
New Rhetoric Courses in Writing Programs: A Report from a Conference for New England Writing Program Administrators

by Linda K. Shamoon

with contributions from Robert A. Schwegler, John Trimbur,
and Patricia Bizzell

On October 9, 1993 during his session at the conference on "Composition in the Twenty-First Century: Crisis and Change," Stephen M. North announced he intended to change the writing program at the State University of New York at Albany from one based on composition to one called "Rhetoric and Poetics." His statement was less an announcement than a response to questions about the future of our discipline. North's voice joins others in forming a critique of composition studies, particularly of the process movement stretching from approximately 1975 to 1985 (see Lester Faigley; James A. Berlin; John Trimbur "Social Turn"), while also looking in other directions for the theory and content to drive a reformulated writing program. But North and others who may be looking to rhetoric as the next formulation of our discipline have not elaborated their particular philosophical bases for rebuilding contemporary writing programs as rhetoric programs, nor have they offered a definition of rhetoric that would be powerful enough to drive these programs. If this is our future, then we must have a better understanding of what is at stake when our writing programs shift from composition to rhetoric.

During the summer previous to the conference at Miami University of Ohio, on June 16, 1993, forty Writing Program Administrators from the New England region gathered at the W. Alton Jones Campus of the University of Rhode Island to explore an array of theoretical and practical issues involved in reformulating our composition courses into rhetoric courses and in conceiving of writing programs as rhetoric programs.¹ Unlike the conference at Miami University, participants at this conference were not gazing into the crystal ball in order to discern the future. This conference's organizers and presenters took a more polemical stance, challenging participants to understand the present material conditions of writing programs and asking them to consider what is involved if we commit our discipline to the study of rhetoric as persuasion, negotiated meaning, situated texts and civic discourse, as well as to a reexamination of the relationships among student writer, instructor, immediate context, and cultural setting. This paper is a report on the deliberations at this conference, deliberations that were both theoretical and practical.

In the morning, participants wrestled with some of the theoretical implications of the conference as presented in position papers delivered by four featured speakers; these position papers are framed and summarized below. In the afternoon, the conference participants responded to the speakers in practical terms by drafting syllabi for freshman rhetoric courses that might replace composition courses; these syllabi are discussed below and characterized in the Appendix. Neither the theoretical nor the practical voices of the conference were unanimous, of course; resistance mixed with approval through out the day, and this debate in particular (which is reviewed in the last section of this report) brought to the surface both the dearly held assumptions about the teaching of writing and many of the contradictions that are apparent when "writing" is framed as "composition."

One day, of course, could never cover all of the issues related to the foundations or design of rhetoric classes or programs, nor could it review all of the questions involved in differentiating composition from rhetoric. Rather than a comprehensive look at the future, the conference resembled more the start of a conversation among acquaintances who have certain crucial interests in common and who are just beginning to talk among themselves about their latest insights, questions, practices, and beliefs. As such, the conference raised more issues than it resolved and left many others unspoken, but it did bring into sharp focus many of the challenges that lie ahead if rhetoric is the future of our discipline. It posed these challenges in terms of difference: how is rhetoric different from composition studies, from communication studies, or from other iterations of rhetoric studies of the past two thousand years? It laid open questions of practice: what would be taught in the new rhetoric classes and for what purposes? It approached questions of timeliness: why are programs in the region changing at this time and what is their future? Finally, underlying all of these questions was one of definition: what do we mean by the term "rhetoric," and do we need disciplinary consensus about this term in order for rhetoric to drive the reformulation of our field? Indeed, many questions were raised, and the array of answers engendered much debate. For all of the participants, this conference was the start of a *long* conversation.

I. The Morning: Four Position Papers

The morning's agenda was devoted to the presentation of the four position papers, but it really began with John Burt's informing many of us that at Brandeis University the full-credit freshman writing seminar would no longer exist; it was in the process of being reinvented as a half-credit "writing lab" attached to classes in "humanistic inquiry" (Burt). This news coincided with developments at the University of Rhode Island and at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. At URI a new general education program will probably not include Basic Composition, a course presently taken by 85% of the freshman class of 2,180 students; at Sacred Heart the second semester of the required freshman writing sequence will probably be replaced by an array of writing

intensive disciplinary courses (Warriner). These changes give chilling credence to the "new abolitionism" that is seen by Robert Connors, whose history of composition studies is a narrative of periods of growth in composition offerings, followed by institutional and administrative directives to trim or eliminate such courses. Connors attributes these see-saw patterns to changing interests in general education as well as to disciplinary wars with literary studies. David R. Russell, in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990: A Curricular History*, ties the fate of writing courses and programs to periods of change in student demographics. The first paper of this conference looked closely at current economic and social conditions to explain the new abolitionism and to argue that it is timely to transform composition programs into rhetoric programs.

(A note on the presentations of the four papers that follow. In writing this article, I prepared summaries of longer papers that were presented by myself, Robert Schwegler, Patricia Bizzell, and John Trimbur, trying to capture as much of their flavor as possible. Following each summary, I have written a commentary. The commentaries sometimes extend the preceding papers—by characterizing their writers' later remarks, at the conference itself or in publications—and they sometimes reflect on the remarks, especially by connecting them to conference issues and themes and their implications. My role, then, is alternatively reporter and analyst.)

"Material Conditions and the Diminishing Numbers of Composition Classes or Programs"

by Linda K. Shamoon

The material conditions of our times—namely the economy, the success of writing across the curriculum, and the new cohort of composition scholars entering our programs—are pushing many programs to redesign the central courses that drive their curricula.

Richard Lloyd-Jones, in "Who We Were; Who We Should Become," draws tight connections between national economic conditions, the fate of writing programs, and writing as a discipline (491). Lloyd-Jones argues that while writing programs once flourished on a base of low salaries and high course loads, today these programs are on the brink of forced change because of "expensive" small classes and tenured faculty. Writing classes, with fifteen to twenty-five students in a room, at a rate of forty to fifty sections per semester at typical New England state institutions, look very expensive to administrators.

In their efforts to live within shrinking budgets, these administrators typically ask writing instructors to teach a few more students per section, thinking that small changes in class size are superficial adjustments for individual classrooms. In a process-oriented composition class, however, where the intensity of work is controlled by students' drafting and revising of papers, much of the teacher's energy is given to responding to these drafts and to helping students discover themselves as writers. As every teacher of composition knows,

this is labor intensive work, wherein the teacher may feel she is not dealing with a class unit but rather with twenty writing novices, each one discovering a personal writing process and each one presenting the instructor with several different writing and cognitive problems. When an administrator asks a few more students or one more class to become normal teaching load, the intensifying labor conditions begin to feel like exploitation.

In this management-labor stalemate, in which administrators are seeking less expensive instructional modes and writing instructors are struggling to enforce their own sensible labor standards (as stated in "Statement on Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing"), there is a danger that management will turn our own resources and research against us to extract cheaper conditions of productivity. We are facing this ironic turn of events in the flourishing of particular strands of our research and practice, particularly writing across the curriculum. Our claims that writing should be infused throughout the curriculum at all levels have successfully fueled writing across the curriculum programs at almost fifty percent of the nation's post-secondary institutions (Soven 1). As a result, at institutions as different as Prince George's Community College and the University of Chicago, writing practice and some forms of writing instruction are delivered through a wide range of disciplinary courses, taught by faculty who have attended writing across the curriculum workshops (Fulwiler and Young 3). At the University of Rhode Island and other New England institutions these workshops are often led by one writing across the curriculum director. The success of such programs, wherein a few writing instructors seem capable of replacing expensive classes, may undermine the viability of department-based writing programs. Ironically, our research and our institutional politics led to these conditions.

These two material conditions, the expense of writing programs and the flourishing of apparently less costly options, could lead to the end of the current surge of writing programs and classes, but another condition—a concrete social condition—brings the potential for such sweeping change that we may be able to alter the shape of our discipline, even in the face of its see-saw history and current economic stress. Materially, this potential for change comes with the younger generation of English and writing scholars who are presently moving into English departments and writing programs. Two years ago at the University of Rhode Island, for example, five new, young faculty joined the department and formed a new cohort. As Sandra Kanter found through her research for the New England Resource Center for Higher Education, a new cohort of faculty will bring new priorities as part of who they are and as an inevitable factor of becoming a cohort.

Increasingly, these new cohorts are altering the terrain of our departments. Instead of drawing from modernist interpretations of literary texts or cognitive psychology's understanding of the composing process, this cohort draws from discourse studies, communications studies, and political and literary theory, showing us that texts are products of communities, or expressions of the conditions, behaviors, attitudes, and strategies which, taken together, form the

language and paradigms of expression. The scholarly efforts and pedagogical preferences of these faculty lead to new content in our classes and new directions for both literature and composition programs. The composition courses designed by these faculty might be more appropriately called rhetoric courses in that they stress the features, contexts, discourses, appeals, and responses to specific texts; but they remain writing courses because writing is the primary mode of expression, response, analysis, criticism, and, above all, the means of participation in specific discourse communities. Students who complete these courses should be able to use writing as a means of participating responsibly in public discourses of all kinds, either to join or disrupt the conversation.

It is particularly exciting to contemplate that in spite of extremely difficult economic pressures, the political and social conditions of the university may be coming together to support this reformulation of our discipline.

Further Reflections and Commentary

Judging from the numerous articles in our journals, my analysis of the material conditions and changing directions in composition programs may seem obvious. Indeed, after the conference Toby Fulwiler of the University of Vermont commented that he sees these changes everywhere. On the other hand, a few years from now, the current emphasis upon moving our discipline towards the study and practice of writing as culturally and politically situated discourse may come to look like a passing experiment unless certain theoretical issues are resolved, issues that admittedly are not confronted in my presentation.

Primary among the issues that must be addressed are a thorough clarification of the differences between composition and rhetoric, along with an explanation of the benefits to be gained from distinguishing these differences. Unless these differences are compellingly elaborated, we practitioners will not be prompted to change our practices. Indeed, many of the current changes in our composition texts, especially in those essay collections that have been prompted by an interest in cultural studies, look more like an adjustment of the Aristotelian communication triangle (shifting away from the author's activities and processes of invention and expression toward an emphasis on audience and subject) rather than a thorough-going change in the discipline itself. Without a wider theoretical basis and a full scale research program, these texts look as if we have merely discovered new topics for our composition courses.

Perhaps at the heart of the matter is an even more crucial issue: the lack of consensus about "rhetoric." Does rhetoric mean an enumerating of the many forms of writing that occur in our culture so that students may imitate these forms? Is it the study of argumentation so that students have sensible responses to socially important topics like abortion or gun control? Is it part of the field of cultural studies, so that students are more tolerant in the expression of their views and more critically aware of various aspects of "culture"? Or are we struggling with a new understanding of this term, one that will help us explain our research to ourselves? Encouraging a disciplinary discussion about the

meaning of the term is more than an intellectual exercise. If we see rhetoric as a study of argument, then we teach appeals to logic and the forms of persuasive writing, but if we see it as the study of situated discourse, then we will probably teach some version of cultural analysis and critique. What reformulation of our understanding of rhetoric should drive our discipline?

The next paper of the conference, by Robert A. Schwegler, addresses many of these issues. In particular, his extensive listing of the differences between composition and rhetoric presents an intriguing challenge to current practice and presents an interesting way to think about definitions of rhetoric and the realignment of our research and teaching.

"Dichotomies: Composition vs. Rhetoric"

by Robert A. Schwegler

(Edited and summarized by Linda K. Shamoon)

I want to outline four crucial dichotomies between composition and rhetoric as strategies for disrupting the ways we currently articulate our work as scholars, teachers, and writing program administrators.

The act of composing vs. discursive practice. Composition focuses on the individual composing. Composing is the central act and the composing self is the central consciousness. All other activities of reading and writing and all information enter the scene either as they contribute to composing or constrain it. Thus, the composing self comes first, and everything else becomes a context for composing. Rhetoric, on the other hand, focuses on a discursive field and the practices that make it up. The central concerns of rhetoric are the various articulations of production and reception, of major texts and minor texts, and the social or cultural exigencies of discourse. Rhetoric recognizes that these relationships constitute composing and the composer by producing the self and a sense of self; by producing difference and awareness of difference; by creating stasis and change. Thus, the field comes first, producing composers who either further its relationships or struggle to realign them.

The dichotomy of declamation vs. conversation. Composition aims at the production of more or less discrete texts. These texts are bounded acts of communication that convey meaning and embody the composer (voice), and the expression or transmission of meaning is the goal. The text, in composition, is the unit of utterance, of analysis, and of evaluation. An utterance (or text) is treated as singular and self-sufficient, even if its authorship is collaborative and even if it has multiple readers. This makes text into declamation (Halloran), with pride of place given to certain kinds of writing, such as essays, articles, or reports. Other texts are viewed as preparatory or supportive (memos, notes, summaries) or as incomplete (drafts, novice texts), or even of questionable merit (dummy runs). From this perspective, a discursive field (or discourse community) appears to be distinguished by primary texts, each leading to the next like the works in a traditional literary history.

In contrast, rhetoric focuses on chains of substantive texts, fragmentary texts, speeches, legal documents, institutional patterns, cultural resources, and the like. The dynamic relationships among texts and other performances are the subjects of analysis and evaluation. No single text or other performance is fully complete or sufficient in itself. All performances are connected, interdependent and only partially completed. Note-taking, informal talk, reports, summaries, apprenticeship tasks all constitute the field in its various dimensions. The image that emerges is of a dynamic network of performances whose configuration is altered by each successive performance. Rhetoric views each performance, large or small, as part of an interlocked conversational field. The goal of entering into the conversational field is action through realignment of the symbolic or the material.

Interpretation vs. interpolation (Interpellation). The distinguishing activity of modern literary and cultural study is interpretation, based on the assumption that literary and cultural texts are important because of their meaning. Interpretation is the thing which “goes without saying” in modern and much postmodern literary study. Composition helps students discover meaning and strategy as they read, helps them embody meaning in texts, and helps them choose strategies that guide readers’ understanding. As a result, the expression of meaning and the role of reading as interpretation are the things that “go without saying” in composition.

By contrast, rhetoric starts with the assumption that the field predates the composer. The field itself, therefore, generates most (say 95%) of the information, strategies, usage, and perspectives in a text or other performance. A text’s meaning, that is, its difference from other performances cannot be its primary characteristic nor the primary goal of composing and reading. Instead, the reproduction of existing discursive practices and relationships is the primary goal, one that still leaves some space for contestation or for reconfiguring the field. Rhetoric helps students recognize that they are being inserted—or interpellated—into an ongoing arrangement of knowledge, power, and practice. The distinguishing act of rhetoric is interpolation, a consciousness of entering into and being constituted by a discursive field and also being alert to sites that allow a composer to choose between simply reproducing existing relationships or rearticulating them.

Private vs. civic. Composition makes sharp distinctions between the personal and the public, the expressive and the transactional, the individual and the social. These distinctions echo the modernist splitting of individual (non-political) and society (political). Composition places large stretches of discourse within the domain of the noncontestable (personal writing), the marginally contestable (academic discourse), or the public but heavily colonized (politically delimited writing on topics such as gun control). Rhetoric, on the other hand replaces the personal/public distinction with a new space—the civic—while retaining relatively small areas for discursive practices that are personal or that are political and governmental. In the civic sphere, democratic discursive practices construct democratic realities, including matters of identity, morality,

spirituality and economy. Civic discursive practices have the power both to reproduce or to rearticulate the relationships that constitute our lives and selves.

Commentary

Schwegler's position paper, of those presented at the conference, most directly clarifies the term "rhetoric" as situated discourse. For Schwegler, rhetoric (with a particular emphasis upon the production and reception of texts) is clearly a social and cultural activity, one that issues from *and* creates relationships among those engaged in discursive practices. According to Sharon Crowley, this definition places Schwegler among "constructionist" rhetoricians. Constructionist rhetoricians, says Crowley, assume that the discourse used by speakers or writers to shape the real world emerges from social and political situations that are specific to particular times and places, and that are tied into ("complicit") with the conditions that give rise to these practices (8-13).

Crowley differentiates constructionists from "essentialists" (who argue for schemes of rhetoric that are unchanging over time and across societies), but she also acknowledges that the constructionist approach has largely been used to critique the "current rhetorical canon" (13-15). Similarly, Schwegler's definition of rhetoric stands in opposition to composition while also implying a critique of composition studies. Thus, Schwegler would call our attention to the cultural web of communication in which writers write, and he would reduce our emphasis upon process as a universally applicable behavioral model. He would have us resist reading texts solely as acts of interpretation and, instead, highlight the social or political ideologies or "what is at stake" in specific pieces of writing. Finally, Schwegler would oppose the teaching of writing as the expressivists' discovery of voice and, instead, insist upon an understanding of the field in which any text is written and the degree to which it preserves or disrupts the conversation. In these ways, Schwegler's definition of rhetoric is also his critique of the practices of composition studies.

Is it enough to define rhetoric by its difference from composition studies? Perhaps so, if the main purpose is critique, but Schwegler's definition ignores several issues that are crucial to writing program administrators. First, rhetoric has two thousand years of history with many definitions that are certainly more well known and widely assumed as operational than those Schwegler provides. Thus, his definition, because it is attached to composing practices rather than to other characterizations of rhetoric, may not be seen as a definition at all. Second, this definition-by-difference is one that clarifies the discipline to itself, but it may not clarify our interests and claim upon rhetoric as our discipline to the university at large. Since we have learned that all programs are situated politically in the university, we must have a definition that helps us situate ourselves to outsiders. If we do not frame such a definition, it is doubtful that we will be able to establish programs within academia that are driven by rhetoric and poetics. Finally, of course, Schwegler's piece just hints at the practical implications of the distinctions between rhetoric and composition, but perhaps this is appropriate to a theoretical paper.

At the conference, it was John Trimbur and Patricia Bizzell who elaborated upon the shift for teachers and students that accompanies the change from composition to rhetoric. Both presenters also focus upon rhetoric as the study of discursive fields, upon texts as conversation, upon writing as interpellation and, most importantly, upon the teaching of writing as the production of civic discourse. In his remarks Trimbur noted that the shift towards constructionist rhetoric in the classroom should have two effects. First it should revise the way we see our students, pushing us to situate them as participants in civic conversation rather than as future employees or essayists. Second, it should help students understand and cope with the incommensurate knowledges and experiences that constitute American society. Similarly, Bizzell argued that a reformulation of our discipline toward a new rhetoric emerges from and addresses our heterogeneity in America.

"Rhetoric in Modern Times"

by John Trimbur

(Edited and summarized by Linda K. Shamoon)

Rhetoric may offer a way to see the people we encounter as students not only as composers and academic initiates, but also as members of an educated public. In "The Idea of an Educated Public," Alasdair MacIntyre says that teachers are the "forlorn hope of Western modernity" because they are charged with a dual mission that is both essential and impossible. They are charged with teaching young people how to fit into a social role or vocation and, at the same time, how to think for themselves. According to MacIntyre, the familiar tension between individuation and socialization that haunts (and polarizes) our representations of students as writers can be reconciled only through the existence of an educated public and the creation of public spheres of opinion and influence. In such spheres critical discussion of social purposes and political policies is understood to be a necessary feature of the roles to which students are socialized. By this account, the function of education is neither to emancipate nor domesticate students but to institute the social. The point of teaching, then, is not to liberate an individual's creative talents from oppressive institutions. Nor is it a matter of acculturating students to the professionalized discourses and practices of the academy. The point rather is that learning to think for yourself is itself a by-product of participation in deliberation and decision-making.

Rhetoric is the traditional vehicle for participation in public life and the notion of rhetorical education for citizenship is an old and hallowed one. However, rather than simply importing rhetoric into freshman writing courses we need to rearticulate rhetoric to the heterogeneous realities of modern class society and mass education. Because we live in a divided society of incommensurable knowledges and interests, students experience argumentative discourse as adversarial, volatile and manipulative, one-sided or dishonest, and potentially violent. This view of differences is in part an artifact of the media and a forensic

rhetoric that poses issues in polarized terms, thereby reducing public discourse to a matter of experts arguing for and against, and positioning the public as spectators and clients. A rhetoric for an educated public is concerned not so much with resolving differences or celebrating them, but with promoting an ethos of collaborative disagreement by which students can locate differences in relation to each other, to see how these differences are organized in contemporary America, and to begin to imagine ways individuals and groups can work and live together with difference.

"Negotiating Difference': A Basic Course for the American Multicultural Democracy"

by Patricia Bizzell

(Edited and summarized by Linda K. Shamoan)

In thinking about the place of rhetoric in the first-year writing course, I want to ask first, what is rhetoric? Let us say that it is the study of how language can be used to persuade people to act together for the common good. Next, I ask, what studies of language persuading people to act for the common good are most appropriate for a course required of American students? To answer this question, we must ask about the nature of the American environment, and one salient feature is its multiculturalism. Indeed, the United States has always been multicultural—since the 1600s—and the diverse groups who live here have always interacted, sometimes with unrelenting hostility and sometimes with a spirit of contention that has issued in changes acceptable to all parties. Dealing with multiculturalism must be salient to any who wish to foster more just outcomes.

Given this view of the United States, then it seems to me that the kinds of persuasion toward the common good that students most need to know are those kinds that operate across cultural boundaries, those that negotiate difference. Negotiating difference goes with the territory, in effect. If you want to be an American, you have to commit yourself to interacting across cultural boundaries, no matter how difficult that may sometimes be, and give up any hope of soothing homogeneity in the nation.

A rhetoric course, then, might usefully introduce students to readings that model the rhetorical strategies that Americans have used in negotiations from colonial times to the present. The historical perspective would be useful, first because it would prevent students from seeing multiculturalism as some current fad, and thus would enforce the idea that negotiation was indeed something that they must learn. Second, it would provide the widest possible range of rhetorical strategies from the greatest possible number of groups who have been involved in American negotiations. Third, it would also provide the greatest amount of information on the cultural treasures of the negotiating groups, knowledge needed to understand and to move another.

In studying the readings, negotiating about their meaning and contemporary importance, and planning what needs to be added to them, students would also actively practice their new skills and knowledge of negotiation, both in writing and in speech.

Elaboration

Bizzell's follow-up comments developed her goal of "negotiating difference" by explaining Mary Louise Pratt's concept of "contact zones," that is, "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other . . ." (166). In an article in *College English* Bizzell explains she is attracted to this concept because it prompts disturbing self-reflexivity for all individuals, and because it fully integrates composition, rhetoric, and literary studies. "Studying texts as they respond to contact zone conditions is studying them rhetorically, studying them as efforts of rhetoric" (168). For example, Bizzell discussed how in New England literature of 1600 to 1800, two cultural groups, the Europeans and the Native Americans, contended for the right to account for their interactions. Studying this contact zone means studying canonical and noncanonical texts, including Puritan histories, memoirs by non-Puritans, Native American speeches, letters, and spiritual autobiographies. According to Bizzell,

The object would not be to represent what the lives of the diverse European immigrant and Native American groups were really like. Rather, the attempt would be to show how each group represented itself imaginatively in relation to the others. We would, in effect, be reading all the texts as brought to the contact zone, for the purpose of communicating across cultural boundaries. (167)

Commentary

With these words Bizzell lays out a very specific course of study for students in our classes; Trimbur works in the same direction, although with less specified content for the classroom. At the conference, Bizzell's description of New England literature as an example of an opportunity to view contact zones in action generated much enthusiasm. Participants may have seen it as a bridge between the concerns of the position papers (with their emphases on "situated discourse," "institution of the social," and "crossing cultural boundaries") and their own interests and disciplinary commitments (such as expanding their professional knowledge of literature and writing, and also helping student writers). Trimbur's position paper also links our work as teachers to themes of difference, but his goal is to redefine our uses of rhetoric within an American society that has a vast and varied citizenship, a society which is dramatically different from societies where a rhetorical education for the few enabled civic participation only for the few. In calling for this redefinition, Trimbur ties rhetoric to its historical roots while allowing for its reformulation.

Since Trimbur and Bizzell are both important figures in rhetoric and composition studies, their efforts to redirect our field toward their versions of

rhetorical study will be taken seriously, but these efforts should not go without close questioning along two lines of thought. We must carefully examine the disciplinary implications of Bizzell's agenda, and we must candidly confront the problems presented to us in the classroom by Trimbur's and Bizzell's privileging of difference in our curricula. Bizzell's attempts to describe the kinds of disciplinary work that should engage us suggest the study of constellations of texts in order to reveal their authors' frames of mind and views of the world. These activities are surely more like those of the historian and the literary critic than of the writing specialist or even the rhetorician. Is Bizzell really arguing that at the very moment we are reformulating our field to claim a particular and larger territory for ourselves, she would have us blur the distinctions between composition, rhetoric, literary criticism, and history? Politically, this is very risky. One hundred years of disciplinary history and institutional organization will surely preserve things as they are, with the teaching of writing as a rudimentary and general vocation while the teaching of text interpretation will remain the only desirable or true disciplinary activity. In her zeal to redirect composition studies toward the study of contact zones, Bizzell's agenda has the potential to drive the teaching of writing further to the margins.

A second issue that must be raised concerns Bizzell's and Trimbur's equation of rhetoric with the teaching of difference within our society. Having students think about and write about difference is not necessarily the same thing as teaching constructionist rhetoric in order to institute the social or make room for civic discourse. Reports from some practitioners who make these themes a central concern in their classes indicate that the teaching of difference not infrequently leads to passive resistance or even open hostility between teacher and student (Mountford). Or, just as often in our program it leads to an inactive and indecisive appreciation of all peoples and all things. These classroom experiences are identity politics at its worst rather than an education for civic discourse at its best. This critique does not mean it is out of bounds for us to teach difference (as Maxine Hairston would argue it is). Rather, it is to point to a gap in our discussion of civic discourse and to acknowledge that we desperately need a more specific formulation of its contents and a more fruitful notion of appropriate pedagogy.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that questioning Trimbur's and Bizzell's positions does not negate the potency of their efforts to reformulate composition studies around constructionist rhetorical practices that emphasize the civic. Trimbur and Bizzell critique current practice in order to re-envision what we do as teachers of writing and to re-theorize rhetoric as a means of education for public life. Trimbur correctly sees an alarming societal vacuum in the area of civic discourse, and he rightly prescribes a re-theorized rhetoric as the means by which we may educate students to participate in public discussion of all matters of societal concern, with the effect of turning attention away from media personalities and "experts" whose pretense at civic discourse simply aims to preserve current power arrangements. Bizzell, too, in her definition of rhetoric as "... the study of how language can be used to persuade people to act together

for the common good . . . " places the civic at the center of a reformulation of rhetoric for our programs. Although her definition is not unproblematic (what is the common good? good for whom? and by what means of indoctrination?), she reminds us that the reformulation of our programs should have at its center an effort to understand and teach "rhetorical education for citizenship."

II. The Afternoon: Syllabi and Dissensus

In the afternoon, conference participants were asked to conceptualize their programs from this rhetorical perspective and challenged to design appropriate syllabi, syllabi that they could imagine themselves teaching and their students enjoying. In a remarkably short time, six syllabi were outlined, each pulling at different aspects of the morning's presentations. Descriptions of these syllabi appear in the Appendix. Five of them draw upon nonstandard texts, including legal texts, comics, videos, business materials, academic course bulletins, and spoken discourse. These five syllabi ask students to write a variety of prose, including essays, response journals, parody, imitation, critical essays, monologues, and so forth. A sixth syllabus, which draws upon standard argument texts and standard rhetorical analysis of argumentative discourse, poses the overall question, "Can argument be personally based and still be culturally meaningful?" Together the syllabi exemplify the many ways writing program administrators may cast their courses as rhetoric courses.

Overall, the speed with which these syllabi were produced, the interesting array of texts and assignments they include, and the varied learning goals found among them indicate that the disciplinary direction suggested by the position papers is particularly fruitful. The conference participants came from a variety of types of colleges (community colleges, large state institutions, small liberal arts colleges, etc.), yet most could frame a syllabus that would be viable at their institution. In addition, the participants had varied interests and training, of course, yet the major themes of the conference were accessible enough to everyone that they could imagine and frame classroom activities within the syllabi. Of course, since the participants were experienced composition instructors, they were familiar with an array of suitable texts and resources and had little trouble adapting these to the reformulated purposes of their experimental syllabi. Finally, the participants certainly did not agree with all the themes of the conference position papers. Yet most could produce a syllabus that included some of the features under discussion. These outcomes suggest that reformulating composition courses into constructionist rhetoric courses is conceivable for most of our colleagues.

Syllabi such as these—that reconceive the boundaries of "text," that ask students to contextualize all texts as on-going conversation, that privilege civic discourse in order to reveal tacit knowledge and power structures—such syllabi disrupt the practices of many composition programs. For those instructors whose teaching or programs situate expressive discourse, belletristic essays, and process pedagogy at their center, the position papers and the six syllabi seem to negate or

appropriate their teaching and pedagogical assumptions. Consequently, some conference participants were unable or unwilling even to play with the ideas presented in the theoretical discussions. In one "collaborative" group there was barely any dialogue between those who were interested in exploring the civic discourses of an educated public and those who preferred students to write personal, revelatory essays. During the last segment of the conference, when all participants responded to the themes of the day, these differences were aired in a debate that centered upon three topical flash points: the importance of personal writing, the questionable value of studying specialized writing, especially legal discourse, and the place of process in writing instruction. It may seem odd that the defense of the personal essay and a sweeping condemnation of legal discourse bore the brunt of the debate about the value of shifting away from composition and towards a reformulated rhetoric, but these practices obviously represented deeply held assumptions and beliefs among participants. The contestations about the personal essay, legal discourse, and process pedagogy tugged at our identities and personal philosophies as writing teachers.

As Linda Brodkey's recent personal literacy narrative so aptly dramatizes, a love of text, reading, and interpretation represents, for most of us, lifetime passions. Brodkey's essay shows us that our personal preferences, as both reinforced and created by our disciplinary training, often run to narrative. Essays in the belletristic tradition, therefore, pull at us, with their highly polished prose, their narrative/epiphanic structures, and their intensely personal voices. Furthermore, the essayist tradition fits our cultural conditioning, for we are Americans, and in the Emersonian manner we understand the clarifying value of individual expression and the powerful discovery of voice as passionate vocation. As writing teachers we see that the act of writing may mediate this discovery of voice and, along with our tutelage in text interpretation and in deconstruction of the academy, we may equip our students to be better people and to succeed in the university. Perhaps it is right to insist that a new rhetorical direction must be as promising and personally satisfying.

In addition, the achievements of the past twenty-five years of research on composing processes probably should not be off-handedly dismissed as unhelpful to students or as a-political. Research on composing has contributed mightily to our understanding of how writing occurs, revealing what was hidden when the focus was on product. It is not at all clear that the shift to rhetoric as promulgated by the conference will continue to reveal those hidden aspects of composing and of writing in other disciplines that process research so compellingly lays bare. In fact, to be fair, the years of research on composing processes should not be so easily dismissed as wholly and complacently in the service of white, middle class students and teachers. Process research and teaching is closely associated with the effort to accommodate open admissions students, with the movement for students' rights to their own language, and with academic recognition of developmental writing courses. All of these developments are significant contributions to the welfare of marginalized students. Additionally, some strands of writing across the curriculum should be seen as efforts to

demystify academic language and conventions, thus reducing the power of gate-keeping, and making participation in academic disciplines more accessible to students. It is not at all clear that a "reformed" rhetorical direction would be as successful.

Even for the many participants at the conference who are already engaged in the alternative practices outlined in the syllabi, the proposed reformulations are not without their problems or contradictions. Several participants were concerned that the pull of an historicized rhetorical approach is inherently hierarchical and masculine, and that a topicalized or historicized writing course would not allow for students' control over their writing and over the course. They asked how a course that is based in counter-hegemonic practices could be centered on texts in which the instructor is expert. In such courses, they asked, where and how is the instructor situated by the material, by the discipline, by the institution, and, perhaps most difficult of all, by her students? Other participants wrestled with another contradictory aspect of the pedagogy: how may we help students to see the cultural conventions of discursive practices, ask them to go against these "overdetermined" practices, and yet expect them to participate in the discourse? Is it truly possible for students to engage in extensive cultural criticism and then to participate in these communities as well? Questions such as these indicate that for those practitioners who have made a paradigm shift, it is extremely difficult not to be pulled back into familiar subjectivities. As Goleman says, "The fact that contradictions still exist . . . is a regrettable but unavoidable symptom of [our] own uneven relationship to this huge and difficult undertaking" (178).

Rather than derailing the project, however, all of these problems and points of resistance give direction to the work that needs to be done if a reformulation is to occur. For example, since expressive writing surely has a place in Western text tradition, its hegemony is a disciplinary research problem that calls for extensive elaboration, especially as situated discourse. As another example, legal discourse is but one of many discourses that constitute a contact zone and, thus, may be contextualized and historicized along with other texts. Similarly, patterns of criticism and participation are not mutually exclusive nor, from a rhetorical perspective, have they ever been; we must develop ways to help our students engage in both types of rhetoric and writing. Most importantly, disciplinary leaders who are already engaged in shifting from composition to rhetoric must help us better understand constructionist rhetoric and the nature of civic discourse. Elaboration of these territories, in particular, will be the means by which writing specialists may reformulate our discipline and resituate our interests within the academy.

Finally, as the debate about the place of new rhetoric courses in writing programs continues, there are many implications for writing program administrators. First, WPAs should be aware that many writing instructors have already broadened their definition of "text" to include not only standard academic or belletristic essays, but also all kinds of materials and media, such as videos, television, comics, radio, billboards, and so on. Indeed, many of these instructors

are already asking their students to "read," critique, and write about these texts as cultural artifacts. Second, the conference provided WPAs with the rationale and the theoretical underpinnings to transform these experimental classroom practices into full curriculum designs and new program directions. Programs reformulated along lines suggested by the conference would be driven not by increasingly sophisticated versions of the writing process but by studies in rhetorical or discursive fields. Such programs would offer classes based on specific disciplinary or topical content that make plain the nature of the field's public discourse, its unspoken methods and assumptions, and its social constructs, all of which would shape the relevant writing processes and products. While advanced courses would draw upon basic courses within rhetorical or discursive fields, neither faculty nor students would assume an easy transfer of skills, knowledge, or performance *across* fields. Expertise in one discourse would not guarantee expertise in another; writers would have to learn the rhetorical field. For WPAs such prospects are both breathtaking and daunting. On the one hand, this reformulation broadens the numbers and kinds of courses we might offer. On the other hand, our programs will need faculty who are differently trained than they are now: more broadly versed in a constructionist approach to rhetoric and more specialized in specific discursive fields. Indeed, for a while, the most daunting implication of the conference may be new directions in teacher training and faculty development. But, as Bizzell said in her invitation to those who would join in the task of reorganizing English Studies: "My main object is to get people to work on the project. . . . This new paradigm will stimulate scholarship and give vitally needed guidance to graduate and undergraduate curricula" (169).

Note

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Appendix

Six Syllabi Generated During the Afternoon Session: Brief Descriptions

1. In "Behind the Mask: Culture in the USA, First-Year Writing," Kathy Cain (Merrimack), Karen Potter (Colby), and Pauline Uchmanowicz (Wheaton) framed a course as follows:

What do fortune cookies, comic books, bestsellers, television shows or rap music have to tell us about culture, power and identity in the USA? How are cultural images and texts created in America, and what are our institutional expectations about this production, if any? Does the circulation of cultural artifacts promote the idea that race, gender, sexuality, and class are "natural," biological or unchanging categories, or does this activity ask us to view our cultural differences as at least partially "constructed" by society? In this class, we will "read" and "analyze" a number of print, image and spoken texts—including essays, oral histories, comic books, film, popular songs—in order to investigate the ways in which difference often "hides behind the mask" of national identity.

Assignments included a range from reader/viewer responses (written and oral); to journal and journal exchanges; essays; creative performances or writing; video; computer generated texts; and collaborative projects. Evaluation was posited as an ongoing class activity.

2. In "The Rhetoric of Language and Culture: Exploring the Perspectives of Insiders and Outsiders," Sarah Aguiar (Connecticut), Eleanor Kutz (Massachusetts at Boston), Roxanne Mountford (Rensselaer), and Nedra Reynolds (Rhode Island) proposed a course that attempts to explore

what it means to be part of a language community, that is, to understand the dynamics of moving in and out of groups that use language in definitive ways. We will think about this phenomenon by exploring our own and others' experience with such communities and by developing our own theories about how one negotiates this complex task. We assume that we are all insiders to some communities and outsiders to others, but that through a study of rhetoric, language, and culture, we can 1) formalize the knowledge we already have of how to use language in particular communities, 2) use that knowledge to communicate in other communities, and 3) appreciate and critique the discourse of the many communities we interact with.

They went on to discuss possible areas of inquiry about language and culture which could be approached from the dual perspective of the insider/outsider, including collecting and analyzing public and private versions of family stories; investigating student culture on campuses by analyzing campus-specific texts such as local editorials; investigating culture through micro-ethnographies, with students perhaps pairing up and listing the communities that each is an insider to and outsider of; and investigating disciplinary discourse in students' own major fields, either in journals or in the discourses of different classrooms

3. In their outline of "Options for a Course in Legal Rhetoric/Cultural Studies," Robin Muksian (Rhode Island), Michael Rossi (Merrimack), and Beverly Wall (Trinity) described how:

This course will examine the dynamics of rhetoric and culture surrounding significant legal cases. We will explore the culture of democracy as a complex interaction of legal argumentation, civic discourse, and "popular" conversations, looking particularly at the ways in which people constitute a sense of community through language and argumentation. Class assignments and activities may include: reading responses, writing-to-learn

activities, small-group discussions, oral presentations, electronic dialogues, searches on the Internet, etc.

Assignment options in the syllabus ranged from the intensive analysis of a single landmark case in order to "establish a framework of rhetorical purposes, positions, discussions and debates" to the analyses of two related cases, to three or four cases that present a broader array of topics, with increasing collaborative efforts on the part of students.

4. A course constructed around "Intercultural Negotiations" by Teresa Ammirati (Connecticut College), Kathy Moffitt (Rhode Island), Thomas Recchio (University of Connecticut), and Robert Schwegler (Rhode Island) proposed to

examine the ways in which language, position-taking, evidence, and audiences differ from cultural group to cultural group. Students will learn to negotiate with others whose cultural context differs from their own and will also come to a greater understanding of their own cultural presuppositions.

We will focus on five areas of negotiation characteristic of university life ([or] five activities characteristic of international business). These areas include course reading and lectures, classroom interchange, academic research, bureaucratic necessities, and social life.

Students in the course would do a good deal of ethnographic and analytic work with various kinds of texts common to each the five areas. The syllabus group also noted how the theme of the course could also be pursued through the focus of international business. For business the topics would be: marketing, proposed actions, problem resolution, negotiated agreements, and progress reports.

5. Patricia Bizzell (Holy Cross), John Brereton (Massachusetts at Boston), Patricia Burnes (Maine), Judith Goleman (Massachusetts at Boston), and Andrew Rearick, III (Rhode Island) called for a number of readings clustered historically, with students engaged in "dialogic double action," that is, dialogue with historical texts and with self and others in the present setting.

6. Finally, in "Rhetoric as Argument," John Burt (Brandeis), Robert Connors (New Hampshire), and Bruce Herzberg (Bentley) raised the broad question

Can argument be personally based and still be culturally meaningful? Are only arguments that clearly delineate public or civic issues to be dealt with? Can students create arguments that are essentially personal (i.e., argument from student to her father on why she should be allowed to spend a semester abroad in order to enhance her major and experience) or should all arguments be socially or civically based? Are all topics to be text-based or can any of them be based on non-text research?

They proposed a course that would have students work with and learn to analyze different sorts of argumentative discourse, with an emphasis on audience analysis, use of conceptions of shared values. Possible foci could include "current civic/cultural issues re the usual suspects: race, gender, rights, class, etc;" or historical rhetorical analyses: analyzing the discourse surrounding issues such as slavery, entry into war, creation of a polity, etc.. Possible texts: The Federalist, selected anti Federalist writings, letters, excerpts from the debates at the Philadelphia Convention and the ratifying conventions, etc. Assignments might include reading and analysis of historical cases, especially those that can be related to contemporary issues, or reading in and contemporary analysis of civic issues, including creation of argument. The course would focus on the abstraction of argumentative strategies and their application to immediate personal concerns.