this curriculum model is to stimulate discussion of greater integration between curriculum planning and definitions of acceptable writing skills.

Aims, effects, and unsolved problems. The work of the CUNY Task Force on Writing is significant because it suggests that, properly done, the large-scale-testing of writing may have educational value beyond its primary aim of establishing a minimum level of writing preparedness in a large university system. I have pointed out that the CUNY task force was composed mainly of writing teachers, not professional testers. From the beginning, these writing teachers strove to create a test that would lead to wider discussion of writing evaluation, writing standards, and the writing curriculum throughout the university. These efforts have shown some signs of success. Decentralized reading, while making it more difficult to ensure consistency among readers, has brought faculty together for training in holistic reading and has, in many instances, led to a review of local standards of evaluation. The use of the test by some colleges for placement purposes has led to discussions of the relationship among courses in a writing sequence and the skills properly emphasized in each course. Since virtually every CUNY college already offers basic skills instruction in writing, the test is unlikely to prompt additional course requirements. But it may, in some instances, increase the number of students that colleges recognize as needing the existing skills courses. In short, the test has successfully raised the issue of what "minimal readiness" really is in writing for college-level work. In addition, the test has

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served as a focus for contact between CUNY English faculty and New York City high school English department heads who are already preparing their students for a new and demanding writing test recently introduced as a high school graduation requirement by the New York State Board of Regents.

While most CUNY colleges are finding the CUNY Writing Assessment Test useful in a variety of ways, a substantial number of problems remain unsolved. The financial tribulations of New York City and the state have left the testing program markedly underfunded since its inception. The decentralized reading plan has placed a significant burden on English Department and writing program faculty throughout the CUNY system. The differing schedules of the various CUNY colleges have led to a highly complicated calendar for testing and retesting and have produced corresponding difficulties in assuring the rapid and accurate transmission of test data. As a result, some of the needed research on the test results and on the impact of the test has been unduly delayed.

These problems make it difficult to speak with assurance about the long-range influence of the writing test or even to predict the performance of the first group of students facing the proficiency requirement as a condition for continued matriculation this fall. What has undeniably been achieved is a greater consciousness at every campus of the importance of evaluation in establishing writing proficiency, a greater sense of the need for shared standards, and a greater congruence in the way these standards find expression in the writing curriculum.

¹ The CUNY Writing Assessment Test Evaluation Scale:

6: The essay is competently organized and the ideas are expressed in appropriate language. A sense of pattern or development is present *from* beginning to end. The writer supports assertions with explanation or illustration.

Sentences reflect a command of syntax within the ordinary range of standard written English. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling are generally correct

5-4: The writer introduces some point or idea and demonstrates an awareness that development or illustration is called for.

The essay presents a discernible pattern of organization, even if there are occasional digressions.

The essay demonstrates sufficient command of vocabulary to convey, without serious distortion or excessive simplification, the range of the writer's ideas.

Sentences reflect a sufficient command of syntax to ensure reasonable clarity of expression. The writer generally avoids both the monotony of rudimentary syntax and the incoherence created by tangled syntax.

The writer demonstrates through punctuation an understanding of the boundaries of the sentence.

The writer spells the common words of the language with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Exceptions can be made for the so-called spelling "demons" which frequently trouble an advanced writer.

The writer shows the ability to use regularly, but not necessarily faultlessly, the common forms of agreement and of grammatical inflection in standard written English.

3-2: An idea or point is suggested, but it is undeveloped or presented in a purely repetitious way.

The pattern of the essay is somewhat random and relationships between sentences and paragraphs are rarely signaled.

The essay is restricted to a very narrow range of language, so that the vocabulary chosen frequently does not serve the needs of the writer.

The syntax of the essay is not sufficiently stable to ensure reasonable clarity of expression. The syntax often is rudimentary or tangled.

The writer frequently commits errors of punctuation which obscure sentence boundaries.

The writer spells the common words of the language with only intermittent accuracy.

The essay reveals recurrent grammatical problems; if there are only occasional problems, this may be due to the extremely narrow range of syntactical choices the writer has used.

1: The essay suffers from general incoherence and has no discernible pattern of organization. It displays a high frequency of error in the regular features of standard written English. Lapses in punctuation, spelling, and grammar often frustrate the reader. OR. the essay is so brief that any reasonably accurate judgment of the writer's competence is impossible.

² The CUNY Writing Task Force booklet with sample essays and commentary illustrating these criteria is available from the CUNY Instructional Resource Center, 535 East 80th Street, New York, New York 10021.

IV. The CUNY Writing Assessment Test and the teaching of writing

Allan Brick

The CUNY Writing Assessment Test, mandated for the undergraduate colleges of the City University of New York, has had largely positive effects on the teaching of writing at Hunter College. This test, together with tests in mathematics and reading, is taken by approximately 2,700 entering Hunter freshmen (1979-80 figures) and taken again as a remediation exit retest by 58 percent who failed to meet the CUNY standard.

As former coordinator of basic English and present coordinator of the entire CUNY Freshman Skills Assessment Program at Hunter, I see the writing test as a significant step forward in a strategy of ensuring our students not only literacy in writing but the opportunity for valid learning throughout the college curriculum. Precisely because it is not a multiple-choice test counting errors in mechanics and grammar, but an essay in which students express themselves and argue for their personal opinions, the CUNY Writing Assessment Test demonstrates that CUNY faculty are concerned about the student as a whole person—as a thinking, experimenting, expressive individual. Thus the writing test balances the reading and math portions of the CUNY Skills Assessment Program which, in their predilection for quick, quantified, "objectively" statistical assessment, tend to deny individual differences and to undercut the desire of open admissions-level students to attend college and to remain there.

In mandating skills assessment, the CUNY Board of Trustees was seeking—I think quite justifiably—to strengthen CUNY's public image. Traditionally, CUNY's mission is to make quality education available to large numbers of students who are the first in their families to go to college. CUNY is not, nor has it ever been, a haven for students whose interests and abilities are wholly inappropriate to higher learning. It was the board's desire to tighten up on basic standards and, in order to survive as a university in the budget-slashing atmosphere of the latter 1970s, to prove that CUNY offers opportunity yet demands skills and discipline in students who would continue beyond the sophomore year. No wonder then that problems as well as strengths have emerged from a testing system that, somewhat ambivalently, would ensure remedial education for all the upward-bound students who need it and yet would also enforce a two-year limit on their acquisition of minimum proficiency. In examining both sides of this system as it affects the teaching of writing, we may consider the challenges involved. Can we make a standardized, compulsory testing program work toward our goals as educators? Have our curriculum and methods been taken out of our control by a uniformity legislated from on high?

Effects of the test on faculty attitudes and curriculum. These are the questions

that arose in our minds at Hunter when, in the fall of 1977, we were shocked to discover that we had to implement the new CUNY Skills Assessment Program immediately. In four months, by April, 1978, we had to begin testing our incoming fall, 1978, freshmen with a whole battery of new tests. Fortunately, for some years we had had our own placement test program for entering freshmen. But now it was necessary to dovetail the newly required CUNY "minimal readiness" tests with the existing Hunter tests. Worse still, in a number of cases our old tests set higher levels for required remediation than the new CUNY tests. In addition to new tests and scoring procedures, we had to organize ourselves for reading, second-reading, and, potentially, third-reading all of the essays for the writing test according to an unfamiliar "holistic" procedure and by new criteria. This was a tremendous increase in workload. In our previous system, we relied on a multiple-choice test to eliminate some 40 percent of the essays from being read at all and then relied on a single reading for most of the essays remaining. All of this placement reading had been done by the six full-time members of the remedial writing staff. Now, with no supplemental budget in sight for training and paying readers, we had to involve the entire English Department and all of the writing teachers in the (separate) Department of Academic Skills.

Getting the English Department's literary scholars, its composition and remedial writing instructors, and the writing instructors from Academic Skills all in the same room at the same time one day in April, 1978, for the first test reading marked a major social and educational event at Hunter College. These groups had had almost no contact with each other before this day. Suddenly, there they all were, some 100 English teachers together on common ground, waiting skeptically for the chief readers (myself and a colleague) to show them how to score holistically an entering freshman's essay. And we actually were all there, with only one exception, I think—someone who had a family emergency. Even dental appointments had been cancelled. Senior department members no one could remember having seen for years—at least not at a department meeting—showed up, somehow compelled or cajoled, perhaps just not wanting to miss the democratic event.

We were there for a training session in holistic reading according to the CUNY Writing Assessment Test six-point evaluation scale. We began the session by passing out a copy of the scale. Hands shot up immediately to query the language and intention of the scale's definitions. Deaf to all questions, we then passed out sample student essays previously agreed upon as easily rateable, and asked our colleagues to read several essays quickly, recording their score for each. Then we asked for shows of hands to see how many had given the same scores to the same essays.

This request led to the major, and crucial, surprise of the day. Agreement right from the start, although not universal, was astoundingly close. The many hands in the air at the same time, revealing the common scoring of each essay marked the beginning of an afternoon of unprecedented good feeling and professional pride. Even when we got to the more problematic, borderline samples, most people agreed; if they did differ, it was rarely by more than one point. Thus we provided the necessary large base of readers for the CUNY Writing Assessment Test that first spring. More important, we demonstrated a professional approach to

student writing that, for the majority of the English faculty-the literature teachers-offered a new way of looking at their own teaching and at their colleagues who teach writing.

I only wish I could report that we now get all of those same people into a room together every term to repeat the process and continue the demystification. But one coup of such dimensions is all you get. Since that time, we have relied upon similar grading sessions for the English remedial writing and Academic Skills writing teachers, and much of the CUNY Writing Assessment Test reading is now handled by (and budgeted for) teaching adjuncts. Still, the fact that all of the writing teachers in Academic Skills and remedial English are now meeting together regularly is a result of major importance.

Practical effects of the test. One effect of these joint sessions has been communication and clarification between the English and Academic Skills departments as to the exit criteria for moving a student out of the top-level remedial writing course into freshman English. Under the CUNY skills assessment rulings, each individual college still has the right to determine these criteria if they are above the CUNY standard of minimal readiness. In Hunter's case, when it came to implementing the writing test, we saw no way to have two cutoffs -one for CUNY and one for Hunter. Administratively it seemed impossible--on the ground of costs for readings alone-to have a remedial course exit requirement that differed from the CUNY writing test. Thus we made the CUNY Writing Assessment Test the final exam in Hunter's highest-level remedial course in both Academic Skills and English.

Most teachers have welcomed the standardization and clarity the test has brought even though they do have to "teach to the test," or, more specifically, to the skills emphasized by the test criteria. Some teachers, however, have objected that to require students to pass a standard 50-minute test in order to prove they are ready for freshman English undermines and is unfair to open admissions students who need more latitude at this stage of their development. These teachers maintain that many students--bidialectical and bilingual students in particular-need more time to develop discipline, work habits, and study skills, and to acclimatize themselves to an entirely new cultural milieu. These students should not, therefore, be subjected so soon in their college careers to a 50-minute exam that so heavily emphasizes editing and grammar. These teachers prefer our old two-hour essay test, because they feel that to give these students a fair chance we must give them time to demonstrate the skills they have learned. Hunter has compounded this problem, these teachers say, by requiring students to pass the test before they can register beyond 36 credits (the university limit is 60).

I agree with these complaints. We should find a way to modify a too rigid program. At the same time, I also agree with the view that the test makes good sense for the *majority* of students entering CUNY with poor writing skills. The CUNY test requires students to demonstrate "command" over an idea and the vocabulary and syntax in which the idea is expressed. Unquestionably, students must have this ability if they are to do even minimally proficient college-level work. Thus all writing teachers-remedial and freshman level-now have a clear picture of the goals and emphases of their respective courses. Appropriate syntax and

sentence-to-sentence coherence are the main objectives in remedial courses at Hunter. Skill in organization and use of rhetorical modes are the main objective in the regular freshman course.

Associated with this curricular clarification effected by the test is a certain increased academic stringency. We are demonstrably unfair to many students if we take too relaxed an attitude toward their "getting themselves together" for college work. As coordinator of basic English courses, I have seen the injustice done to many students who are permitted to take remedial courses over and over again, sometimes with gaps of a term or more, while going on with the rest of their college courses, sometimes right up to the point of graduation in certain majors. These students are then forbidden to graduate, their chronic mistake patterns now having become so deep that for them (at least at this stage of their lives) the appropriate remedial course is impossible to pass. Contributing to this situation is the fact that many departmental majors and many upper-level courses do not require-much less teach-writing. This deep problem is characteristic of colleges generally. Only now, at Hunter and elsewhere, is there some movement toward confronting it.

For the majority of students, it is a godsend also that both a time limit on remediation and the criteria of minimal readiness for college work have been so clearly established. If students cannot make it in college at this point in their lives, they deserve an early warning that they would do better to face reality and drop out, at least for the time being, rather than go on taking courses-postponing maturity in the illusion that they are "making it," when in reality they are not.

Social and philosophical issues raised by the test. Stringency and standardization, which may be as bitter a pill for teachers as for students, are finally acceptable from the point of view of democratic and humanistic principles because the benefits of a sound writing test, even one dictated from above, accrue to students through the ability to *write*, the principal medium of humanistic study and exchange of ideas among free people.

Still, certain disadvantages of a standardized test are worth considering because they reflect what may be a serious flaw in the whole concept of asking university students in a diverse, urban setting-or perhaps any American setting-to write extemporaneously on topics defined for them by university faculty, however well intentioned. This flaw lies in the nature and wording of the topics. Test topics may condition students both directly and indirectly before they even enter college. Because in the CUNY system students must be retested if they do not meet the standard, remedial writing courses throughout the university must now to a considerable degree be "taught to" the CUNY writing test. Given this fact, some teachers have pointed out certain sociological and rhetorical biases in some of the topics offered as options on the test.

Take, for example, the following topic:

In a world of telephones, television, and tape recorders, it is no wonder that many young people do not write well. They do not have to, because writing is no longer an essential skill for a person in modern society.

Do you agree or disagree with what this passage says? Explain and illustrate your answer from your own experience, your observation of others, or your reading.

Several of my colleagues have pointed out that a topic like this is more a trap than a position the student feels free to "agree or disagree" with according to his or her own inclinations. What entering freshman would actually dare disagree with this assertion, these colleagues argue, when writing to a bunch of English teachers? Consider also the students' consciousness of themselves (as compared with their consciousness of the teachers who framed the topic and to whom the students are writing) as relatively unable to offer data and analysis that would legitimately refute, confirm, or qualify the proposition.

Other colleagues of mine make a still more serious charge about the topics on the CUNY writing test, and perhaps on all similar tests which require students to write essays to prescribed topics. I quote here from a memo sent to me by Lewis Meyers, who was writing as a representative of the full-time developmental English instructors:

In most of the topics we find a strong sociological bias. That is, the topics ask students for a response to social relations as a system. Doubtless an underlying assumption here is that the ability to respond well to social issues is a measure of intellectual maturity. This is debatable. Undebatable is the fact that students are asked to write within a framework defined by the largely middle-class identity of teachers. So one topic states that "success is measured to a very large extent in terms of money," and asks students if they agree or not with the validity of that measurement. We submit that only people who are not financially desperate can respond to that question in good faith, and their response is a foregone conclusion. Students do not, for the most part, have money. They want to make it. Who can blame them? And yet, by the very phrasing of the topic, they know they are being asked to "overcome" themselves. Other topics, such as one on changing ideas of culture heroes, similarly invite piety or cynicism by implicitly requiring students to deny their own customary allegiances and values, or give up all hope of salvation by confirming them. This prejudicial trend within the topics cannot help but stiffen the test-taker into unreal verbal attitudes that must hurt his or her efforts to write well.

This critique continues by expanding its point that the "middle-class" topics, in their apparent attempt to "get as close to the students' own shared experiences and knowledge as possible without provoking subjectivity," actually tend to remove students from their experiences and knowledge:

The topics are abstractions (not just abstract); and these abstractions are so blank, inert and lifeless that almost no one can write about them without his or her own writing assuming these qualities. This, we feel, cuts the students' tie to their own "experience and knowledge" and makes writing harder, not easier. We suspect also

that as a result many students-particularly borderline ones-write worse than they might.

This is heavy criticism, and if applicable to most of the CUNY writing test topics (and I don't believe that it is-not to most of them) it would be devastating. But the fact is that at present we simply do not know whether this criticism of test topics is valid or not.

Finally, on philosophical and logical grounds, still other colleagues point out that the topics used in the CUNY writing test involve statements that appear to be the same in character but actually are not. Some of the passages make argumentative value assertions; others are apparent statements of fact; and quite a few are neither clearly one or the other. The quite possible result is the students' confusion as to the point with which they are to "agree or disagree." Such a confusion may be seen in the following set of topics (which constitutes one test in its entirety):

A. Job security is more important than the opportunity to change the kind of work one does. I would rather be guaranteed a steady job for the rest of my working life, even if the daily routine never changed, than have the freedom of changing jobs along with the risk of having no job at all.

Do you agree or disagree with what this passage says? Explain and illustrate your answer from your own experience, your observations of others, or your reading.

B. Recent laws make it possible to punish young teenagers as if they were adults. This is unfair, because teenagers are often unaware of the seriousness of the crimes they commit. They should not be condemned to spend years of their lives in jail.

Do you agree or disagree...?

The initial statement in A, concerning job security, is a matter of opinion, where the initial statement in B (since no information to check it by is provided) must be taken as a matter of fact. The result of such juxtaposition may very well give an unsettlingly factual tone to the statement in A, obscuring its nature as a statement of subjective value. This tone is enhanced by the personal assertion in the second sentence of A. In B, the second sentence is quasi-factual, while the third sentence is entirely an assertion of moral belief.

While some kind of mixing of value with fact in the topic statements of essay exams seems inevitable, the potential for confusion could be diminished by allowing the students alternative, more open, rhetorical modes for their essays. Thus some Hunter College instructors are pressing for alternatives to the currently exclusive "agree or disagree" format used by the CUNY writing test:

The nature of students' response is adversely affected also by the varying instructions in the topics to agree or disagree with the issue raised. Argumentation, as the sole way to discuss viewing television, living in sin or making money, seems to us a rather narrow and constricting focus for the writer. The topics, therefore, do not

Notes on contributors

Robert R. Bataille teaches at Iowa State University, where he was assistant chair of the English Department from 1974 to 1979. His Ph.D. is from the University of Kansas. He has read papers at CCCC and at the Wyoming Conference on Freshman and Sophomore English. His articles have appeared in *Eighteenth-Century Life*, *ADE Bulletin*, *Black American Literature Forum*, *CEA Forum*, and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. His article in this issue of *WPA* is reprinted in revised form from the *WPA Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (December, 1978).

Allan Brick teaches at Hunter College, CUNY, specializing in the Victorian period. He is writing a book on *The Leader*, a radical weekly of the 1860s edited by G. H. Lewes. Formerly director of freshman composition in evening session and coordinator of developmental English for day and evening, he is now campus coordinator for the City University of New York Skills Assessment Program. As administrator and occasional writer of articles about freshman English, he is concerned about authenticating personal writing in relation to the learning of basic skills and expository forms.

Thomas M. Dunn chairs the Department of Chemistry at the University of Michigan and was a member of the university's English Composition Board from 1977 to 1980. The ECB administers the University of Michigan writing program at both the lower and upper academic levels. After leaving the board, Professor Dunn continues to support the teaching of writing by speaking before interested school and university groups. His academic degrees are from the University of Sydney and the University of London (University College). His field is the electronic spectroscopy of organic and inorganic molecules. He has published and lectured widely in this field in Europe and the United States and served for six years as deputy editor of the *Journal of the American Chemical Society*. He was also a member of the board of the University of Michigan Press for three years.

Robert Lyons teaches in the English Department at Queens College, CUNY. He was chair for composition at Queens, a founding member of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors (CAWS), and chair of the CUNY Task Force on Writing, the university committee that developed the CUNY Writing Assessment Test. In 1979, he was associate dean for academic affairs, CUNY. His *Autobiography: A Reader for Writers*, was published in 1977 by Oxford University Press.

Announcements

WPA Editorial Board

Three members of the *WPA* Editorial Board retire at the end of the year. Nominations are welcome for their replacement. Editors must be willing to read, comment thoughtfully on, and return promptly up to a dozen articles a year. Qualifications include broad present or past experience as a writing program administrator at either a two-year or four-year institution, and/or special expertise in one area of writing program administration. Professional prominence is desirable but by no means necessary. *WPA* members may nominate others or themselves. Nominations should include a brief supporting statement of qualification and must reach the Editor no later than December 15, 1980. The *WPA* Executive Committee will make editorial appointments during the December MLA convention in Houston. Appointments will be announced in the spring issue of *WPA*.

WPA at MLA

WPA will sponsor an important special session at the MLA convention in Houston this December. Harvey Wiener, president of *WPA*, will lead a discussion on "Writing Program Administration: Selecting, Training, and Integrating Part-Time English Faculty." Panelists will be Donald A. McQuade, Queens College, CUNY; Maxine Hairston, University of Texas, Austin; and Wayne C. Booth, University of Chicago. Please consult the convention program for hour and room. *WPA*'s general membership meeting will follow this special session.

Kentucky Regional WPA

The first annual meeting of Kentucky Writing Program Administrators was held at the University of Louisville on May 16, 1980. The meeting was sponsored jointly by the *WPA* and the English Department at the University of Louisville. Twenty-one *WPA*'s from 14 institutions across the state heard *WPA* consultant and Director of Freshman English at Indiana University Michael Flanigan speak on evaluating writing programs and writing teachers. The afternoon was spent planning a fall, 1980, meeting at Berea College in central Kentucky and establishing that writing across the disciplines, program evaluation, and high school liaison programs would be the focus of future meetings. Plans were also made to join the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English (KCTE) to help formulate minimal standards in composition in Kentucky secondary schools. Professors Joseph Comprone of the University of Louisville and Ken Davis of the University of Kentucky coordinated efforts to plan and conduct the day-long meeting. Interested *WPA*'s in Kentucky who were unable to attend but would like to be involved in the future should contact either Joe Comprone or Ken Davis for

further information. Exact dates and topics for the fall meeting will be sent to all postsecondary English or communications departments in Kentucky early in the fall.

Summer Peer Tutoring Institute

Institute Fellows chosen for the first Brooklyn College Summer Institute in Training Peer Tutors, June 23-July 24, 1980, were Suzanne Allen, SUNY-Binghamton; Keith Beyer, Northwest Community College, Powell, Wyoming; Maryann Castelucci, College of Staten Island, CUNY; Martha Combel, Glendale Community College, Glendale, Arizona; Mary Dickson, Trinity College, Burlington, Vermont; Marvin Garrett, University of Cincinnati; Carol Haber, Asnuntuck Community College, Enfield, Connecticut; Mara Holt, Alabama State University, Montgomery; Harvey Kail, University of Maine, Orono; Lois Leewe, Hunter College, CUNY; Betty Merrill, Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio; Marjorie Pena, Baruch College, CUNY; Bene Scanlon, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro; Stephen Stone, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; and John Trimbur, Community College of Baltimore.

Institute faculty were Kenneth A. Bruffee, Brooklyn College, CUNY, and Alex Gitterman, Columbia University. The following consultants also participated in the institute: Marian Arkin, La Guardia Community College, CUNY; Paula Beck, Nassau Community College, Garden City, New York; Peggy Broder, Cleveland State University; Judy Fishman, Queens College, CUNY; Ann Raimés, Hunter College, CUNY; Sandra Shor, Queens College, CUNY; and Rickie Solinger, SUNY-New Paltz. Peer tutors from Brooklyn College and La Guardia Community College also participated. Institute evaluators were Linda Peterson, Yale University, and Paula Johnson, New York University.

The institute will be offered for a second time during summer, 1981. Institute seminars are based on the course described by Marcia Silver in "Training and Using Peer Tutors," *College English*, December, 1978; and by Kenneth A. Bruffee in "The Brooklyn Plan: Attaining Intellectual Growth through Peer-Group Tutoring," *Liberal Education*, December, 1978, and in *A Short Course in Writing*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop, 1980). Application forms for the 1981 institute, and for the institute's New York City regional internships, may be obtained by writing Marcia Silver, Project Administrator, Brooklyn College Peer-Tutor Training Institute, English Department, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York 11210. The institute is supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

Ph.D. Program for WPA's

The English Department of the University of Louisville has recently developed and registered with the State of Kentucky a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition. The program emphasizes the integration of rhetorical, linguistic, and literary theory with practice in teaching composition. It invites applications from indi-

viduals having recently completed B.A. or M.A. degrees, and those currently employed as teachers or administrators in writing programs. Fellowships, teaching assistantships, and scholarships are available. The department also makes every effort to provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn in the classroom as teachers and tutors, or as administrators in the composition program at Louisville. Provisions have been made to encourage teachers employed full-time to pursue the degree during summer sessions. Those interested should contact Joseph Comprone, Director of Composition, English Department, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky 40208.

WPA in The Chronicle of Higher Education

An article that appeared in last spring's issue of *WPA*, Walter Jewell's "The Contribution of Administrative Leadership to Academic Excellence," was excerpted and reviewed in the May 19, 1980, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The review, written by Theresa R. Kilcarr, stressed Jewell's exploration of practical ways college administrators help improve teaching and learning in higher education. *The Chronicle* is a reliable resource for up-to-the-minute news of interest to college administrators and teachers. A weekly, it is available by subscription at \$25 a year. The subscription address is *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Subscription Service Department, P.O. Box 699, Hightstown, New Jersey 08520.

Developmental Education Conference

The Eighth Annual Ohio Developmental Education Conference entitled "Intelligence Can be Taught!?" will be held November 5-7, 1980, at the Carrousel Inn, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The keynote speaker will be Arthur Whimbey, author of *Intelligence Can be Taught*, *Cognitive Process Instruction*, and *Problem Solving and Comprehension*. Workshops will cover such topics as effective use of learning labs, subsidies for developmental education, ways to enhance thinking methods, the validity and use of diagnostic tests, and interdisciplinary approaches to developmental education. The conference is designed for veteran developmental education teachers and administrators, as well as those who have recently entered the field.

For information and registration forms contact Dr. Phyllis Sherwood, Raymond Walters General & Technical College, 9555 Plainfield Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236 (513-745-4202).

Reference Works Available

WPAs who are stocking departmental reference shelves may find the following works of value.

Needed Research in the Teaching of Writing. This is the report of a nationwide survey by Richard M. Bossone and Richard L. Larson. Orders should be sent to Dean Richard M. Bossone, CUNY Graduate Center, 33 West 42nd Street,

New York, New York 10036. \$3.00 per copy. Checks should be made payable to the CUNY Research Foundation.

The Journal of Basic Writing. Back issues are available on the following topics: Error, Courses, Uses of Grammar, Evaluation, Applications: Theory into Practice, Programs, and Vocabulary. \$2.50 per copy. Subscription, \$5.00 per year (institutions, \$7.50). The subscription address is *The Journal of Basic Writing*, Instructional Resource Center, 535 East 80th Street, New York, New York 10021.

New Journal

The Writing Center Journal, a new biannual publication, will offer its first issue for fall/winter, 1980. The inaugural issue's theme is "The Writing Center: Its Function and Scope." It will feature articles by Lou Kelly, University of Iowa; Muriel Harris, Purdue University; and Judy Fishman, Queens College, CUNY.

Manuscript deadline for the spring/summer, 1981, issue is January 15, 1981. Manuscripts or inquiries dealing with any aspect of individualized instruction in writing may be sent to either editor:

Lil Brannon
Department of English
New York University
New York, NY 10003

Stephen North
Department of English
SUNY-Albany
Albany, NY 12222

To order subscriptions (\$5.00 per year), send checks payable to Stephen North.

In the winter issue

Forum. Faculty development in composition

Thomas Bonner, Barbara Brothers, Robert Lyons, Richard Marius, Ellen Nold

A common-sense approach to administration

David Rankin

Writing program evaluation: An outline for self-study

WPA Board of Consultant Evaluators

Membership in the Council of Writing Program Administrators

Membership in the Council of Writing Program Administrators includes a subscription to *WPA*. The membership fee is \$10 a year in the United States and \$11.50 a year in other countries.*

To apply for membership, please fill out this form and return it with a check or money order payable to the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Send the form and fee to Joseph Comprone, Treasurer, WPA, English Department, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky 40208.

Date _____

Name _____

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Institution _____

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Amount enclosed _____ \$10 _____ \$11.50

*Members who join during the period September 1 through January 15 will receive the fall, winter, and spring issues of the current year's volume. Members who join from January 15 through September 1 will receive the last issue of the current year (spring) and the first two issues of the next volume (fall and winter).

Change or revision of name and address. If the name or address printed on your *WPA* mailing label is incorrect or has changed, please print the complete, correct information below and send it to Kenneth A. Bruffee, Editor, *WPA*, English Department, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York 11210.

create opportunities for students to have something to say, when having something to say is largely dependent on being given an opening to do so. Rather, the instructions for writing eliminate the idea of a variety of approaches-both in the interpretation of meaning and in the rhetorical extension of meaning. The result is to discourage optimum performance by those students who have more in mind than argument allows, or who have no side to take and thus must fake it,

These instructors are thus calling for research into the psychological effect on students of essay test topics such as those used by the CUNY writing test. This research has yet to be done, although one instructor at Hunter is now beginning to study the effects on student test writing of variations in topic language and content.

At the same time, even most critics of the CUNY Writing Assessment Test acknowledge that the CUNY Task Force on Writing in general responded appropriately to the assessment mandate of the CUNY Board of Trustees. The task force had to respond quickly under intense pressure to create a test and yet, at the same time, resist equally intense pressure to adopt a multiple-choice instrument. Under these conditions, the "agree or disagree" format the task force adopted provided an educationally sound as well as relatively simple and manageable way of meeting the testing needs of an enormous university system. While the holistic scoring methods by which we score the test have been demonstrated reliable, however, the reliability of the test itself has not yet been satisfactorily examined with regard to its structure and its topics. There is some irony now in the lack of objectivity that can be claimed in this particular unresearched area. Still, there should be no doubt that going ahead despite language and format problems was far better than deferring to the alternative of multiple-choice testing that would have deeply undermined both the teaching of writing and the entire atmosphere of learning and growth in a liberal university.

If writing teachers-as researchers, administrators, and activists in the academy-can now move to consolidate the potential gains of this kind of holistic approach to required skills assessment, it is entirely possible that our larger goals can be realized. One such goal is a significant degree of integration of writing and reading-the sophisticated critical reading of literature-so that literature courses will involve more writing, and writing courses will make practical use of literature, including student writing shared and analyzed as literature. Another goal is the understanding and practical use of "writing as learning" by teachers throughout the college curriculum. We must challenge the definition of writing both as merely a skill and as merely a barrier for restricting or excluding students. We must demonstrate instead that writing is the basis for an integrated education throughout college and beyond.