Review: *Evaluating College Writing Programs.*
Stephen P. Witte and Lester Faigley
(Studies in Writing and Rhetoric.
Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois
University Press, 1983, pp. 120; $8.50).

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I have a brother-in-law who enjoys disagreement for its own sake, and when we have a conversation I frequently come away muttering, "But that's what I was saying all along." For example, in a recent conversation I began by saying that my tolerance for air travel doesn't extend much beyond five hours and three time zones, so I would find his business-related international travel difficult. He disagreed and began b$_y$ explaining the comforts of first class air travel, the stimulation of his work, and about twenty sentences later explained that the only difficulty with traveling half way around the world is spending all those hours in a plane and crossing all those time zones.

As a Consultant Evaluator for **WPA** I felt as if I were having a conversation with my brother-in-law during much of my reading of Evaluating *College Writing Programs*. This first monograph in the CCC-sponored Studies in Writing and Rhetoric series says much that I agree with but starts in a contentious vein. Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley begin by pointing to the weaknesses in **WPA** evaluations and note their inferiority to quantitative methods, later they link WPA-style evaluations with quantitative approaches to show the shortcomings of both, and ultimately they propose a model which contains many of the components of **WPA** evaluations. Early in the book the **WPA** approach is described this way:

> In spite of its widespread use, we refrain from calling the expert-opinion approach a model for evaluation. Even though the expertopinion approach seems to provide the basis of the Council for Writing Program Administrators' forays into evaluation, we have been able to find very few accessible documents describing either instances or rationales for this approach. In one such document, the WPA Board of Consultant Evaluators lists a series of questions capable of generating descriptions of many components of writing programs. However, the WPA Board never indicates how the resultant descriptions should figure in program evaluations. The WPA Board apparently sees no distinction between description and evaluation while it offers its set of questions as "a tool that WPA's and their colleagues may find useful in reviewing their programs' goals, needs, and procedures," it provides no guidance for arriving at evaluative judgments. (p. 5)

Witte and Faigley attribute the following assumptions to the expert-opinion approach: 1) the best evaluator is an expert on the thing or activity being evaluated; 2) the criteria upon which judgments are made are appropriate; 3) the expert or experts selected to evaluate the program are capable of processing all of the relevant evaluation data in order to make judgments based on those data. "As a consequence," claim the authors, "the expert-opinion approach to writing program evaluation is largely atheoretical, making any evaluation model impossible to extrapolate." (p. 7)

Although the quantitative model also, according to Witte and Faigley, lacks an articulated model, it is superior to the expert-opinion model because:

> The Evaluator is not at the center of the evaluation, Instead of relying on subjective impressions, an evaluator seeks objectivity in quantitative measures which can be used across evaluation settings. Quantitative evaluations are frequently published, allowing other researchers to examine their assumptions, methodologies, and results. Researchers have attempted to learn from other researchers in order to refine their research designs and procedures. (p. 7)

The expert-opinion approach is dismissed after two pages, but the next 30-page chapter examines four quantitative studies--the University of Northern Iowa study, the University of California at San Diego study, the Miami University study, and the University of Texas study--to derive a model o quantitative studies in general. This model includes these features:

- It is oriented more toward products than processes;
- It attempts to measure changes over a relatively short period of time;
- It provides summa Live evaluation;
- It produces findings which have local applicability;
- It is predicated on several untested assumptions about the development and measurement of writing ability;
- It does not examine the appropriateness of goals;
- It ignores program structure and administration. (p. 38)

After establishing a model for the quantitative approach, the authors take a more positive view of the expert-opinion approach. Near the end of this chapter they write: " Neither the expert-opinion approach to evaluation nor the pretestposttest quantitative approach will alone suffice." (p. 38) And on the next page this: "If the quantitative model and the expert-opinion approach are inadequate, they are so, in part because they fail to accommodate several important components of college writing programs and the complex relationships among these components." (p. 39) Although it was earlier described as inferior to the quantitative approach, the expert-opinion model is now classed with the quantitative approach.

The next chapter proposes the authors' framework for a valid model of evaluation, and it is here that I feel my post-brother-in-law mutter coming on. The authors establish components necessary to evaluation, components which have

much in common with items on the WPA program evaluation outline (*WPA*, 4, 1980, pp. 23-28). Witte and Faigley identify five areas for evaluating a writing program: social context; institutional context; program structure and administration; content or curriculum; and instruction. To facilitate comparison of Witte-Faigley components with items on the WPA document, I have reduced 16 pages of prose in the former into a list and have matched items in this list with corresponding items (where such items are available) from the WPA guide. Abbreviated location of each WPA item is included in parentheses, and abbreviations used are as follows: Curriculum = C; Courses and Goals = C & G; Syllabus = S; Instructional Methods and Materials = IMM; Grading Policies = GP; Program Administration = PA; Institutional and Program Structure = IPA; Writing Program Administrator's Job Description = WPAJD; Faculty Development = FD; Support Services = SS.

Cultural and Social Context

Refers to the environment in which a writing program exists...includes all influences from outside the institution which affect either the day-to-day operation of the program or the nature of the program...might be defined as that component of writing programs over which no one directly associated with the program has control

Witte/Faigley	WPA
Values and uses of literacy in society	—
—Legislative appropriations which affect class size	—Who determines class size? (PA, IPS)
—Legislative influence on student enrollment at an institution	—Where do funds that support the writing program come from? (PA, IPS)
—Student abilities, goals, academic fields, age	—Connections with feeder schools to improve writing instruction and quality of student preparation (C, C & G)
—Admissions policies of institutions	—

Institutional Context

Refers to institutional policies and features which can affect different aspects of writing programs and courses included in them

Witte/Faigley	WPA
—Responsibility and authority of WPA as evidenced in policy documents	—WPA's rank and status, teaching load, responsibilities, terms of appointment and review (PA, WPAJD)
—Faculty promotion policies as evidenced in institutional documents	—Reward, terms of salary, promotion, tenure, for teaching and research (PA, FD)
—Institutional interest in issues such as writing across the curriculum	—What goals do the administration and faculty in other departments think the writing program should have? (C, C & G)
—Physical layout of classroom	—
—Attitude within institution toward teaching writing	—How do the goals of the writing program accord with the goals of the institution as a whole? (C, C & G)
—Availability of duplicating facilities	Are there reproduction facilities available to duplicate student work? (C, IMM)?
—Availability of conference facilities	—Do writing teachers have adequate office space for conferring with students? (C, IMM)
—Influence of writing program on student performance in the institution	—Writing program's relation through administration and curriculum to other departments and divisions in the institution (PA, IPS)
—Influence of writing program size in the institution	—

Program Structure and Administration

Refers to way writing courses are organized into a program and to all administrative aspects of the program not directly a part of an administrative structure beyond the writing program itself...aspects associated with administering a writing program include: teacher training and faculty development, common syllabi, evaluation of faculty, logistics of delivering writing instruction and curriculum

Witte/Faigley	WPA
—Degree of WPA's responsibility for creating and implementing programmatic policies	—What is the WPA responsible for? (PA, WPAJD)
—Degree of WPA's control over hiring	—Who hires, promotes, tenures, salaries and assigns courses to writing staff? (PA, IPS)
—WPA's role in evaluating teaching	—
—Existence or lack of common syllabus	—Does each writing course have a syllabus? Uniform or individual? (C, S)

Content or Curriculum

What is taught in order for the program to accomplish its goals

—Content as body of knowledge including punctuation, definition of discourse types, lists of transition words, concept of essay or paragraph	—Are methods consistent with program goals? (C, IMM)
—Content as processes such as analyzing written texts	—What is purpose or function of reading assigned in writing courses? (C, S)
—Textbooks used and philosophies evident in them	—Why is the program using the textbooks it is currently using? (C, IMM)
—Forms and principles of discourse addressed by the curriculum	—
—Specific goals and objectives of curriculum	—What are goals of writing program? How arrived at? Reviewed? Implemented? (C, C & G)

Instruction

Refers to methods or means used to teach the content or curriculum of the program...what teachers do to help students realize the goals of the program

Witte/Faigley	WPA
—Assumptions underlying organization of instruction	—Relation of each syllabus to program and institutional goals (C, S)
—Sequence of instruction identified through syllabi, handouts and assignment sheets	—Is there logical sequence of courses, units or assignments in the program? (C, IMM)
—Accurate descriptions of instructional methods such as discussion or conference	—
—Description of integration of media such as TV, film and computers into courses	—What instructional materials and media other than textbooks used in the program? (C, IMM)

As this chart illustrates, nearly all of the components in the Witte-Faigley framework have analogues in the WPA outline. In fact, there are items in the WPA outline which have no counterpart in the Witte-Faigley framework. For example, the WPA outline includes sections on testing and grading practices under the general heading of curriculum, a category for faculty development which includes sections on current conditions and support far faculty's attempts at self-improvement, and a category for support services (defined as units which reinforce the writing program and coordinate their services with the program's goals, curriculum and administrative procedures) which includes sections on organization, personnel and administration.

If the Witte-Faigley framework stopped with listing components, it would have little new to offer, and WPA evaluators would be justified in doing nothing more than muttering. But Witte and Faigley do not stop at listing. They insist on the importance of considering effects in evaluating a writing program, effects which include more than products such as samples of student writing. Further, they emphasize consideration of components' interactions and conclude with the statement that a comprehensive evaluation would include attention to 26 possible sets of interactions, interactions such as cultural and social context with curriculum, or institutional context with program structure and administration.

Once again I am reminded of my brother-in-law, Despite my mutterings I value him because his contentiousness makes me think hard, and I value Evaluating *College Writing Programs* for much the same reason. Witte and Faigley force me to think hard about evaluating writing programs, and I believe their book will have the same effect on any WPA member. Witte and Faigley define effects broadly; they are concerned with more than quantitative evaluations of student writing; and they acknowledge that unintended effects of writing programs may be as important as intended ones.

In insisting on the interaction of components such as "institutional context with instruction" or "cultural and social context with program structure and administration," (p. 64) Witte and Faigley underscore the dynamic nature of writing programs at the same time that they note their complexity. Perhaps even more important is the authors' recognition that no one method is sufficient far evaluating any writing program. Drawing on the work of the noted evaluation specialist Michael Patton, they endorse a paradigm of choices which recognizes the appropriateness of different methods of evaluation for different situations. As Witte and Faigley put it, "Such a paradigm may lead to a synthesis of world views which will allow much greater latitude in deciding which kinds of data can be validly used in writing program evaluations and much greater latitude in the interpretation of those data." (p. 74) In affirming a paradigm of choices, Witte and Faigley in no way abandon their central concern with validity in evaluation but acknowledge that validity "depends on the appropriateness of the evaluation to the nature of the thing evaluated." (p. 67)

To guide the evaluator interested in applying an interactive approach to evaluation, Witte and Faigley suggest the types of questions which might be posed. For example, in considering the interaction of a writing program with the institution which houses it, one might ask: "How does the writing program influence admissions requirements at a particular institution?" or "To what extent does a writing program promote communication among faculty and students in different disciplines on the basis of a common interest in written language?' (p. 76) The authors acknowledge the complexity of evaluations which attempt to answer such questions but assert:

> By attempting to answer such questions, we can better come to know what we do, how we do it, and why it is important. If answers are possible, they are obtainable only through a pluralistic approach to evaluation that acknowledges the history of writing and the teaching of writing, builds on theories of learning and language, and incorporates a variety of evaluation methodologies and procedures." (pp. 77-78)

What Witte and Faigley offer, then, is a clear statement of the complexity of evaluating writing programs, a statement which should interest all members of WPA. In addition Witte and Faigley raise issues which should effect the way WPA Consultant Evaluators proceed.

Not only do we need to consider the interactions among the parts of programs evaluated by WPA Consultant Evaluators, but we need to rethink the function of the evaluations themselves. As Witte and Faigley note, quantitative researchers learn from the published reports of their colleagues, but I see no similar learning among WPA evaluators. Reports are received by participating institutions and by the president of WPA, but much more could he done with them. By looking closely at WPA evaluations we can begin to determine how questions on the self-study guide can be improved, how we can learn from the answers to these questions, and how these questions can be expanded to reflect the complexity of all writing

programs. By pointing to the limitations inherent in the present WPA evaluations, Witte and Faigley challenge us to improve them, and by going beyond a list of components within a program, they suggest how this improvement might take shape. *Evaluating College Writing Progams* deserves a place on the bookshelves of all WPA members, and it deserves to be a topic of conversation among WPAs. Some of us may begin by muttering as we read it, but we will be led beyond muttering to substantive thinking about what it means to evaluate a writing program.