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Humboldt State University's Master's Program in the teaching of writing

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In the past few years, several universities have established new doctoral programs to train composition specialists while others have allowed students to pursue a rhetoric " concentration" or "minor" as they work for the traditional Ph.D. in English.' One hears less about composition programs at the Master's level, although they exist at several institutions, including Kansas State, Rutgers, Washington State, and Humboldt State. From letters of inquiry regarding our Master's Program in the Teaching of Writing (MATW) we know administrators at other institutions are considering whether to establish similar programs. To assist them we will explain how our program developed, describe the curriculum, and mention some strengths and weaknesses of the model we adopted.

Origin of the program

The English Department began thinking seriously about an M.A. program in the teaching of writing in 1976 when it received an innovative grant from the Chancellor's Office of the California State University System to establish a course called Teaching College Writing, a course designed for instructors (not students) in all departments. It was one way of getting writing taught and taught well "across the curriculum," a phrase not yet, in the mid-seventies, a commonplace of the profession but one quickly gaining momentum. Colleagues in other departments who took this course liked it, and the English Department began to consider whether there were people outside the University community with the need and desire to learn mare about the teaching of writing. After surveys indicated there were, Humboldt established a Master's Program in the Teaching of Writing and began accepting students in 1978.

The same year that the English Department received the grant to establish its Teaching College Writing course was also the first year of the Redwood Writing Project, a branch of the National Writing Project directed by James Gray. Two members of the HSU English Department, including one of the present authors, established and directed the first Redwood Writing Project, which incorporated many of the features of the national project: teachers teach teachers, everybody writes, and all become aware of the research and scholarship in rhetoric and composition since 1965.

David Boxer, Tom Gage, and others who set up the M.A. Program built a great deal of writing into the curriculum, believing strongly in the second principle of the Writing Project: that teachers of writing should themselves write. Therefore, students participate in a writing workshop where they discuss and critique their own writing, not only the kind of writing graduate students traditionally do- -term

WPA: Writing Program Administration, Volume 7, Number 3, Spring 1984
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papers and reports on reading, for example--but other kinds as well: interior monologues, autobiographies, humorous sketches, and narratives. They also write papers in their regular courses as well. Because they write often and write a variety of discourse and because they are encouraged to make their own writing process an abject of inquiry, they develop what we feel is a healthy double perspective: they learn to evaluate various proposals to improve writing instruction from both the student's and teacher's point of view,

Humboldt's M.A, program in writing trains elementary, secondary, an college teachers and has, in fact, attracted teachers interested in all levels. Of the 51 students who have either graduated from the program or are currently enrolled, 16 have taught mostly at the university level, 14 at the secondary level, 7 at the junior high level, 7 in elementary schools, and 7 in adult education and other special programs. It's difficult to categorize students, however. For example, M.A. candidates on leave from high school teaching may teach freshman composition at HSU while they are working on their degrees. Since they have been college teachers themselves, these students return to their high school classes with a clearer understanding of what college teachers expect entering freshmen to know about writing. Several students who had taught in elementary or secondary school before entering the program found jobs teaching in college after having received their degrees.

Sequence of courses

Students must complete 45 units of upper division and graduate courses, including the required courses listed in the first and second columns of the chart on p. 34. Students in both the literature and writing programs take the literature courses in the second column. The course work and all other requirements can be completed in one year. Although individual programs may vary, MATW students ideally take the required courses, except the literature courses, in the order they are listed on the chart. (They are encouraged to take the literature courses any quarter they wish.) During the winter quarter they take the Development of Writing Abilities, a literature course, and an elective. During the spring quarter they take Rhetorical and Linguistic Approaches to Writing, having completed a course in syntax as prerequisite.

Either in winter or spring quarter a student completes an internship (English 299) at HSU or at some other institution. Most students do their internship in English 1, the required freshman composition course at HSU, but some prefer to become interns in elementary and high school classrooms. Interns work with a master teacher, first observing, then taking on more responsibility by working individually with students who have special problems and by conducting discussions of a student paper or a model essay from an anthology of readings. Interns don't grade papers; they observe how the master teacher grades. Sometimes they grade a set of papers on a separate sheet--to see how their grades and comments compare with those of the master teacher. The master teacher is responsible for teaching the intern while teaching the class.

The internship has several benefits: it encourages lively, informal discussions between student and master teacher regarding teaching philosophy and practice; it inspires the master teacher, who enjoys having an interested and knowledgeable observer in the classroom; it allows the students in the writing class to have more than one view of writing and more than one person to seek out for individual conferences; and, finally, it becomes valuable training for the many M.A. candidates who later teach (for pay) the freshman writing course.

The Master's project, the final requirement for the degree, is shorter than the usual M.A. thesis (30 to 40 pages is an acceptable length). And it is not based entirely on reading and library research. Students observe classrooms in which writing is taught, interview teachers and students, or do some empirical research related to writing instruction. One student has studied students at a local high school, trying to determine whether students who improve in writing ability share certain personality traits as measured by the Omnibus Personality Inventory. Another student is finishing a study on the teaching of writing to Native Americans. In the process she has talked with Native Americans and their teachers and also collected and analyzed student essays. A third student, using holistic scoring techniques, charted and described the development in writing ability of junior high students over a three-year period. Another M.A. candidate, interested in comparing holistic and atomistic methods of evaluation, analyzed papers from this study using indexes of syntactic maturity developed by researchers studying the effect of sentence-combining practice. Another student discussed invention and computerized instruction in writing, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of Hugh Burns' computer program based on Aristotle's *topoi*.[2]

Course content

Five courses--in addition to the literature courses, the internship, and the Master's project--are required of all candidates for the MATW. These courses present views on the teaching of writing and the composing process: developmental, cognitive, rhetorical, psycholinguistic, and linguistic. They also provide intensive practice in writing so that the candidate becomes a competent writer as well as a master teacher of writing.

English 210: Fundamentals of Research, a two-unit course, introduces students to methods of research. Because it is required of students majoring in both literature and writing, it covers both fields. Beginning next year the course will be taught by two faculty members: a professor with research interests in literature who will discuss literary research and a professor with research interests in composition who will discuss sources and procedures in the field of writing. In the composition half of the course students learn about the relevant periodicals: about indexes, abstracts, and bibliographies; about the ERIC system; and how to use the computer to do a bibliographic search. Students compile an annotated bibliography of approximately 30 items, usually on a topic they wish to learn more about in preparation for their Master's project.

Some courses in research methods focus narrowly on the pre- test/ post-test experimental design. English 210 covers different methods of investigation--the pre-test/post-test design, the case study, the ethnographic approach,$ protocol analysis,* and error analysis. Learning about these approaches prepares students for later courses in which they will read reports by different researchers. It also encourages them to begin considering what approach they will use for their Master's project.

WPA: Writing Program Administration, Volume 7, Number 3, Spring 1984
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English 211: Seminar *in the Teaching of Writing* familiarizes students with discourse theory, how student writers write, and developments in the art of teaching English since 1965. Students learn how to teach writing as a process by considering ways to assist students during the prewriting, revising, and editing of their work. Reading for the course varies, but usually includes Donald H. Graves' *Writing: Teachers ' Children* at *Work* (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983) and Erika Lindemann's A *Rhetoric for Writing Teachers (New* York: Oxford University Press, 1982) and selections from two anthologies: Richard Graves' *Rhetoric and Composition: A* Sourcebook *for Teachers* (Rochelle Park: Hayden, 1976) and Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett's *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). Through their reading and class discussion students become aware of the contributions of Mina Shaughnessy, Lee Odell, Frank D' Angelo, James Kinneavy, Wayne Booth, Richard Ohmann, Francis Christensen, and others. They orally critique at least one article, usually one by a scholar whose views they will consider in a paper of their own on some aspect of teaching composition. The final exam may consist of an evaluation of an essay selected from a stack of English Placement Exams taken by entering freshmen at Humboldt. The English 211 student marks errors and infelicities--and also noteworthy achievements--on the essay, writes a comment to the student, and then writes for the instructor a diagnosis of the student's pattern of error, including a program for remedy.

English 290: *Writing Workshop* implements the second feature of the National Writing Project: everyone writes. English 290 and 211 were originally team-taught by two instructors, both present in every meeting of each course. This arrangement allowed teachers to connect theory to practice. If, for example, the teacher of 211 had just discussed the value of peer response groups to teaching revision, he was present to observe and discuss how response groups worked in the Workshop as students critiqued their classmates' writing. The teacher of the Workshop knew exactly what students were learning in 211 and could point out how her teaching strategies related to ones they were learning about in 211. Because our present staffing formula does not allow team-teaching, we are no longer able to have both teachers participate in both courses. The two courses are always offered concurrently, however, and the two teachers confer often. Thus they are still able to help students evaluate teaching strategies by considering how much they have helped them develop as writers.

The format for English 290 derives from the work of James Moffett (see especially *Active Voice* [Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1981]) and Peter Elbow *(Writing without Teachers* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1973]). The instructor creates writing exercises following the sequences Moffett outlines in *Active Voice:* inner to outer speech, dialogue to monologue, narrative to essay. Usually students first record thoughts, impressions, and memories and then write essays supporting a generalization. Following Elbow's guidelines, writers share their work in small groups of five or six. This course fosters confidence and gives students a chance to assume other rhetorical stances besides the one forced on them when they write only for the teacher as examiner.

Students usually *take English 212: The Development of Writing Abilities* after they have completed English 211 and English 290. English 212 is less of a "how to" course than 211 but both cover practical applications: 211 stresses applications of theory to college teaching and 212 to pre-college teaching. English 212 originated from one of the components of the National Writing Project: the focus on how research and scholarship since 1965 verifies or refutes hypotheses concerning the composing process and the teaching of writing. The course takes a developmental perspective, with developmental understood in several *ways.* First, it refers to the development of writing throughout history--to the movement from oral, to residually oral, to literate culture. Drawing on the work of Walter Ong, David Olson, and Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, the class discusses the cognitive consequences of literacy, the argument that exposure to written texts changes the way we think. [5]

In the context of English 212, development also refers to the development of writing abilities as children mature and progress through their formal schooling. Students begin by exploring the relationship between speaking and writing and read Lev Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1934/1962) and selections from Barry Kroll and Roberta Vann's *Exploring* Speaking- *Writing Relationships* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1981). Then they learn different views of writing development by reading several of the following studies: James Moffett's *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (Boston: HoughtonMifflin, 1968), Andrew Wilkinson, et al.'s *Assessing Language Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), Walter Loban's *Language Development* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1976), and James Britton, et al.'s *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* (London: MacMillan Education, 1975). As they do their reading, students consider how cognitively accessible certain kinds of writing exercises are for writers at different ages.

Developmental also refers to the composing process, to the development of a piece of writing from inchoate idea to finished product. Instructors assign articles by Donald Graves and his colleagues at the Writing Process Laboratory of the University of New Hampshire, [6] Janet Emig's *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders,* [7] and research reports by Sondra Perl, Linda Flower, and Nancy Sommers to acquaint students with this aspect of development [8]

The class often analyzes student papers. Students may look at papers of sevenyear olds while reading Graves, of adolescents while reading Emig, and of basic writers and college students while reading Per], Sommers, and error analysts such as David Bartholomae.' Each student critiques seven "presentation" articles, material from ERIC, or tapes of speeches from professional meetings. Each student duplicates and distributes to her classmates all seven critiques so that members of the class, as well as the teacher, are the writer's audience. Students write an I-Search paper following Ken Macrorie's suggestions in *Searching Writing: A Context book* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden, 1980).

In *English 218: Rhetorical and* Linguistic *Approaches* to *Writing* students learn some ancient and modern methods of analyzing texts. Because other courses have already emphasized process, this course focuses on product, but not exclusively: students learn different approaches to invention, including Cicero's classical approach and Young, Becker, and Pike's tagmemic heuristic. Because a course in basic syntax is a prerequisite, students taking this course are ready to move beyond the sentence and consider what paragraph theorists and discourse analysts offer the teacher of writing. Students become familiar with the different approaches to paragraph description and instruction presented in NCTE's

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collection *The Sentence and the Paragraph* (Urbana. Ill.: NCTE, 1963-65-66) and learn some new approaches as well; they also read M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan's *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976) and learn to analyze a piece of writing in terms of cohesive devices.

The success of the program

We feel the MATW program has been successful. We base this conclusion on criteria which may not be empirically rigorous enough to satisfy everyone but which we think are convincing. For one thing, we have no trouble attracting students. This past year, the fourth year of the program, we had to turn students away from some graduate classes because they were over-enrolled. The program satisfies a need for well-trained writing specialists. Three graduates and six candidates are language specialists at their schools or will be when they finish work for their degrees. Other teachers may not have the title language specialist but because they are knowledgeable about writing instruction they fulfill this function. These teachers share what they have learned with other teachers in their schools. As interest in teaching writing at all levels and in all disciplines spreads, the need for specialists will increase.

Humboldt's MATW program has provided opportunities for cooperation with the Redwood Writing Project. Some teachers in the area who participated in the Writing Project became hooked on writing and joined the MATW program to learn more. One local teacher who received her MATW from Humboldt has become co-director of the Redwood Writing Project, President of the local NCTE chapter, Director of a highly successful Young Writers' Conference, and a solid force for better instruction in writing in the Arcata-Eureka area. M.A. programs affect the quality of writing instruction in elementary schools and junior and senior high schools more immediately and directly than Ph.D. or even D.A. programs. Few if any graduates of D.A. or Ph.D. programs return to high school to teach; instead they work in colleges struggling to get college students to overcome writing problems, many which are probably the result of inadequate instruction in high school. Graduates of M.A. programs, however, do not consider themselves overqualifed for elementary and secondary school teaching. They can often work out a year's leave of absence to work on their M.A. and soon are back in their schools, applying what they have recently learned about teaching writing.

Humboldt State undergraduates also benefit from the program. Some candidates elect to take two years to get their degree. After they have completed their Seminar in the Teaching of Writing, the Writing Workshop, and the Writing Internship, these candidates are eligible to apply for part-time positions teaching freshman composition. By the time they enter the classroom, they are well-trained writing teachers better trained, we would suggest, than teaching assistants at many larger institutions offering a Ph.D. in English,

There are some problems with our model that we have not yet solved. Only some of our students, however, plan on careers as college teachers; many intend to teach in elementary and secondary schools. We therefore have had to make our program suitable for teachers of all grade levels--first grade through college. In some respects, this is an advantage: students receive an overview of how writing abilities develop with age and learn strategies appropriate for students at different levels of maturation. Inevitably, however, we slight some aspects of writing theory and practice as we struggle to provide information relevant to teachers of all grade levels. The quarter system under which we operate also both helps and hinders. It allows us to offer within a single year courses which approach the teaching of writing from different perspectives, but it also forces us to cover each perspective in twelve weeks.

We think, however, that we have a good program. Although it was designed before the Task Force on the Preparation of Teachers of Writing of the Conference on College Composition and Communication published their "Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers" *(College Composition* and Communication, 33 [1982], 446-449), it provides the experiences and knowledge called for by the Task Force. This Position Statement, as well as descriptions of established programs such as this one at Humboldt, should assist administrators who wish to develop Master's programs at their own institutions.

Notes

[1]Janice M. Lauer, "Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 10 (1980), 190-194.

[2]For more information on this program, see Hugh L. Burns and George H. Culp. "Stimulating Invention in English Composition through Computer-Assisted Instruction," *Educational Technology*, 20 (1980), 5-10.

[3]Donald Graves describes this approach in "A New Look at Research on Writing," in *Perspectives on Writing in Grades 1-8*, ed. Shirley Haley-James (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1981), pp. 93-116.

[4]See Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," *College Composition and Communication*, 32 (1981), 365-387.

[5]See, for example, Walter Ong's "Literacy and Orality in Our Times," *ADE Bulletin* (September, 1978), 1-7 [Reprinted in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*]; David Olson, "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing," *Harvard Educational Review*, 47 (1977), 257-281; and Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, "Literacy without Schooling: Testing for Intellectual Effects," *Harvard Educational Review*, 48 (1978), 448-461.

[6]Many of these have been collected in *Donald Graves in Australia*, ed. R. D. Walshe (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982).

[7]Janet Emig, *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1971).

[8]Some sample articles by these researchers are: Sondra Perl, "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 13 (1979), 317-336; Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," *College Composition and Communication*, 31 (1981), 378-388. See note 4 for an article explaining Flower's approach to the writing process.

[9]David Bartholomae, "The Study of Error," *College Composition and Communication*, 31 (1980), 253-269.

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