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Council of Writing Program Administrators

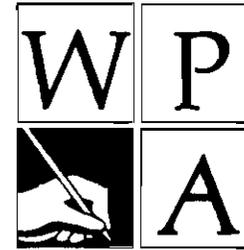
*announces
a special issue on collaborative learning
honoring*

Kenneth A. Bruffee

Essays By

Lisa S. Ede
Peter Elbow
Andrea A. Lunsford
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William Strong
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Writing
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Council of Writing Program Administrators

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is a national association of college and university faculty who serve or have served as directors of freshman composition, coordinators of writing labs and workshops, chairpersons and members of writing program-related committees, or in similar administrative capacities. The Council of Writing Program Administrators is an affiliate of the Association of American Colleges.

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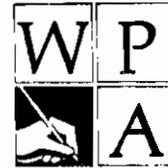
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The Editors of WPA invite contributions that are appropriate to the interests and concerns of those who administer writing programs in American and Canadian colleges and universities. Articles on teaching writing or research in composition are acceptable only if they deal with the relationship of these activities to program administration.

Article length (flexible), 2,-4,000 words. Authors should submit two copies and retain a copy for their own files. Material should be suitably documented using the *MLA Handbook, 2nd Edition* although as much reference as possible should be included within the text. Annotated bibliographies accompanying articles are encouraged, as well as any other apparatus which might make material more conceptually and practically valuable to working writing program administrators. The editors reserve the right to edit manuscripts accepted for publication to conform with the style of the journal. Article deadlines: fall-winter issue, January 15; spring issue, September 15. Relevant announcements are also acceptable. Announcement deadlines: fall-winter issue, October 1; spring issue, January 5. Address contributions and editorial correspondence to William E. Smith, Editor, WPA, English Department, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322-3200.

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Writing
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The WPA as (Journal) Writer: What the Record Reveals

Kenneth A. Bruffee

The Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators had its inception as a pamphlet called "Issues in Writing Program Administration," edited and published by yours truly as a part of the first MLA teaching of Writing Division convention program in New York City, December, 1976. Of the seven sessions at that convention devoted to issues in teaching writing, one had been reserved for an organizational meeting of a new thing under the sun, an association to serve the interests of people administering writing programs in American and Canadian colleges and universities. That association was of course WPA: the Council of Writing Program Administrators. The purpose of the pamphlet was to suggest to whoever showed up at that organizational meeting, and to anyone else who might be interested, some of the issues such an association might address. The list of authors contributing to the pamphlet is an illustrious one. It contains the names of a number of people who have distinguished themselves in this field in the past decade, but who at that time were obscure workers in the vineyards, as we all were. Among them are Joseph Comprone, Harry Crosby, Timothy Donovan, Erika Lindemann, Elaine Maimon, Donald McQuade, Nathaniel Teich, and Stephen Witte.

In contributing to this pamphlet each author undertook, as the introduction puts it, to survey "an issue that writing program administrators face in their long-range planning and in their day to day work." One thing the brief essays in the pamphlet show is that the topics that concern WPAs have not changed very much in the past decade. Many of the same issues have been dealt with over the years, but in much greater detail, both in the newsletter that immediately followed the organizational pamphlet and in the fourteen issues that the journal has published as a refereed publication since it went between red covers with Volume 3, in Fall, 1979. What I think has changed, though, and very much for the better, is the sophistication and knowledgeability with which we are addressing these topics. What a rereading of the WPA journal for the past six years suggests to me, is not just an increasing awareness that the issues concerning us are complex. Equally important, that rereading suggests to me first, an increasing awareness that, from the point of view of writing program administration, the key to understanding and dealing with those complex issues is their common relationship to program structure; and, second, the increasing sense of professional integrity of those who practice Writing Program Administration.

In one area, in fact, there has been little change, because change was not greatly needed. Every issue of *WPA* to date has contained at least one piece intended to explain how to do something, how to accomplish effectively some particular task that is part of almost every *WPA*'s responsibilities. Many of these topics were first addressed, briefly, in the pamphlet I described earlier. Articles of this sort are the bread and butter of such a journal as ours and are often the articles that readers quite rightly turn to first. *WPA* has published how-to articles over the years on evaluating writing programs, dealing with outside evaluators, evaluating teaching, training lab tutors, hiring composition specialists, retraining older faculty as composition teachers, establishing writing-across-the-curriculum programs, running regional conferences, dealing with faculty unions, dealing with problems of part-time faculty, fostering cooperation between high schools and college writing programs, and evaluating lab programs and new composition textbooks. And of course *WPA* has published since 1981 an excellent tool for this latter task, its annual bibliography of the year's crop of newly published composition textbooks.

The general quality of the journal's how-to articles has always been relatively high. Each one isolates a single issue and addresses it practically. As a result, we are gradually developing a systematic, generalized core of knowledge of the sort that is basic to any professional practice.

The articles in the second category I would like to mention are how-to articles also, but of a special kind. They put how-to into context. Instead of dealing with issues individually, these articles deal with them as interrelated. Contextual how-to articles of this type tend to make a common assumption: the relation of program structure to educational quality. This is an important assumption. It underlies, for example, the difference between the editorial policy of *WPA* and the editorial policy of *CCC* and other journals that publish articles on teaching writing. *WPA* does not publish articles on classroom practice, theory of composition, or research in composition unless they deal with the relationship of these topics to program administration. The distinction is important, because as writing teachers, all of us—and all the teachers who work in our programs—naturally tend to equate the quality of education at any institution with the quality of teaching that goes on there and with the quality of resources—library, laboratories, and so on—available to students and teachers. What *WPAs* learn to assume is that, with regard at least to writing programs, another factor affects educational quality as well. That factor is the way the elements in a program are organized, articulated, and sustained.

It matters a lot to us, of course, that our institution has a faculty of effective composition teachers, effective ESL teachers, effective basic writing teachers, effective lab tutors, and effective library personnel. But as *WPAs*, it also matters to us that each group of effective teachers knows what the other groups are doing, each group adapts its teaching to

what the others are doing, and each group is aware of its part in carefully organized sequential and parallel patterns of instruction that make the program as a whole easily accessible to students and answerable to their needs. This relation of educational quality to program structure is a central issue for *WPAs*. In the past few years in the pages of *WPA* the analysis and critical understanding of this central issue has become increasingly sophisticated and well informed.

Again, some particulars may help make my point. A number of articles in *WPA* have not just told us how to do our job better. They have also told us how the job and the tools it takes to do the job suit the general purpose of the job. Articles have analyzed, for example, the complexities of the relationship between writing lab faculty and their assumptions and practices on the one hand and English Department faculty and their assumptions and practices on the other hand. Articles have analyzed and evaluated the uses and abuses in writing programs as a whole, of computers and word processors. Articles have analyzed and evaluated testing procedures in large, multi-institutional systems and also of testing as used in a wide variety of other institutions nationwide. And articles have analyzed and evaluated the professional implications of training and using peer tutors. The quality of this analysis and evaluation of the systems we are involved in has risen, I think, as our professional self-confidence has risen. The quality of these articles shows that we are increasingly able to accept and make good use of the not always entirely flattering results of our analysis and evaluation.

This new ability to criticize ourselves and put that criticism to good use is especially evident, I think, in the last and somewhat smaller category of articles I shall mention. This category interests me especially because it contributes to making the Council of Writing Program Administrators more than just a professional guild looking after the welfare and institutional interests of its members. The category is comprised of a few articles appearing mainly in the past two years, that address directly or indirectly the issue of the professional identity of *WPAs* and of our national organization.

In discussing this category I will be mentioning several articles specifically. I will not be singling these articles out, though, to award palms. These are not necessarily Ken Bruffee's Oldies but Goodies. In discussing them I make no claim for their quality, nor do I cast aspersions on the quality or value of the many excellent articles I will not be able to mention. I choose these five to discuss in detail only because they seem to me capable of being read as a special type—the type that helps us tell ourselves who we are. Each is implicitly or explicitly about “the process of defining, redefining, and attempting to exercise control over” the skills required to work competently as a *WPA* (Turner and Hodge, in Jackson 72).

One of the earliest articles of this type is Leon Coburn's "Notes of a Freshman Comp Director: Give Up Hope All You Who Enter Here" (Coburn gives the quotation in the original Italian, of course), published in the Spring, 1982, issue of *WPA* (Vol. 5, No. 3). This article, in spite of its glum title and *Candide*-like narrative form is remarkable for its revelation of the author's conscious professional self-awareness as a WPA. This awareness is evident first in the reasons he gives for becoming a WPA after "10 years as a specialist in eighteenth-century British literature." Coburn lists the following as "my main reasons for taking" the job:

1. I had been a severe critic of the composition program for several years and felt that it was time to either put up or shut up.
2. Rightly or wrongly, I thought I could do better a job than the other candidates for the position.
3. I thought there might be more opportunities for SIGNIFICANT research in composition than in my academic specialty (9; emphasis mine).

Coburn's professional self-awareness is clear also in one of his first acts as WPA: to make contact between his local program and its national context by engaging a pair of WPA Consultant/Evaluators to visit his campus. Finally, the conclusions Coburn draws from his experience are conclusions we all easily understand and recognize as insights central to this professional field:

1. No job on campus is as thankless or as demanding as directing the writing program.
2. No other job offers a better opportunity to have a significant impact on students' education.
3. There is a potential rapport among writing teachers that can be mutually supporting and very satisfying.
4. What we do really matters (13).

In the next issue of *WPA*, Fall-Winter, 1982 (Vol. 6, No. 1) Stephen North's "Helping Ed" tells us some more home truths about being a WPA. North had the courage to look at the vital quick of any writing program, one student's career through the program at North's own institution. The result is a frank, unadorned story of almost total programmatic incoherence. However successfully lucid and neat the program in question might appear on paper, where it counts this program (and it might just as easily be the program of any one of us) beyond question fails. North draws our attention to the payoff in writing program administration: beyond the facts and figures, beyond the committee meetings and the curricular descriptions, lies the experience of our students. It is

perhaps the toughest criterion we have to measure ourselves by. And it is an important milestone for us as professionals that, as the appearance of North's article in *WPA* suggests, we have begun to hold ourselves to it.

The healthy programmatic self-criticism of North's article is shared also by John C. Bean and John Ramage's article in the Fall-Winter, 1983, issue of *WPA* (Vol. 7, Nos. 1-2) entitled "An Experimental Program to Increase the Efficiency of Freshman English at Montana State University: An Initial Report." Like North, Bean and Ramage take a risk. They describe a large innovative program that they are themselves in great measure responsible for designing and administering. What is important about the article from my point of view is that these writers carefully detail their program's failures as well as its successes; they tell us their doubts about it as well as their reasonable certainties. The article is no white wash. It is no show-and-tell public relations piece written with one eye cocked toward the institution's higher administration. It is written on the assumption that its intended audience will read sympathetically and with knowledge born of plenty of its own administrative experience. It is written to fellow professionals who know the meaning of a batting average. For members of an organization to be able to assume that kind of audience in addressing their colleagues nationally bespeaks, in my view, a high degree of professional maturity on the part of us all.

That we are working toward such a level of professional maturity is attested to also by the publication in the Spring, 1983, issue (Vol. 6, No. 3) of Stephen C. Zelnick's "A Report on the Workshop on the Administration of Writing Programs, 1982." This article raises a sensitive professional issue for public debate within the profession's acknowledged medium of exchange, its journal. The issue is one that every stable profession must address publicly sooner or later, and on which the profession's integrity rests. That issue is the nature of the expertise essential to the profession and how that expertise shall be developed, maintained, and passed on: what its members shall be taught and how they shall be taught it. The kind of knowledge this particular article suggests as essential to the practice of our profession may or may not be the readers' notion of it, but whoever addresses the issue of professional development next at least has this early attempt at hand, either to build on, revise, or reject.

The last article I would place in this category of writing that helps us tell ourselves who we are is Anne Ruggles Gere's review of Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley's book *Evaluating College Writing Programs*, Spring, 1984 (Vol. 7, No. 3). As most of you know, Witte and Faigley are fairly astringent in their criticism of the WPA Consultant/Evaluator program. They give the program little quarter—not even to allow that WPA was battling dragons with whatever weapon came to hand fully five years before Witte and Faigley armored in gleaming research entered the fray themselves.

What is important about Gere's response to the book is that she meets its criticism, as a representative of WPA and as a member of the WPA Board of Consultant/Evaluators, with the utmost diplomacy. She demonstrates with discreet tabular comparison and a minimum of comment that in fact all but six of the evaluation criteria that Witte and Faigley bring to bear on writing programs have analogues in the WPA Consultation/Evaluation Self-Study Questionnaire. Having argued in WPA's defense in this restrained way, her conclusion is not that WPA has been harshly or unfairly treated. She concludes instead that "Witte and Faigley offer... a clear statement of the complexity of evaluating writing programs, a statement which should interest all members of WPA" and which "should affect the way WPA Consultant/Evaluators proceed" (41).

Now, my point is not that Gere has been generous. *Evaluating College Writing Programs* is a good book. It needs no gestures of generosity. My point is what Gere's review says about WPA as an organization and about the growing professional integrity of WPAs generally. Rereading once again, from the perspective of Gere's 1984 article, Leon Coburn's 1982 essay about first taking on the job of writing program administrator, there seems to be evidence, even during the short, two-year interval, of still another level of development in the profession. With no intention, of course, to contrast the two articles per se unfavorably in any way but to view them for the moment merely as milestones representative of the profession's collective state of mind, it seems possible to speculate that we continue to undergo the deepening in professional self-understanding that I have been talking about. We seem to have arrived as a profession at the point that Coburn says he had to arrive at in order to offer to become his institution's WPA. As a profession we seem to have arrived at the understanding that it is time we collectively either put up or shut up. That strikes me as a wise conclusion and a mark of considerable professional maturity.

This maturity tends to be confirmed, furthermore, if we compare Gere's response to Witte and Faigley's criticism of WPA with, for example, the response of the American Medical Association or American Bar Association to criticism on almost any topic directed from outside the inner circle of membership. Granted, the AMA and ABA are large, old, and grandly self-possessed organizations. WPA is small, new, and *arriviste*. Still, I think Gere's response reveals an attribute if not unique to WPAs as professionals, certainly important to the successful practice of writing program administration. It is the ability to hear valid criticism. Not just listen to it. Hear it, and turn it to good use.

Note

In drafting this article I have drawn on John Archer Jackson, Ed., *Professions and Professionalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), especially Jackson's introduction and the chapter "Occupations and Professions" by C. Turner and M. N. Hodge."



Faculty Development and the Teaching of Writing

Joseph F. Trimmer

Every year those of us who attend 4C's leave the convention reassured of the vitality of our discipline and recommitted to improving our own teaching and writing. On Monday morning, still glowing with professional good will, we meet the department curmudgeon at the coffee urn. We start talking enthusiastically about what we have learned and what we are going to do until we catch that look in his eye—we have all seen it—and suddenly our enthusiasm starts to whistle harmlessly into the void like air escaping from a punctured tire. Are we hopelessly deluded? Is 4C's nothing more than an early summer camp? Uncertain, we try a quick composition fix—a workshop, a seminar—but the results are the same. The romance blossoms briefly only to wilt beneath the world-weary gaze of our colleagues. It is at this point that we pronounce the words for the first time: FACULTY DEVELOPMENT.

Five years ago, our university's band of 4C's regulars decided to embark upon a modest mission. We would design a faculty development program to inform our colleagues of the intellectual revolution that was occurring in the teaching of writing. Our university had always professed its belief in the value of writing, just as our English Department had always professed its belief in the virtues of its writing curriculum. But we wondered how these public pieties squared with private performance. Was our faculty really committed to teaching writing? And if it was, was it sufficiently committed to reconsider the writing curriculum in light of the new research on the teaching of writing?

We realized that our mission was doomed from the start unless we acquired the political clout of our administration and the intellectual respect of our colleagues. At our suggestion, the Provost formed (and funded) an interdisciplinary committee to study the status of writing at our university. Again, at our request, the Provost appointed the most eminent scholars on our faculty to serve on this committee. After several weeks of discussion about the purpose and problems of teaching writing, the committee decided to act like most university study committees. It drafted a questionnaire to solicit the opinions of the university community.¹

Over 600 of our faculty and students replied to this questionnaire, providing the committee with an extensive index to the attitudes and assumptions on our campus. For example, virtually 100% of the respondents agreed that writing competency should be a graduation

requirement. But there was considerable disagreement about how that competency should be measured. Only 30% of our faculty and students felt that the existing sequence of freshman composition courses was sufficient to insure writing competency. Almost 60% of the faculty favored some kind of competency exam. To no one's surprise, only 20% of the students indicated a preference for this option. Interestingly enough, however, almost 40% of the students favored an upper division writing course, a suggestion that appealed to only 10% of the faculty. More importantly, of those who preferred an upper division writing course, 60% of the students felt that the course should be taught in their major or by an interdisciplinary faculty, while 70% of the faculty suggested that if such a course had to be taught it should be taught by the English Department.

The questionnaire also revealed that faculty and students were confused about basic definitions. What was writing—themes, laboratory reports, essay exams, research papers? What was teaching writing—planning assignments, grading papers? 94% of the faculty stated that they required writing in all their courses, but only 18% of the students indicated that they were required to write in any course except freshman composition. Both faculty and students agreed that most writing assignments were given in less than five minutes and were rarely reinforced by individual conferences. 70% of the faculty insisted that they announced their grading criteria in advance and required some kind of revision. But 50% of the students claimed that they were never informed about grading criteria in advance and were never asked to revise their papers. Even if the committee allowed for the distortions that always accompany self-justification, such figures seemed to call for a campus-wide re-education on the teaching of writing.

Before proposing such a re-education, the study committee, again acting quite predictably, requested the opinion of outside consultants. The consulting team—supplied by the Council of Writing Program Administrators—was provided with the results of the questionnaire, policy statements on the university's writing requirements, course syllabi, and other public documents that attempted to explain the philosophy and pedagogy of the writing curriculum.² The team spent three days on campus talking to administrators, tenured and part-time faculty, and a large cross section of students. They visited the writing center, the reading laboratory, and several composition classes. Their report, when combined with the findings of the study committee, suggested that the university follow a four-stage process of faculty development. We have attempted to respond to these recommendations in the following ways:

1. Provide Constant and Current Information on the Teaching of Writing to All Members of the Faculty

We conduct an in-service training program for new English faculty that includes a two-day orientation workshop, a year-long seminar

on the teaching of writing, and an extensive monitoring system. We sponsor a faculty symposium where staff members discuss topics such as error analysis, mode theory, writing about literature, the research paper, and computer assisted instruction. We inaugurated a special lecture series where scholars such as Ed Corbett, Frank D'Angelo, Maxine Hairston, Joe Williams, Erika Lindemann, Peter Elbow, James Moffett and James Kinneavy have presented their research to faculty from various disciplines. And finally, we arranged a faculty exchange program with Westminster College, Oxford, that has enabled us to learn how our British colleagues teach and conduct research on writing.

2. Encourage Faculty to Design Research Projects on the Teaching and Evaluation of Writing

We have experimented with several forms of a language skills exam both as a placement tool and as a proficiency test. We developed a writing across the curriculum testing project in which forty faculty members from other disciplines were trained, along with the staff of the writing program, in the methods of analytical and holistic scoring. We have established a writing consultancy program in which writing faculty work with faculty from other disciplines to enrich the writing component in their courses. We are developing a comprehensive computer software program for use in the writing center and basic writing courses. And individual faculty members are conducting research in areas such as rhetorical theory, cognitive psychology, corporate literacy, and collaborative learning.

3. Publish the Results of this Research to the Profession

We publish an English Department Newsletter, featuring the research of the writing faculty, that is mailed to over two thousand parties—faculty in other English Departments, program officers in funding agencies, and distinguished alumni. Our faculty presents papers on all aspects of teaching writing at state, regional and national conferences. In particular, our senior faculty has made joint presentations with doctoral students at the annual conventions of the National Council of Teachers of English, the Modern Language Association, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication. We have been successful in applying for a number of internal and external fellowships and grants to underwrite the work of individual scholars, group research endeavors (such as the computer software project), and summer workshops. We have published the results of our research in the major scholarly journals and in several major textbooks.

4. Convert Research Findings into Permanent Institutional Programs and Policies

We are constantly revising our writing curriculum to reflect the faculty's growing sophistication about the teaching of writing. We have added upper division writing courses for majors and non-majors, and are slowly converting features of the writing consultancy project into permanent curriculum changes in other departments. We have hired gifted new faculty with specialized training in composition and rhetoric to develop graduate courses for the growing cadre of doctoral students interested in studying and conducting research in composition. And finally, we have implemented a Ph.D. in composition that features an imaginative interdisciplinary component and several innovative internships in the English Department, in other departments throughout the university, and in the corporate world.

I have described our university's attempt to follow this four-stage faculty development process for three reasons:

1. I wanted to demonstrate that our program emerged from a systematic planning procedure.
2. I wanted to show-off the number and variety of successful activities we have attempted.
3. I wanted to confess that although we have created a successful program, we have yet to convince our department curmudgeons that we are doing anything except whistling into the void.

As I analyzed the mixed results of our program, I wondered whether we were typical. Were other departments designing activities or instituting policies that were more successful in convincing curmudgeons? To answer that question, I sent a simple questionnaire to English Department chairs throughout the country asking them to describe and comment on the programs they had sponsored in the last five years to educate their faculty about the latest research in the teaching of writing.³ I was able to draw three conclusions from the 400 responses I received:

1. 40% of those responding offer no faculty development programs on the teaching of writing.
2. 60% of those responding offer some form of faculty development on the teaching of writing, but none listed activities that we had not already considered or implemented.
3. Virtually all those who offered faculty development programs indicated that the activities had little effect on the unconverted—on those faculty members who were disdainful of or disinterested in the research on the teaching of writing

To supplement my findings, I called the program officers at those agencies who have been most active in funding faculty development programs in the teaching of writing—NEH, FIPSE, The Lilly Endowment.⁴ What was their assessment of faculty development in the teaching of writing? All agreed. The most successful programs have taken place at small liberal arts colleges where administrators and faculty are dedicated to and reward excellence in teaching, where all faculty believe in and insist on writing as a way of learning, and where all English Department faculty, regardless of rank, teach writing as part of their regular assignment. The least successful programs have been attempted at large state universities where administrators and faculty are dedicated to and reward excellence in traditional areas of research, where all faculty believe that writing is a transcription skill that is taught in the English Department, and where English Department faculty show little interest in changing the established order in which teaching assistants and adjunct faculty teach writing courses and the senior faculty preside over literature seminars.

I was not surprised by the results of my questionnaire or the assessment of the funding agencies. If anything I was disappointed by the predictability of my findings. There were no magic solutions, no magic kingdoms, only the ordinary world I already knew. But as I read and re-read my stack of 400 replies, I became intrigued by the language of the responses. The assumptions, the tone, the metaphors, the rhetoric seemed to fall consistently into three categories. I call these categories the Rhetoric of the 3C's.

1. The Rhetoric of Cynicism: Those who employed this rhetoric seemed to be senior faculty who had devoted their lives to reading and writing about literature. Although they no longer taught composition, they believed that they still knew how and that no abstract theory or empirical study would improve the writing of their students or their ability to grade a set of papers. They were convinced that considering composition as a discipline was a silly fad, like Black Studies or Women Studies, induced by an unfortunate market and supported by misguided funding agencies that performed services similar to CETA. In particular, they believed that research in the teaching of writing was a sham, a self-indulgent, jargon-ridden concoction of unreadable inanities that would be better forgotten than foisted on an intelligent faculty.

2. The Rhetoric of Conflict: Those who employed this rhetoric seemed to be junior faculty who had discovered a new field and were now possessed with an evangelical zeal to preach their message to the uninformed. They believed that teaching writing was a complex and creative discipline—not a simple-minded and oppressive duty. Indeed, their ultimate mission was to restore rhetoric as the ruling monarch of English studies, a monarch who had been dethroned by a group of counter-revolutionaries known as literary critics. Rather than seeing composition

as a silly fad, this group perceived it as the force of the future, induced perhaps by market realities but empowered by a wider and older vision of language studies that would eventually reshape the political map of the university. As for composition research, they believed that its minor imperfections were the by-products of venture scholarship. While literary critics labored endlessly in the rearguard of learning, composition teachers were working at the cutting edge of imaginative, interdisciplinary study.

3. The Rhetoric of Complacency: Those who employed this rhetoric were faculty of all ranks who seemed bewildered as to what all the fuss was about. Like well-meaning Rip Van Winkles, they seemed to have wandered into the middle of a revolution they did not understand. They believed that English teachers had always taught literature and composition. There was no conflict between the two enterprises. They were two sides of the same coin, two interrelated processes. Confused and annoyed by the unnecessary conflict, they uttered the fundamental pieties of the profession. They saw no reason to consider composition a separate discipline. They had not read the latest research on the teaching of writing. Indeed, they saw no reason to reject a new fad or restore an old tradition. They were content with the status quo: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Like all rhetorical positions, the rhetoric of the 3C's offers us a partial view of reality. The rhetoric of cynicism sees composition as a momentary blip on the intellectual test pattern. The rhetoric of conflict sees composition as the savior of a moribund discipline. The rhetoric of complacency sees a blissful world in which composition and literature exist in unexamined harmony. What we need to complete these partial views is the rhetoric of a 4th C, a rhetoric I will call the rhetoric of compromise. By compromise, I do not mean giving up in fatigue, going over to the other side, or ignoring fundamental differences. I do mean exploring the areas of agreement that will bind the contending parties to collaborative effort and mutual respect.

If the rhetoric of compromise is used for a program in faculty development, then it must establish its purpose, identify its audience, and develop a strategy.

Purpose. There are at least three purposes for such a program:

1. To improve writing
2. To improve the teaching of writing
3. To improve the status of writing teachers

According to the rhetoric of compromise, these three purposes can be accomplished without converting the entire English Department, much less the whole university, to the latest research findings on the teaching

of writing. No monolithic theory is sufficient to accommodate the variety of teachers and writers in the academy. We should provide current information on research and encourage healthy debate about its value, but we should not feel its complete adoption is crucial to the improvement of teaching writing or our status as writing teachers. After all we were taught by writing teachers unfamiliar with heuristics and tagmemics and most of us can compose a decent sentence.

Audience. There are at least three audiences for a faculty development program in any department:

1. Talented Ten. 10% of any department contains faculty members who are so innately curious that they will develop themselves whether or not there is a faculty development program.

2. Untouchable Forty. 40% of any department contains faculty members who are so habitually committed to one point of view that they will never change or so fundamentally ineffective as teachers that their conversion would be meaningless.

3. Dormant Fifty. 50% of any department contains faculty who if given the right information, encouragement, and incentives would be willing to re-think some of their attitudes toward writing, the teaching of writing, and writing teachers. According to the rhetoric of compromise, there is no point in trying to convert the untouchables—it is an endless and enervating activity. Cut your losses, learn from the talented ten, and awaken the dormant fifty. Sixty percent is still a majority.

Strategy. The strategy for such a program acknowledges that all faculty members live with deeply embedded images of their professional identity. To abandon these images would be to deny their self-respect and intellectual integrity. Such images cannot be changed without tearing out a cluster of beliefs and lifetime habits. If we attack them directly, we will only intensify faculty resistance. If we ridicule them, we will only alienate those who regret our insensitivity. The best strategy is:

1. To recognize that faculty members will change only when they can transfer their commitment from an original image to a more compelling image.
2. To show our understanding of and respect for that original position by restating it in terms faculty find acceptable.
3. To explore possible compromises between contending positions.

Such a strategy, if directed by the right purpose, at the right audience, should reduce antagonism and encourage our colleagues to listen. Our concessions should also encourage concessions. No longer forced to defend their self-image, our colleagues may be willing to consider

modifications in their position and move closer to our position. Finally, if no acceptable compromise is possible, we will have projected an image of equity and integrity, thus accomplishing at least one of our purposes—respect for the intellectual status of writing teachers. If we do no more than develop that image, then we have taught our coffee-room curmudgeon something he wasn't expecting to learn about what we are learning at 4C's.

Notes

¹"Report of Faculty Committee on the Status of Writing," Muncie, IN: Ball State University, 1981.

²The WPA Consultation was conducted September 30-October 2, 1981.

³The questionnaire (See Appendix) was sent to the MLA mailing list on English Department chairs in January, 1984. The list contains over 1,600 names. The 400 responses (representing 25% of the total) was tabulated for presentation at 4C's in New York, March, 1984.

⁴Interviews were conducted with senior program officers at each funding agency in February, 1984. These interviews were supplemented by Alice L. Beeman's *Toward Better Teaching: A Report of the Post Doctoral Teaching Awards Programs of the Lilly Endowment*. Indianapolis: The Lilly Endowment, 1981; and Richard Hendrix's *Priorities for Improvement: Essays and Views on Needed Improvements in Higher Education—Funds for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education*. Washington: American Association for Higher Education, 1984.

Appendix

Questionnaire on Faculty Development in the Teaching of Writing

1. What kind of programs has your department sponsored in the past five years to introduce the latest research in the teaching of writing to your faculty? Make a list.
2. What specific programs have proved most successful in interesting your senior literature faculty in the teaching of writing? In other words, which programs did senior faculty attend? Which ones stimulated discussion in the coffee room? Which ones produced curriculum change?
3. What specific problems (political and/or intellectual) have prevented your senior literature faculty from acknowledging the value of research on the teaching of writing?
4. To what extent have these programs appealed to other audiences—graduate students, faculty from other departments, faculty from high schools or other universities?
5. As you look toward the future of your department, how will this generation of English teachers view the connection between the teaching of literature and the teaching of writing? In what ways will their views change the nature of your department?



Speaking Frankly: Writing Program Administrators Look at Instructional Goals and Faculty Retraining¹

Linda G. Polin and Edward M. White²

This is the third in a series of articles reporting results of a four-and-a-half year study of college composition programs, funded by the National Institute of Education. The two earlier articles presented findings from our detailed questionnaire, sent to all writing instruction faculty on the nineteen campuses of the California State University (CSU). That questionnaire was developed in part from analysis of 57 face-to-face interviews conducted with a variety of administrators on ten of the nineteen campuses. (Copies of the six interview protocols we developed may be found in the appendix to our Phase I report, available from ERIC as document number ED 239-293.)

In this article we will concentrate upon the interview responses we received from English department chairs, composition program coordinators, and remedial instruction coordinators. We focus on what these writing program administrators have to say about two key issues: program goals and faculty retraining. The two issues are linked in many ways, but we feature them here because they were the most prominent issues in our interviews and because our findings turned out to be both surprising and interesting.

Our research is studying every aspect of composition programs, with particular attention to the issues which writing program administrators can affect directly. Thus, we are interested in the nature of decision-making with regard to curriculum, instructional methods, and teacher assignment and evaluation. Our findings in relation to curriculum cohesion and faculty development, some of which we present here, ought to be generally useful to administrators concerned about ways of supporting effective activities in both of the areas.

The Sample

In the winter of 1981 we interviewed 57 people on ten of the nineteen campuses of the CSU. We selected campuses to include different enrollment sizes, geographic settings, and student populations (high and low minority enrollments, higher and lower proportions of students admitted under such special status as that given for weak academic preparation). The interview campuses, which include two polytechnic

institutions, not only represent the massive CSU system, but are roughly representative of American higher education.

Two of the ten interviewed campuses have fully developed writing programs operating outside the English department. In both instances, the non-English department program directors coordinate courses and instructors much the way their English department counterparts do. We believe it is important to include these programs in our analyses and to maintain their distinction from the English department program.

A Few Words About Turning Interviews into Data Analysis

All interviews were taped (though interviewees were free to request the tape be turned off for "off the record" comments). Transcripts of the tapes were the basis of the analysis. Passages of the transcripts were numbered using an arbitrary but constant size rule based upon turn-taking in the interview conversation. We then coded each numbered passage to indicate the main topic (or topics) discussed in that passage. Two readers coded each interview transcript to control the reliability of coder interpretations, and no one coded an interview that he or she had conducted.

Based upon a frequency count of topic code numbers, we were able to determine for which topics we had the most, and most diverse (different campuses or levels of administration) information. In this way, we identified five topics for first priority analysis. Our next step was to read through the coded sections of interview on each topic to get a feel for the range or variety in responses. Readers took notes from the interviews to support their perceptions of the categories for each topic. In group meetings, we first agreed upon a descriptor for each topic area, and then, aided by notes and excerpts from the transcripts, the group worked out categories distinguishing among programs within that descriptor. This sometimes resulted in redefinition of categories. Sometimes we found topics with only two mutually exclusive subcategories; sometimes topics generated four or more subcategories. Following agreement on the topical analysis of the interviews, we wrote drafts explicating these analyses and offering quotations in support of analysis conclusions. These "vignettes" were circulated among the group.

For this report to be meaningful, we need to report the location of campus writing programs in the identified subcategories of each topic. However, since it is the typicality of the campuses and the responses that we want to stress, rather than the particular identity of each, we have disguised campus identities with letter codes: A to J. We want to be careful not to imply that these analyses are based upon and yield facts about these campus programs. They do not. They are the perceptions and personal beliefs of the interviewees, and our analyses yield impressions of how the world works on each campus. Our analysis in this article

identifies perceived patterns of composition program features; it does not compare or rank individual campuses. Non-English department composition programs are identified by the extension letter "B" parenthetically affixed to the campus letter code, for example, program J(B).

Scope and Focus of Program Goals

We specifically asked composition program coordinators to describe the program goals and philosophy underlying freshman and remedial composition courses. We had two reasons for asking this question. First, we wondered to what extent newer composition theory had become "institutionalized," that is, formally adopted by English departments. Second, we wondered whether we would find much variety among English department composition programs, and we expected our goals and philosophy questions might reveal grounds for different program choices.

What we found instead was very little formal description of any sort. With a few exceptions (usually in relation to remedial programs), those coordinators who were able to articulate some programmatic goals tended to describe instructional activities or course content rather than intended growth or change in students or faculty. That is, when asked about program goals and philosophy, they chose to speak about carrying out a curriculum rather than about aiming at particular outcomes from that curriculum. There are, of course, many reasons why writing program administrators find it difficult to speak of program goals (for example, goals may be seen in terms of individual students with widely varying abilities rather than in terms of programs), but it is nonetheless worthy of notice that most such administrators do not tend to think of the desired outcomes of their regular programs.

As a result of this tendency, we found it most appropriate to analyze interview data from this question in terms of the scope of the planned curriculum, that is, the degree to which program planning affects both remedial and regular composition teaching. We identified three categories describing differences in the breadth and focus of curriculum statements. Our shorthand labels for these categories are "laissez-faire," "remedial only," and "regular and remedial." The first category, "laissez-faire," describes programs with no formal guidelines for curriculum and little evidence of administrative influence over the coursework of individual instructors. The second and third categories describe programs that differ in terms of the extent of their "programmatic" influence.

Laissez-faire

While all twelve composition coordinators interviewed report the existence of guidelines or course descriptions, some admit they have not seen or distributed a copy in years, while others produce hundred-page

documents and describe instructor training. At the one extreme, we labeled as "laissez-faire" those campus programs in which course guidelines are "available" if someone asks, but where there is no active attempt to ensure widespread adoption of or adherence to these guidelines. In short, these programs have a very limited "programmatically" nature and leave a good deal of their domain uncharted.

Three programs are identified as laissez-faire: F, H, and I. Programs F and H are large, urban campuses, known to make extensive use of part-time instructors (50% or more of the department staff). Program I is a mid-sized polytechnical school. To demonstrate our laissez-faire definition, we offer the following exchanges between the interviewer (INT) and the composition coordinators for programs F and H (COMP-F, COMP-H).

COMP-F...the diversity of the 100 sections, it's hard to... There is [a goals/philosophy statement] in our statement about the course, that it's a course in expository writing, if that's a philosophy. I guess it can be answered in two different ways: Among the 100 plus sections, no; in theory, yes. There is our statement which says clearly it's a course in expository writing not in literary analysis. That students will write. But it can't be taken for granted that in every section they write...[that] the papers will be responded to and students will have an opportunity to respond to the response, to write to show that they have learned. What we're trying to impress on everybody, that this is a writing process... . Certainly the most coherent theory probably exists among the TAs because they've all been through my class...that's true for maybe a third of [the sections]. The faculty, I don't know really what happens in faculty sections. I never see their evaluations. I've been in one faculty member's writing class on his request. I hear rumors from some others, but I don't really know what happens.

COMP-H: The history of the composition program here is that we used to be a department of literature that taught some composition and I think now it would be more accurate to say we are a department of composition that teaches some literature. Certainly that's true in terms of our FTE.... The only guidelines that have existed have been rather general and perfunctory descriptions of the courses that appear in the university catalogue. But I suspect that most faculty members have not even looked at those.

The remarks of the nine other composition coordinators indicate they have more actively and successfully established a cohesive program of instruction. The main distinction between these more organized programs is a characteristic that might best be called "scope" or "breadth" of the formal curriculum: the degree of planned articulation between remedial and regular composition, and the focus on student gains. Six of these coordinators refer in their comments to both levels of composition coursework; three others refer only to their remedial composition program.

Remedial Only

For three composition programs, the focus of their formal curriculum is restricted to their remedial composition program (J, E, and C). One of these programs is located on a polytechnic college campus, one on a large suburban campus, and one on a large urban campus. The common feature among these programs is the absence of a cohesive freshman composition program despite the presence of an organized and structured remedial writing program. As one might expect under such circumstances, two of the three programs have separate "remedial coordinators" whose job it is to organize the remedial coursework and instructional staff (J and C).

When asked about the regular composition program, the freshman composition coordinators sound very much like their laissez-faire colleagues. Though they do talk about the desirability of organizing the freshman composition program, they also report their "authority" extends almost exclusively to the part-time lecturers and graduate teaching assistants.

Methods of Program Cohesion. Program E's composition coordinator reports a uniform midterm in all remedial classes, a single common textbook, a required training course for instructors, a planned sequential curriculum, and specific performance expectations for students. Program J's remedial coordinator also mentions common exams, texts, course guidelines, and agreement upon instructional methods. With the exception of common exams, program C's remedial coordinator reports the same devices for ensuring a cohesive program. The interview comments of Program E's composition coordinator are typical:

COMP-E: There is a very specific set of goals for [the remedial course]. At the end of the first half of the semester we want the students to be able to proof-read their own writing accurately. The theory behind that is these very, very inexperienced writers literally do not see what they have written. They see only what they meant to write. And so we...(monologue continues for 1½ single-spaced pages of transcription.)

INT: These are taught by part-timers?

COMP-E: Yes, exclusively.

It is important to note here, that in addition to articulating a remedial curriculum, these coordinators describe student outcomes. In fact, we discovered from our transcript analyses that specific prescriptions for student growth in writing skill exist for remedial coursework only, that when coordinators talk about regular freshman composition many of them are vague about student gains and others do not describe student gains at all. The coordinators of these three programs make it clear that their success with establishing a cohesive remedial program is due in

large part to the fact that most remedial courses are taught by part- and full-time lecturers or graduate assistants. Each coordinator remarks upon his or her lack of specific knowledge of or power over the regular faculty. However, this in and of itself cannot explain the lack of a programmatic structure in the composition coursework.

We have speculated that goals for student achievement or growth from remedial instruction may simply be more easily described and measured than are those for freshman composition. Further, the need to describe and measure "exit" requirements for remedial instruction is greater than the need to do so for freshman composition.

Regular and Remedial Composition

Coordinators of the six remaining writing programs describe programmatic features that provide for some measure of cohesion among instructors in both remedial and regular composition. The six programs are D, G, J(B), Q, Q(B), and S. Perhaps it is no coincidence that four of these six programs are found on smaller, suburban campuses, and that the fifth, although located on a large campus, actually represents two small programs housed outside of the English department (one in the Chicano Studies department, one in the Pan-African Studies department). It is apparently more difficult to structure and enforce a particular program with a large faculty than with a small one. Only one of these six programs is located in the English department of a large, urban campus.

This exception to our size hypothesis (program D) divides control of its writing program between the English department composition coordinator and the Writing Lab director, who doubles as the remedial coordinator. The two coordinators articulate clear goals for their students and specific philosophies of instruction which are translated into instructional strategies.

The two ethnic studies department programs are small, run by one person, and staffed primarily by part-timers or non-tenure track full-time lecturers. This seems to support our observation, above, that the coordinator's ability to establish and maintain a cohesive program may be largely dependent upon the status of the faculty teaching courses in the program.

Methods of Program Cohesion. Again, common exams, textbook lists, and sample syllabuses offer some measures of cohesion among remedial and regular freshman composition. However, we also find mention of faculty "retraining" efforts in the comments from these composition coordinators. These coordinators seem more willing to deal with the issue of influence over tenured and tenure-track faculty teaching in the freshman composition program.

It thus seems as if the question of goals for freshman composition courses is a very complicated matter, connected directly to the basic sense of "program" at the institution. One of the first studies of collegiate composition programs, Albert Kitzhaber's *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teaching of Writing in College* (1963), centered on the dispute over such goals, in a narrow sense. What he then called "therapy" is now widely accepted, and rather readily defined, in remedial composition programs. What he wisely called "theories" remains a welter of conflicting procedures and aims, embodied in hundreds of textbooks and generally uncoordinated classes of regular freshman composition. The smaller the size of the staff and the lower their status, the more readily they can be affected by composition program decisions, such as a definition of goals. As composition staffs increase in size, and as more and more tenured or tenure-track faculty participate, the role of the writing program administrator changes. Under these conditions, goals statements seem to link directly with considerations of faculty development and the very concept of goals expands beyond student performance into faculty performance and even to campus climate.

Faculty Retraining

We have noted the distinction made by most of the writing program administrators we interviewed between knowledge of (and influence upon) what is done in class by the tenured as opposed to the part-time faculty. In earlier articles we reported the reluctance and even adamant refusal of some tenured and tenure-track faculty to participate in lower-division writing class instruction. As everyone knows, the teaching of writing, particularly at the lower-division or remedial level, remains a low-status activity in most English departments, generally delegated to the least experienced and lowest paid members of the staff. Nonetheless, for various reasons (such as declining enrollments in literature courses), more and more of the senior and tenured staff at many institutions have become involved in the teaching of writing during the last decade. Ironically, because of the recent burgeoning interest in writing instruction as a legitimate field of study, many part-time instructors who are new graduates may be better informed about writing theory than their more prestigious colleagues, and may even have been trained in teaching writing.

For these reasons, we were very interested in the ways writing program administrators attempted to extend their influence over the full-time, tenured and tenure-track faculty teaching writing. Our composition coordinators use the phrase "faculty retraining" or "faculty development" to refer to an entire range of activities whose goal it is to help ease the transition for the literature-trained faculty who must now function as writing course instructors. From our interviews we find that

these activities can be as marginal as circulating a research article or as vigorous as requiring a completion of a graduate course in composition theory.

Further our analyses indicate that faculty retraining is one element of the writing program administrator's job that our interviewees consciously decided either to accept or ignore. Most of those we interviewed chose to take on the challenge as an important, if frustrating, aspect of their work, an obligation with implications for many other parts of the job. Among the comments of those coordinators who report attempts at retraining activities, we find persistent statements of frustration and limited success, but also one rather surprisingly hopeful note.

Six of the twelve coordinators interviewed take a very active role in retraining faculty: E, J, J(B), I, Q(B), and S. Coordinators for programs E and Q(B) require faculty to complete a graduate course on writing before they may teach in the composition program. The Program E coordinator teaches this course as part of a Masters degree program in composition offered by the English department. The Q(B) program relies on a course for non-English department faculty teaching in the interdisciplinary department where the Q(B) writing program is housed. While these "requirements" may ensure greater compliance or success in reaching those full-time faculty who will be teaching in the composition program, no doubt they also serve to discourage faculty from volunteering to teach writing.

The other four program coordinators are considerably less formal in their approach. These program coordinators run loosely organized social gatherings in which composition is the formal topic for discussion. However, these coordinators describe their difficulties in drawing tenured and tenure-track faculty into these activities. Success appears to be largely affected by the level of energy and commitment on the part of the coordinator. Those who are more successful in drawing their faculty tend to have consistent, systematic offerings. They also clearly put substantial time, effort, and, sometimes, personal cash into the organization of the activity.

ENGL-I: We have an informal luncheon meeting called "comp. meetings" held perhaps once every six weeks, in which we, as a faculty, are to read an article and discuss it. Or have an individual faculty member come and discuss an article on which he may be working, on composition, or which he has read and wishes to use as focal point for an hour, an hour and a half discussion.

INT: Are those well attended?

ENGL: I'd say we have perhaps eight to ten faculty. Often the people who attend the meeting and are the most interested are also those who know the most about it, and those who need it the most are nowhere to be seen. They were better attended at first and it really depends on the person who's got the energy to do the paper work and recruiting.

COMP-J(B): It is usually a Saturday workshop or something in someone's home. And it is casual and we have pie and coffee. But sometimes some very good suggestions come out of that. Everyone brings his or her favorite essay or project or whatever. We exchange a lot of ideas.quite often they are at my house and I provide a little dinner party or some hors d'oeuvres or something. How are you going to get people there otherwise? You can't pay them. You have to have some sort of a carrot.

INT: And do they respond to this carrot?

COMP: Most of them show up.

COMP-S: And the [full-time faculty], they take the time to say I'd really like to come to that [meeting] but I can't. And I think part of it is that conflict in their souls between composition and literature. They say, 'Look, I'm going to give just so much time a week to composition. I believe in it—teaching [it] is an important thing, but I'm not going to that discussion session. It's too much of my time.' So it's a really interesting paradox, and yet the interest is there. Oh, they'd love to know in two seconds what happened at that discussion session. But they don't want to take that hour and a half.

For the most part, the more successful formal faculty development efforts use one of two approaches: 1) mandatory, enforced prerequisite coursework in composition before assignment to teach composition, and 2) socially contexted "meetings" which are not overtly designated as "faculty development" meetings, but for which composition topics and materials are prepared in advance. It is important to note that the two programs with prerequisite coursework are on campuses with graduate Masters programs in composition, and that the required course is one of the core seminar courses in the Masters degree program. Relatively few campuses have such degree programs to draw upon. Further, in our interview sample, the "socially contexted" approach to retraining arises in the smaller composition programs. In such settings most faculty members know each other well and may feel that the socially positive aspects of the session compensate for the labor of the learning that goes on. Personal closeness may overcome the traditional professional distance. In addition, on a smaller campus it may be harder to escape meetings unnoticed.

It does seem clear that direct efforts to solve the problem of faculty retraining in composition are largely unsuccessful in drawing the tenured and tenure-track professors. It is not hard to figure out a key source of this resistance: until recently, composition instruction was a "service" performed by the English department for the benefit of the campus and the English department's own graduate students who were employed to teach the course. In short, it has traditionally been a task without academic recognition or reward. As every writing program administrator knows, influential faculty in most English departments continue to deny that composition is a field of study, or, in any event, that it is a field about which they have anything to learn.

Though it sounds like a losing battle, faculty development for regular faculty need not be; we have discovered a very simple event that succeeds in drawing all writing instructors and getting them to interact on the subject of composition instruction. An important additional benefit accrues to this event: establishing some comparability in instructional goals across classes taught by these different faculty members. This successful process is simply group scoring of student essays written to a common topic. These occasions arise on several levels: system-wide for the scoring of placement test writing samples, campus-wide for the scoring of essay exams certifying students' writing competence for graduation, and of course, in the department for common exams across sections of a course.

Those coordinators heading programs in which common essay assignments are given talk about the positive "side effects" of a process which entails gathering faculty members together to select and word the essay topic, develop the scoring guide, and read and score papers. Among the benefits they describe are the opportunity for interaction between tenured and tenure-track faculty and adjunct or part-time lecturers, discussion of composition theory, and sharing of instructional methods. They also describe reports of change in class instruction, such as an increase in assignment of in-class writing.

Consider the long excerpt below from our interview with the composition coordinator for the program on campus D. The first set of remarks describe his largely unsuccessful efforts to draw full-time faculty to retraining sessions on composition. The second set of remarks address a question about his knowledge of what goes on in the classrooms of his composition instructors. Earlier in the interview this same coordinator reports repeated frustration from his failures in faculty development.

COMP-D: When I first started [here], we did that constantly....where we would beg people to come, browbeat them, invite them, plead with them, bribe them with wine and cheese, and do everything we could to get them to come and listen to some of our best people talk about everything from grading techniques to massive theories of composition....

COMP-D: The [common] final exam allows a great deal of [influence on full-time faculty] to occur. The common final exam, not just for being able to go back over and work with the statistics and the calculator, but the committee work that comes prior to that, working with people and setting up the topics, talking about the theory of composition. They bring in topics, possible topics. You learn something about it; you make comments and make an effect on people and vice versa: 'You can't make students write on that.' Also, the [exam] reading sessions, where you spend a whole day with all your composition staff, at every level [lecturer to tenured]. They're talking about composition; that's the focus. And prior to that, everybody went his own separate way and you never really knew what was going on.... There's an example of how you can affect your individuals, including brand new part-time people, on the basis of something like a [common] final

exam. We have a prewriting segment built in to the final exam where students may not write in their blue books for half an hour. People who may never have heard of prewriting before, it's hard to believe nowadays, we inform them in the beginning of the semester what the exam is all about.

Summary and Conclusions

This article describes data on two of several issues uncovered by our interview analyses. These two issues, composition program goals and faculty retraining, are among our most intriguing because findings were not what we expected.

We did not find many instances of composition program goals or theoretical perspectives on writing instruction describing expected student gains in writing skills, knowledge about the writing process, or attitude toward writing. On some campuses, we find descriptions, goals, and activities for remedial coursework, most often defined in terms of the students' ability to profit from regular composition course instruction (a sort of "readiness" goal). But we did not find any statements of goals for the students in regular composition courses.

The practice of college-level composition programs seems to argue against the statement of fully articulated goals for students in freshman and remedial writing courses. Perhaps we ought to have looked for such goals as successful "consciousness raising," for English department faculty as well as for faculty in other departments. When we re-examine our own data in this light, we find that this approach reveals curious, even useful findings. In the CSU, that "consciousness raising" is being spurred by a strong incentive, an upper-division writing competency requirement for graduation. We have found evidence that the way in which a campus (and English department) deals with that requirement reflects both the programmatic nature of its lower-division writing courses and the relative interest and knowledge on the part of English and non-English faculty. We even have some evidence that student writing performance at the freshman level has a relation to the way the campus as a whole deals with this kind of graduation writing requirement.

The second issue we discussed in this article focuses upon the writing faculty themselves and efforts to "retrain" literature professors for their secondary role as writing instructors. Throughout our data analyses (in this and our previous two articles in this series), we found distinctions between part-time, contract instructors or lecturers and regular tenured or tenure-track faculty. In comments by our interviewees and in questionnaire responses from the instructors themselves we find this distinction holds up. But the meaning of this distinction is far more complex and difficult to understand than we expected.

We also detect a strong, if as yet undemonstrated, assumption that tenured faculty know less about the teaching of writing than do newer faculty because they tend to know less about new writing theory. And, we find corollary assumptions, such as that tenured faculty are less competent writing instructors, that they need "re-training," that they need to be monitored or evaluated. At the same time, we find inequities in the opportunities for part-timers to participate in program decision-making. We find real limits to the extent of writing program administrators' authority and power of persuasion over regular faculty. We find few assurances and little use of mechanisms for assuring a common core of curriculum and instructional methods for composition courses. It appears that the staffing of composition courses greatly affects the likelihood of establishing and maintaining that elusive "program" of instruction we have been seeking.

Our data indicate that formal attempts to unify part-time and tenured instructors do not succeed. However, we have found that common essay exams offer several such opportunities to involve all writing course instructors in discussion through preparing the essay topic, setting criteria, and scoring papers.

Notes

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²Other members of the research team are Ron Basich, The California State University Chancellor's Office, Office of Analytical Studies, and English department faculty from four campuses of The California State University: Kim Flachmann (Bakersfield), Charles Moore (Sacramento), David Rankin (Dominguez Hills), William Stryker (Northridge).



Writing Assessment Test Design: Response to Two WPA Essays

Karen L. Greenberg

As a WPA who is primarily concerned with the teaching and the testing of basic writers, I was pleased to see two excellent essays on writing assessment in a recent issue of *WPA*: "Do You Agree or Disagree" by Judith Fishman and "The Phenomenon of Impact" by Lynn Quitman Troyka (*WPA*, Fall-Winter 1984, 17-26 and 27-36). However, as the current Chair of CUNY's Task Force on Writing and as a Director of the National Testing Network in Writing, I was disturbed by several of Fishman's assumptions about writing assessment and about research methodology, assumptions that overlook the findings of recent research in the field.

In her essay, Fishman does not acknowledge the literature and the relevant research on writing assessment on the design of essay test topics. Her analysis of writing assessment instruments is based on personal experience and hearsay, factors that are important but that cannot substitute for knowledge based on theory and research. For example, her primary concern about CUNY's writing assessment test is that "the test does not enable students to write at their best (even considering the constraints of testing) (18)." This concern reflects an assumption that it is possible, and necessary, to develop a test of minimum writing competencies that enables all or most of the test-takers to perform optimally. This assumption is questionable.

First, it is extremely difficult to design a test that will elicit thoughtful and sincere responses from a large and diverse population. The test must present subject matter with which all students—of both sexes, of all ages and races, and of dozens of different native language backgrounds—can become engaged. In addition, the test must be "valid" (i.e., enable a rater to rank students according to the test's criteria and to discriminate among students' differing levels of writing competence), and it must be "reliable" (i.e., yield the same relative magnitude of scores for the same group of students under differing conditions). Research on the CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test has demonstrated that it satisfies the criteria described above.¹ Can we—CUNY faculty members—refine the

test? Of course we can; and research is underway that attempts to do so. Can we, or any other testing committee, refine or redesign the test so that it "enables students to write at their best"? Not if the test's sole purpose is to determine which students are at least minimally competent college-level writers and which are not.

Researchers in writing assessment agree that a test that might enable students to do their best work as writers would have to have the following features:²

1. it would allow students to write under circumstances that approximate the conditions under which their best writing is done;
2. it would require students to do several different types of writing tasks (in order to obtain an adequate sample of their best writing);
3. it would provide ample opportunity for students to revise and to edit each of the tasks.

Writing assessment specialists agree that if one were attempting to measure students' growth as writers over a specific time or to diagnose students' writing problems, or to determine the effectiveness of a writing program or methodology, it would be necessary to incorporate the three features above into the instrument that would be used to assess students' writing skills.³ However, if one's purpose for testing is to sort students into those who need remediation in writing and those who do not, it is not necessary to address these three features.⁴ This is particularly true in the case of the CUNY test, because any errors in the test results are found and corrected by faculty on the first day of class: students write a diagnostic essay and faculty can use this essay to change students' course placement.

At many of the CUNY colleges, the test is used to place students into composition courses and to exit them from developmental writing courses. It is important to note, however, that CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs mandates only that the test be taken for placement and, if failed, that it be taken again before the completion of sixty credits. Troyka underlines this point in her essay and remarks that "no test, essay or multiple-choice, can be statistically sensitive enough to measure growth over the short haul." Thus, she adds, "colleges that re-test students after only ten to fifteen weeks of life in college are bound to be disappointed with the results, and the teachers whose final grades are determined by one test are bound to be frustrated" (31).

There are many large-scale postsecondary writing assessment programs that use a test similar to CUNY's for determining whether students have minimally competent writing skills.⁵ For example, all students

entering a state college in California or in New Jersey have to take a holistically-scored writing test that consists of a single expository question. Research on New Jersey's test indicates that it is extremely accurate in placing students into remedial and non-remedial courses: faculty agree with more than 90% of the placement decisions.⁶ The New Jersey test allows students only twenty minutes (unlike CUNY's test which allows fifty minutes). Again, research confirms that brief amounts of time are adequate for the test's purpose: "for the purpose of placement into remedial courses, a twenty minute essay produces as much information as a forty-five minute essay."

Furthermore, several colleges have adopted the CUNY test or a version of it, and they have done so for reasons that contradict another of Fishman's assumptions—that the CUNY test has become a model simply because of its "efficiency" and its "packaging." According to a survey of faculty at Drew University—one of the colleges that uses the CUNY model—the CUNY test is a "demanding" test: "they [Drew faculty] believe the CUNY test to be a much more richly discriminant instrument [than the previous test], particularly at the upper end of the scale" (Salmore, 3). Faculty at other schools using versions of the CUNY test (including Oakton Community College and Malcolm X College) have also been pleased with its validity and reliability.

Another of Fishman's questionable assumptions is that an essay test question can be sufficiently fine-tuned to enable all of the test-takers to write at their best. Some of the characteristics of a test question that she thinks would allow all students to write better include specification of an audience, specification of a purpose for addressing that audience, and attribution to an actual speaker or writer (23). She states these characteristics as if there is conclusive evidence to support their importance, but there isn't. The research findings are contradictory, and Fishman has not connected her assertions to the relevant theory of research. At first glance, Fishman's assumptions seem to be correct because many professionals have recommended full specification of the rhetorical context in designing writing assignments. However, as James Hoetker wrote in his comprehensive review of the literature on topic design, "so far there are no convincing data to show that extensive fictional contexts have any facilitating effect on students' writing" (386). In fact, Hoetker went on to state that:

First, such a scenario [a fictional rhetorical context] introduces into the testing situation all of the problems of varying individual interpretations and responses that are associated with the reading of any work of fiction. Second, the sheer amount of language that students must process is increased. Opportunities for confusion, misinterpretation, and creative misreadings are proportionately increased. Third, the more language and information students are given, the more difficult it seems to be for them to get beyond the

language of the topic to discover what they themselves have to say, so that examiners find themselves receiving, not "original response," but their "own prose back in copy speech" (387).

My experimental study of the effects of variations in essay test topics confirmed all three of Hoetker's points, as did Gordon Brossell and Barbara Ash's studies of the rhetorical contexts of essay questions.⁸

On the issue of audience awareness, there is actually some evidence that writing assignments specifying types of audiences do not elicit writing that shows more signs of audience awareness and adaptation than do assignments without any audience specified.⁹ This finding has been interpreted as evidence for a difference between a "real" audience and an "ostensible" one. If students know that the only person who will read their writing is the teacher (and in a test situation, the teacher may not even be known to them), many will ignore the ostensible audience specified by the directions and will write for the real evaluators. Moreover, sometimes specifying the audience for a writing assignment or for an essay test may influence students' writing performance in negative ways. There is some research evidence showing that students who are asked to write to a relative or to a friend may write more fragmentary prose or more informal diction and nonstandard grammar than they would write for a teacher, and their writing may be downgraded as a result.¹⁰ This research addresses Fishman's suggestion that students' writing competence should be measured by a question that asks them to write to their "Uncle Harold". Finally, in his review of the research on the effects of audience and role specification, Leo Ruth concluded that "the awareness of specific critical readers, whether they be students or others, may inhibit and complicate rather than simplify the problems of dealing with audience" (84) and that "an exceedingly complex task becomes even more convoluted as the writer realizes that in the real-world context of the assessment situation, his only real reader(s) will be the evaluator(s)" (85). Students who attempt to address both the real and the ostensible audiences at once—whether they are compatible or not—may get very confused.

Fishman also assumes that an increase in the rhetorical specificity of the CUNY test question will elicit better writing, but she believes that the "cue words" in the directions should be less specific. She and some of her colleagues feel that asking students to "agree or disagree" with a statement invites an "essay of opinion" on an "issue that they know little about." Instead, she proposes that students should answer the question, "What do you think?" and that they should "discuss your response [to the statement]." However, I would guess that "What do you think?" would cue students to begin their essays with "I think that..." and would lead to essays that do not ever go beyond personal opinion. Furthermore, as the literature on essay test topic design reveals, decreasing the specificity of the cue words in the question creates unintended

traps for students. In her analysis of the "describe trap" and the "discuss trap" of vague directions on essay tests of writing, Catharine Keech explained why these cue words are cases of "underprompting" in which the test-makers do not clarify their expectations about how the students should respond to the prompt (166). This underprompting discriminates against students who cannot psyche out the test-makers' implicit expectations. Moreover, as Keech has shown, "the apparent freedom of this instruction may become a trap if the readers who score these papers have a 'hidden agenda' that rewards conventional school-essay language" (173). In the Fishman example, if students actually wrote "what they think" and if their responses were not analytic or persuasive essays, readers might fail them.

Fishman is also concerned that the "agree-disagree" format "promotes a model of mind that does not reflect what we should be reaching for in institutions of higher learning" (81). I am not sure what she means by this, but I do know that surveys conducted by the National Testing Network in Writing indicate that this test format is preferred by most American postsecondary institutions.¹¹ It is also used for one of the essays on the College Board's English Composition Test because, according to ETS, and agree-disagree format "measures the student's ability to do the kind of writing required in most college courses, writing in which the student explains a point of view, defends it, or persuades another to accept it.... This kind of expository writing emphasizes precision in diction, logic in the presentation of ideas, and clarity of expression" (3).

Even if all of the experts in topic design could agree on the best format, cue words, and content of a writing test topic, this "ideal" topic might not enable students to write any better than they would on other topics because of a problem discussed in the literature as the "mismatch problem." Any writing assignment offers multiple opportunities for mismatches in the way that test-makers, test-takers, and test-raters interpret it.¹² I discovered this problem in my experimental research on topic design: students' interpretations of the directions and the content of my experimental topics often differed dramatically from those of the teacher-raters.¹³ The researchers at the Berkeley Writing Assessment Project have been systematically exploring this mismatch problem, and their findings are of great importance to all of us who are endeavoring to assess writing fairly and accurately. One of this team's recent findings is that students frequently focus on phrases in a writing topic or question that teachers do not feel are important for shaping an adequate response. For example, the students and teachers in one of their studies were interviewed about a writing topic that consisted of one declarative sentence stating a generalization about the topic and one interrogatory sentence asking a question about the topic. Fifty-three percent of the students said that it was important to elaborate on the idea stated in the declarative sentence, but not one single teacher felt that the declarative sentence had to be mentioned in the response.¹⁴

Experimental research conducted by Gordon Brossell and Barbara Ash confirms the idea that variations in the structure of topics may not have any effect on students' writing performance. After doing extensive field-testing of topics for the College-Level Academic Skills Test (a test that every college student in Florida must take), they found no significant differences in test scores on the different topics: The essays revealed little to suggest that writers had been helped or hindered by particular versions of topics. Subject matter similarly seemed of slight consequence. We came away feeling that as long as topics do not require special knowledge and are suited to the characteristics of the test-takers, neither small syntactical variations nor subject matter has much of an effect on essay examination scores (424).

In fact, the research conducted by Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy, members of the Berkeley team, suggests that only clarity of statement is critical: test designers must "be sure that the language of the prompt forestalls needless difficulties that arise from ambiguous wording and confusing signals," and that we should be "wary of introducing writing tasks that simulate real life" because these tasks, with their full rhetorical context, may confuse students or may elicit writing samples that will not satisfy the purposes of assessment (418-419). In order to avoid some of these problems, these researchers suggest that we do extensive pilot-and field-testing of any topics that we create and that we interview students to elicit their interpretations of the topics. And Ruth and Murphy call for further research on topic design.

True, Fishman calls for more research too, but I am concerned about the types of investigations that she characterizes as "research." She acknowledges that the work that she and some of her colleagues did was "informal research" consisting of "informal interviews." However, anecdotes and interviews conducted by interviewers with a clear bias do not constitute "research" even at the most informal level. Descriptive research is as productive as controlled experimental research, as long as the research design is adequate in scope, depth, and precision. A biased, informal investigation is not.

There are dozens of textbooks on the methods and the tools of conducting descriptive or experimental research.¹⁵ Most of these texts recommend that research must include, at the very least, the following characteristics:

1. a clear identification of the exact nature and dimensions of the problem;
2. a clear statement of the specific research objectives related to the problem;
3. a discussion of the relevant literature and of existing theory and research evidence;

4. an explanation of the validity and the reliability of the research procedures or instruments;
5. an analysis of competing interpretations for the findings.

Although Fishman calls the results of her interviews "preliminary" (24), I think that she and her colleagues made several mistakes in interviewing that greatly undermine their assertions. They did not adequately develop a detailed, uniform interview guide; and they failed to establish safeguards against interviewer bias. Neither did they conduct sufficient practice interviews to make sure that interviewers had acquired the needed skills nor did they make any provisions for calculating the reliability of their interview data. Fishman's observational research techniques were also flawed: she did not do any random sampling and she did not use any check on the reliability of her observers. Since Fishman does not describe her "survey" in any detail, one cannot judge accurately the design and administration of her questionnaire. However, it is clear that she did not attempt to obtain a random sample, but instead, selected her survey sample on the basis of convenience. WPAs who are not experienced in conducting research on writing or on writing assessment need to know that problems like the ones described above undermine the validity and the usefulness of any research findings.¹⁶

Fishman is absolutely right that any teaching or testing program "must be continually reassessed, reevaluated, studied, and probed, questioned, and requestioned" (24). In her essay, Troyka points out that the office that oversees CUNY's entire testing program has offered, and continues to offer, assistance to all faculty interested in conducting research on writing or on writing assessment. Currently, a research subcommittee of the CUNY Task Force on Writing is planning an ethnographic study of the topics on the CUNY test.¹⁷ This study will attempt to discover the various ways in which students interpret the current topic type (and various other types of topics) and how these interpretations affect students' writing processes and products in the context of the classroom and the testing situations. We are trying to design research that is valid and reliable and that can affect both testing and teaching. We believe that the ethnographic model is most appropriate because it takes into account the importance of the writing context and because it is a multimodal enterprise that incorporates surveys, interviews, participant observations, case studies, and protocol analyses.

Both Fishman and Troyka make reference to my essay on "Competency Testing: What Role Should Teachers of Composition Play?" In that essay, I wrote that:

...if we are dissatisfied with the content or the planned uses of tests to be given in our schools, we must be fully prepared to document our discontent with evidence that will be convincing to writing program administrators and testing directors. Impassioned speeches

about the corrosive effects of writing tests on students' creativity do not constitute convincing evidence; data on the number of incorrect course placements resulting from the test of data showing very low test reliability do (374).

Fishman seems to have missed my point.

Notes

¹For research reports on the validity and the reliability of the CUNY Writing Skills Assessment Test, see Mara Zibrin, *The 1979 Audit of the Writing Assessment Test* (New York: CUNY Office of Academic Affairs, 1980); Susan Ryzewicz, *The CUNY Writing Assessment Test: A Three-Year Audit Review* (New York: CUNY Office of Academic Affairs, 1982); and Karen Greenberg, *CUNY Writing Faculty: Practices and Perceptions* (New York: CUNY Office of Academic Affairs, 1983). The complete list of research monographs on the testing program can be obtained from the CUNY Instructional Resource Center, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

²For a discussion of the characteristics of effective tests of writing, see Charles Cooper and Lee Odell, Eds., *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977); Charles Cooper, Ed., *The Nature and Measurement of Competency in English* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1981); and Davida Charney, "The Validity of Using Holistic Scoring to Evaluate Writing: A Critical Overview" *Research in the Teaching of English*, 18 (February 1984): 65-81.

³For a discussion of the relationships between a writing test's characteristics and its purpose, see the works listed in Note 2 above.

⁴Charles Cooper and Lee Odell, "Introduction," *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977), 20.

⁵For the results of a survey on the writing assessment practices of NTNW member institutions, write to me at National Testing Network in Writing, CUNY, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

⁶For research on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Testing Program, write to William Lutz, Chair, English Department, Rutgers University, Camden, NJ 08102.

⁷William Lutz, *Statewide Testing in New Jersey* (Camden, NJ: Rutgers University, 1979), 6.

⁸I found that specification of a fuller rhetorical context confused students. See Karen Greenberg, *The Effects of Variations in Essay Questions on the Writing Performance of CUNY Freshmen* (New York: CUNY Office of Academic Affairs, 1981). Brossell and Ash found that changes in the writer's role and purpose had little effect on students' writing or on their test scores. See Gordon Brossell and Barbara Ash, "An Experiment with the Wording of Essay Topics," *College Composition and Communication* 35 (December 1984): 423-426.

⁹For a discussion of the effects of audience specification in a topic, see Patrick Woodworth and Catharine Keech, *The Write Occasion* (Berkeley: Bay Area Relationships: Analysis or Invention," *College Composition and Communication* 31 (May 1980): 221-226; Douglas Park, "The Meanings of Audience," *College English* 44 (March 1982): 247-257; and Leo Ruth, "Sources of Knowledge for Designing Writing Test Prompts," *Properties of Writing Tasks*, Ed. Leo Ruth, ERIC ED 230 576.

¹⁰For research on audience specification, see Note 9.

¹¹To obtain this survey, see Note 5.

¹²For research on "mismatches" in the interpretation of essay topics, see Karen Carroll and Sandra Murphy, "A Study of the Construction of the Meanings of a Writing Prompt by Its Authors, The Student Writers, and the Raters," *Properties of Writing Tasks*, Ed. Leo Tuth, ERIC ED 230 576 and see Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy, "Designing Topics for Writing Assessment: Problems of Meaning," *College Composition and Communication* 35 (December 1985): 410-422.

¹³For information on my study, see Note 8.

¹⁴For information on this study, see Note 12.

¹⁵Three of the most accessible texts on research methodology and tools are Earl Babbie, *Survey Research Methods* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc, 1973), John Best, *Research in Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), and Deobold Van Dalen, *Understanding Educational Research* (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1973).

¹⁶For further information on the various techniques for conducting valid and reliable research, consult the last twenty-five issues of *Research in the Teaching of English*. This journal includes excellent examples of all of the many techniques for studying writing: controlled experiments, quasi-experiments, correlational analysis, longitudinal analysis, case studies, protocol analysis, and ethnographic studies.

¹⁷For an overview of ethnographic research in English, see Kenneth Kantor, Dan Kirby, and Judith Goetz, "Research in Context: Ethnographic Studies in English Education," *Research in the Teaching of English* 15 (December 1981): 293-310.

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Spreading the Good Word: The Peer-Tutoring Report and the Public Image of the Writing Center

Thomas Hemmeter

In her assessment of the growing pains of writing centers, Muriel Harris frankly admits that writing centers have an image problem linked to the fact that "outside the lab too many people don't really know what we do or how we do it."¹ Whether with students, administrators or faculty, ongoing communication between writing centers and other sectors of the university is vital to their continued growth and maturity. Much attention has recently been given to one important constituency, the faculty. Jeanette Harris notes the importance of reaching out to the faculty in our efforts to expand the writing center audience across the curriculum:

Good public relations are important to any tutorial program but are especially vital to one that is expanding in new directions. Although most public relations efforts are student directed, aimed at students who might use the center, a multi-disciplinary program must direct its efforts primarily toward instructors.²

She goes on to suggest individual conferences with instructors and faculty workshops as means of making contact and communicating with instructors. Peggy F. Broder emphasizes that even with members of English departments there is a need for "frequent reciprocal communication about writing assignments. No lab can function effectively with an English department unless tutors are fully informed about assignments that students are working with." She further notes that teachers "should receive a brief summary of what aspects of the paper were worked on. This can be done simply with a checklist or the tutor can write a brief summary."³

While I agree that ongoing communication with the faculty is important, I would suggest that in adopting this perfunctory attitude toward written records of tutorials we might be neglecting a resource for improving a writing center's image, a resource so obvious that we tend to overlook it: the well-written tutor report. Such direct communication between a tutor and the teacher of the student tutored can do much to reverse the all-too-common attitudes of indifference or mild hostility towards writing centers on the part of faculty, who quite understandably distrust such no-credit, para-academic entities associated with counseling or education programs. While I am aware of the dangers of linking

writing center tutorials to classroom teaching—described by John Trimbur as a consequence of adopting the support service model with its subordination of tutor to classroom instructor⁴—I think the pitfalls of trial and conventional tutoring can be avoided and significant gains in faculty use of and respect for peer tutoring can be realized through direct written contact between tutor and teacher.

Efforts to establish meaningful communications between faculty and tutor are not without risks, however, and the problems are particularly acute in communications between peer tutors and teachers because the latter often look upon peer tutors as students trying to do a job for which they are not qualified. For example, teachers will pounce upon errors in reports as evidence of the inadequacy of peer tutoring. Obviously, poorly written tutor reports can undo the writing center director's efforts to secure faculty trust in the value of peer tutoring, and instead of improving the image of the writing center such reports ironically achieve precisely the opposite effect. Yet the risks do not outweigh the potential gain: well-written reports sent regularly to the faculty demonstrate as no other communication can the value and quality of peer tutoring, help to bridge the communication gap among tutor, student and teacher, and establish in immediate, concrete form the importance of a writing center.

Having become aware through negative feedback of the damaging nature of sketchily or hurriedly written, poorly organized, and error-filled reports, I took steps to improve our writing center's report writing and in the process discovered a method of upgrading the academic respectability of the writing center. In outlining this method I will focus on three areas: the tutor report as a circuit of communication; the qualities and format of an effective report; and the training of peer tutors in report writing.

The writing center director must first of all establish a circuit of communication if she/he hopes tutoring reports to function meaningfully. Tutors are instructed to describe their tutorials, taking notes during or immediately after conference and writing the report as soon as possible. Periodically these reports are photocopied and sent to the students' classroom teachers. I do this about once a month. A letter explaining the function of the writing center and inviting responses should accompany the first reports sent each semester. Teachers are informed that to protect students' rights and to keep the information exchange open and positive, students voluntarily using the writing center have the right to keep their reports private. Although most students opt to have their reports sent as proof of effort to correct writing deficiencies, faculty cannot use the reports as monitoring devices since some of their students may choose not to have their reports sent. Feedback from professors is communicated to the concerned tutor, student, or the entire tutoring staff if appropriate. At St. Lawrence we have generated a list of effective and ineffective report writing and tutoring techniques from faculty

responses to reports. When operating efficiently, this communication circuit helps promote real progress in writing while protecting the sensitive tri-partite relationship among students, faculty and writing center tutors. All parties know what tutoring work is in progress.

To prevent poorly written reports from short-circuiting this communication process, the writing center director must train tutors to write clear and complete reports in correct standard English. This first entails a clear definition of the qualities and format of an effective report. I have isolated four criteria: objectivity, tact, completeness, and mechanical correctness. To maintain the posture of objectivity in a report, the tutor must avoid subjective remarks on the attitude of the student or the quality of the work. Not only do such comments make the tutorial appear less professional and the tutor overly involved with non-writing problems, they endanger the relationship between writing center and academic classroom by interposing a tutor's judgment between teacher and student. Most often these remarks take the form of praise for the quality of a draft, commonly something like "the organization of Cheryl's paper was very good but she had problems with sentence structures." I stress to tutors that such a judgmental comment as the one above, that the organization of a paper was good, offers no possibility for gain but carries the potential for much harm. If the teacher recognizes the organization of a paper as good, there is no need for the tutor's confirmation in a report. But if the teacher disagrees with the tutor's evaluation and decides that the paper is poorly organized, the tutor's credibility will have been undermined for having stated the opposite conclusion in the report.

Two misconceptions motivate tutors to make evaluative remarks in their reports: a misunderstanding of the appropriate tutor role and a confusion of audience for the report. In the former case tutors sometimes feel they must play the role of a teacher, one with the authority to make judgments on the merits and demerits of a paper, in order to legitimize their tutoring. Whether motivated by insecurity, vanity, or just carelessness, these tutors fail to realize that in arrogating to themselves the power of professorial judgment they might be colliding with the teacher's judgment, not only on the paper in question but on their own roles as tutors. In discussing the following report with its writer, I tried to get her to see that her comment on the paper's organization might interfere with the teacher's evaluation.

Doug seemed to understand the basic concepts of indifference curve analysis. His paper was well-organized but he needed to define his terms more clearly and he has a "lot" of spelling errors.

Every statement includes a judgment of one sort or another. The first is not so damaging since the tutor qualifies the judgment with the word "seemed," but the second sentence includes a bald evaluation on the paper's organization and a most teacherly comment on the excessive number of errors. I counsel tutors to recognize that the power of the

grade and therefore meaningful judgment lies in professors' hands, and that the tutors' role, difficult though it may be, is not that of teacher or judge but of peer, of sympathetic and experienced reader. The tutor rewrote the report as follows:

Doug's rough draft had two main problems running throughout the paper—clear definition of terms and spelling. We worked on defining terms like "indifference curve" and "absolute conditions" more completely. I kept asking Doug questions and he began to see that what he had written was incomplete. He rewrote one definition. I helped him correct the spelling in one paragraph, pointed out his tendency to misspell words with double letters, and advised him to go over the finished draft very carefully. I offered to teach him to proofread his final draft if he returned.

Clearly this tutor is no longer invading the professor's territory and the report reflects a clear understanding of the interactive roles of tutor, student and teacher.

A second, associated misconception motivating positive judgments in tutor reports derives from an unclear perception of the precise audience for the report. In the beginning tutors often have an ambiguous audience in mind, one consisting of both teacher and student. Consequently, since positive feedback and encouraging remarks are stressed in tutor training sessions, the tutors write evaluative statements of praise into the reports as though the student were the reader. I encourage tutors to isolate teachers as the sole audience and to think of their reports as messages between tutor and teacher. They must separate what they say in a tutorial from what they write about that tutorial: in the former case they speak in private as a peer to a fellow student struggling through a paper and should make as many positive remarks as possible; in the latter case they speak in public as a tutor to the teacher and should avoid judgments as much as possible. For the tutors this is a useful exercise in the value of audience analysis in writing.

In discovering this audience confusion I also stumbled upon the source of another problem in the writing of tutor reports: the absence of tact. In correcting the remarks of positive evaluation in the reports, I led some tutors to think that they were not supposed to say anything positive in a tutorial just because they were asked not to make positive judgments in report. Naturally this attitude was reflected in negative or sarcastic comments in their reports, again oversimplifying the rhetoric of the tutor report. While the student may not be the reader of the report, he or she is definitely involved in this communication (as the subject of the writing) and has certain rights, in particular the right of freedom from libel. Again tutors need to become aware of their reports as public documents whose contents may be damaging. Even though a student may have been rude or uncooperative in a tutorial, the tutor must keep a professional, unemotional distance both in tutorial and in report writing.

In reporting on a common type of unproductive tutorial in which the student brings in a finished paper for the tutor to touch up and approve—without suggesting changes requiring the student to retype the paper—a tutor might follow this politic model report:

Fritz came in with an already-typed paper and wanted to work on spelling only. We went over the paper and corrected a few mistakes. Problems were also noticed with paragraphing, sentence structure and capitalization.

Without having stated directly that the student did not take seriously any suggestions for change, the tutor has conveyed quite clearly to the teacher the student's attitude and the tutor's recognition of the problems in the paper. It is there for the teacher to read in the first sentence indicating that the student brought in the paper already typed and clearly wanted to make only cosmetic changes so as not to have to retype the paper. This report manages to protect the tutor's integrity without damning the student.

To promote completeness as well as objectivity in reports, I advise a three-part structure for descriptions of tutorials: a clear direct statement of the writing problem(s); a brief description of the specific work done in attempting to solve the problem(s); and concluding remarks pointing out writing problems not taken up in this particular conference and scheduling future tutorials. The first two steps ensure that the teacher learns what actually occurred in the tutorial and the third gives a sense of closure even while making plans for further writing instruction. In discussing the tutorial in a problem-solving context, the tutor not only maintains a non-judgmental neutrality but keeps the focus on what the teacher is truly interested in: meaningful work on the student's writing problems. While faculty in the sciences have expressed appreciation of this report format, faculty in the humanities likewise appreciate a report's clear focus on the writing problem, as exemplified in this tutor's report and the English professor's written response:

Charles brought in his rough draft. He had written five paragraphs on the ineffectiveness of the new drinking age law. We discussed the lack of detail in his essay and although he didn't have a lot of time before it was due, he left to rewrite one of his paragraphs and he will come back with it later tonight. I suggested that next time he bring in his rough draft at least a full day before it is due. We also worked briefly on the use of commas, especially after introductory clauses, and I pointed out various spelling errors and suggested the use of a dictionary.

In an unsolicited note the student's teacher wrote,

Very nice job of reporting on the tutor's part as well as keen understanding of Charles' problems. I'm impressed and grateful for

the help to me and Charles. I feel certain that he will return to the WC—oops! Writing Center. He wants very much to do well.

As the first sentence of this note indicates, the teacher appreciates the report's focus on the student's writing problems.

One necessary feature of an effective statement of the writing problem(s) is specificity. In the report above the tutor clearly refers to "five" paragraphs on the particular topic of the ineffectiveness of the drinking age law, and he refers not merely to mechanical problems but to the use of commas before introductory clauses. In reading such a detailed account, the teacher becomes aware not only of the particular nature of the writing problems but of the careful, knowledgeable instruction of a competent, concerned tutor. We know from our own reading that abstract, vague writing is less interesting and given less attention than detailed prose. In the following two reports on tutorials for paper structure, both of which follow the structural guidelines mentioned above, the former appears pale and lifeless when contrasted to the latter.

Becky brought in her draft. We worked mainly on organization. She had all her ideas, and needed a direction in which to write. We worked on an order of ideas for her paper. She was using her ideas in such a way that they were spreading out all over. We grouped together ideas relating to one another, and tried to find an order in which to put them in her paper. We did not, however, get to work on the following: transitions, diction and grammar. I suggested that she return when she is first starting a paper for help in organization and thesis writing so that she may also receive help in the other problem areas before the paper is due.

Sarah and I spent considerable time making sure that all her points were relevant to her thesis. We worked through her examples and found that many did not adequately reinforce the point she was trying to make. Her paper was heavily laden with "Elizabeth" examples, and light on the "Mr. Darcy" side, although her thesis gave them equal importance. I stressed parallelism to her—if she is devoting her paper to the simultaneous "growths" of E. and D., then her examples should parallel one another. We eliminated (zap!) a lot of tangential stuff, as well as a whole lot of repetitions and summing-up statements. Her conclusion did not address the specific ideas covered in the paper; i.e., she saw growth in terms of revelation within the paper, but then defined it as new-found generosity in the conclusion. Sarah does not know how to use semicolons.

This second report displays a lively mind at work, not only in the writing but in the tutorial. The detailed references to the particular characters of the novel and to the ideas of the student's paper contribute to the sense that this is a real voice speaking about a particular tutorial,

while the abstract diction of the first report belongs to a textbook voice speaking about the tutorial as though it were one among several of this same general type. As the teacher's comments above indicate, the faculty are concerned about individual students and like to see individual attention given to the particular problems of each student. While the tutor writing the first report may have given individual attention to the student, it is not reflected in the writing of the report, whereas the writing in the second report clearly reflects personal attention to the particular student.

This latter report, however, also reveals a failure of tact in the tutor's attempt to conclude the description. While I do ask that reports end with comments citing writing problems not taken up in the tutorial, to state so baldly that "Sarah does not know how to use semicolons" is not only blunt, it is also possibly untrue and fails to inform the teacher whether the tutor advised the student of the weakness, worked with the student at all on this problem, or even mentioned this mechanical problem to the student. A better close to this report might have been as follows: "I mentioned to Sarah that semicolons are consistently misused in the paper and that, since we had run out of time, she could bring the paper back tomorrow afternoon to review the rules. Although she did not make an appointment, she said she would get some help with this problem before handing the paper in." I counsel tutors to end their reports with some such statement pointing out writing problems not taken up in the tutorial and commenting on future tutorials not only to give the report a formal close and to protect tutors from faculty assumptions that they did not recognize or work on certain problems in a paper, but also to remind tutor, student and teacher that progress in writing comes step by step, one problem at a time. I advise tutors to focus on one or, at the most, two different writing problems in a single tutorial, so that in openly listing other problems recognized but not worked on, the tutor clearly puts the responsibility on the student to reschedule another appointment to address these problem areas. In noting this in the report as well as informing the student, the tutor ensures that all parties in this complex writing interchange are aware of their actions and advice.

Although this three-part format may seem rigid, in practice it produces a great variety in reports. For one thing, the format stretches to accommodate the numerous types of writing problems brought to the writing center. This same format works for literary analysis papers, laboratory reports, economics papers, research papers in the social sciences, and tutorials in basic grammar and punctuation. Since it follows the conventional paper structure—introduction, body and conclusion—the report format appears familiar and natural to both readers and writers. In training tutors to follow this report format, I labor to keep the form from hardening into an inflexible mold which might inhibit individual expression or a lively voice. No organizational structure is valuable if it cramps expression into lifeless prose. While I want a neutral voice, I

do not want a dead voice. In introducing this reporting method, I work from actual reports written over the years by tutors in the writing center, using individual examples to focus on the different responses appropriate to different tutoring situations. We review over a dozen model reports, discussing how the tutor reported on recalcitrant students, failed conferences, pre-writing conferences, tutorials on the basics, etc. I reproduce the reports, mostly superior examples, precisely as they were written, giving me the opportunity to comment not only on the structural features but also on the writing style and voice.

I also work to preserve each tutor's individual voice within the report format by giving feedback to each tutor on her or his reports as they are written. I try to read through the accumulated reports at least once a week, writing the tutors notes of praise or criticism on tutoring methods, format of report, and writing style and correctness. Though reading through the reports consumes a few hours of my week, the time is well spent, keeping me current and involved in tutoring problems and activities in the writing center. Some might object that this eavesdropping violates a privileged communication among tutor, teacher, and student, an illegal wiretap into this circuit of communication, but I maintain that the nature of report writing is public and reports should be open to scrutiny. The content of the report—the details of the particular tutorial—is of course kept confidential, but both student and tutor need to learn that writing is not an obsessively private affair but a social exchange and that improvement comes only through public exposure.

Habitually checking over tutor reports returns an additional dividend in preventing poorly written reports from reaching teachers. Although few tutors need to work on their reporting writing by the middle of the semester, I continue to read all reports to ensure a uniformly high quality of writing. In effect I edit the reports to protect the image of the writing center as truly a center of effective writing. While my editing is minimal—I always protect the tutor's voice and never change the substance of what is said—I will ask a tutor to delete obvious errors and to change a tactless or careless remark. The faculty at St. Lawrence have responded favorably, appreciating the clear description of tutorials with their students. I present one final model report with the teacher's response as confirmation of the value of well-written reports in bolstering the reputation of a writing center.

Debby came in with a summary and critique of an experiment in "Type A" and "Type B" students. Her main problem was a lack of support for the ideas in her critique. She would make a statement and then state her opinion again in a different way, but she did not explain or support her points. I asked her many questions, and she wrote down a few sentences to add. However, she still did not seem to fully understand what evidence entails. I invited her back tonight if she wanted to work more extensively on the support in her paper.

Other problems were misuse of colons and semicolons; dropped "s" endings on nouns and verbs; a few transitions. We worked briefly on some of these, but we did not have time for extensive work. I mentioned to Debby that she might want to make an appointment in the future to work on these.

I received the following note from Debby's teacher:

I would like to compliment one of your tutors, Tom Rickey, on his report on Debby Lane. It sounds like Tom is doing a good job of getting students to express their point of view clearly (with evidence) and not just correctly (e.g., punctuation). While all of the reports I received were informative, Tom's report was particularly well done.

Not only did the teacher learn from the report that meaningful work was taking place in the writing center, he understood that the writing center proceeded on the sound principle of emphasizing clear and well-supported writing over correct writing. In conveying this writing principle to the teacher so directly and concretely, through a tutorial of one of his students, the report had communicated a difficult but important concept more effectively than any writing center director's memorandum, meeting, or conference with the teacher could have done.

In providing the faculty clear, complete pictures of tutorials, well-written reports dispel the air of mystery hanging over writing center activities, bringing to light the meaningful teaching of a difficult skill. Faculty awareness of and support for writing center tutoring helps maintain the precarious balance between serving students and serving faculty. Both must be served if the writing center is to play a meaningful role on a college campus. The tutor can neither write the paper for a student nor act as the teacher's aide; neither frustrate the student's needs nor disappoint the teacher's hopes. The pedagogical role is difficult, but it is impossible without clear understanding among student, faculty and writing center. Such understanding must be cultivated through effective communication. This is after all, the writing center's *raison d'être*. Clear and articulate reports put into practice what writing center directors preach: they are a picture in words of the value and importance of effective and informed talk about writing. The faculty will believe what they see.

Notes

¹Muriel Harris, "Growing Pains: The Coming of Age of Writing Centers," *The Writing Center Journal*, II, No.1 (Fall/Winter, 1982), 5.

²Jeanette Harris, "Expanding the Writing Center Audience," *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1983), 42.

³Peggy F. Broder, "Such Good Friends: Cooperation Between the English Department and the Writing Lab," *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 5, No. 2 (Winter, 1981), 8-9.

⁴John Trimbur, "Students of Staff: Thought on the Use of Peer Tutors in Writing Centers," *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 7, Nos. 1-2 (Fall/Winter, 1983), 34-35.



"ACCESS": Retaining Underprepared College Freshmen through Coordinated Instruction in Literacy Skills and General Education

Laurel Corona and Bruce Keitel

Substantial research and common sense indicate that low persistence and graduation rates are the natural consequence of academic underpreparation among minority and disadvantaged students. Although specially admitted students generally are screened for motivation and aptitude, they frequently lack sophisticated ability to apply their natural talents. Bright minority students often come to the university, do poorly in their first semesters, grow discouraged, and disappear. Nearly three years ago, recognizing this problem, a group of San Diego State University faculty and administrators initiated "ACCESS"—"Advising—Counselling—Coordinated English Skills—Support." Jointly sponsored by the Educational Opportunity Program, The Academic Skills Center and the Department of English and Comparative Literature, ACCESS provides a comprehensive program of freshman services aimed at increasing retention among minority and disadvantaged students by increasing their literacy skills and by training them in the full range of academic survival skills. In effect, ACCESS creates a "bridge" year between high school graduation and full exposure to the college curriculum, compensating for students' academic underpreparation while orienting them to the college milieu.

The centerpiece in ACCESS, the Coordinated English Skills program, recently was included in the National Directory of Exemplary Developmental Programs. Coordinated English Skills matches courses from the regular general education curriculum with reading and writing courses offered by the Academic Skills Center and the English Department. In the program, students learn to read and write effectively by mastering their general education texts and by elaborating issues and themes raised in general education classes.

All EOP students are encouraged to participate in the program, and approximately 80% of EOP's entering freshmen do enroll in course "packages." The students identified as "high risk" candidates—those whose low high school grades and substandard test scores suggest high risk of failure and eventual disqualification—are required to participate. The lowest five percent of EOP's entering freshman class is admitted to the university contingent upon participation in ACCESS.

Measuring the program's success against figures from preceding years, we discover that in its pilot semester, the Fall of 1982, ACCESS cut by more than fifty percent the number of EOP freshmen placed on academic probation. ACCESS also increased the number of students who returned for a second semester and went on to complete their freshman years. Preliminary results from a longitudinal study indicate that more than sixty per cent of the students who participated in the pilot semester are still enrolled at San Diego State University or some other four-year institution. Most importantly, the encouraging performance of the pilot group has given rise to the hope that such an immediate interventive program will result in greater persistence and graduation rates among this group and others that have followed them.

The ACCESS program's design rests on a carefully considered, comprehensive definition of "underpreparation." We do not use the term "underprepared" simply as the latest euphemism for students with marked deficiencies in basic skills; instead, our experience leads us to define underpreparation as a syndrome of academic and cultural handicaps. Although many college students need to develop reading, writing, and computation skills, we have found that teaching these skills in isolation does not effectively compensate for their lack of preparation. Moreover, the conventional wisdom implies that underpreparation signifies merely the lack of a specific body of knowledge commonly accepted as preparatory for college. That same wisdom suggests that acquisition of that knowledge constitutes fit remedy for underpreparation.

Our experience shows that underprepared students are not adequately skilled as pursuers of learning; they have not mastered the basics of efficient, autonomous learning. Successful, skilled learners would feel confident that, if they wanted to learn more about photosynthesis, they would know where and how to gather the information they needed. Even when they share the same intellectual gifts that skilled learners enjoy, underprepared learners do not share that same command of their resources. Deficiencies in an overall body of knowledge generally can be overcome by instruction, but those deficiencies are not easily overcome if students lack the skills or the methods for attaining mastery of the material. Lack of preparation pervades all phases of the learning process, but it often becomes visible only through poor academic performances.

Underpreparation frequently is disguised in strange, inconsistent classroom conduct or performance. EOP often gets calls or notes from instructors who are confused by our students' erratic performance. Typically the professor will remark that a student's attendance had been perfect, but he or she failed to show up for the midterm examination. Other professors tell us that some students have received consistently high grades on their daily or weekly assignments but have failed comprehensive final examinations. Most frequently, we hear professors comment on the discrepancy between the students' apparent efforts and

their results. One professor explained that several EOP students assiduously took notes on every word of every lecture, filling their notebooks from margin to margin with dense paragraphs and nearly perfect transcripts of the lecture materials; the professor then went on to express concern that, in their zeal, these students were capturing everything except the point. More than any other learning difficulty, we have found that underpreparation manifests itself in the inability to determine relative importance among ideas and a corollary tendency to assign equal importance to everything. Surely, none of these students could justly be accused of lack of motivation (a complaint frequently lodged against minority students), but the end product did not reflect the students' investment of effort. Because the end products—grades—determine the students' academic progress, students who exhibit these behaviors may not succeed in college. Through its comprehensive, coordinated approach, ACCESS tries to remedy the whole syndrome rather than offer a simple corrective for insufficient information.

Because we regard underpreparation as a syndrome, we believe that most skills courses and most remedial programs are limited by perimeters too narrowly drawn. We believe that teaching just reading, just writing, just study skills, or just coping skills without attention to the whole picture of the students' situations will not effect any lasting improvement in the students' skills or performance. Almost all remedial programs show decent growth rates by creating series of "Hawthorne effects," but sustained growth and improvement require focus on the student within his or her immediate academic context, complete with all its changing emotional and intellectual demands.

As program designers move from theory to practice, they must create programs which will produce efficient, autonomous learners. They must select instructors who can coach, guide, and counsel. Instructors must serve as resources for students rather than acting strictly as sources of information. Skills instructors should guide students toward significant discovery: For example, students as a rule do not need generalized lectures on sophisticated notetaking strategies; instead, they need to be guided through the experience of examining their notetaking styles, comparing their styles with their needs, and creating new techniques from the results of the comparison.

In order to serve as the kind of resource underprepared students need, skills instructors should have two tools they normally lack—information on the students' other courses and means for assessing the demands that those other courses place upon the students. The ACCESS program's strength derives in large part from the instructors' use of those tools. The program gives the instructors the information they need to develop curriculum which meets the students' needs at the moment and teaches students in one specific context skills they will need in future semesters when they are on their own.

The idea behind the Coordinated English Skills program is neither complex nor new. Many universities, including San Diego State University, have used the coordinated approach in inter-disciplinary and honors programs. ACCESS is unique, however, in its success with "high risk" students, and in its comprehensiveness. In its simplest terms, the program works by placing students in a suitable pair of writing and reading classes, and those students also take a general education class together. A graduate tutor assists in the skills class and attends the general education class with the students; the tutors then conduct study groups for the students, and study group attendance is mandatory. The reading and writing classes draw upon the general education lectures and textbooks, so that students learn skills by using real college materials, and they gain competitive advantage by practicing the skills which general education examinations will challenge. During the pilot semester, ACCESS concentrated on entry-level classes, but as ACCESS students have progressed through the general education sequence, we have tailored new, more sophisticated packages to suit their needs. The majority of packages have been organized around humanities and social science classes, but we have offered packages in the sciences, and we currently are experimenting with a package which coordinates writing and mathematics. Now completing its third year, the program has offered more than 100 packages and has served over 1500 students.

The reading and writing instructors have latitude to use general education materials in whatever ways they deem appropriate, but the coordinated approach is fairly strictly governed by the conventions in the humanities and social sciences: The general education professors are admonished to conduct business as usual, and the skills instructors are exhorted to adapt and enrich the general education curriculum. Rather than standardizing the skills curriculum, we have allowed the general education courses to dictate the substance and the methods in the reading and writing classes. In practice, the program delivers to each skills instructor a group of twenty-five students learning the same material and sharing the goal of doing well in one particular class. We do provide general guidelines for delivery of skills instruction, but the wide variety of demands in the general education classes makes standardization almost impossible. Most significantly, the variety of testing procedures in the different general education classes militates against standardization of skills instruction: Some professors still administer only multiple-choice tests while others insist on carefully written essay tests. That difference obviously implies vastly different approaches to mastery of the course materials in the different courses.

Skills instructors understand that their foremost obligation to their students is to improve their reading and writing skills. We do not expect that well-trained reading and writing specialists will abandon their specialties in the interest of becoming ersatz specialists in the humanities or social sciences; instead, we expect that they will use their expertise to

help students master general education material. For the most part, the skills instructors treat reading and writing as complementary arcs of the same circle, using highly refined versions of the SQ3R method or, in some cases, using highly sophisticated versions of the Language Experience approach. The materials, activities, and assignments derive their substance from the content of the general education courses. In the students' eyes, skills development appears both natural and necessary as they discover that their command of basic skills bears directly on their proficiency and performance in the general education courses.

Skills instructors generally assign reading and writing tasks to reinforce comprehension and command of general education material, but a representative sample of their assignments reflects the wide range of their concerns for specific literacy skills even in the context of content materials. For example, one instructor shows consistent concern for comprehension of text materials. In that professor's natural science writing class, students write short essays on solubility as a characteristic property and the conservation of mass as a law of nature. Other instructors focus on survey and summary skills: In the religious studies writing class, the professor asks students first to write on the organization and development of their textbooks; students then go on to write about the Hindu caste system, the four noble truths of Buddhism, and the human needs satisfied by all religions. Still other instructors focus on syntactic or rhetorical expertise: In the psychology writing class, students work primarily with sentence level mechanics using major concepts from psychology. In the mythology writing class, students learn paragraph and essay structures by formulating and defending theses based on information from the lectures. In some cases, instructors use writing assignments to encourage application of course material to everyday experience: In the sociology writing class, students learn about their own enculturation through their study of sociological concepts. Most of the skills instructors require daily lecture summaries, and most of them see significant gains in fluency as a result of regular summary writing.

As the program has evolved, it has increased its emphasis on reading skills. In the pilot semester, ACCESS offered only one reading development course, and the students in that course performed better than students who did not receive direct instruction in reading. In that pilot reading course, students learned and perfected each of the steps in the SQ3R reading method. They learned how to call upon background experience and develop familiarity with the text through extended surveys; they learned sophisticated decoding skills and discovery of sophisticated vocabulary in context; they learned advanced comprehension and inference skills using their text materials; and students learned to apply new information to familiar situations through integration of the writing process into regular textbook study. When materials were exceptionally difficult, abstract, or complex, students learned to schematize and

prepare flow charts which simplified the texts. In many cases, students discovered that rhetorical principles developed in their writing classes were being used by their textbook authors.

As a result of their reading instruction, students in the humanities package out-performed a similar group of students who had taken the course the previous year without the benefit of the supplemental reading and writing instruction. Fourteen of the twenty-two students enrolled in the course package received grades of C or better. More significantly, more than 65% of the students received A's or B's, and EOP students received the second and third highest grades on the first midterm, competing favorably against a total class population of 350. The whole group ended the course with an aggregate grade average of 2.3, an average identical to that for the whole class. Their performance is especially notable, because none of the students in the humanities package had entered the university with a TSWE score above 25.

Over the program's three year history, all ACCESS packages have generated student performances better than those recorded by EOP freshmen who did not have the benefit of ACCESS classes. Each year, ACCESS students' aggregate grade average has exceeded the average for all EOP. In the first year of the program, the GPA for all EOP students (including ACCESS participants) was 1.67; ACCESS participants, however, had a 1.97 average. In the years prior to development of ACCESS, EOP freshmen averaged 1.4. Because all skills classes are graded simply "credit" or "no credit," many students' GPA's were identical to their grades in the general education courses. For those students who took additional courses outside the packages, their grades in those extra classes generally were lower, but in the vast majority of cases, the students had performed satisfactorily in all their classes.

The academic probation rate among ACCESS students is significantly lower than the rate for EOP students who choose not to participate, and each year the ACCESS probation rate has grown closer to the rate among all freshmen. In the Fall of 1984, 97 students among the entering EOP freshman class chose not to take ACCESS classes; at the end of the fall semester, 57 of those 97 (58.7%) were placed on academic probation, and 16 of those students finished with grade averages of 0.00. By contrast, 66 of the 220 ACCESS participants (30%) were placed on probation, and only 11 had averages of 0.00. Also by way of contrast, the university estimates that about 20% of each freshman class finishes the first semester on probation. In general, we would like ACCESS students to perform comparably with their traditional counterparts. We would hope to see normal grade distributions in all the general education courses, and, in fact, in most courses we have seen natural bell curves. Still, as we perfect the program and grow more familiar with the intricacies of preparation for general education courses, we anticipate that the probation rate may actually fall below the comparable rate for all freshmen, and we hope to see ACCESS grade averages exceeding the averages for all freshmen.

Our experience suggests five crucial resources for implementation of a program like ACCESS.

First, the university faculty must include a cadre of dedicated, well-trained, well-skilled reading and writing specialists. The reading and writing faculty are the single greatest contributor to the program's success, contributing primarily on the strength of their intellectual capacity and their adaptability. These instructors must be facile enough in the reading and writing processes that they can adapt them to meet the demands of a wide variety of subjects. The skills instructors must also show a knack for quick and effective innovation; in some cases, they must be capable of developing and delivering curriculum materials and class activities on demand. We have found that the skills instructors must treat ACCESS as an affair of the heart. Their humane treatment of students has the same impact on students' performance that their instructional methods do.

Second, whenever a program addresses the needs of a specific population, there must be ways for program coordinators and counselors to advise that population about the program and its benefits. EOP has the advantage of employing six full-time counselors who specialize in working with minority and disadvantaged students. Those counselors' command of crisis intervention techniques and their skill in communicating with students helps students negotiate the difficult transition from high school to college, and the counselors' special skills help students clarify their values and expectations. Perhaps most importantly, the counselors help students identify with the academic and social standards in the program and in the university.

Third, the university community must include a population of capable and committed graduate students who can assist in reading and writing instruction. They must be willing to devote time and energy to attending general education classes and preparing materials for study group sessions. The program must pay these students a decent wage, and it must reward them with other perquisites, because they represent the crucial link between general education and the skills classes.

Fourth, there must be cooperation and collegial spirit among all the faculty who teach in the program. Although general education and skills instructors need not meet often, they must communicate openly when they do meet. General education instructors must be willing to supply skills instructors with book lists, syllabi, outlines of course materials, and other information which clarifies the themes in their courses and shows their expectations for students' preparation and performance. General education instructors also must help the skills teachers monitor students' progress through their courses, and the general education professors should be willing to offer advice and counsel about remedies for specific students' problems.

Finally, the university administration and the support staff must work in concert with the program director. They must share a sense of purpose and direction for the program, and they must work efficiently at taking care of administrative and logistical details.

As we have developed and refined ACCESS, we have found that nearly everyone wants to participate and cooperate, because the program clearly benefits everyone who gets involved with it. The students benefit from cultivating good skills and earning good grades. They form strong bonds with their classmates, and they develop strong support groups as they deal with the pressures of college life. The reading and writing instructors benefit from having concrete subject matter and substantive issues with which to work; they generally comment that they prefer dealing with course content to working with the traditional solipsistic or narcissistic topics that frequently dominate basic composition classes. The skills instructors gain both incentive and reassurance from their knowledge that they really are preparing students for academic success. They also avoid motivational and discipline problems, because students easily can see that their skill deficiencies bear directly on their academic performance.

The general education faculty benefit from working with groups of students who are well-prepared and responsive. One professor who has worked with the program since its inception recently commented in a meeting of department chairs and university administrators: "When I first began working with ACCESS I was skeptical at best. In my experience, EOP students always had clustered at the bottom of the grade curve, and they generally seemed alienated or frustrated. I have found, however, that ACCESS prepares and motivates them for success. Now, as a result of the program, they follow the same grade distribution that the rest of the class follows. Far more gratifyingly though, EOP students now regularly score the highest grades on my tests, and they consistently arrive in class well-prepared and ready to contribute. Not only have I abandoned my skepticism but I have come to prefer teaching ACCESS students because of their enthusiasm about my courses and about college."

Ultimately, the whole university benefits by attracting and retaining minority and disadvantaged students who successfully progress toward degrees. As a result of their successful experience in ACCESS, students develop self-esteem and great loyalty to the university. These students, in fact, help the university and special admissions programs fulfill their missions. These students discover and then demonstrate to their communities that higher education can still deliver on its promise as a means to upward social mobility.



Affiliate News

"Writing and Undergraduate Education": A Report on the First Annual NEWPA Fall Meeting

John Trimbur

New England Writing Program Administrators (NEWPA) held its first annual fall meeting "Writing and Undergraduate Education" on October 4 and 5, 1985, at Harvard University hosted by the Expository Writing Program. Eighty participants, veteran WPAs to graduate students, came from private and state universities; liberal arts, state, and community colleges; and high schools in New England and upstate New York to talk about the theory and design of campus-wide writing programs.

NEWPA is an outgrowth of the Mass Bay Association of WPAs, an organization founded a decade ago by Harry Crosby (Boston University) and Timothy R. Donovan (Northeastern University). Last spring, representatives of the Mass Bay Association of WPAs and WPAs from New England and upstate New York met at Harvard's Expository Writing Program office to discuss the need for a regional organization and to shape the format for the first fall meeting.

The conference opened with a wine and cheese reception co-sponsored by the national Council of Writing Program Administrators. Later, at dinner in the Harvard Faculty Club, NEWPA honored Harry Crosby for his years of service to our profession, a timely occasion that marked his retirement as Chair of the Rhetoric Division at the College of Basic Studies at Boston University and his reactivation as Director of the Writing Center at Harvard. Program Chair John Trimbur (Boston University) read greetings from Winifred Bryan Horner, President of the Council of WPAs, and at the final plenary session on Saturday, NEWPA members voted to affiliate with the national WPA.

Conference organizers—John Trimbur, Toby Fulwiler (University of Vermont), Tori Haring-Smith (Brown University), and NEWPA President Ben W. McClelland (Rhode Island College)—planned a series of events that involved participants actively in small group discussions and workshops. There were no major speakers, no call for papers, no formal presentations which would cast conference participants in the role of spectators. The meeting was participatory and self-reflexive, about ourselves and what WPAs talk about when we talk about writing and undergraduate education.

To keep conversation focused on this common theme, the small group discussions centered on a fictional case-study of "Platonic College." The groups met Friday and twice on Saturday, in the role of a college-wide ad hoc Task Force, to formulate a philosophy, outline a curriculum, recommend staffing and training, and forecast a schedule to implement a campus-wide writing program. The eight workshops which took place on Saturday raised issues that formed the topics of the small group discussions: the role of freshman composition, led by Richard Marius (Harvard); writing and general education, led by Bruce Herzberg (Bentley); writing and the English Department, led by Lil Brannon (NYU) and C. H. Knoblauch (SUNY-Albany); models of faculty development, led by Toby Fulwiler; maintaining writing across the curriculum programs, led by William Mullin (UMass-Amherst); peer tutoring in writing, led by Tori Haring-Smith; computing and writing, led by Sam Boothby (Harvard School of Education); and college writing programs and the high schools, led by Ben W. McClelland.

Participants were enthusiastic about what became known as the meeting's "no stars" approach to staging a day and half of professional talk. The conversations revealed the conceptual diversity of writing programs in the region and the wide range of institutional circumstances and pressures WPAs face. One of the prevailing undercurrents that surfaced periodically at the conference, sometimes quite sharply, was the tension between theory and practice, between the desire to articulate a theoretical underpinning for what we do and the daily practical need to put a program in place and make it work. As one participant noted, the conversation veered between critical probes of our working assumptions and the search for a quick fix—a tension that reflects no doubt our hybrid identity as WPAs, as faculty and program administrators.

It was not surprising that few of the issues confronting WPAs were resolved. What did emerge, however, was a strong sense of the direction and achievements of writing programs and the new questions WPAs are asking themselves and each other. The successful proliferation of writing across the curriculum programs, for example, has opened new issues for theoretical exploration and programmatic development. Many WPAs in the region are beyond the point of initiating writing across the curriculum programs and are interested now in refining our understanding of what writing across the curriculum implies for writing programs and undergraduate education. One current of thought suggested we need to know more about the relationship between rhetoric and the other disciplines, to understand how the epistemological assumptions and methodologies of the various disciplines predispose faculty toward writing and determine their responsiveness and orientation to campus-wide writing programs. A number of WPAs suggested that writing across the curriculum has been important not just in developing student writing abilities but also in reforming and improving undergraduate teaching. We need to

tap the experience of colleagues who have successfully incorporated writing into their courses and to find forums for them to present their findings.

Many participants noted that writing across the curriculum has also had a marked effect on the way we define the rationale and goals of our writing courses. The time-worn professional commitment to required freshman composition especially was subjected to critical scrutiny. The questions that arose asked, among other things, why and by what authority freshman composition is a "service" course or a "content" course with its own distinctive subject matter; who is qualified to teach writing and according to what criteria. These questions invariably raised the problematical relationship among writing programs, English departments, and undergraduate education. This problem, many WPAs felt, is a strategic one that poses a series of related issues about the nature and identity of our writing programs, the disciplinary status of composition studies, and the professional standing of WPAs.

These issues will be debated over and over again. Our ability to talk together, to locate points of common agreement, and to explore our differences in a collegial manner is an indication of the professional maturity of WPAs in the region. We plan to meet again in Fall 1986. Look for details about time, place, and theme to be announced shortly.



Contributors

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Laurel Corona developed the *Access* program while EOP Academic Services Coordinator at San Diego State University. She is currently Director of the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services at the University of California at San Diego. She received her M.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of Chicago and her Ph.D. from the University of California at Davis. She is a university fellow in the San Diego Area Writing Project. Her major professional interest is undergraduate retention, in particular, the development of transitional programs between high schools and the university to improve recruitment and retention of non-traditional students.

Karen L. Greenberg is Assistant Professor of English at Hunter College of The City University of New York, where she teaches courses in writing and linguistics. She also directs the college's Writing Center. She is currently the Chair of the CUNY Task Force on Writing, and Chair of the CCCC Committee on Assessment. Her Ph.D. in linguistics is from New York University. Her essay on "Research on Basic Writing" is included in Random House's forthcoming *Sourcebook on Basic Writing*, and her composition text will be published next year by St. Martin's Press.

Thomas Hemmeter is Associate Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at St. Lawrence University. He has read papers on composition and writing centers at the Northeast Modern Language Association and the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition. He contributed to manuals of composition materials written for the Thirteen College Program for the development of higher education at predominantly Black institutions. His article on Scorsese's *Raging Bull* will appear in a 1986 issue of *Literature/Film Quarterly*. Currently on leave, he is completing two projects: an article on collaborative teaching of writing and economics, and a monograph on a pre-service training program for peer tutors in writing centers at small institutions.

Bruce Keitel is currently the EOP Academic Services Coordinator at San Diego State University. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. He has worked in and directed a variety of special programs for minority students, including San Diego City School's Demonstration Writing Program. He also has authored a reading development program for underprepared high school students, and he is working on a series of materials using the Language Experience approach to develop content-area reading skills. He devotes his extra time to writing and illustrating children's books.

Linda Polin is Assistant Professor of Educational Computing at Pepperdine University. Her UCLA dissertation (1984) focuses on the assessment of tenth grade writing skills. She has been Associate Director of Research in the Effective Teaching of Writing project since 1981. She is responsible for all data analysis for the project and for the series of articles appearing in *WPA*.

John Trimbur is the writing program administrator of the College of Basic Studies at Boston University. He is a Fellow of the Brooklyn College Institute in Training Peer Tutors, a member of the WPA Board of Consultant/Evaluators, and chairs the NCTE Committee on the Underemployment of College Teachers of English. He has published articles and reviews on John Gardner, Charles Olson, and Jack Spicer and has contributed a chapter to *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition* (MLA, 1985).

Joseph F. Trimmer is Professor of English and Director of Doctoral Programs in Composition at Ball State University. The author of articles and books on American life and literature, he has served as the Director of the American Studies Curriculum Project (an international scholars project hosted by the Smithsonian Institute) and Director of Research for *Middletown* (a six-part film series that aired on PBS). His publications in composition include *The Riverside Reader* and *Writing With a Purpose, 8th Edition*.

Edward M. White is Professor and former chair of the English Department at California State College, San Bernadino, and Director of Research in Effective Teaching of Writing, a project funded by the National Institute of Education through the California State University Foundation. He has been coordinator of the CSU Writing Skills Improvement Program, and for over a decade was Director of the English Equivalency Program. In addition, he is the author of numerous articles on literature and the teaching of writing; he has also written several textbooks, including *Teaching and Assessing Writing* (Jossey-Bass, 1985).

Announcements

The National Testing Network in Writing, 4th Annual Conference

The National Testing Network in Writing, The City University of New York, and Cuyahoga Community College announce the FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON WRITING ASSESSMENT on April 16, 17, and 18, 1986, in Cleveland, Ohio. This national conference is for educators, administrators, and assessment personnel and will be devoted to critical issues in assessing writing in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary settings. Discussion topics will include theories and models of writing assessment, assessing writing across the curriculum, the politics of testing, computer applications in writing assessment, the impact of testing on minority students and on ESL students, and research on writing assessment. The Keynote Speaker is Rexford Brown, the Education Commission of the States, and the Closing Speaker is Elaine Maimon, Beaver College.

For information and registration materials, please write Professor Mary Lou Conlin, Cuyahoga Community College, 2900 Community College Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44115.

The National Project for College Assessment Program Evaluation (CAPE)

The National Project for College Assessment Program Evaluation (CAPE), an ongoing program supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education and the City University of New York, provides specially trained consultants who will evaluate an institution's placement, competency, or proficiency tests in reading, writing, mathematics, and English as a Second Language. A consultant team will initiate a self study of the campus testing program; will make a site visit to interview administrators, faculty, and students and will provide a detailed written report of their findings. CAPE can defray partial expenses for up to ten institutions (two and four-year) during the 1985-86 academic year. Applications for the cost sharing program and for the ongoing program are available from: Barbara Schaijer-Peleg, Project Coordinator, CAPE, The City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021.

Ninth Annual Symposium on Developmental/Remedial Education

The New York College Learning Skills Association and Rochester Institute of Technology will host the Ninth Annual Symposium on Developmental/Remedial Education on April 13-15, 1986, at Grossinger's Resort Hotel, in Liberty, New York. Dr. Claire Weinstein, University of Texas at Austin, will be the keynote speaker. Pre-Symposium Institutes will include: "Critical Thinking" conducted by Dr. Curtis Miles, Director of the Center for Reasoning Studies, Piedmont Technical College, South Carolina and "Retention" conducted by Dr. Paul Kazmierski, Assistant Vice President, Learning Development Center, Rochester Institute of Technology, New York.

For registration information contact: Marcia Birken, Chair, Ninth Annual Symposium, Learning Development Center, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1 Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, New York 14623.

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HM UPDATE

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