

Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators
Volume 14, Numbers 1-2, Fall/Winter, 1990

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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 or writing programs, coordinators of writing centers and writing 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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The length of articles should be approximately 2-4,000 words. Authors should submit an original plus two copies, with the author identified only on a separate cover letter. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you would like a copy of your manuscript returned to you. All articles are anonymously reviewed by our Editorial Board, and their responses will be forwarded to you within about ten weeks of receipt of the manuscript.

Articles should be suitably documented using the current MLA Handbook, 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 writing program administrators. The editor reserves the right to edit manuscripts to conform to the style of the journal.

Authors whose articles are accepted for publication will be asked to submit their articles both in print form and on IBM compatible disk, if possible. (An article submitted on disk using WordPerfect in particular will greatly facilitate production.) Authors will also be asked to submit a 100 word biography for inclusion in the "Notes on Contributors" section of the journal.

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Relevant announcements and calls for papers are also acceptable. Announcement deadlines: Fall/Winter issue, August 15; Spring issue, December 15.

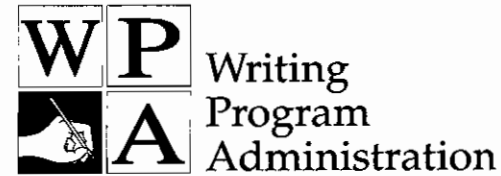
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Writing Across the Curriculum: Transforming the Academy?

Cynthia Cornell and David J. Klooster

As the Writing Across the Curriculum movement enters its second decade, participants recognize that the continuation of campus-wide writing programs is threatened. On many campuses where writing programs have existed for a decade or more, the willingness of faculty to share responsibility for writing is waning, and administrative agenda are shifting to other issues. On such campuses writing across the curriculum is struggling for survival.

In an attempt to support flagging energies, a national WAC network has gathered at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication for the last several years to discuss strategies for sustaining Writing Across the Curriculum programs. A panel at the 1989 CCCC's in Seattle devoted itself to the issue of "Building WAC Programs That Last" (Sipple). A recently published book offers advice on *Strengthening Writing Across the Curriculum Programs*. And a recent article in *College Composition and Communication* provides lessons from past, unsustainable cross-curricular writing programs to "those who are now attempting to make struggling programs into institutional fixtures, and transform an educational trend into a tradition" (Russell 185).

The irony of the situation is obvious when we consider other developments in the WAC movement. For many university administrators, writing across the curriculum remains a compelling goal. For example, an Indiana University task force has been carefully planning a new writing across the curriculum requirement. Across the nation the story is the same: new programs are beginning everywhere. In terms of numbers of participating institutions, the WAC movement has never been stronger.

The educational value of Writing Across the Curriculum, after all, has never been doubted. Articles by Fulwiler in *College English* and by Griffin and Russell in *College Composition and Communication* describe the benefits that members of the movement have long known. WAC has been singularly effective in raising consciousness on campuses across the nation about the importance of writing in the learning process. Participants acknowledge that careful and sustained attention to writing produces a host of salutary effects: colleagues from diverse disciplines engage in productive conversa-

tions about their teaching, instructors clarify their goals and develop methods appropriate to their courses, students receive increased and more effective support in the difficult process of learning to write, and the classroom becomes a more active community of learners. In addition, within the composition and rhetoric community, WAC research has helped to initiate a major reexamination of the nature and problems of academic discourse. Other unexpected benefits of WAC programs include increased faculty collaboration, improved teaching and research among participating faculty, and a greater sense that the university is in fact a community of teacher-scholars and not an accidental collection of competing researchers (Fulwiler).

A recent large-scale assessment of the ten-year-old program on the DePauw University campus confirmed such findings (Cornell et al). Our study drew responses from one quarter of our student body and two-thirds of our faculty. Students, faculty, and administrators almost universally support our program for the many reasons cited above. In addition, our evaluation gives us information beyond attitudes and individual testimonials and demonstrates what we had before only suspected: that in spite of the fact that our program is built around required writing-intensive courses, WAC hasn't limited itself to those courses. The program has produced a ripple effect, so that all across campus—in and out of the boundaries of the program—more and more writing is being assigned and supported by university faculty.

Why, then, in view of such evidence, are some WAC programs struggling?

The answer, we believe, lies in the fact that WAC programs come in conflict again and again with faulty assumptions about the educational process and with competing priorities within the university. Fundamentally, WAC forces institutions to reexamine their identity.

Threats from Faulty Assumptions about WAC

As WAC programs mature, many of them find their continuation threatened by present realities that do not accord with the initial assumptions of their founders. When we say this, we have in mind particularly those programs that intend to improve student writing as well as student learning.¹ We are not talking about the fate of programs which have limited themselves to a more modest agenda, using writing as a way of learning, with little or no attention to a final, formal written product. Nor do we question the value of such programs. We simply recognize that the learning-to-write agenda of WAC programs faces the greatest difficulty in sustaining itself.

We are also not talking about WAC programs, formal or informal, at very selective colleges where students enter with well developed learning and writing skills and need only limited instruction in academic discourse. We have in mind, instead, programs at colleges and universities that are accepting students with widely differing abilities and academic experiences and who, if they are to survive in the academy, often need extensive instruction in writing and thinking.

Assumption #1. *WAC is temporary.* Some administrations and faculties, we suspect, hoped WAC would be a short-term therapy with long-term benefits for an ailing curriculum and educational culture. As soon as some programs prove their effectiveness in improving students' performance on writing tasks (often measured with pre- and post-test writing samples), administrators may be eager to declare that the patient is well again. They may want to say that writing is back where it belongs in the curriculum and that the efforts that helped to reinstate it can be discontinued.

Our research on the DePauw program demonstrates quite clearly that to declare the patient cured and abandon the program would be to risk its gains. Faculty who participate in the program are willing to take on the considerable extra work required to teach writing and teach with writing when the university puts that work high on its list of priorities and supports it with clear curricular sanction and adequate resources. But were priorities to shift and the program to disappear, it is likely that many faculty members would revert to their pre-program practices of teaching without writing or requiring formal writing without teaching students how to do it. After a short term of therapy, we can't assume that the teaching practices of higher education will have been permanently transformed.

Assumption #2. *WAC will make our students competent writers.* Some institutions began WAC programs as a response to society's demand that students write well. This was certainly one of the founding purposes of the DePauw program, a purpose reflected in its title, "The Writing Competence Program," and in the certification procedure that marks each student's exit from the final required course in the program, the writing intensive course in a discipline.

But the claim implied in such language needs to be carefully qualified, because a misunderstanding of the realities of writing instruction and student learning can subvert support of any developmental writing program. While an extension of writing instruction into content courses certainly can help students become *better* writers as well as better learners, WAC programs cannot easily deliver on the promise of producing writers who are competent in any situation.

The data we gathered for our evaluation showed us that students do make statistically significant improvement in the grades they earn on essays written during the semester in a writing-intensive course. But our data also demonstrate something composition teachers have long known without experimental verification: the gains a student makes through writing instruction do not always transfer well from one course to another. Our students may make remarkable progress in one course, but when they go on to another, especially one in a new discipline, we may be confronted in the hallway by an astonished colleague, asking "Who taught this kid how to write?" WAC programs make this fragility of writing instruction more widely experienced within the academy but perhaps not more fully understood.

Assumption #3. *Teaching WAC courses is no more work than teaching traditional courses.* Anyone who teaches average students to write knows that writing instruction takes tremendous time and energy. Composition instructors accept this work; their colleagues in other departments may not. For some, the additional workload makes it impossible to cover all the material of a course; for others the added work cuts into their own writing. When we asked some of our colleagues at DePauw why they had not continued to participate in our WAC program, we received answers like these: "I had to choose between my students' writing and my own," or "If I had to grade one more paper, I'd sink."

A failure of administrations to address the workload issue will almost assuredly lead to a failure of a WAC program as a learning-to-write program. Some large institutions appear to be shifting the paper-marking burden to graduate assistants, especially in writing-intensive sections of large lecture classes outside the English Department, a practice fair neither to the graduate assistant nor to the student writer. In small colleges, adequate solutions are hard to find because faculty time is already spread so thin. Solving the workload problems of WAC will require creativity and commitment.

Assumption #4. *WAC can be sustained by the energies of faculty leaders and the goodwill of faculty participants.* Certainly a program cannot get off the ground without plenty of energy and goodwill. WAC leadership has been remarkably energetic; the missionary zeal of the national leaders of the movement has infected local leaders as well. But without deep sources of institutional support, WAC programs cannot last. The Berkeley and Colgate stories (Russell) tell us that, as does our own experience. Our ten year program has been staffed by a diminishing group of faculty members whose goodwill has been sustained largely by the commitment of a single faculty leader

outside the English Department. When this leader retires in five years, he may well have no successor.

Assumption #5. *WAC is cheap.* Many institutions sought grant money to get their WAC programs going. Those funding sources are typically exhausted several years into the program when it becomes painfully clear that WAC requires not just a beginning investment in seed money but huge amounts of additional capital for crop maintenance and harvest. Writing centers, writing center directors, tutors, teaching assistants, word processors, workshops for training new faculty in the program and for the renewal of veteran faculty, coordinators of the program, incentives for faculty members to take part—all of these cost money. When faculty participation is voluntary, programs may well find that after the early years of collegial cooperation and sacrifice, faculty will drift away from the program or demand compensation in time or money for their work. For many faculty members, a reduction in teaching load—in either number of students or number of courses—is the best incentive to participate in a WAC program. Clearly, for WAC to prosper, it cannot be cheap.

Assumption #6. *WAC works best at institutions where teaching is paramount.* Fulwiler, Rose, Lanham, Russell, and others have already argued that WAC programs encounter particular resistance at the kind of institution "which places research and specialized professional training above undergraduate teaching" (Russell 191). It follows, then, that if WAC works anywhere, it should work at colleges and universities that define themselves as teaching institutions. It should work at schools like DePauw. And clearly it has, at least for a decade. Our university prides itself on excellent teaching. Effectiveness in the classroom is the *sine qua non* of all personnel decisions. Research and publication requirements are modest. Ten years ago our administration strongly supported the founding of our WAC program, and it continues today to nurture the program with tangible encouragement. Faculty receive money or released time in exchange for attendance at the WAC training workshop; WAC courses limit enrollment to twenty students; participation and leadership in the program are credited in personnel decisions; special faculty development monies are available for attendance at writing conferences.

Likewise, our faculty has supported the principles of the writing movement in large numbers. Indeed, many members of the faculty have long required their students to write, especially in upper level courses. Although our students vary in their aptitude and preparation for academic work, they are diligent and pragmatic in their desire to learn to write. We've had sufficient money to run workshops, to found a Writing Center, to send

faculty leaders to conferences, and to publicize our successes. Yet despite this ideal environment and despite demonstrated success, the future of our WAC program is uncertain.

Although 104 of our 180 faculty members have participated in WAC workshops, only twenty-five to thirty regularly offer courses in the program. The rest have quietly removed themselves from official participation in WAC, which is voluntary here. Fourteen percent, then, of the faculty bears nearly the entire burden of writing-intensive courses now, and our data suggest that this same committed group assumes the heaviest responsibility for attention to writing outside the boundaries of the program. We doubt that this small percentage of our faculty, no matter how well rewarded, can maintain a strong program, and we fear further attrition among this group.

Our evaluation suggests that this decrease in faculty participation is most directly tied to faculty members' needing to choose between competing priorities at a small school where workload problems take many forms and are unrelieved by the labors of graduate assistants or the likelihood of released time or frequent leaves or sabbaticals. Thus we face a second category of threats to WAC programs. These programs can be subverted not only by discrepancies between naive expectations and sterner realities but also by conflicts among competing priorities. Some of these are peculiar to small colleges; others are general to the entire academic establishment.

Threats from Conflicting Priorities and Incompatible Agenda

Conflict #1. *Commitment to department and discipline vs. commitment to writing program.* WAC programs in small colleges often force faculty participants to make difficult decisions about where their loyalties lie. Often, teachers of writing-intensive courses must make hard choices about course design. How much material can be covered if a significant writing component is added to a course? When the course must fit into a departmental sequence, the instructor may feel she has to choose coverage over writing, loyalty to her department's curriculum over commitment to a university-wide competence requirement.

In some situations, faculty members must decide if they are more loyal to their departmental colleagues or to a university program. At DePauw, for example, an instructor may wish to offer a section of an introductory course as a writing-intensive course but will recognize that if he limits his enrollment in that course to twenty, his colleague may have to take fifty students in her non-writing section of the same course. Untenured faculty are particularly vulnerable in this dilemma of competing loyalties.

Conflict #2. *The Writing Program vs. other General Education Requirements.* On many campuses, the writing program must compete for faculty interest with other general education initiatives. Core courses, distribution requirements, interdisciplinary courses, and other cross-curricular programs all claim the time and dedication of faculty members. WAC has heavy demands; if a faculty has free choice about how and where to invest its energies, it may not choose Writing Across the Curriculum programs.

A similar source of difficulty for WAC programs on many campuses will be the inevitable shifts in institutional priorities and programs. As administrations come and go and as the academy responds to trends in the culture, the curriculum across which we write and the professional expectations within which we teach will be bent, pulled, revised, and redefined. If an administration increases the expectations for research and publication, or if it encourages faculty to diversify or internationalize its course offerings, or if the next cross curricular emphasis is moral reflection or critical thinking, the available time to teach writing will be sapped. If WAC is to survive, it must be able to adapt to such changing priorities.

Conflict #3. *WAC: A voluntary program for faculty vs. a requirement for students.* Some WAC programs require involvement by students but allow faculty to decide whether to participate. This is the case at DePauw, for example, where students must complete the three stages of the writing program by the end of their sophomore year, but faculty are free to elect when and if they offer writing-intensive courses.

This conflict becomes especially problematic when the number of faculty participants shrinks enough to have an effect on course selection and availability among the writing-intensive courses. When there are not enough courses offered, or when they are not offered in a variety of disciplines, students are forced to enroll where they aren't interested, they become frustrated and resentful, and the faculty who do offer courses find that they not only have a heavy paper load, but they also have churlish students and a chilly classroom climate.

Conflict #4. *The goals of a successful WAC program vs. the realities of academic administration.* In a paper presented at the 1989 meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Richard Young offered an analysis of the incompatibility between the goals of WAC programs and the characteristics of effective academic administration. He noted that successful writing instruction demands a great deal of faculty time and energy—frequent writing assignments and feedback, regular reinforcement of developing abilities, a variety of forms and audiences for writing, and a

compelling demonstration by the instructor of the importance of writing. Effective administration, on the other hand, requires that programs not place additional burdens on faculty and that they not require additional budgetary outlays. As we have seen, WAC programs, especially those with an agenda to teach writing, require both faculty time and institutional resources. Because the appropriate pedagogy conflicts with the necessary administrative priorities, all but the most committed institutions will experience tensions that can threaten the existence of ambitious writing programs.

Conflict #5. *Even in the teaching colleges, faculty as scholar/researcher vs. faculty as teacher.* We have already challenged the assumption that WAC works best at institutions where teaching is supposed to be paramount. We must now also challenge the assumption that such colleges and universities are free of the tension between the drive to publish and the commitment to good teaching. The reality is that some form of this tension is common throughout higher education today.

The pressure to publish comes from the institution, from the profession, and from within the individual faculty member. For one thing, if a college wants to compete effectively for the diminishing pool of students who are well prepared for advanced study and for the diminished pool of government and foundation funding for academic programs, it needs to demonstrate that its faculty is actively engaged in nationally respected research and publication. But it is not just administrations that influence the priorities of their teaching faculty. As new instructors come out of graduate school, their values and commitments have been shaped by the research institution. They begin their professional careers with their commitment to their discipline firmly established, but most are not yet equally committed to their students' learning. Finally, faculty respond to the pressures of the professional market as they establish their priorities. So, even though some colleges may still award tenure to faculty with modest publications but excellent teaching records, if faculty members want mobility within the profession, they know they had better attend first to their research and publication. In short, just when students in most of our colleges need a faculty deeply committed to teaching, faculties find it less and less professionally advantageous to commit themselves.

Conclusions: The Difficulty of Transforming the Academy

The WAC movement has gained considerable support in our colleges and universities because its aims and methods seem simple: to teach students to

write and to help them learn their academic subjects by asking them to write more, and for more diverse audiences. But as the writing movement enters a new decade, we realize that our aims are not so simple. They are radical. The proponents of WAC are asking academics to transform themselves, to recompose their identities and priorities and practices. WAC requires professors to be *teachers* first of all, not disciplinary specialists, scholars, or researchers.

To continue to teach writing across the curriculum well, year after year, requires not just a willingness to be a good team player or half-heartedly to accept someone else's agenda; it requires a deep commitment to student development. WAC brings the structural conflicts of the academy to the forefront because the teaching of writing requires instructors and administrators to place the good of the students before all else.

Notes

¹Griffin identifies three premises of such programs: 1) if we expect students' writing abilities to grow, we must give them opportunities throughout the college years to practice and improve, 2) writing is a way of learning, and thus a natural pedagogical tool throughout the university, and 3) "since written discourse is central to university education, the responsibility for the quality of student writing is university-wide."

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Writing Programs Outside the English Department: an Assessment of a Five-Year Program

Judith Q. McMullen and J. Douglas Wellman¹

In 1982, the School of Forestry and Wildlife Resources at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University began a Writing Improvement Program (WIP) for all majors. A writing consultant was hired from the English Department and certain key courses were designated as WIP courses. As the program now stands, students write papers which are screened by the writing consultant for problems in organization, word choice, and mechanics. Papers which pass the screening are considered competent and can be submitted to the course instructor for grading. Personal conferences with the writing consultant are required for those students whose papers do not pass this initial screening. The students then get the chance to rewrite their papers before handing them in for a grade.

One of the initial beliefs about this program was that the writing consultant would eventually work her way out of a job. We stressed the importance of professors working toward "improving student writing in their own classes" (Wellman and McMullen 416). We wanted emphasis placed on writing as a tool for teaching. With this in mind, the writing consultant conducted faculty workshops on effective paper assignments and on grading for writing and content. The paper assignments are given by the course instructor, not the writing consultant, and the final grade is assigned by the instructor for a whole piece of communication.

Five years and hundreds of papers later, the WIP is still going strong. Although satisfied that we had reached some of the goals for this program, we felt it was time to answer the question we are often asked: Does a writing program outside the English Department work? In a broader sense, we were asking the same question that writing across the curriculum programs have been asking for years. Although our program is not part of a university-wide WAC program, it does incorporate two of the elements C. W. Griffin found in most such programs: faculty workshops on evaluating student writing and writing intensive courses (402). The WIP could be a step toward a larger, cross-curricular writing program since it emphasizes what Griffin, Toby Fulwiler, Janet Emig, William Irmscher and others see as a major premise of WAC: writing is a tool for learnings.

The Writing Program Survey

In 1988, we surveyed graduates of the School during the first five years the WIP had been in place. We asked them twenty-three questions which emphasized two broad areas: 1) How much and what kinds of writing did they do at work? and 2) Did the WIP make them more competent and effective writers? We also asked for suggestions on ways to improve the program, and, finally, for written general comments about the program.

We identified 386 graduates since initiation of the writing program. Of the 386 surveys we sent out, 55 were returned because of bad addresses, leaving 331 potential respondents in our survey. With several follow-up mailings, we received 217 completed questionnaires, for a final response rate of 66%. A telephone non-response check indicated that most of those who failed to respond did not live at the address listed.

The first section of the survey focused on the kinds and amount of writing done on the job. The choices for kinds of writing were memos, letters, short reports, long reports, press releases, and other (respondents could check all kinds that applied). Most indicated that they wrote memos (72%), letters (69%), and short reports (68%). Fewer indicated that they wrote long reports (32%) and press releases (12%). These results reinforce the change in emphasis we have already made from long research reports to short critical reports for writing improvement program papers.

One way to "sell" the WIP to students in natural resources is to impress on them the amount of writing they will be required to do on the job in the "real" world, no matter what their major concentration: Wildlife, Fisheries, Forest Products, Forest Management, or Outdoor Recreation. We hoped that the responses to Question #8, "How much of your time on the job do you spend writing?" would support this emphasis on the value of good writing skills. The respondents selected one of the following categories—0%, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, and 51-100%. Results indicate that program graduates are expected to do considerable writing in their work. Over half of the respondents reported spending 20% or more of their work time writing. The breakdown for the time spent writing on the job is as follows:

Percent of Work Time in Writing	Percent of Respondents
0%	4.6
10%	36.4
20%	17.5
30%	17.5

Percent of Work Time in Writing	Percent of Respondents
40%	8.3
50%	9.2
51-100%	3.7
no answer	2.8
	<hr/> 100%

Additionally, half of the respondents reported reviewing others' writing as part of their work.

The next section of the survey focused on the program itself. We began by asking how many WIP papers the graduates had written while in school. When the program began, we tried to have all students write six WIP papers, primarily in their junior and senior years, and professors whose courses were not in the mandatory program were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. With the university's switch from the quarter system to the semester system in 1988, students write only four papers in their junior and senior years as part of the WIP. However, we are now including a freshman and additional sophomore courses in the program. The model response for number of WIP papers written was 5 papers (17.5%), and 64% of the respondents indicated that they had written 5 or more WIP papers. Given that they put forth substantial effort in the writing program, how do they feel about it? We included a number of questions to measure satisfaction with the program. We first were interested in whether the program helped them during their student days. We found that 62% felt the writing program helped them improve their performance in courses that were not part of the formal program. Next, and more significantly, we wanted to know if they felt the program helped them in their careers after graduation. Fully 88% felt their writing skills were adequate when they started their current job, although only 48% felt the writing program helped them acquire skills necessary to do the writing they do in their job. Our interpretation of these findings is that our graduates generally support the added attention given to writing as a result of the program, but that students who enter the program with adequate skills are not helped much and that class assignments have not adequately reflected job demands.

Since we are always interested in ways of improving the program, the last section of the survey asked for suggestions from those who had been through it. First, we asked about the amount of writing they did in the program. Most were satisfied, but any change should be in the direction of more writing, not less:

Too Much	8.8%
About Right	62.7%
Too Little	20.7%
No Answer	7.8%
<hr/>	
	100%

When asked whether the types of writing they did for the program helped prepare them for writing on the job, 52.5% said "yes" and 33.6% said "no." One of the strong themes in the many written comments was that we should pay more attention to brief, business-style writing since that constitutes the bulk of their on-the-job writing.

We also asked the respondents to indicate which aspects of the WIP were most helpful. They could check as many as they wished from among four alternatives:

More attention to writing skills in all your classes	56%
Opportunity for more writing practice	47%
Rewriting papers	30%
Conferences with the writing consultant	13%

We wanted to know whether we should emphasize different aspects of the writing process in our program. Respondents were presented the following list and asked to check all that applied:

Mechanics	40%
Organization	52%
Writing for Different Audiences	51%
Effective Word Choice	48%
Research	22%
Rewrites	14%

For an overall assessment of the program, we asked: "How helpful do you think the Writing Improvement Program is?" Students responded on a five-point scale ranging from "not at all helpful" to "extremely helpful." Almost 50% of the students felt the WIP was helpful (responses 4 and 5), while only 14% felt it was not helpful (responses 1 and 2). The responses were as follows:

Not at all Helpful			Extremely Helpful		
1	2	3	4	5	No Answer
3.2%	10.6%	30.0%	35.0%	14.3%	6.9%

The final question of the survey gave the respondents a chance to write additional general comments about the writing program. A majority (55%) of those who responded to the survey took the time to write personal comments, an indication that the program was highly beneficial to them. Their comments were often lengthy and specific, and the majority were supportive of the program. We learned a great deal about the practical applications of a writing program such as ours from the comments of these graduates. One respondent expressed the feelings of many: "There is more writing in my job than I thought there would be." This point was stressed by another respondent: "In every job I have had since graduation there has been some type of writing involved, either weekly or monthly reports, letters, employee suggestions, memos, or newspaper articles. Any experience forestry students can get in writing will be helpful later on in their careers." Another student praised the idea of "practicing writing skills and writing about forestry rather than just 'English class' writing."

Several noted how much better the program seemed from the perspective of a graduate rather than from that of a student: "It [the WIP program] is well worth the time spent by all; even though the students complain, they all benefit." Another put it a different way: "I hated the program while I was in it, but, like spinach, it was good for me!" Still another respondent stressed how hindsight has made the effort required in the WIP seem worthwhile: "No one enjoys the WIP when involved in it because it does require additional effort; however, any additional effort put into writing will help down the road in one's career."

Many respondents pointed out a direct correlation between the skills they acquired in the WIP and their success on the job. For instance, one respondent wrote: "I appreciate the training received through the WIP. That training helped me obtain my present position. My supervisor has repeatedly told me that one of the deciding factors in choosing me as his assistant was my writing ability." Other respondents had also received praise for their writing skills, as the following response shows: "Keep up the good work. My supervisor has complimented my writing ability many times!" In even stronger words, another respondent said, "Please do not stop this valuable program. The program helped me. The two other supervisors at my job do not write well, so I am one step ahead."

Many of the respondents summed up the overall value of the writing program in words similar to the following: "The WIP's most significant impact was projecting the attitude to students that good writing skills are vital to success and giving them practice and help when it is needed." In a similar vein, one respondent wrote: "Many of my professional counterparts are poor writers and this puts them at a tremendous disadvantage in the professional arena. I don't think you can impress students enough about how important writing skills are." Another respondent gave the program

much credit for his writing skills in graduate school: "As a grad student at the University of Idaho, I was incredibly prepared for the endless research and writing. I have also had many opportunities since graduating from Tech to help others write effectively, including quite a few grad students from other undergrad programs. Most of them were upset that they graduated without being prepared to complete the writing assignments required in graduate school."

Not all the comments were positive, of course. One respondent commented on the early program's emphasis on junior and senior classes: "I thought that the start of the program was less than effective. It was too little too late when I started it in my junior year; it should begin in the freshman or at least sophomore year." As noted above, we have now extended the writing program to all classes.

There were some negative feelings at the beginning of the program about an "outsider" trying to teach forestry students to write. One respondent put it rather strongly: "Let the English department handle writing and composition. I resented the insinuation that I was just another illiterate forester. Basically, I had to take part in writing therapy without a writing problem being diagnosed." Another respondent resented the strain on his grade point average (at Tech, QCA): "After 21 quarter hours in English department classes, I had a QCA of 3.86—One quarter and one paper with Ms. McMullen=2.5. The WIP dilutes an individual's in-major QCA." Echoing this idea, another respondent said, "If you want your foresters to burn/cruise/buy timber/supervise seed planting/communicate with landowners, etc., then you are over-emphasizing the English paper junk."

The English department drew additional criticism from the following respondent: "The existence of such a program [the WIP] exposes two major flaws—the first is that the English department is not doing its job, and the second is that forestry professors and other forestry instructors should be able to grade papers according to English content themselves. I resented having to take time out of my forestry classes to complete 'English assignments.' The Forestry department should not have to play nursemaid and coax the poor writers along. Make the English department recognize their weakness and supply the education necessary." Strong language, but this respondent wasn't alone in his feelings. Any time writing programs move outside of the English department—where many think it belongs—there will be some bad feelings. The following statement from a respondent shows this kind of resentment of the perceived "outsider" stepping in: "If English courses aren't adequate, then pressure should be brought on the English department to upgrade their courses. I did not like having time taken from my forestry classes to rehash English 101."

We received many suggestions for improving the program. Some of these we have already incorporated, such as moving from longer research

papers to short, critical analyses and beginning the program with freshmen forestry students rather than waiting until the junior year. We have also gotten the English department representative out of the grading business. Whereas in the beginning of the WIP, the consultant's "writing style" grade counted for 50% of the final grade, the writing consultant now screens the papers but does not assign a grade. Students generally see this process as one which can lead to a better grade on a paper rather than as a punitive procedure. Respondents suggested the following changes: "increased office hours for writing consultant," "writing more technical reports," "more emphasis on memos and letters," "building on the basics (grammar and punctuation)," impressing new foresters "not to be so wordy in reports and to get to the point quickly," and "forcing students to do as much writing as possible."

Finally, one respondent who graduated the year we began the program and did not take part in it, summed up the feelings of many: "I did not know that forestry students were having a problem with their writing skills. I'm disappointed to know we need this program, but am glad we've got it if it's helping the students."

The Future for the Writing Improvement Program

We feel our survey has provided quantitative and qualitative evidence that the WIP works: almost half of the program graduates indicated that the writing they did for the program prepared them for writing on the job; half felt that the overall WIP was "very" or "extremely" helpful; and the majority of their written comments were supportive. We also have less tangible but just as encouraging indications of the program's effectiveness from student evaluations, from comments by faculty members who have noticed improvements in student writing, and from those in the forest industry who hire our students and appreciate their writing skills.

Looking to the future, are there major changes in our writing program that we should consider? One possible change would be to make it a true Writing Across the Curriculum program. This would mean turning the program over to the professors in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Resources. Catherine Blair (1988) believes that Writing Across the Curriculum programs should not be "housed" in English Departments and that English faculty must give up "ownership of writing" and let "faculty in all disciplines feel free to volunteer to teach writing courses" and to "take a professional interest in writing instruction."

If the writing consultant gives up "ownership" of our writing improvement program, will the forestry faculty be willing and able to assume

responsibility for writing instruction in their courses? Such action might please those who still feel uncomfortable with the idea of an outsider assessing student writing. However, will the focus on good writing skills remain? Will the professors be willing to continue assigning papers as tools for learning if they are the only ones evaluating them? Perhaps the biggest question is whether the professors believe that the time required for teaching through writing will be recognized and rewarded. Some reports are not encouraging. David R. Russell sees the "convenient institutionalized arrangement which places research and specialized professional training above undergraduate teaching" as the greatest obstacle to the success of WAC programs (191). In an assessment of one WAC program, Smithson and Sorrentino found this "obstacle" an almost insurmountable one. They concluded that teachers employing WAC methods "are taking on more than the 'normal' workload," and "pay a high price for the success of writing across the curriculum" (337).

Another option is to keep the program going—as a writing program outside the English department but not a Writing Across the Curriculum program. If we do so, should we make any changes? We received many helpful suggestions for changes from those who took part in the program. They seem to be asking for more, not less: more writing practice, emphasis on different types of writing, and recognition of excellent writing skills rather than merely competent ones. It would be easy to rest on our laurels and keep the program going exactly as it is at the present. The students accept the writing improvement program because they are introduced to it as freshmen. They know which courses are included in the program, and by the time they are seniors, most of them know how to write a paper that will pass the writing consultant's screening. However, we began this program with higher aims: we wanted to graduate students from the School of Forestry who would be recognized as excellent writers.

Our survey demonstrates that students do see the value of good writing skills and the need for practicing these skills in their major courses. We have answered the question of whether emphasis on writing in courses outside of the English department works, at least in the eyes of the "customers." Now it is time to ask the harder questions: 1) Who should teach these skills, English professors or Forestry professors? 2) Why should a Forestry professor spend the time required to evaluate student writing? 3) How do we "reward" good writing and make it an important part of a student's entire college experience—not just something that the English department is responsible for? and 4) How can we encourage good writers to become excellent writers? The changes we have already initiated in the writing improvement program and those we make in the future will work toward answering some of these important questions about writing programs outside the English department.

Notes

¹We gratefully acknowledge Gwen N. Hirsch's assistance in the design and administration of the survey.

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Does a Writing Program Make a Difference? A Ten-Year Comparison of Faculty Attitudes about Writing

Barbara M. Olds

Does a writing program make a difference? As WPAs, our natural inclination is to answer such a question (whether it is posed by colleagues, students or administrators) with a resounding "YES!" Yet we seldom have concrete evidence to support our claims. At the Colorado School of Mines (CSM) we have had the opportunity to demonstrate that a carefully designed writing program *does* make a difference in faculty attitudes and perceptions about student writing. In a longitudinal study we asked our faculty, mostly engineers and scientists, about their students' writing. Specifically, in 1977 Dr. Julia Alexander surveyed CSM faculty about their students' communication skills; I distributed the same survey to faculty ten years later. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix A.

In comparing responses to the two surveys, I interpret the results as a reflection of positive change in faculty attitudes over the past decade. For example, more faculty believe their students write at least adequately; more are convinced that undergraduate success depends heavily on writing ability; perhaps most encouragingly, more are assigning various types of writing in their classes and using such assignments to help determine grades.

I believe these changes are in many respects the direct result of a new approach to communication instruction at CSM, an approach which grew out of both a shift in engineering education priorities and a careful self-assessment of CSM's role, mission, and curriculum.

CSM and the Engineering Culture

Nationally, the engineering profession has been increasingly vocal in stressing the importance of communication skills for engineering graduates. For example, the most recent ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) guidelines argue that "competency in *written communication* in the English language is essential for the engineering graduate. Although specific coursework requirements serve as a foundation for such compe-

tency, the development and enhancement of writing skills must be demonstrated through student work in engineering courses as well as other studies" (ABET 9). When ABET talks, engineering educators listen! ABET's recent attention to communication has helped to nudge some faculty and administrators towards support of writing programs.

At CSM every student majors in engineering or applied science, and the School takes seriously the feedback from its alumni and the industries which it traditionally serves. Therefore, when alumni and industry people were asked ten years ago about the attributes they would like to see CSM graduates possess, the faculty listened carefully to their suggestions: those surveyed ranked communication skills, the ability to work effectively in groups, and the ability to self-educate (in addition to technical competence, of course) as essential for the ideal engineering graduate. The document resulting from the survey, the *Profile of the Future Graduate* (FGP), is directly responsible for many curricular changes on campus.

The FGP was important for two main reasons: 1) CSM undertook to discover what qualities its ideal graduate should possess, to carefully reexamine its role, mission, and curriculum, and 2) we actually set out to *do something* with the results. This led to a number of changes, the most far-reaching of which was the EPICS program, described below. Because of CSM's unique culture (engineering school; small, state-supported institution, etc.) our solutions won't work for everyone, but we do believe that a self-examination, such as the FGP, and a resulting curriculum evaluation is worthwhile for any institution.

The EPICS Program

EPICS (Engineering Practices Introductory Course Sequence) was a collaborative effort from the beginning. An interdisciplinary group of faculty (engineers, scientists, computer scientists, graphic artists, humanists and composition specialists) envisioned a program which would develop in our students the qualities called for in the FGP. In brief, students in EPICS take a four semester required sequence in which problem-solving and communication skills are emphasized. In addition to studying such engineering basics as computer programming, board- and computer-aided graphics, and software packages, students spend a portion of each semester working in small groups to solve real problems posed by "clients" in industry or government and reporting on their results orally and in writing (Olds, Pavelich et al, Pavelich and Olds, Olds and Miller, "Using").

Many of the abilities emphasized in EPICS are remarkably similar to major thrusts in composition theory over the past decade. For example:

* One of the major goals of EPICS is to foster students' *critical thinking and problem-solving skills*, to "push" them in their intellectual development whenever possible (Bloom). One way we do this is by having freshmen and sophomores work on real problems supplied by clients in industry and government. Such projects must include technical components, but we also stress political, ethical, aesthetic, and environmental constraints. Written assignments are required as called for by the project, e.g. clarification memos, minutes, progress reports, and final recommendations. We also employ such writing-to-learn techniques as free-writing (Elbow) to help students think carefully about questions raised by their project work. Through EPICS students begin to understand the importance and complexity of successful communication.

* We stress *collaborative group work* in EPICS as the professional model that most engineers are likely to encounter. Much has been written in the past decade about the importance of collaboration both in the classroom and in the workplace (Allen, Anderson, Bruffee, Couture and Rymer, Dohiny-Farina, Ede and Lunsford, Faigley and Morgan). Our experience indicates that group work in the classroom prepares our students well for their experiences in industry. From their first semester, students are assigned to project teams of four to six people and required to divide the research, decision-making, and writing tasks necessary for the successful completion of the project. As they progress through the program, they become increasingly adept at working with others, sharing writing tasks, and producing and editing documents collaboratively.

* We emphasize such useful technical writing concepts as *audience analysis, editing, keyword analysis, and the top-down approach to document design*. When the students have a real client from industry or government, they quickly learn the importance of analyzing their audience and presenting their results to him/her convincingly (Clevinger, Ede and Lunsford, Mathes and Stevenson, Spilka). We have found that even case studies are no substitute for this actual client experience.

* Most importantly, EPICS has provided an on-going campus workshop in writing, a *de facto* writing-across-the-curriculum program. Certainly WAC has been discussed in great depth in the last decade (Russell, Griffin, Herrington, McLeod, Young and Fulwiler). Because each project/communications class in EPICS is team-taught by a scientist or engineer and a composition specialist, we have seen a tremendous "trickle down" effect across the curriculum. Engineering faculty learn from their composition partners about, say, editing or effective document design, and they carry that knowledge back to their own classrooms and to their own writing. In addition, the "legitimacy" that engineers and scientists (clients and class professors) lend to the class carries a great deal of weight with our students and shouldn't be underestimated. Like it or not, a composition teacher

sometimes simply does not have the authority that someone in the students' own field does—particularly someone who has achieved a certain stature in his/her profession.

I believe that all of these factors have helped to educate our faculty about the value of communication abilities in a technical curriculum. The survey results show that clear shifts *have* occurred in faculty attitudes about and perceptions of student writing since the EPICS program was implemented. The following sections will briefly summarize the survey results.

Then and Now

One way of analyzing the information from the two surveys is to look at three basic questions:

- * What do faculty think about the quality of student writing and its relationship to academic and career success?
- * What do faculty see as the major writing problems of their students and what kind of writing do they assign?
- * What should happen now to improve communication instruction on campus?

What do faculty think about the quality of student writing and its relationship to academic and career success?

Questions 6, 8, 4 and 12 were the keys here. When asked to assess the writing of undergraduates in their field (Question #6), only 20% of the faculty surveyed in 1977 felt that students wrote at least adequately, while 75% said students wrote "rather poorly" or "quite poorly." In contrast, 38% of the 1987 faculty responding felt undergraduates wrote at least adequately, although a majority, 63%, still said students wrote "rather poorly" or "quite poorly" (see Figure 1).

Although many explanations for the 18% increase in faculty satisfaction with student writing are possible (better students, better pre-college preparation, etc.), no major shifts in the demographics of either the student body or the faculty at CSM occurred between the two surveys. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that whatever changes occurred are largely the result of curricular changes. When the 1977 survey was conducted, there was no required writing course at CSM until the senior year. Since we began to require EPICS in the first four semesters, I believe we are helping our students to become better communicators earlier in their college careers.

Question #6 Undergrads Write...

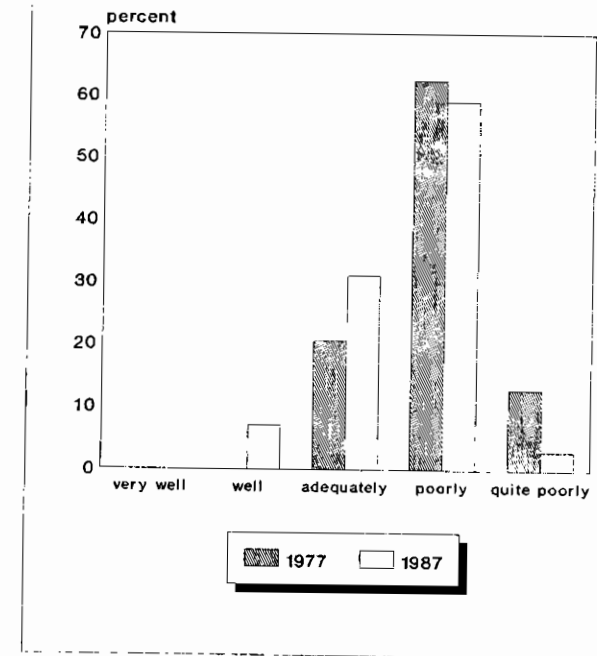


Figure 1

Anecdotal evidence from upper division faculty indicates that students in their courses write better, work better in teams, and make better oral presentations than they did before EPICS was developed.

There seems to be little question about the necessity for good communication skills in either poll. Over 80% of the 1977 sample and 90% of the 1987 sample agreed that communication skills will "very heavily" influence their students' success in their careers (Question #8).

Over 80% of the faculty in both surveys also believe that writing ability influences academic success (Question #4). In 1977, 50% of the faculty replied "very heavily" or "heavily," 39% "moderately," and 8% "slightly" or "not at all." In comparison, in 1987, 56% of the faculty responded "very heavily" or "heavily," 30% "moderately," and 14% "slightly."

In a related question, we asked faculty how often writing assignments influenced grades in the classes they taught (Question #12, Figure 2). Of the 1977 respondents, 26% replied "very heavily" or "heavily," 44% said "moderately," and 26% said "slightly" or "not at all." In comparison, the 1987 faculty replied "very heavily" or "heavily" 42% of the time, "moderately" 32%, and "slightly" or "not at all" 25%.

Question #12 Writing Assignments Influence Grades...

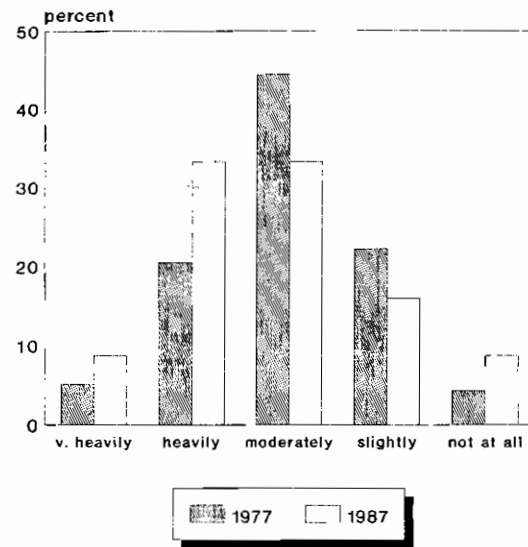


Figure 2

EPICS has helped encourage faculty to include writing in their classes by showing faculty appropriate uses of writing in technical classes and by increasing their confidence in their ability to teach writing. In addition, we have received recent funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Department of Education's FIPSE program to make curricular changes which will lead to more writing and writing instruction in technical classes.

What do faculty see as the major writing problems of their students and what kind of writing do they assign?

Several questions (13, 14, and 15) asked faculty about their current practices and beliefs concerning communication:

Question 13 listed a number of "errors" in student writing and asked faculty to indicate whether or not they believed each to be a major problem. The 1987 faculty felt that every one of the categories listed was less of a problem than the 1977 faculty. The largest decreases came in issues related

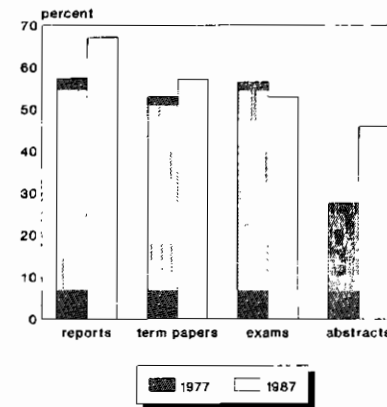
to mechanics, grammar and spelling. Since the ten years between the two studies saw the influx of computers and spell-checkers, the shift to fewer spelling problems is more than likely traceable to that.

Interestingly, complaints about "poor organization" and "logic" remained essentially the same between the two studies, despite the addition of the EPICS program. Perhaps our faculty are becoming increasingly sophisticated about the qualities of good writing; as a result they may view higher order abilities such as analysis, organization, and logic as relatively more "major" concerns than issues such as spelling and mechanics.

This theory is borne out in part by faculty response to Questions 14 and 15 which asked them to indicate the types of writing and speaking assignments typically included in their courses (Figures 3 and 4).

The number of faculty requiring each type of writing increased over the ten year period with the exception only of essay responses on exams. Oral presentation requirements also increased, both group and individual presentations. Since oral communication is stressed in EPICS along with written skills, perhaps this influence is being felt in the curriculum as a whole.

Question #14 Required Writing Assignments



Question #14 Required Writing Assignments

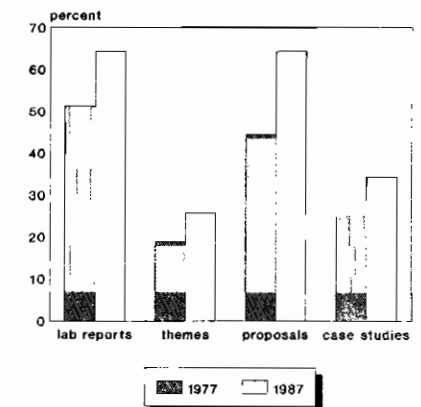


Figure 3

Question #15 Required Oral Assignments

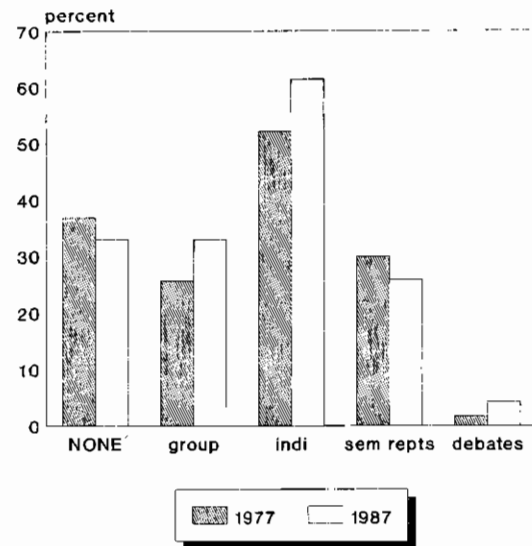


Figure 4

In her report, Alexander concludes that "the faculty, by and large, believes student writing will improve only when every department on campus requires more written work of each and every student." The success of the EPICS program and of writing-across-the-curriculum programs nationally attests to the validity of this claim. We were pleased to find that more faculty at CSM *are* requiring writing and speaking in their classes.

What should happen now to improve communication instruction on campus?

In her concluding section, Alexander made several recommendations including requiring a graduation literacy exam, setting up a basic composition course, developing advanced courses in technical writing, and establishing a remedial reading program. On the question of adding communication courses, 57% of the faculty approved in 1977, 38% in 1987. Speculation about why is intriguing. I would like to think that we're doing a better job of reaching our students through EPICS and therefore the faculty don't perceive a great need for an additional writing course. It may also be that

faculty have embraced more enthusiastically the notion that *they* are primarily responsible for teaching communication skills.

Conclusion

Much has changed at CSM between the time Dr. Alexander conducted her survey in 1977 and my repetition of it ten years later; the most significant curricular change has been the implementation of the EPICS program. These changes have led to a number of positive changes in faculty attitudes about writing: more faculty believe their students write at least adequately; more are convinced that undergraduate success depends heavily on writing ability; perhaps most encouragingly, more are assigning various types of writing in their classes and using such assignments to help determine grades. At least part of the reason for these differences lies in the development of a campus climate that encourages communication excellence—largely, to date, as a result of the EPICS program. Now that EPICS has led the way towards more positive faculty attitudes about writing and speaking, we can continue our efforts with new initiatives. Among the hopeful possibilities:

- * The dean of undergraduate studies has recently formed a school-wide committee to investigate how writing and oral communication skills are currently being taught on campus and to recommend improvements.
- * Several faculty (engineers and communication specialists) have team-taught a chemical engineering, summer field session for two years emphasizing oral and written communication. The course was enthusiastically evaluated by both students and faculty.
- * The National Endowment for the Humanities has funded a program to integrate humanities directly into engineering courses at CSM. Classes in the program heavily emphasize communication skills (Olds and Miller, "Integrating").
- * The Department of Education's FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education) program has funded a program which will extend EPICS problem-solving and communication concepts to the senior-level capstone design courses at CSM.

By evaluating the needs and culture of our institution and then fitting our writing program to them, we have seen how a change in curriculum can lead to changed faculty attitudes and perceptions. The results of our longitudinal survey help to document what we WPAs already know—a writing program *does* make a difference.

Appendix A

Colorado School of Mines Survey of Faculty Opinion: The relationship Between Students' Academic Success and Communication Skills

From this survey, we want to find out: 1) what general impressions CSM faculty members have of their students' communication skills; 2) to what degree communication skills influence a student's academic and career success; and 3) what kinds and amounts of writing CSM students are required to do. Dr. Gary approved and supports the project, Dr. Julia Alexander of the Humanities and Social Sciences Department is in charge of the survey, and the Computing Center will analyze the data.

Because the information gathered with your help can be used to modify curriculum goals for hundreds of students yearly, would you please give the few minutes it will take you to respond to the following items? Please return the form to Dr. Alexander, Alderson Hall 105, by campus mail. We greatly appreciate your cooperation.

1. Department:

2. Academic rank:

_____ (1) Professor _____ (3) Assistant Professor _____ (5) Adjunct Faculty
_____ (2) Associate Professor _____ (4) Instructor

3. For each course level listed below, please indicate whether or not you are currently teaching or have taught a course or courses on that level during the past academic year:

Freshman and/or Sophomore:	Junior and/or Senior:	Graduate:
_____ (1) Yes	_____ (1) Yes	_____ (1) Yes
_____ (2) No	_____ (2) No	_____ (2) No

4. My general impression of the courses taught in my field is that the ability to write influences the academic success of undergraduates:

_____ (1) very heavily _____ (3) moderately _____ (5) not at all
_____ (2) heavily _____ (4) slightly

5. In my field the ability to write influences the academic success of graduate students as compared with that of undergraduate students:

_____ (1) much more _____ (3) about as much _____ (5) much less
_____ (2) somewhat more _____ (4) somewhat less

6. My impression is that undergraduates in my field generally write:

_____ (1) very well _____ (3) adequately _____ (5) quite poorly
_____ (2) well _____ (4) rather poorly

7. In comparison with undergraduates in my field, graduate students generally seem to write:

_____ (1) much better _____ (3) about the same _____ (5) much worse
_____ (2) somewhat better _____ (4) somewhat worse

8. In their careers after they have finished their formal education, the ability to write will, in my opinion, influence the success of students in my field:

_____ (1) very heavily _____ (3) moderately _____ (5) not at all
_____ (2) heavily _____ (4) slightly

9. CSM now requires only a one-semester, senior-level course in technical writing for graduation (EN 412). If this course could be supplemented by more required courses in basic communication skills, my attitude toward such additional training for CSM students probably would be:

_____ (1) approval _____ (2) disapproval _____ (3) I need more information before I can respond.

10. If CSM were to establish an advanced degree program in technical writing and editing for people holding a BS in engineering, my attitude toward such a program probably would be:

_____ (1) approval _____ (2) disapproval _____ (3) I need more information.

11. If CSM were to establish a graduation requirement that each student must show (by exam, faculty referral or extra course work) an ability to write clear and correct English, my attitude toward such a graduation requirement probably would be:

_____ (1) approval _____ (2) disapproval _____ (3) I need more information.

12. In my own teaching, required writing assignments typically influence my students' grades:

_____ (1) very heavily _____ (3) moderately _____ (5) not at all
_____ (2) heavily _____ (4) slightly

13. Listed below are some faults which might be observed in student writing. Please indicate for each whether or not you believe it is a major problem:

a. Lack of significant content	e. bad spelling and/or punctuation
_____ (1) Yes	_____ (1) Yes
_____ (2) No	_____ (2) No
b. failures in logic	f. inappropriate use of "I" in reports
_____ (1) Yes	_____ (1) Yes
_____ (2) No	_____ (2) No
c. mistakes in grammar and diction	g. limited general and/or technical vocabulary
_____ (1) Yes	_____ (1) Yes
_____ (2) No	_____ (2) No
d. poor organization	h. other—please list in the space below:
_____ (1) Yes	
_____ (2) No	

14. In the course(s) most representative of those which you typically teach, please indicate whether each of the following types of writing is required:

a. laboratory reports	c. research papers or proposals
_____ (1) Yes	_____ (1) Yes
_____ (2) No	_____ (2) No
b. themes or other short essays	d. case studies
_____ (1) Yes	_____ (1) Yes
_____ (2) No	_____ (2) No

e. technical reports

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

f. term papers

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

g. essay responses on examinations

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

h. abstracts

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

i. other—please list in the space below:

15. In the course(s) most representative of those which you typically teach, please indicate whether each of the following types of formal speaking is required:

☐ NONE of Item 15 applies—e.g., my students are not evaluated in formal speaking situations.

a. group oral presentations

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

d. debates

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

b. individual oral presentations

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

e. other—please list in the space below:

c. seminar reports

- ____ (1) Yes
____ (2) No

If you have further thoughts regarding the influence of communication skills on academic and career success, or suggestions for improving CSM students' writing and formal speaking, please comment:

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Conflicting Paradigms: Theoretical and Administrative Tensions in Writing Program Administration

Irene Gale

It is perhaps hackneyed to say that rhetoric and composition is still an "emerging field." Yet, its status as a growing discipline often does create substantial administrative problems for writing program administrators. One such problem is the tension created by an environment in which a department maintains a thriving graduate program in rhetoric and composition but its freshman writing program is not directed by the same faculty who teach in the graduate program. Theoretical conflicts can arise from such a situation: graduate teaching assistants may be learning the most current theory and research in composition from their graduate courses, while they are taught in their teaching practicums notions of writing and composition pedagogy that are antithetical to the concepts they learn in their classes. Similarly, some institutions employ rhetoric and composition specialists but assign administration of the writing program to non-compositionists. Undoubtedly, the conflicting paradigms that arise can have an adverse effect on any writing program's effectiveness. In this paper, I will explore the theoretical and administrative tensions arising from such conflicting paradigms, discuss the effects of these tensions on the writing program and those who teach in it, and explore ways to resolve such conflicts so as to make our programs as effective as possible.

It is understandable that we must deal with conflicting theoretical paradigms. As the field emerged—or is emerging, depending on your point of view—from the current-traditional paradigm to a model that valorizes the writing process, and as some theorists now are critiquing the "cognitivist" and "expressivist" assumptions of process theory and are calling for what James Berlin calls a "social-epistemic" rhetoric or what Marilyn Cooper calls an "ecological model," there is a great deal of theoretical, pedagogical, and administrative confusion. These theoretical shifts and competing paradigms have a significant impact not only on composition pedagogy but also on writing program administration. Conflicts can arise, for example, when graduate students taking graduate course work in composition theory are heavily influenced by one paradigm of composition instruction and then must teach in a writing program that is informed by a competing pedagogical ideology; when senior faculty who have not remained current with changes in composition theory are nonetheless asked

to evaluate teaching assistants who are incorporating new pedagogies into the curriculum; when teaching assistants who are not interested in composition theory and pedagogy devise pedagogies inconsistent with the writing program's goals and objectives; and when there is no institution-wide coordination of writing program policy. None of these things is necessarily negative *per se*; however, when such diverse paradigms arise and remain unexamined, the potential for programmatic incoherence often results.

As a kind of case study, I will consider one large state university that I am familiar with in order to explore how theoretical competition can lead to administrative problems and a lack of coherence within a composition program.¹ My intent in presenting this case is not to offer the results of data-driven research, but to provide a description of one institution to illustrate the kinds of paradigmatic conflicts that *can* arise. As Edward M. White writes in *Developing Successful College Writing Programs*, "It is not easy to discover what is going on, or why, in any college writing program. The research describing these programs is surprisingly constricted" (16). Yet the increasing body of detailed program descriptions and analyses (Hartzog, and Connolly and Vilardi, for example) serves as an important resource for all writing program administrators in helping us become aware of the issues pertinent to other programs so that we can adapt others' insights to the context of our own institutions and, in addition, avoid some of the problems that other programs have unfortunately experienced.²

Theoretical Competition and Administrative Problems

Summarizing a study by Thomas Wilcox, White comments that "large universities . . . preferred to hire specialists in literary fields, distinguished scholars in particular, and overused cheap labor—in the form of part-time and non-tenure-track appointments and graduate assistants—for writing instruction" (20). Such is the situation at the case university—an institution with over 30,000 students and a large and thriving graduate program in English. In universities such as the case institution, as well as in those White refers to, undergraduate writing programs are not seen as important to the overall mission of the institution and thus are not given the support necessary to provide adequate staffing by trained professionals.

At this university, adjuncts and graduate assistants receive a "recommended" syllabus for the two-semester sequence of required freshman composition. This syllabus was devised by the Director of Freshman English, independent of input from rhetoric and composition specialists on the faculty. (The director is largely uninvolved in the graduate program.)

According to the syllabus, the first week of class is devoted to discussion of the "writing process." Freshmen read the introductions in their texts that outline the "recursive nature of the writing process" and that explain what writers do when they prewrite, plan, draft, revise, edit, and proofread. However, the rest of the syllabus is solidly in the current-traditional paradigm. There is one 500-word essay due approximately every week, based on traditional rhetorical modes beginning with narration and description and culminating in argument. The syllabus does not provide for students to receive feedback in advance of grading, either from peers or from the instructor. Five of the eight to ten required papers are written in class. As a matter of fact, the recommended syllabus contains no instruction or practice in any of the activities that are commonly understood to be part of the writing process: invention techniques, such as brainstorming and heuristics; revision workshops and other collaborative pedagogies; and so on.

All first-time teaching assistants are required to attend a methods practicum during the first semester that they teach. In this course, taught by the Freshman English Director, they read and discuss the readings assigned on the syllabus and are given "lessons" for each section. Teaching assistants are also required to read *An Introduction to the Teaching of Writing* by Stephen and Susan Judy, a book which, ironically, contradicts most of what is presented in the methods course as "the way to teach writing."

Teaching assistants are also required to enroll in another pedagogy course sometime before they graduate. The content of this course depends on which member of the faculty teaches it. Occasionally, this course is taught by literature professors who have no formal training in composition and who appear to favor current-traditional, back-to-basics approaches. It is sometimes taught by the Director of Freshman English, sometimes by a rhetoric and composition specialist who favors what James Berlin calls "expressivist approaches" and sometimes by another who leans towards "social epistemic," collaborative approaches. Both of these latter approaches undermine the department's recommended syllabus, with its emphasis on rhetorical modes and finished products. Unless teaching assistants enroll in additional rhetoric and composition classes (and there is little administrative or social reward for doing so), this is the end of their training as writing teachers, even though they may remain employed as such at the case institution for several years.

Clearly, in the case institution the quality and quantity of graduate assistant training in composition pedagogy and theory results in many conflicting paradigms of writing instruction in operation within the same department. Many graduate assistants are thoroughly confused by the time they finish their training and, consequently, fall back on the way they were taught writing as undergraduates. Some graduate assistants place enormous

emphasis on surface correctness, others almost none, preferring to deal with social issues raised in the readings; others treat the class as an introduction to literature. These approaches are not in themselves "wrong"; a variety of paradigms may even in some cases be advantageous, so long as the assumptions that underlie the paradigms are informed by current theory and practice. In the case study writing program, however, there is no departmental mechanism to monitor whether pedagogies designed by teaching assistants are so informed or how such approaches enhance or detract from the overall goals of the writing program. At least two other universities that I'm familiar with suffer similar problems, as do, no doubt, many others; and both the Hartzog and the Connolly and Vilardi studies illustrate the difficulties nationwide in monitoring, training, and evaluating TAs.³

Perhaps even more important than the mere existence of conflicting paradigms is that often these paradigms are not made explicit and acknowledged as the underpinnings of a program or as alternatives to it. In some situations there can be different paradigms and yet no conflict—so long as people acknowledge that they differ but agree that the program will operate according to certain principles. In addressing this point after reviewing an earlier version of this article, an editorial reader for *WPA* wrote,

If I may use my own institution as a case in point, there are six of us in composition. Among us we have cognitivists, social constructionists, an expressivist, and a developmentalist. Yet our program, which has social construction as its underlying paradigm, makes use of the strengths of all; one paradigm need not exclude others, as long as we agree that the goals of our classes are to introduce students to writing in an academic setting and to help them learn the processes and strategies of such writing. The problem is not just paradigm conflicts, but that the people involved in a writing program all need to talk to one another about philosophy as well as scheduling and staffing.

This writer is exactly right: a program's operating paradigm must be more than tacit, and everyone involved in the program must communicate with one another. Such is not the situation at the case institution.

A number of teaching assistants at the case-study institution specialize in rhetoric and composition and, thus, continue to take course work in composition theory, research methods, and rhetoric. It is often these instructors who feel most the disjunctions caused by the competing paradigms within the writing program there. In this institution of 30,000 students, the program is simply too large for the Director of Freshman English to evaluate all the instructors, and so senior faculty members are called upon to

evaluate all teaching assistants and adjuncts. These senior faculty do not teach writing classes and, typically, the demands of their own scholarship have preempted them from staying current with the rapidly growing body of theory and research in composition studies. And, as might be expected, some are openly hostile to rhetoric and composition in general.

In one incident a teaching assistant, also a rhetoric and composition specialist, was asked by just such a senior faculty member to provide a list of topics that she would be discussing over the next few weeks. The instructor promptly complied, providing a list of writing "activities," mainly collaborative group activities, that her class would be engaged in during the specified time. The evaluator returned her list, requesting that he be notified as to when she planned to lecture. Although she hadn't planned to lecture, she nonetheless devised a formal presentation rather than risk an unsatisfactory evaluation from an evaluating professor who did not consider collaborative activities to be "real teaching." Moreover, since she felt compelled to contrive a lecture for no other reason than to appease her evaluator, this teaching assistant had to accept in her personnel file an evaluation that gave a false picture of her classroom abilities and procedures. Of course, the problems of teaching evaluation are well documented in the scholarly literature on writing program administration, but what makes this already difficult problem even more complex is a situation in which conflicting ideas about what qualifies as effective writing instruction result in the writing program administrator having a false picture of what is actually happening in the writing classrooms under his or her supervision.

One of the interesting findings of Polin and White's study of writing programs in California universities is "that students write better on campuses where there is a single WPA for the writing programs as a whole, as opposed to those campuses where separate administrators coordinate the remedial, the freshman, and the upper-division writing courses" (as quoted in White 12). At the case university, the upper-division writing courses are administered by one professor, the writing center by an adjunct, and the two-semester freshman sequence by another professor; the remedial courses are coordinated by a professor from a local community college, and another composition tutoring center (a federally-funded program for economically disadvantaged students) is directed by a specialist in education. The implication from Polin and White's study is that an institution's overall writing program will be more coherent and thus more effective if it is directed by a single writing program administrator. Since this is not the situation at the case institution or at many of the institutions described in the Connolly and Vilardi study, the lack of a single WPA in charge of all writing programs may also be another source of conflicting paradigms that adversely affect the quality of writing instruction.

Some Suggestions

These problems are less the fault of the writing program administrator than of the department's administration. And, of course, budgetary, legislative, and administrative constraints in any institution will limit the writing program administrator's power to run a program as effectively as he or she might wish. However, there are ways that writing program administrators and English department chairs can provide leadership in resolving some of the administrative tensions that this discussion poses.

First, teaching-assistant training can be improved in several important ways. The CCCC "Task Force on the Preparation of Teachers of Writing" states that teachers of writing at all academic levels "need, first of all, experience in writing, and also some theoretical knowledge to guide classroom practice" (446).⁴ It has long been argued that teachers of writing should themselves *be* writers. And as Sally Barr Reagan argues in a recent article in *WPA*, "Teaching TAs to Teach: Show, Don't Tell,"

Reading about teaching strategies, being told what should be incorporated, or discussing different approaches to teaching does not have the same impact as showing their effects on students. If we expect our TAs to move beyond the bounds of the traditional composition classroom, their training should parallel the new pedagogical approaches. (50)

At the case study institution, the valuable connections between the practical experience teaching assistants gain in the classroom and in graduate course work, required or not, is not exploited. Certainly, administrators and graduate faculty in such institutions should work together to develop ways to exploit these two departmental assets. It seems that both the graduate program and the writing program could benefit from such collaboration.

One way that these connections could be exploited is by changing the way graduate courses are structured. Charles Moran has argued that direct training in writing and editing should be the core of training programs for writing teachers. Talk about theory and research should grow from the writing and editing experiences that the teaching assistants themselves are engaged in. Many graduate courses, even in rhetoric and composition, are based on the presentational model, in that the professor lectures and requires one or two research papers due at the end of term but offers no avenue for peer response to emerging papers.⁵ It strikes me as inconsistent to teach TAs to teach writing as a process on the one hand while on the other to force them as students to magically produce finished products. Such courses offer no access to group or professor feedback during the writing process and make no overt connections between the processes of inquiry and writing.⁶ And often there is little comment from the graduate professor about the paper as a piece of writing. Teaching assistants and others training

to be writing teachers rarely get to experience how process pedagogy works—and sometimes fails. They rarely experience the benefits and drawbacks of peer feedback, the struggles and joys of working through the revision process, or the satisfaction in seeing that the end product is significantly better because of the revision process. Without that experience, they are less likely to find ways for their students to share those same struggles and joys.

In other words, teaching assistants need courses designed to deal with writing problems they face as students and professionals. Several universities, including the one I am presently associated with, have instituted required courses in writing and publishing scholarship in English.⁷ Such courses not only help young professionals learn the conventions of publishing in English, but they help them become better writers; and, most importantly to writing program administrators, they more firmly establish connections between our own attempts to compose professional prose and our students' attempts to master academic discourse.

Second, writing program administrators should whenever possible influence the required core curriculum for writing instructors that teach in their programs. Even teaching assistants specializing in literature need courses in composition theory. Perhaps all graduate TAs should be required to take at least one course in composition theory beyond the typical practicum. This additional training in theory will help them design informed pedagogies. Donald Stewart takes this position one step further, arguing that instruction in composition theory should become an integral part of English education on the *undergraduate* level, before students ever enter a graduate program (194-95).⁸

Third, universities like the case institution that have large writing programs and graduate programs in rhetoric and composition have an untapped resource. Graduate programs and large writing programs provide a pool of researchers and subjects to study. Graduate programs that take advantage of these resources could become valuable sources of new scholarship in composition studies.⁹

Fourth, writing program administrators should be specialists in rhetoric and composition, familiar with various approaches to the teaching of writing and the strengths and weaknesses of each and, therefore, able to help teaching assistants develop and evaluate the pedagogies that they devise in response to the specific needs of their classroom. Gary Olson and Joseph Moxley write in a recent article in *College Composition and Communication*, "Ostensibly, writing program administrators are their departments' specialists in rhetoric and composition—in many cases, their *only* specialists in this field" (56). Clearly, this is an unjustified assumption; at least at the case institution, the rhetoric composition faculty—the "specialists"—are

largely involved with the graduate program, not the writing program. Assigning direction of a writing program to non-specialists is sure to create and reinforce the kinds of tensions I've been discussing.

Fifth, writing program administrators in such large institutions can develop administrative structures that will provide colleagues with current information that will help them make informed decisions about the writing programs in their institutions. Such administrative structures, perhaps small groups of teaching assistants and senior faculty, could also provide the writing program administrator with ways to monitor instructor problems and successes. For example, Michael Holzman devised small administrative groups in response to problems similar to the ones I have explored here. Small groups of teaching assistants met with a senior faculty member in order to discuss pedagogy and classroom problems. I would further argue that each group should be chaired by a composition specialist who in turn provides feedback to the writing program administrator. Of course, the structure of these groups would vary greatly from institution to institution. But their function would be to keep information flowing from the writing program administrator to the instructors and back again. Another, perhaps somewhat cumbersome, solution to this problem was proposed by a writing program administrator who heard an earlier version of this paper presented at the 1989 WPA conference: he schedules the same meeting at three different times whenever he needs to communicate with all of the instructors and adjuncts in his program. "Needless to say," he went on, "I can't do that very often."

Writing program administrators also need to ensure that those faculty who are asked to evaluate writing instruction are familiar with the goals of the writing program as a whole as well as the theory and pedagogy that informs those goals. One obvious way to do this is to provide in-service workshops to inform evaluators about process pedagogies such as collaborative learning.¹⁰

I do not claim that the problems of the case institution are typical. I only wish to raise questions and explore possible solutions. Nor am I advocating that writing program administrators enforce conformity to particular approaches to the teaching of writing. However, any writing program is only as good as those who teach in it, and a program will be coherent and pedagogically sound only to the extent that all participants are knowledgeable and informed. Only then will conflicting paradigms within the program work to create lively and productive debate rather than confusing and unproductive tension.

Notes

¹Most of the tensions I will be exploring are not as evident in smaller programs. In small departments where the entire faculty teaches writing, conflicts can be handled in regular faculty meetings where everyone can discuss shared pedagogical objectives and methodologies. Michael Holzman calls such an arrangement a "sort of a participatory democracy." But in many large universities, with numerous teaching assistants and hundreds of freshman English sections, such participation is not practical or typical.

²Similar to the Hartzog and Connolly and Vilardi works is a text recently published by Fulwiler and Young that presents numerous descriptions of writing-across-the-curriculum programs.

³It is unclear from Connolly and Vilardi exactly what kind of TA training is being provided at the institutions described. Many listed seminars, practicums and apprenticeships; none listed any *required* course work beyond these. Pittsburgh claims to "intimately relate" graduate study in composition and the study of literature and literary theory, leaving vague exactly how that is accomplished without watering down composition studies (137). Furthermore, it seems that given the demand for rhetoric and composition specialists, relatively few are being graduated. White predicts that "despite the signs of new programs, special Ph.D.s in rhetoric and composition will be in short supply for many years. In 1985-86, a total of only twenty institutions granted 228 such degrees; 102 of them were from three universities: Southern California, Indiana of Pennsylvania, and Pittsburgh (Chapman and Tate, 1987, p. 128)" (11).

⁴A new CCCC committee on the preparation of college teachers of writing, chaired by Richard Larson, is charged with developing guidelines and recommendations for training writing teachers at all levels.

⁵See Hillocks for a discussion of the general ineffectiveness of the presentational model (113-31, 192-204).

⁶According to Reither, "Academic writing, reading, and inquiry are inseparably linked; and all three are learned not by doing any one alone, but by doing them all at the same time. To 'teach writing' is thus necessarily to ground writing in reading and inquiry" (625).

⁷For a discussion of the importance of this kind of program, see Olson.

⁸One book that some WPAs use to help convince administrators that strong writing programs are in the best interest of the institution is Boyer's *College: The Undergraduate Experience*, which argues that writing is the heart of any curriculum and can help solve problems of attrition.

⁹See Reagan for an example of how graduate students' research can benefit teacher training.

¹⁰See Polin and White for a discussion of "retraining" literature faculty to teach writing.

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Evaluating a Portfolio System

David W. Smit

In the fall of 1988 we in the Composition Program at Kansas State University began to experiment with a portfolio system. We did so for reasons usually associated with the implementation of other portfolio systems (Elbow and Belanoff, "Portfolio" and "State"; Ford and Larkin, Burnham). We wanted to make our grading more consistent from section to section since each semester we have over 130 sections of Composition I and II taught by more than 60 instructors. In addition, we wanted to make our grading more rigorous. Although the average grade point for all students in our program has been about 2.5 (C+ /B-) for the past four years—an average not unduly high considering that we offer our students a great deal of help in classes of about twenty-three—the general perception was that the abilities of our students had gone down in recent years and that we were passing students who could not write. Our failure rate varied from 3.6 to 5.3 per cent over the previous four years, but we had no way to judge whether these rates were too high, too low, or just right.

We also wanted to judge adequately the writing competence of our students; that is, we wanted a form of evaluation which allowed our students to submit a variety of writing written under "normal" or "naturalistic" conditions, one which allowed time for multiple drafts, consultation with other readers, and careful editing (Cooper). The standard proficiency exam which asks students to write on one topic for two or three hours was therefore out of the question.

Besides raising our standards and making our testing more effective, we wanted to improve our teaching. We wanted our instructors to consider themselves more as professional advisors or coaches than as graders or editors. We wanted to encourage them to use conferences and peer review and above all to talk to each other, to feel free to discuss their concerns and problems, to work on goals, assignments, and grades together, to be a community with common goals and standards.

Thus we adopted a portfolio system on an experimental basis for those instructors in our advisory groups, both regular instructors and graduate students who had been teaching in the program for three years or less. Our more experienced instructors, about one-third of the staff, did not participate in the experiment.

The portfolio system we adopted was based on the program at SUNY-Stony Brook (Elbow and Belanoff, "Portfolio" and "State"). In order to pass

Composition I and II, students must submit a portfolio of their work to one other instructor, an outside reader, who decides whether their work meets the standards of the program. If the outside reader decides that a student's portfolio fails, that student must fail the course.

The writing in each portfolio must be of a certain kind. The overall format of our program is based on the aims of writing in James Kinneavy's *Theory of Discourse*. In Composition I, students write to express themselves and to convey information, what Kinneavy calls expressive and referential discourse; in Composition II they write persuasively and in response to literature. Thus the portfolios for Composition I must contain three revised pieces: an expressive piece and two referential pieces. In order to give our students practice in writing under exam conditions, we also require that one piece, either expressive or referential, be written in class. For Composition II, the portfolios must contain two persuasive pieces and one critical analysis or other response to a poem, story, or play. All of these pieces of writing must be revised. And as in Composition I, one writing, either a persuasive piece or a response to literature, must be done in class.

To give students practice in submitting the final portfolio we hold a trial run at mid-term. For the trial run students submit one revised piece to an outside reader. If the writing in the trial run passes, the student knows that at least one piece of writing is already good enough to pass the final. If the writing in the trial run fails, the student has the rest of the semester to revise it or to work on another piece to submit in its place. Students suffer no other consequences for failing the trial run. We do not record the failures. The trial run is meant to be practice for submitting the final portfolio.

Students must submit their portfolios in a standard format: each piece of writing must be either typed or neatly handwritten in ink on unlined 8 1/2" X 11" paper. In order to discourage plagiarism and to help us decide borderline cases, we require that each paper be accompanied by a copy of the assignment and all previous notes, drafts, and reader-responses.

If the original instructor disagrees with the judgment of the outside reader, she may appeal to the Director of Composition, who assigns the portfolio to another experienced instructor for a second reading. In every case, the decision of the second reader is final.

After two semesters of the portfolio system on an experimental basis, we were faced with the decision of whether to adopt it throughout the program. During the first semester of the experiment we had faced a certain amount of confusion and hostility from students who either did not understand how the system worked or who felt threatened by it. Moreover, we had been forced to modify a number of our procedures, which did not help our cause with the disgruntled students or with the instructors who had harbored doubts about the new system in the first place. Although we were generally

pleased with our experiment, we felt we needed more information before making up our collective mind. We decided we needed four kinds of information: 1) comparative facts and figures about grades and rates of failure, not only from year to year but between sections that used the portfolio system and those that did not, 2) information about how often our instructors agreed and disagreed about their judgments, 3) a survey of what our instructors thought about the system and whether it seemed to have any effect on how they taught, and 4) a survey of selected students, both those who had been in sections which used portfolios and those in traditional classes, to determine what they thought of the new procedure.

I would like to share these evaluative procedures and their results in order to contribute to our knowledge of portfolio systems and how they work. The kinds of analyses we performed and the evaluative instruments we used—as well as our results—should be helpful to other programs thinking of implementing similar portfolio systems.

Facts and Figures about Grades

In our system students can pass the portfolio but still fail the course for other reasons, such as excessive absence or not doing other required work. Thus we needed to know not only the number of students whose portfolio failed but also the number who failed the class as a whole.

As I have already mentioned, in the previous four years the failure rates for our freshman composition courses as a whole had hovered between 3.6 and 5.3 per cent, a four-year average of 4.6 per cent. Students failed the portfolio alone just below this range: both semesters after appeals, 3.2 per cent of the portfolios failed. This rate was in keeping with the experience of SUNY-Stony Brook, which reported a failure rate, after a number of borderline portfolios were allowed to be revised, of under five per cent (Elbow and Belanoff, "State" 102). It seemed then that the portfolio system had not made our program any more rigorous.

But a quick review of final grades for the program as a whole indicated a startling discrepancy. The overall failure rates for composition classes as a whole—that is, for both portfolio and traditional sections—jumped to 7.2 per cent in the fall and 8.2 per cent in the spring. Clearly something was going on.

A comparison of the grade distributions of portfolio sections with traditional sections helped to explain the discrepancy (see Table 1).

Table 1
A Comparison of Grade Distributions for
Portfolio and Traditional Classes

Fall 1988	A	B	C	D	F	Inc	W
Portfolio Classes							
Totals	366	885	601	104	183	29	91
Percentage	16.2	39.2	26.6	4.6	8.1	1.3	4
Traditional Classes							
Totals	121	409	254	40	43	3	33
Percentage	13.4	45.3	28.1	4.4	4.8	.3	3
Totals:	487	1,294	855	144	226	32	124
Total Percentage:	15.4	40.9	27	4.6	7.2	1	3.9
Spring 1989	A	B	C	D	F	Inc	W
Portfolio Classes							
Totals	355	716	464	89	185	33	98
Percentage	18.3	36.9	23.9	4.6	9.5	1.7	5.1
Traditional Classes							
Totals	77	273	118	18	17	1	17
Percentage	14.8	52.4	22.6	3.4	3.3	.2	3.3
Totals:	432	989	582	107	202	34	115
Total Percentage:	17.6	40.2	23.6	4.3	8.2	1.4	4.7

In the fall semester the failure rate for the course as a whole in portfolio sections was 3.3 percentage points higher than in regular sections; in the spring the failure rate for the course as a whole in portfolio sections was 6.2

percentage points higher. Using the rate of failure for the entire course as a standard, portfolio sections were significantly more rigorous. But why were they more rigorous if only 3.2 per cent of the portfolios were failing? We thought of a number of explanations, but the most obvious was that the effort required to assemble the portfolio—all the conferences and all the revising, which our instructors and the Writing Lab reported was unprecedented—had forced many students to fall along the wayside, to drop after the official day for dropping classes, which at K-State is recorded as an F, or to not submit a portfolio at all. We found this interpretation somewhat comforting. We surmised that in previous years many students had passed even though they had not completed all the assignments or even though they had not paid much attention to their final products. Such students could pass no longer. However, students who did work hard within the portfolio system, those who did all the major assignments and who worked at revision, had a slightly better chance of passing than in earlier years.

Other explanations did occur to us. During the year we implemented the portfolio system, K-State had an unusually large increase in enrollment, but preliminary indications were that the high school records and ACT scores of our latest class of freshman were not substantially different from those of previous years. In addition, the same year we implemented the portfolio exam, we also put into effect a new composition curriculum which introduced a research report into Composition I. According to our experienced instructors, the research report made Composition I much more difficult for borderline students than it had been in previous years. But neither of these explanations account for the discrepancy in grades between the portfolio and traditional sections. There is no apparent reason why more borderline students should have wound up in portfolio sections since students did not know which sections would participate in the portfolio system when they registered. And the new curriculum was used in both portfolio and traditional classes.

All in all, our grade distributions suggested that portfolio grading had indeed made our program more rigorous.

Information about Consistency in Grading

In order to make our grading of portfolios consistent, we held grading sessions once a semester for all instructors in the program. In addition, twice a semester instructors in the portfolio system met in small groups with an experienced instructor to read sample papers and discuss whether these papers should pass or fail.

We used very general criteria for evaluating papers in portfolios: each paper had to have a clear purpose, a form of organization which was easy

to follow, sufficient detail or evidence, a consistent tone appropriate to the purpose and audience of the paper, and careful editing. However, each piece of writing in the portfolio had to be accompanied by an assignment sheet, and we encouraged assignment sheets to be more specific. For example, a common assignment in Composition I asks students to tell a story about a significant event in their lives, a story which has sensory detail, dialogue, and a dramatized "key moment." Thus portfolio readers can use the general criteria as a framework for interpreting the more specific requirements of individual assignments.

In our discussions in both large and small groups we generally agreed about whether the sample papers should pass or fail, but there was always a significant minority who disagreed about whether the weakest papers should fail.

To see how well portfolio readers agreed in their judgments, we collected two kinds of information. At the midterm trial run we asked instructors to indicate how many of the outside readers' judgments were "surprises"; that is, how many of the judgments they strongly objected to. In the fall semester approximately five per cent were surprises. Because of an oversight we did not note the surprises in the trial run of the spring semester.

At the end of the semester we also noted the number of appeals which instructors submitted for portfolios which failed but which they thought should have passed. In the fall, 23 per cent of the failed portfolios—16 out of 70—were appealed. In the spring, 27 per cent—17 out of 63—were appealed. Although these numbers indicate that we disagreed over one-fourth of the failures, we also noted that these disagreements occurred among less than ten per cent of instructors and concerned less than one per cent of the total number of portfolios we read: in the fall we disagreed on 16 portfolios out of a total of over 1800, and in the spring we disagreed on 17 portfolios out of over 1600. We are exploring ways to increase our consistency, primarily by being more directive in our grading sessions, but we wonder if we will be able to do much better than we already have.

A Survey of Instructors

Our survey was based on the model offered by Barbara Gross Davis, Michael Scriven, and Susan Thomas (169-94). Besides asking about other matters such as our curriculum and our training program, we inquired about how often our instructors used those teaching techniques we associate with effective instruction in writing. If they had participated in the portfolio system, we also asked whether the system encouraged them to use particular techniques and whether the portfolio exam had other effects. The results are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

As Table 2 indicates, teachers who had participated in the portfolio system agreed overwhelmingly that it had helped to develop a sense of collegiality (69.2 per cent sometimes or more frequently), that it encouraged students to revise (92.3 per cent sometimes or more frequently), that it helped to develop an adequate minimum standard for the program (88.5 per cent sometimes or more frequently), encouraged conferences (96.2 per cent sometimes or more frequently), and encouraged instructors to think of themselves as coaches (80.8 per cent sometimes or more frequently). The instructors' responses also indicated that to a lesser extent the portfolio system encouraged students who needed the help to attend the Writing Lab (65.4 per cent sometimes or more frequently), but we could expect this lower number because attending our Writing Lab is entirely voluntary, and many students will not attend because of their tight schedules, their heavy work loads, or a misplaced sense of pride.

Table 2

Responses of Instructors to the Portfolio System

As a result of your participation in the portfolio evaluation this year, how would you rate the following about the portfolio system? (Results are stated in percentages. A total of 26 instructors responded. One instructor did not respond to questions a, e, and f.)

	Never	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. helped to develop a sense of collegiality among instructors	11.5	15.4	34.6	26.9	7.7
b. encouraged students to revise	3.8	3.8	11.5	38.5	42.3
c. helped to develop an adequate minimum standard for passing composition	3.8	7.7	38.5	30.8	19.2
d. encouraged you to confer with your students	0	3.8	19.2	46.2	30.8
e. encouraged students who needed to attend Writing Lab	3.8	26.9	42.3	15.4	7.7
f. encouraged you to think of yourself as a coach	0	15.4	38.5	15.4	26.9

In addition, our instructors indicated that they were likely to use those teaching strategies which the portfolio system was designed to encourage, although there were no significant differences between those who participated in the portfolio system and those who did not (see Table 3). Apparently, our staff had been using all along those teaching strategies we were trying to promote. We were, however, surprised that more of our instructors did not comment on first drafts or discuss student writing in class. These are two techniques we need to promote more actively in our training sessions.

In short, the survey showed that the instructors participating in the portfolio system used peer group workshops, conferred with their students, and encouraged revision—exactly what we had been hoping for. But our instructors may not have done these things primarily because of the portfolio system since the instructors who did not participate in the system used the same techniques. At best we can say that the portfolio system did not lessen our emphasis on peer groups, conferences, and revision.

A Survey of Students

We surveyed 375 students, slightly more than 10 per cent of all of those registered in Composition I and II. The classes we surveyed were roughly divided among the classes of first-year, second- and third-year, and more experienced instructors. They were also divided among the students of instructors who supported the portfolio system and those who had severe reservations about it.

Our first concern was whether the portfolio exam encouraged our students to confer with their instructors and revise their work and whether they received sufficient help in meeting the program's standards. Once again, the results were overwhelmingly supportive (see Table 4). Of the students surveyed, 87.2 per cent said that portfolios encouraged them to consult with their instructor, 93.5 per cent said that portfolios encouraged them to revise, and 82.4 per cent said that they received sufficient help in meeting our program's standards.

Table 3

A Comparison of Teaching Techniques Used by Beginning and Experienced Instructors (BI, EI)*

As a result of your participation in the Program, how often did you use any of the following techniques? (Results are shown in percentages, with 26 beginning instructors (BIs) and 14 experienced instructors (EIs) responding. Beginning instructors, all of whom participated in the portfolio system, are listed first.)

	Never	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
a. students work together in small groups to help each other with writing	BI: 7.7 EI: 0	7.7 7.1	11.5 28.6	65.4 57.1	7.7 7.1
b. students evaluate each others' writing	BI: 0 EI: 0	7.7 7.1	26.9 21.4	38.5 28.6	26.9 42.9
c. students engage in prewriting/invention activities	BI: 0 EI: 7.1	0 7.1	11.5 7.1	53.8 50	34.6 28.6
d. students are required to revise their writing	BI: 3.8 EI: 0	3.8 7.1	15.4 0	26.9 42.9	50 50
e. students submit first drafts for comments or grading	BI: 15.4 EI: 7.1	26.9 35.7	19.2 28.6	15.4 14.3	23.1 14.3
f. examples of student writing are discussed in class	BI: 7.7 EI: 0	50 14.3	15.4 28.6	19.2 42.9	7.7 14.3
g. you confer regularly with students about their writing	BI: 0 EI: 0	3.8 0	19.2 7.1	53.8 71.4	23.1 21.4

[* All of our beginning instructors participated in the portfolio system both semesters; during the second semester a number of experienced instructors voluntarily joined them. Thus, this comparison between beginning and experienced instructors does not neatly distinguish between instructors who participated in the portfolio system and those who did not.]

Table 4
Student Attitudes About the Portfolio System

As a result of your participation in the portfolio system this year, how would you rate the following about the Composition Program and your instructor in helping you deal with the portfolio system? (Results are stated in percentages. Between 335 and 337 students answered each question.)

	Yes	No	Not Sure/ Not Applicable
a. encouraged you to revise	93.5	3	3.6
b. encouraged you to consult with your instructor	87.2	6.8	6
c. encouraged you to attend the Writing Lab	39.4	37	23.6
d. gave you a good sense of what the Program's minimum standards are	75.3	16.4	8.3
e. helped you feel that your writing met the Program's minimum standards	77	12.8	10.1
f. gave you sufficient help in meeting the Program's standards	82.4	7.8	9.8

We had two additional concerns about using portfolios: that students would not recognize the standards implicit in the wide variety of writing we allowed them to submit and that the system simply put too much pressure on them. But our fears were allayed somewhat by these results: 75.3 per cent of the students said that the portfolio system gave them a good sense of the composition program's minimum standards, and 77 per cent said that they felt encouraged that their writing met the program's standards. Still 16.4 per cent responded that they did not have a sense of the program's standards, and 12.8 per cent said that they did not feel as if they had met the program's standards, with 8.3 per cent and 10.1 per cent respectively not sure. We need to improve these figures since they are considerably higher than our actual failure rates, which might indicate that the portfolio system does cause a

certain amount of uncertainty about whether portfolios will pass or fail, some of it perhaps unwarranted.

Asked point blank whether they preferred a portfolio evaluation to a regular final exam, the students preferred the portfolio by a margin of four to one (see Table 5). The only group that seemed to have reservations about the system was composed of students who had submitted portfolios in the fall but not in the spring. There the vote was evenly split 18 to 19, perhaps because during that first semester a certain amount of bad feeling was fueled by rumors and half-truths as we modified our procedures and "got the bugs out" of the system.

In general, I think our four-part evaluation was successful: it told us what we wanted to know and gave us some confidence that we were not confronting a host of problems we were not aware of. The four methods of evaluation we used were also important in building support for a procedure about which many people had reservations. On the basis of this information we decided to implement the portfolio system throughout the program during the 1989-90 academic year.

Table 5
Students' Choice of Evaluation

Given the choice between submitting a portfolio and taking a regular final examination, which would you prefer? You should assume that for the regular final examination you would have to write an essay for two hours during the final examination period and that the regular final would count for approximately 1/7 to 1/4 of your final grade. (Results are in raw numbers and then percentages. 335 students responded; on each of the questions marked with an asterisk, one student indicated he was not sure or that the choice of exam made no difference.)

When Student Participated in the Portfolio System	Choice of Evaluation:	
	Portfolio	Regular Exam
Fall Semester Only	18/ 48.6%	19/ 51.3% *
Spring Semester Only	120/ 77.9%	34/ 22.1% *
Both Spring and Fall Semesters	124/ 87.3%	18/ 12.7%
TOTALS:	262/ 78.2%	71/ 21.2%

Notes

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Surveying New Teaching Assistants: Who They Are, What They Know, and What They Want to Know

Irwin Weiser

Writing Program Administrators and others who are responsible for teaching assistant training programs have been helped in recent years by the publication of work such as Bridges' 1986 collection *Training the New Teacher of College Composition* and Reagan's "Teaching TAs to Teach: Show, Don't Tell," which offer WPAs advice about merging theory with practice, designing teaching seminars, and involving teaching assistants in research projects to help them learn about teaching styles. In addition, books like Lindemann's excellent *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, while not addressed exclusively to new writing teachers, offer us texts for our programs which help TAs see the teaching of writing as a theory-driven practice with an intellectual history and integrity.

However, as useful as this work is, it is limited in one important way: because it can only address the generic new teacher, it cannot take into account the concerns or assumptions a particular group of new TAs bring to their work. We can, of course, assume that new teaching assistants will want to know as specifically as possible what their teaching and grading duties are, that they will need to familiarize themselves with the course content and text, that they will need information about holding office hours, the availability of supplies and materials, and how to get onto the payroll.

But some of the major concerns of new TAs can be unintentionally overlooked if we take too much for granted about what these new teachers need to know. And just as importantly, we sometimes forget that what new teaching assistants want to know and what we think they need to know are not the same. This difference can diminish the effectiveness of pre-term orientation programs since the unarticulated concerns of new teaching assistants may prevent them from absorbing the information we provide them. Frequently too shy or nervous or insecure to speak up in front of their peers and supervisors, beginning teaching assistants sometimes are so worried about a particular aspect of teaching that much of what they could learn during orientation simply passes them by.

To address this problem and to make our orientation for new teaching assistants in the composition program responsive to their needs, I have developed a brief questionnaire (Appendix) to solicit information about their

backgrounds and interests. The questionnaire is sent to new TAs early in the summer before they arrive on campus to begin their duties, and their responses are used to help those of us who conduct the orientation plan specific sessions.

The survey elicits several kinds of information. Part I focuses on the prior educational and teaching experience of the respondents, providing me with a basic profile of the group. Part II asks the TAs to rank four groups of items concerning teaching. Neither the grouping of the items nor the items themselves are particularly innocent. Group 1 contains five items which I think should be of fairly immediate concern to new teachers since they involve getting started; Group 2 asks TAs to rank some activities integral to (or traditionally considered integral to) the teaching of writing; Group 3 deliberately asks about rhetorical and pedagogical activities which are generally agreed to be important in the teaching of writing. The responses to Group 3 also help me gain some insight into the assumptions students have about writing as a process and as a social act, two theoretical positions that guide our program and most others. Group 4 seeks information less concerned with the immediacy of teaching than with the TA's new role as teacher/graduate student. Some items, I suspect, are consciousness raising; that is, their very presence brings them to the attention of the teaching assistants. I will address specific items and responses from Part II in more detail later, but first, I would like to look briefly at Part I of the survey.

Part I emphasizes the fact that in part the complexity of working with teaching assistants stems from their heterogeneity. Of our new TAs this year, 79% have not taught composition before, and of those who have, the range of experience is fairly wide: 61% have had no prior training in the teaching of writing, and 47% have not taught at all before. These figures suggest not only that the majority of our new teachers need training as teachers of writing, but also that nearly half will need support in a number of more general matters concerning teaching, such as establishing course policies, dealing with student problems, planning and carrying out class discussions, even—as I have found every year—figuring final grades for students.

The responses to Question 6 point out a disheartening irony of our discipline. Traditionally, the best English students are exempted from or test out of composition, often taking a literature course instead. This August, at least 34% of our new teaching assistants had not taken a course like the one they were assigned to teach. (I say "at least" because the courses respondents identified as "introductory composition" sounded much more like "writing about literature" or "great books" courses.) This is, I think, unlike any other field. In many English departments, some of the people who teach composition have not only never studied their subject matter, they may have never taken a course in it. It is one of the sad realities of how

composition is viewed by both the larger institution and by English departments. Composition continues to be seen as a service course, as a course in skill and technique rather than concept, and so institutional pressure frequently places writing program administrators in the position of providing on-the-job training for staff members with varying degrees of experience, interest, and enthusiasm for their subject. While at some schools, numerical demands for teachers and institutional support for training allow for required courses in composition theory and pedagogy before graduate students are awarded teaching assistantships, the situation we work under at Purdue is all too typical, as the MLA survey referred to earlier points out. And the problem is one which is recognized by teaching assistants. In their 1987 national survey of teaching assistants in all disciplines, Diamond and Gray report that 8% of the English TAs responding say their academic background is inadequate for their responsibility. Although this figure seems small, it is the highest of any of the seven departments which made up 41% of the sample and twice that of the total sample.

The final question in Part I is the result of comments I have heard in the past from several new graduate students. As graduates of small liberal arts schools, they have been as overwhelmed by the size of a 36,000-student, research university as are the new freshmen they are about to teach. These graduate students come from schools where there are no teaching assistants, where all classes are small, where everything is less complicated than it is at a large university. Knowing whether a significant number of our new teaching assistants may find the size of Purdue intimidating allows us to decide how much to discuss the workings of a very large school.

We ask for information about how many students have not attended undergraduate school in the United States only as a way to provide an appropriate response for international teaching assistants. By reviewing application files, we know before we receive this survey how many of our incoming teaching assistants will be new to the U.S., and the Director of the English as a Second Language program and I plan a special session during orientation for international teaching assistants. We discuss cultural differences between American and international universities and students, we show a videotape of an international TA conducting a composition class, and we talk about how to address students' concerns about having a non-native speaker as an instructor in an English class.

I acknowledged earlier that the items in Part II are not innocent. Let me add now that my interpretations of the responses are not innocent either. I realize that sometimes people say what they think others want to hear, and I realize that people frequently hear things other than what has been said. I also understand that my interpretations are open to interpretation, that my reading of the survey responses is not the only possible reading, and that I find myself reading the surveys in sometimes contradictory ways.

One of the messages I receive from the rankings in Part II is that there are some differences between people who have taught composition before and those who have not. In Group 1, for example, the people who have taught before are not particularly concerned with the practical matter of meeting their first class or establishing policies for attendance, grading, etc. In fact, none rank "first-day concerns" any higher than fourth. Nearly half (47%) of the inexperienced teachers, on the other hand, rank this item first, second, or third. Those people who have taught before want more emphasis on commenting on student writing than on grading; the opposite is true of new teachers. This may suggest that those who have had the experience of trying to write helpful comments are familiar with the difficulty of doing so—that it is easier to say that a paper is a C than to write comments which will help the student improve the next paper. New teachers, on the other hand, are likely to be uncertain about standards for grading, and concerned about being unfair. The experienced composition teachers are more concerned about identifying students who need extra help than are novice teachers (Group 2, item 6), and are significantly less concerned about identifying errors in grammar and mechanics—7 of the 8 respondents rank this last.

Experienced teachers are more interested in discussing planning than their inexperienced counterparts, and less interested in organization. They also appear to be more interested in interaction with and between students, ranking both "Helping students respond to each others' writing" and "Talking with students about their writing" higher than the inexperienced teachers. Those TAs who have taught elsewhere before are also more interested in teaching other courses than the beginning teachers, who might be seen as understandably most interested in the course they have to teach first. Experienced TAs are also slightly more interested in how their work will be evaluated and how they will be rewarded than are new teachers. Though none of the experienced TAs rank this item first, 5 of the 8 (62.5%) rank it second and none rank it last. They are less interested, probably because of their prior experience with the role, in their status as student/employee.

There are, however, many areas in which experienced and inexperienced teaching assistants respond similarly. Approximately 50% of both groups rank becoming familiar with the syllabus and text either first or second, and while experienced teachers show much more interest in understanding the theory underlying the course, both groups rank this item very high. Similarly, both new and experienced teaching assistants are concerned about the productive use of class time. Both groups rank "Making writing assignments" high, and both rank "Helping students write for different audiences" comparatively low.

Some of what the data suggest to me is probably pretty obvious. Because, for example, most new teaching assistants show an interest in the theory

underlying the course, I include a theoretical introduction in the talk I give on the first morning of the orientation program, emphasizing the similarities among the three specific syllabi used in the various small practicum (or mentor) groups each will be assigned to for the year, as well as through all of our department's writing courses. As a reaction to the relatively low ranking for audience concerns in the group as a whole this year, I will be sure to include in this early talk a discussion on the centrality of audience to the rhetorical situation and the ways we try to encourage audience awareness through the assignments we make. The same will be true of a discussion of the importance of collaboration in writing and the use of response groups in the class to encourage collaboration. Both the interest by the experienced TAs and the lack of interest by the inexperienced ones makes including a tour of the Writing Lab and an introduction to its services an important part of orientation. We also include as part of the orientation for the whole group an explanation of the mechanics of getting registered, getting teaching assignments, and getting on the payroll, and because usually half of the TAs have attended much smaller undergraduate schools, we talk briefly about some of the "big school" differences, both in terms of how they affect the teaching assistants and how they may affect their students. However, because of the diversity of responses to many of the questions, we have, in recent years, eliminated many large group sessions on particular aspects of teaching writing, and instead have many more opportunities for new TAs to meet in their mentor groups, where specific considerations of syllabi, class activities, and teaching strategies can take place more easily.

By highlighting some of the differences between experienced and inexperienced teaching assistants, the survey led us to change the way we assign students to the small mentor groups in which they will meet weekly. In the past, our groups were deliberately heterogeneous in amount of experience. At present, we have been experimenting with placing the most experienced teachers among our new TAs in one mentor group. While there are advantages to having experienced TAs in the same group as inexperienced TAs—at least for the inexperienced TAs, we have seen several advantages to having one or more groups comprised of those who have had both prior training and teaching in composition. The TAs do not find themselves reviewing information which is "old hat" to them, and the mentors find it easier to arrange sessions which will benefit the whole group. Most interestingly, we have been able to try some less conventional approaches to teaching with the experienced TAs because they are already familiar with the theoretical and practical matters of teaching a process-oriented composition class. For instance, one of my colleagues, Jim Berlin, has been developing a semiotically-based approach to composition—derivative of his theoretical work on social-epistemic rhetoric. The TAs he recently mentored have taught writing as a process and have in most cases had formal training in the teaching of writing. This allows him (and them) to

devote more time in their practicum meetings to developing assignments and class activities that integrate what the teaching assistants already know about teaching writing with what they are learning about semiotics, cultural criticism, and social rhetoric. And while the inexperienced TAs may be missing some of the benefits of having experienced teachers in their mentor group, there appears to be something of a "we're all in the same boat" effect in the groups made up all of novices. In my own group last year, for example, I detected none of the impatience I had sometimes seen when people new to the classroom asked questions which the experienced teachers did not need to spend time on. There also appeared to be more willingness to figure out how to deal with problems within the group, perhaps because they did not feel that someone else already had the answer. Besides, there is plenty of interoffice interaction between old and new TAs to compensate for the lack of interaction in the group sessions.

I must say that I did not expect these questionnaires to suggest revolutionary changes in our orientation program or practicum. Some of the changes they have suggested were, however, unexpected. Those of us who have mentored when orientation consisted of a larger number of meetings of the whole group agree that the new schedule which allows for more small meetings is preferable. It allows mentors and teaching assistants to get to know one another more quickly; it makes discussions of evaluation and grading more productive because the smaller groups can discuss more papers in greater detail; it enables mentors to address specific questions and concerns and to spend time with confidence building. We also are more comfortable introducing theory early in the orientation because we know the teaching assistants are interested in knowing about it.

And it is a concern for what the new teaching assistants want to know that motivated this survey in the first place. If they are most concerned about nitty-gritty things like what they should tell their students to call them or what to do if they run out of things to say after ten minutes, they will not be able to attend as closely to our discussions of writing as process or organizing peer analysis groups. If there is a strong concern for grammar and mechanics (which thankfully there was not this year), we know that we need to address issues of what errors mean, how much they matter, and how to best address them within the context of a composition course. If there is little concern for or interest in audience (as was the case this year), then we know that matters related to audience will demand our attention.

Let me close by saying that one thing I did not anticipate the survey to do was to elicit thanks. Frankly, I have been disappointed by the small number of people who have added comments of their own at the conclusion of the survey. But I have been equally surprised that the majority of those who do comment offer some expression of gratitude for our asking them to let us know what matters to them. And this suggests to me that an important

benefit of this survey has been to tell our incoming teaching assistants that we value their teaching and we care about them.

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Appendix

By taking a few minutes to answer the following questions, you can help tailor this year's orientation program for new teaching assistants to your concerns and interests.

PART I: Background and Experience

1. Have you taught composition previously?
Yes _____ No _____
2. If your answer to 1 is yes, how many composition courses have you taught?
1-3 _____ 4-6 _____ 7-10 _____ Over 10 _____
3. Have you had other kinds of college-teaching experience? If so, specify the kinds of teaching you have done.
4. Have you had elementary, middle, or high school teaching experience?
Yes _____ No _____

5. Have you had any formal (i.e., classes) or informal (i.e., workshops, in-service programs) training in teaching writing?

Yes _____ No _____

If you answer yes, please describe your training briefly. Use the back of this page if you need more space.

6. Have you taken an introductory composition course yourself?

Yes _____ No _____

If you answer yes, please describe briefly the course (length of course, approximate number of papers, required reading, etc.).

If you answer no, but such a course was generally required, did you test out, were you exempted, or did you fulfill the requirement in some other way (by taking a more advanced course, for example)?

7. Which best describes the type of undergraduate school you attended?

- _____ American publicly supported, over 10,000 students
- _____ American publicly supported, under 10,000 students
- _____ American privately supported, over 10,000 students
- _____ American privately supported, under 10,000 students
- _____ College or university not in United States

PART II: Subjects of Interest to You

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR INTEREST IN DISCUSSING AND LEARNING ABOUT EACH OF THE FOLLOWING BY NUMERICALLY RANKING THE ITEMS IN EACH GROUP. USE 1 TO INDICATE THE ITEM MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN EACH GROUP, 2 FOR THE NEXT MOST IMPORTANT, AND SO ON.

Group 1 (Rank 1-5)

- _____ What to say and do on the first day of class
- _____ Becoming familiar with the syllabus and text
- _____ Establishing class policies governing attendance, assignment deadlines, grading, office hours, etc.

- _____ Making an initial evaluation of your students' writing skills
- _____ Understanding the theory which underlies the course

Group 2 (Rank 1-6)

- _____ Making writing assignments
- _____ Commenting on students' papers
- _____ Grading students' papers
- _____ Identifying errors in grammar and mechanics
- _____ Using class time productively
- _____ Identifying students who need extra help (and knowing where they can get it)

Group 3 (Rank 1-5)

- _____ Helping students plan their writing
- _____ Helping students write for different audiences
- _____ Helping students organize their writing
- _____ Helping students respond to each others' writing
- _____ Talking with students about their writing

Group 4 (Rank 1-5)

- _____ Departmental procedures for evaluating and rewarding your teaching
- _____ Your status as a student/employee (fees, benefits, etc.)
- _____ Computing facilities available to you
- _____ Other writing courses offered by the English Department
- _____ Other opportunities for teaching in the English Department

Please feel free to use the back of this questionnaire for any comments you wish to make about matters of concern to you as a new teaching assistant at Purdue. Use the enclosed envelope to return the questionnaire to me. I look forward to seeing you at our first orientation meeting. I'm sure that your responses here will help us make it valuable to you.

Notes on Contributors

Cynthia Cornell is a Professor of English at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. A medievalist by training, she has been a leader in the Writing Competence Program since its beginning in 1978. She has regularly taught WAC courses and served as Co-coordinator of the WAC program, as leader of writing workshops for faculty, as evaluator of the competence program, and as Director of Writing Placement. She has presented papers on the DePauw program and on her research in computer revision at CCCC, ITW, and WPA annual meetings.

Irene Gale teaches composition and technical writing at the University of South Florida, where she serves as associate editor of the *Journal of Advanced Composition*. She is currently completing a book on critical thinking and a book on composition theory.

David Klooster, formerly of DePauw University, is now an Assistant Professor of English and Coordinator of the Freshman Writing Program at John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio. He has published articles on writing centers, writing across the curriculum, and responding to student writing.

Judith Q. McMullen is an Instructor of English and Writing Consultant for the School of Forestry and Wildlife Resources at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. She teaches technical writing, freshman composition, and children's literature. As a writing consultant, she works with the forestry school's writing improvement program, which began seven years ago. She also gives writing workshops for professional foresters.

Barbara M. Olds is an Associate Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences and Director of the EPICS Program at the Colorado School of Mines. Her research interests include interdisciplinary studies (integrating humanities and engineering) and the role of communication in engineering design. She has published articles recently in a variety of publications, including *The Technical Writing Teacher*, *College Teaching*, and *The Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*.

David W. Smit is an assistant professor and the Director of Composition at Kansas State University. He has presented papers on writing in the disciplines, reader-response, and intensive peer review. His articles on literary style have appeared in *The Henry James Review* and *Style*, and an article on collaborative learning was published last year in the *Journal of Advanced Composition*. His book *The Language of a Master: Theories of Style and the Late Writing of Henry James* was published by Southern Illinois Press in 1988.

Irwin Weiser is an Associate Professor of English and Director of Freshman Composition at Purdue University, where, in addition to working with teaching assistants, he teaches composition courses and a graduate seminar in composition research. He is the author of a freshman rhetoric, *Writing: An Introduction* (Scott, Foresman, 1989) and co-author of *Language and Writing: Applications of Linguistics to Rhetoric and Composition* (Ablex, 1987). He has published in the *Journal of Teaching Writing*, the *Arizona English Bulletin*, and *Freshman English News*, and has served on the editorial boards of WPA, *Journal of Basic Writing*, and *Journal of Teaching Writing*.

J. Douglas Wellman is the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Forest Resources at North Carolina State University. He was formerly in the Department of Forestry at Virginia Tech, where he taught and conducted research on forest and recreation policy and directed the Writing Improvement Program. He is author of *Wildland Recreation Policy* and over 70 other scholarly articles. His undergraduate education was in English literature, history and philosophy. Following graduation, he taught high school English for four years before pursuing graduate work at the University of Michigan in the social aspects of natural resources management.

Announcements

Call for Articles

Beginning with the Spring, 1991, issue of WPA, we will feature a new section of the journal, "WPA On Campus," devoted to short articles of a practical nature. We envision this section of the journal as a forum for discussing issues that are important to WPAs but that are not readily suitable for publication as a full-length, scholarly article. Perhaps you have an innovative policy for incorporating transfer students into your writing program or a unique method of evaluating teaching assistants. Share your ideas in the form of a short (1000-2000 word) article, designated for consideration in "WPA On Campus." We hope such a section will stimulate dialogue among our readers and provide an ongoing source of practical information.

Conference Announcement

The Hilton Hotel in Biloxi, MS (The Mississippi Gulf Coast) will be the site of the Seventh Conference on Computers and Writing, May 24-26, 1991. The Conference theme is "Making Connections" between the academic and working world and within and between disciplines. For more information or to request registration materials contact: Julie Chaplin, USM Division of Life-Long Learning, Southern Station, Box 5056, Hattiesburg, MS 39504, (601) 266-4196.

WPA Resolution on Publishers' Complimentary Copies Passed by WPA Executive Committee, March, 1990.

Background: Writing program administrators routinely receive examination copies of a multitude of possible textbooks for the courses they supervise. These represent the considerable efforts of colleagues and of publishers. We receive these at no cost to ourselves or our institutions and, although we cannot use most of them, since we value books, we hate to discard them. We ought not to profit gratuitously from the work of others. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of examination copies are resold every year, often as new books. Whereas:

- a. Selling complimentary copies devalues the work of ourselves and our colleagues who write or edit textbooks by depriving them of earning royalties on their work;
- b. Selling complimentary copies forces necessary or premature revision of existing textbooks, for economic rather than academic reasons;

- c. Selling complimentary copies does not particularly benefit students, who pay between 75-100% of the new book price. The primary beneficiaries are the used-book sellers, who buy low and sell high.

Therefore we, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, oppose the sale of these copies, by ourselves, our colleagues, and any persons we supervise, to any person or organization, including used book dealers.

Moreover, we will work through our faculty associations to urge that the selling of publishers' complimentary copies be prohibited on our respective campuses and at our college bookstores.

We also recommend that publishers' samples that are no longer needed either be donated to the college writing center or library or other non-profit institutions, such as other schools, prisons, hospitals, or the like.

The CCC Committee on Assessment

The CCC Committee on Assessment will hold an open forum at the NCTE Convention in Atlanta to draft a position paper on the development and governance of local and statewide writing assessment programs and procedures, Friday, 6 November, 9-12 pm. Please consult the NCTE Program for location. A second meeting devoted to this topic will also be held at the 1991 CCCC Convention in Boston, 23 March, 1-5 pm. INQUIRIES: Ed Nolte, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Norfolk State University, Norfolk, VA 23504.

Calls for Papers

The Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture. William K. Buckley is soliciting manuscripts for an edited collection of essays on the following question: Why does the argument for or against the use of literature in the composition classroom keep surfacing? Essays should not talk about whether literature should be used in the composition classroom, but rather should focus on questions like: Why does this issue fail to get resolved? What interests are served by this debate? What is the *real* issue behind the controversy? What are the effects of the split on current fields of literacy and composition studies? How does this continual debate give shape to departmental alignments, curriculum requirements, and administrative problems? *Deadline for abstracts:* June 1, 1991. *Deadline for essays:* December 1, 1991. The Pittsburgh Series is published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, and the general editors are David Bartholomae and Jean Ferguson Carr. MLA format. 20-25 page limit.

Sheryl I. Fontaine and Susan Hunter, editors, announce plans for a volume entitled *Writing Ourselves into the Story: Unheard Voices from Composition Studies*. This volume will provide an occasion for teachers and researchers who do not feel included in the story of our evolving discipline to voice unheard perspectives. Contributors might address the following broad questions: Are there ways that the pedagogies and research methodologies we find in textbooks, hear about at professional meetings, or read in the journals don't apply to our teaching, our research, or the political situations we're involved in? What problems do we think are most worth writing about that should be included in discussions of composition studies? Please send 1-3 page proposals for essays, stories, and research by November 15, 1990, to Professor Susan Hunter, Humanities and Social Sciences Department, Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA 91711-5990. For further information, call Sheryl I. Fontaine (714) 773-3163 or Susan Hunter (714) 612-8022.

JAC Announces Kinneavy and Winterowd Award Winners

The **James L. Kinneavy Award** for the most outstanding essay of 1989 published in **JAC** was awarded to David Bleich for "Genders of Writing," an expansion of the notion of genre using feminist perspectives. Susan Miller received the first annual **W. Ross Winterowd Award** for the most outstanding book on composition theory for *Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction to Rhetoric and the Writer* (Southern Illinois UP, 1989), and Charles Bazerman received an honorable mention for *Shaping Written Knowledge: the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* (U of Wisconsin P, 1988). These awards were generously endowed by **Professors Kinneavy and Winterowd** and reflect their ongoing commitment to scholarship in rhetoric and composition. The awards include a cash prize and an attractive framed citation and are presented each year during the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition meeting at the CCCC Convention. Send nominations for the 1990 **W. Ross Winterowd Award** by January 1991 to Gary A. Olson, editor, *Journal of Advanced Composition*; Department of English; University of South Florida; Tampa, FL 33620-5550.

Grants

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is currently accepting proposals for its 1991 research grants. The Council will award several small grants (up to \$1000)* for research relating specifically to the concerns of writing program administrators. Proposals should not exceed four single-spaced typed pages and should describe (1) the research problem and objectives, (2) the procedures for conducting the research (including sample,

design, instrumentation, and personnel), (3) a timeline, and (4) a budget. Researchers planning to conduct surveys may include in their proposal the free use of the WPA mailing list. All WPA grant recipients will be asked to submit their research report to the Council's journal, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, for possible publication before submitting it to other journals. Please include your name, affiliation, address, and telephone number on your proposal. The deadline for submission is November 16, 1990. Please send the proposal *and two copies* to Prof. Karen Greenberg, Chair, WPA Grant Committee, Department of English, Hunter College, CUNY, 695 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021.

*This figure reflects a correction of the \$500 announced in a prior issue of WPA.



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