

# Writing Program Administration

*Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*

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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 and the Modern Language Association.

For membership information, please see page 96.

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# Author's Guide

*WPA: Writing Program Administration* publishes articles and essays concerning the organization, administration, practices, and aims of college and university writing programs. Possible topics include the education and support of writing teachers; the intellectual and administrative work of WPAs; the situation of writing programs, within both academic institutions and broader contexts; the programmatic implications of current theories, technologies, and research; relationships between WPAs and other administrators, between writing and other academic programs, and among high school, two-year, and four-year college writing programs; placement; assessment; and the professional status of WPAs.

The previous list is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive, but contributions must be appropriate to the interests and concerns of those who administer writing programs. The editor welcomes empirical research (quantitative as well as qualitative), historical research, and more theoretically, essayistically, or reflectively developed pieces.

The length of submissions should be approximately 2000 to 5000 words, although the journal occasionally will publish shorter or longer pieces when the subject matter warrants. Articles should be suitably documented using the current *MLA Style Manual*. Please submit three copies of manuscripts, with the author identified only on a separate cover letter. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you would like a copy returned. Submissions are anonymously reviewed by the Editorial Board.

*WPA* publishes reviews of books related to writing programs and their administration. Publishers are invited to send appropriate professional books to the Editor, who assigns reviews. *WPA* also publishes an annual review of textbooks; publishers should contact the Associate Editor.

Authors whose works are accepted for publication will be asked to submit final versions in both print and electronic form. *WPA* is produced with Pagemaker 5.0 for the Macintosh. (Articles submitted in Word for the Macintosh will greatly facilitate production, although we have the capability to translate among many Macintosh and PC programs.) Authors will also be asked to submit a 100-word biography for inclusion in the "Notes on Contributors" section of the journal.

Relevant announcements and calls for papers are acceptable. Announcement deadlines: Fall/Winter issue, September 1; Spring issue, January 1.

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The Council of Writing Program Administrators

Invites you to the

**1998 Summer Workshop for New WPAs**

July 13-16, 1998

&

**Annual WPA Summer Conference**

theme: "Making a Difference: Writing Programs at Work"

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- Leaders are Sheryl Fontaine and Doug Hesse.
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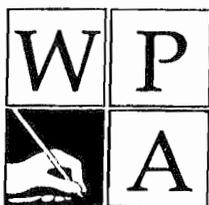
- Structured to encourage participation: plenary sessions will alternate with roundtable discussions and concurrent sessions
- Conference fee includes all materials, breaks, breakfasts, lunches, a reception, and a social event

This year's conference will continue our conversations on how the work of composition programs is evaluated and how the values of work are shaped by the economics within which we work. Among the topical concerns of the conference will be service learning, community literacy centers, writing across the curriculum, and the economics of composition programs.



Registration materials and detailed conference information will be mailed in mid to late spring, 1998. For further information, contact:

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*Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*

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# Letter From the Editor

In *Roughing It*, Mark Twain takes a job as city editor of the *Virginia Enterprise* and immediately has to confront the curse of many editors: the lack of news. At one point, though, he celebrates, "Presently, when things began to look dismal again, a desperado killed a man in a saloon and joy returned once more."

As editor of *WPA*, I've never lacked good submissions. Nonetheless, something of a desperado has strode into the pages of this issue in the form of challenges to traditional composition offerings and administrative structures. The results are some lively reports on directions in several writing programs. Betty Bamberg reviews several models of first-year composition in the light of abolitionist movements. Margaret Graham, Elizabeth Birmingham, and Mark Zachry provide a rich case study of one university's restructuring of first-year composition. Judith Kearns and Brian Turner discuss why the University of Winnipeg formed a Centre for Academic Writing and how the process tested various collaborative efforts. Whereas Kearns and Turner's program moved toward more autonomy for instructors, Geoffrey Chase uses three principles to argue for greater consistency and commonality among sections. Sherrie Gradin reports and analyzes the consequences of a university's abolishing any required writing course. Susan McLeod uses the case of one writing program's administrative transformation to speculate on the future of writing across the curriculum. Jane Cogie's article takes a different turn, presenting a case study of the effects of tutoring experience on composition teachers. Finally, Lynn Bloom offers a number of "laws" that several of us may find fit our own experiences.

It's a matter of passionate debate whether the desperado of abolitionism or radical programmatic reform is wearing a black hat or a white one. Many within composition studies and many *WPAs* themselves welcome these changes, for compelling intellectual and political reasons. As for me, I feel rather like I did at the end of *The Unforgiven*. Clint Eastwood rides slowly out of town in the rain, at night. Behind are lots of dead men, and maybe some deserved to die. There is no cheering. Maybe the town will be better.



Two things have changed in my professional life this fall. As I noted last issue, I've become Director of Graduate Studies in English. Given the teaching responsibilities of our graduate students and my continued professional interests, I'm still closely involved with the writing program but not as *WPA*. There are lots of frying pans and fires in the academy. Second, after four years as editor of *WPA*, I'm "retiring" to life as Vice President of its parent organization. I'm pleased to announce that Marguerite Helmers (University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh) and Dennis Lynch (Michigan Technological University) are the new co-editors. I envy the fine work they have ahead of them.

Doug Hesse

# Alternative Models of First-Year Composition: Possibilities and Problems

Betty Bamberg

In the lead article in a 1995 collection of essays entitled *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*, Robert Connors observes that the freshman composition course "has been at the heart of a continuing series of arguments about its worth and standing" since the requirement was adopted at Harvard in 1885 (3). He then reviews both the primary objections to the course and alternative solutions that have been proposed during recurring cycles of reformism and abolitionism over the past 100 years. Referring to recent challenges to the first-year composition course as the "New Abolitionism," Connors points out a critically important difference between today's critiques and those in the past: historically it has been outsiders who attacked the freshman course, but today it is composition insiders who are debating the merits of the separate first-year writing course and recommending that it be abolished or radically restructured.<sup>1</sup>

Although the "New Abolitionism" may ultimately have no more impact on the existing pattern of first-year writing instruction than the "Old Abolitionism," current challenges could prove more powerful than those in the past. Economic pressures in higher education have resulted in continuing demands to reduce budgets and reallocate resources, and writing programs and courses are an obvious target for administrators who are faced with difficult decisions about institutional priorities and inadequate resources to meet competing demands. For example, a 24 June 1996 *Los Angeles Times* article reported that UCLA "administrators say they are intrigued by the idea of integrating writing so fully that courses that focus only on writing could become obsolete" (Wallace B3). The article makes clear that the impetus for eliminating separate writing courses grows primarily out of administrators' desires to free up budgetary resources to replace faculty lost since 1990 as a result of a 13% decline in state funding. In addition, many colleges and universities are currently engaged in General Education reform. During this process, writing courses and programs at some institutions are being substantially restructured or eliminated. Calls to abolish first-year writing courses on theoretical and pragmatic grounds by highly regarded teachers and researchers within the field of Rhetoric and Composition Studies are, therefore, likely to give credibility and further impetus to administrators or university committees who are seeking to radically change or to eliminate first-year composition instruction. Although the New Abolitionists have raised serious questions regarding first-year writing instruction that merit consideration, they have not examined the extent to which the alternatives proposed will resolve the issues they have raised. In this article, I will examine the theoretical and pragmatic objections to first-year composition courses raised

by the New Abolitionists and then assess several frequently proposed alternatives, evaluating them from the perspective of a WPA's dual (and sometimes conflicting) roles of curriculum designer/innovator and day-to-day administrator.

## Pragmatic and Theoretical Objections to First-Year Composition

One line of New Abolitionist criticism has focused on institutional structures and conditions associated with administering writing programs. Such concerns led Sharon Crowley to advocate eliminating the requirement (although not the course) in her 1991 *Pretext* article which Connors identifies as a "founding statement of the New Abolitionism" (21). Connors characterizes Crowley as arguing that "eliminating the requirement would get rid of admissions exams, prevent any sort of indoctrination of first-year students, offer administrative control over enrollments, and control teaching assistantships more effectively" (Connors 21). At a 1993 CCCC presentation organized in response to Crowley's proposal, Charles Schuster raised other pragmatic objections when he described freshman composition programs, in Connor's words, as the "Third World of English studies . . . in which faculty are underpaid and overworked" and concluded that the course should be eliminated if departments and institutions were unwilling to acknowledge and support the teaching of writing (22).

However, more recent challenges to first-year composition have been based on theoretical issues: the role of content in writing instruction and the question of transfer. In "Writing in the Content Areas: Some Theoretical Complexities," David Kaufer and Richard Young characterize typical first-year writing courses as "writing with no content in particular" or "Writing-WNCP" (77), and contrast them with courses in which content serves more than an instrumental function, that is, "writing with a specific content or Writing-WSC" (82). They contend that Writing-WNCP courses emphasize "personal expression in interpersonal rhetorical transactions" (79) because they assume that "pretty much the *same* skills of writing will develop no matter what content is chosen" and, therefore, typically prefer contents that "do not require so much time and effort to learn—lest instruction in writing be compromised" (78). In Writing-WSC courses, on the other hand, students are engaged in writing about a subject matter, which Kaufer and Young define as a "content that has been discussed in recurring and public rhetorical situations," and students must, therefore, "first engage in learning its history and theory" (79). Kaufer and Young draw heavily on the work of Bereiter and Scardamalia who postulate that "expert" writing involves moving back and forth between two separate problem spaces—rhetoric and content. They argue that only in Writing-WSC courses do students contend with these dual problem spaces when composing. As a result, Writing-WNCP courses cannot give students instruction or practice in negotiating between the demands of these dual problem spaces, a skill which will be necessary in virtually all other university writing (99).

New Abolitionist critics also object to the goals of first-year writing courses which they label as “general skills writing instruction” (Petraglia, ix). Drawing on examples from Writing Across the Curriculum programs and research on Writing in the Disciplines, they point out that general skills writing courses do not teach the complex genres and subtle rhetorical practices that college writers must learn to write papers in their major fields because such knowledge can only be learned within the context of a discipline.<sup>2</sup> Because research on learning general cognitive skills shows limited transferability from one learning task to another (Hill and Resnick), some critics have concluded that most skills are best learned *in context* through a “cognitive apprenticeship” in which novices and experts collaborate on meaningful tasks (Freedman 134). David Russell, who uses activity theory to analyze writing instruction in general skills writing courses, asserts that “there is no autonomous, generalizable skill or set of skills called ‘writing’ that can be learned and then applied to all genres or activities” (59) and claims that “to try to teach students to improve their writing by taking a GWSI [General Writing Skills Instruction] course is something like trying to teach people to improve their ping-pong, jacks, volleyball, basketball, field hockey, and so on by attending a course in general ball using” (58).

These theoretical issues regarding the relationship between content and writing and the problem of skills transfer are important, and WPAs should consider them carefully as they attempt to develop and improve writing courses and programs. But does it follow that general writing skills instruction can no longer be defended as having any genuine purpose or value and should therefore be abolished or radically reformed? In the next section, I will review four content-based curriculum models proposed as alternatives to the general skills writing course, assess the extent to which each model eliminates or mitigates problems identified by New Abolitionists critics, and then analyze potential benefits and constraints of each alternative.

## Alternative Models of First-Year Composition

### 1. Eliminating First-Year Composition: The Writing Intensive Course

The writing intensive course, which integrates writing instruction into a broad range of existing content courses, has been one of the most widely adopted curricular structures in Writing Across the Curriculum programs. In most programs writing intensive courses have been required in addition to first-year composition courses and, therefore, continue and extend writing instruction beyond the first year rather than replace it. However, in 1986 SUNY-Albany, eliminated its first-year writing course when the faculty consciously rejected a “skills” concept of writing in favor of one that emphasized the socially constituted nature of literacy and that made writing instruction a broad faculty responsibility. As a result, students at Albany currently “take a minimum of two writing-intensive courses, at least one of which must be upper division, preferably in the student’s major” (Brannon 240). A variation on the writing intensive

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model integrates writing into an existing course but does so by attaching a separate writing "component" using the lecture/discussion structure. At the University of California, San Diego, for example, all first-year students attend weekly writing/discussion sections in conjunction with an interdisciplinary, team-taught lecture course. The sections are led by graduate assistants who provide instructional support for writing papers assigned in the lecture course (Graham 114).

## 2. Replacing First-Year Composition: The Freshman Writing Seminar

Freshman writing seminars retain some features of the first-year writing course in that they are designed specifically for freshmen and are required during students' first year. However, they differ in that each seminar is, in effect, a special topics course. As a result, students are presented with a smorgasbord of content choices, all clearly identified so they can select a topic that interests them. Instructors (usually regular faculty members) choose topics based on their academic expertise or interests, and the readings and class discussions not only develop students' knowledge about the topic but become the basis for all writing assignments.

Cornell's program, for example, offers freshmen over 100 writing seminars on a variety of topics with faculty and graduate students from more than thirty disciplines designing and teaching the content of the seminars (Gottschalk 3). At Vanderbilt, faculty across the university offer writing seminars on varied topics, and students must complete two seminars during their first three semesters (Neel). As the term "seminar" implies, these classes are limited in size (usually 15-17 students) to encourage extensive student-teacher interaction and individual attention and response to students' writing.

## 3. Modifying First-Year Composition: Writing Links and Adjuncts

Writing links and adjuncts offer another approach to joining content and writing in first-year composition. In this model, writing courses are linked to existing content courses, usually a medium-sized or large General Education lecture course, and students enroll concurrently in both courses. The writing link carries the same number of credit hours as the content course while the adjunct usually meets fewer hours and carries less credit (Graham 112). In linked writing courses, instructors draw on the subjects and topics in the lecture course to develop writing assignments, a strategy which enables them to make use of students' developing knowledge in the content course instead of having to build the background knowledge for assignments within the writing course. Under ideal conditions, the linking will be synergistic: writing in the composition class helps students learn and understand concepts and content in the lecture class while topic knowledge and perspectives from the lecture class enable students to write compositions that have greater depth and critical insight than can usually be developed in the more limited discursive context of a general skills writing course.

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At the University of Washington, whose Interdisciplinary Writing Program is a long established and highly successful example of the writing link model, 20 to 22 writing courses are linked each quarter to large lecture courses in a number of disciplines, usually with one or two links per course. Although requirements and assignments in the writing courses vary so that instructors can maximize linkage with individual lecture courses, most instructors require one "joint" paper (initially assigned in the lecture class) and design two other assignments that draw on the content and rhetorical forms of the lecture class.<sup>3</sup> The attractiveness of this model lies in its apparent ability to join writing with content while maintaining an equal emphasis on writing and content instruction.

#### 4. Reforming First-Year Composition: Specifying the Content

This model, which is reformist rather than abolitionist in spirit, limits the content or approach to content in first-year writing courses. In effect, it does away with the seemingly arbitrary selection of writing topics based on instructors' current interests or on the topics available in a composition reader and, instead, designates a single broad topic which will be the subject of inquiry for the entire term. David Russell, for example, suggests turning the first-year composition course into a liberal arts course about writing in society where students examine research about academic discourses and writing in the workplace, consider "ways writing shapes social processes and power relations," and become aware of the "role of writing in society and in their lives" (74). David Joliffe recommends using an "inquiry contract" in which students write four papers on a single, self-selected subject chosen because of their prior interest in the subject. Students begin by clarifying what they already know about the subject they have selected and conclude with a final paper that draws on previous work "to demonstrate a thesis or to persuade people to think or behave differently about their subject matter" (214). Joliffe maintains that the inquiry contract leads "the student to learn a great deal about a subject matter by considering it as being constituted by a public conversation" and creates the richer discursive context usually found only in content or disciplinary courses (215).

Another approach to limiting content is illustrated by Washington State University's first-year writing program. In revising their General Education program, the faculty decided to integrate internationalism into their General Education curriculum by selecting it as the content for the first-year composition course. Using a reader (*Writing About the World*) developed by writing program faculty and administrators, instructors design reading and writing assignments to develop an international perspective by asking students to focus on such issues as what it means to encounter the "other" and how to understand cultural difference (McLeod). As these examples show, this approach asks students to engage in an extended investigation of a subject which will allow them to consider that subject in depth, thereby creating an instructional context more closely related to the extended inquiry characteristic of most content courses.<sup>4</sup>

## Assessing the Alternatives

Each of these content-based alternatives reduces, to varying degrees, the separation between writing and content that New Abolitionists have criticized in first-year writing courses. In theory, these models enable students to contend with both rhetorical and content problems as well as to engage in a deeper level of critical analysis than is usually possible in a general skills writing class where they typically spend two or three weeks on an assignment, each usually on a different and unrelated topic. However, varying degrees of emphasis are given to rhetorical and content instruction in the models considered. Viewing the alternatives along a continuum with a content emphasis at one end and a rhetorical emphasis at the other, the Writing Intensive and Freshman Writing Seminar models would be placed near the content end; the Writing Link model, which attempt to balance rhetoric and content, near the middle; and the specific content model near the rhetorical end. Such differences in emphasis are significant when considering the appropriateness of a model for a particular institution and its students.

Although all of the models address the role of content in writing, none undertakes to resolve the problem of "transfer"—learning to write for varied contexts. No evidence exists that genres and conventions that may be learned in a single content-based writing course will be more applicable to writing papers in other courses than the rhetorical forms and conventions taught in general skills writing courses. Writing papers for a freshman writing seminar that uses, for example, history as its content or for a writing-intensive sociology course will not prepare students to write literary analyses or scientific reviews. Instead, students are likely to be as confused as the subject of Lucille McCarthy's research who, as he moved from reviewing journal articles in *Cell Biology* to analyzing poems in *Introduction to Poetry*, concluded "that the writing he was doing was totally unlike anything he had ever done before" (126).

The problem of transfer continues at the upper division level even for students who have mastered the rhetorical moves of writing papers for their major classes. In "Writing in History: Narrating the Subject of Time," Sharon Stockton found that history majors receiving A's on their history papers were those who had learned how to move from causal analysis to a complex, specialized form of narrative which built the argument into a narrative event rather than stating it explicitly (55). However, English majors who received A's on their literary analysis papers had difficulty mastering the argument structure favored in history because it seemed like writing a plot summary, an anathema in literary analysis, and so they typically received lower grades on history papers than on their English papers (62). Moreover, genres and expectations can differ substantially even between courses within a discipline. Herrington's 1985 study of two required Chemical Engineering courses (Chemical Process Design and Chemical Engineering Laboratory) found that the two courses in effect constituted separate disciplinary "forums" which differed on a range of variables including issues addressed, the lines of reasoning used, the audience roles assumed, and the social purposes of the writing (119).

Whether any of the content-based instructional models described will be more effective than current general skills writing courses will depend, as all programs do, upon pragmatic issues of implementation as well as the institutional context. Therefore, WPAs must weigh such factors as the balance between writing and content, the match between the level of students' writing skills and the amount of writing instruction provided, the instructional staff available to teach content-based writing courses, and the institutional context to determine which, if any, of these alternatives might be successfully implemented in their institutions.

## Student-Based Concerns and Constraints

A WPA's first consideration must be the writing ability of typical first-year students. The less emphasis that a curricular model places on rhetorical as opposed to content instruction, the greater the need for students to have developed a general rhetorical competence by the time they enter college or university. Although small, highly selective liberal arts colleges have long relied on writing intensive courses or freshman writing seminars rather than a separate, first-year writing course, students at the lower end of the admissions pool may need the additional emphasis on writing and rhetoric provided by a general skills writing course even at these institutions. Vanderbilt, for example, evaluates students on several measures (SAT score, high school GPA, and a placement essay) and requires those who score below a specified level to complete a separate general skills writing course before enrolling in their two required freshman writing seminars (Neel). The same need exists at highly selective research universities. At the University of California, which admits the top 12-1/2% of California's high school seniors, students must pass the Subject A examination or complete a preparatory writing course before taking the required first-year writing course(s). Therefore, the University of California-San Diego postpones the writing instruction component in its year-long freshman core until the winter quarter so that less proficient writers can meet the Subject A requirement during the fall quarter (Graham 114). At the University at Albany, SUNY, whose students have an average combined SAT of 1100, weaker students are assisted through "an array of programs—the Writing Center among them—that give students support, additional instruction, and ways of positioning their ideas within the University" (Brannon 241).

This consistent pattern of preparatory course work and additional instructional support for students with weaker writing skills suggests that institutions which have successfully eliminated or replaced the first-year general skills writing course have been able to do so because most of their entering freshmen have already achieved a relatively high level of general writing proficiency and because they make special provisions to provide additional instruction and support for the minority who are less proficient writers. As a result, the writing intensive or the freshman writing seminar model is not likely to be successful in less selective institutions except as an option for honors students or when it follows and builds on instruction in general skills writing courses.

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## Faculty-Based Concerns and Constraints

Another important consideration is the faculty expertise and commitment required to implement an alternative. Both the writing intensive and freshman writing seminar models depend on strong commitment from disciplinary faculty, a commitment that is unlikely to exist unless these programs are initiated by and/or enthusiastically embraced by the faculty. In addition, ongoing faculty development programs and adequate training in teaching writing are essential. Faculty development, which has been at the center of successful Writing Across the Curriculum programs, will be even more critical when faculty are teaching content-based writing courses that replace rather than build on a first-year course. Linked writing courses present special difficulties in staffing because of the additional time required to attend the linked course, to become familiar with its content, and to develop a degree of disciplinary understanding and expertise. To be successful, linked writing courses need a core faculty of versatile and highly experienced instructors who are able to analyze the discourse of the linked course and adapt their instruction accordingly (Graham 129). Neither inexperienced graduate students nor a pool of temporary, part-time lecturers are likely to develop the expertise or be willing to commit the additional time needed to teach linked courses. Institutions with established, successful writing link programs all rely primarily on experienced, full-time instructors: UC Santa Barbara uses full-time lecturers (Zimmerman), San Diego State University a combination of regular faculty and lecturers (Johns), and the Interdisciplinary Writing Program at the University of Washington a core faculty of six full-time lecturers supplemented by a small number of hand-picked, experienced TAs (Graham 122).

## Administrative Concerns and Constraints

Finally, the size and complexity of the institution as well as the logistics involved in implementing an alternative must enter into any evaluation of whether it is likely to be successful. Freshman seminars taught by regular faculty are most easily implemented at smaller institutions, particularly ones that have a strong commitment to teaching. However, at least one large research institution—Cornell—has developed a program which uses both regular faculty and graduate students as instructors. Linked writing classes are arguably the most administratively complex of the models because of the difficulties of scheduling students concurrently in two classes and finding courses whose content and approach are easily adapted to achieve the goals of writing instruction. When the links constitute a first-year composition option (rather than a requirement for all students) as at the University of Washington, UC Santa Barbara, and San Diego State University, the logistical problems of enrollment, coordinating, and scheduling links are greatly reduced.

Finally, WPAs must be aware that the success of existing programs which exemplify these models results not only from the curricular model itself, but from an institution's history and context, including the skillful leadership of WPAs who have developed and administered the programs. As a result, a model

from one institution cannot be imported to another with an automatic guarantee of success. For example, Cornell's program of interdisciplinary freshman writing seminars was first established in 1966 when faculty in eight departments argued successfully that they should share the responsibility (and the accompanying graduate support) for writing instruction with the English Department. Since its reorganization in 1982 to ensure greater emphasis on writing instruction, several enterprising faculty directors have been able to establish the program's academic credibility and to obtain an endowment that provides additional funding. Continued faculty support and participation is maintained through an extensive, well-funded training program and through the requirement that graduate assistants, who teach two-thirds of the seminars, be mentored during their first term by a faculty member from their discipline. In addition, a group of full-time lecturers are responsible for coordinating instruction and handling the day-to-day administration (Gottschalk 2). The University of Washington's writing links were developed between 1977-1979 with the help of a FIPSE grant and now have semi-autonomous status within the Department of English (Graham 122). The program's success results not only from the presence of an energetic and resourceful director and a core faculty of experienced lecturers, but because the director has the authority to select both the lecture courses which will be linked to the writing classes and the TAs who teach in the program. WPAs who hope to borrow ideas from successful existing programs are well advised to analyze the institutional and instructional context of these programs carefully rather than to assume that the program structures can be successfully transplanted to their institutions.

## The Role of General Skills Writing Courses

Although content-based writing instruction may prove to be a desirable alternative to general skills writing courses at some institutions, many first-year students will still benefit from a carefully designed general skills course because it is likely to offer more focused writing instruction than most content-based alternatives. In the final essay in *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*, Charles Bazerman defends first-year composition as curricular support for first-year students who "as novices in the complex literate environments of the university, are engaged in many transformations in their literacy practices" (254). Rather than measuring the first-year course against the richer discursive contexts of disciplinary writing courses and finding it lacking, we should acknowledge its important role in introducing students to "the critical reflective discourse that provides the medium for the undergraduate experience" (256).

Support for Bazerman's position can be found in the research on "Reading-to-Write" conducted by Linda Flower and her colleagues, who studied the strategies, organizing plans, and text formats used by freshmen at Carnegie Mellon as they responded to writing assignments. They found that students brought well-practiced strategies for summarizing, organizing information into a draft, and writing a standard school theme to their university writing tasks. However, these strategies and formats, serviceable for the "knowledge-telling"

assignments that characterized most of their high school writing tasks, were not adequate to meet the demands of college writing assignments. In particular, students were less practiced with two highly valued characteristics of academic discourse: *"integrating one's own ideas and knowledge into the written conversation with one's sources"* and *"interpreting source texts for a purpose of one's own—applying or adapting knowledge to solve a problem or to reach one's own goals"* (22). Students who did not understand that they were being asked to invent and transform their knowledge by using synthesis and interpretive strategies typically wrote inadequate papers when they relied on their familiar comprehension/response strategies by default.

Results from the Reading-to-Write study suggest, therefore, that students need help in making the difficult transition to using these new and more complex critical thinking strategies. To enable students to move beyond basic knowledge-telling approaches, Flower argues that first-year composition courses should teach students the strategic knowledge that will embed their comprehension/response strategy in a rhetorical plan and lead them toward the goal of *"self-directed critical inquiry"* (251). In describing the relationship between first-year writing instruction and later university writing, Flower compares the freshman writer to a ballet dancer who first perfects the basic movements of ballet which are then *"transformed"* into dance and they are used, not for themselves, but to carry out the expressive, interpretive *purpose* of the dancer." She argues that *"the intellectual moves of comprehension and response [like the basic movements of ballet] are never left behind . . . But as student becomes performer, these moves become embedded in a process with expanded horizons and new goals"* (249).

Although the New Abolitionists have raised important issues in writing instruction and curriculum design, content-based alternatives to first-year composition are not panaceas that will eliminate the problems associated with first-year writing courses. At many institutions, first-year writing instruction may be improved more by resolving pragmatic issues of writing program administration, such as those identified by Crowley and Schuster, than by addressing the theoretical issues which have been the focus of recent New Abolitionists' critiques. Whether a content-based first-year writing course will be a better alternative than a general skills writing course at a given institution can only be determined by carefully weighing various factors: the writing proficiency of first-year students, the instructional staff available, the level of administrative support, etc. When university administrators and committees propose (and in some cases impose) new curricular structures for first-year writing, WPAs need to make clear the limitations as well as the benefits of the proposed alternatives, using research, theory, and their own experience to argue forcefully for the curriculum model that is likely to offer the best writing instruction for students at their institutions.

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## Notes

1. This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper delivered at the Conference of Southern California Writing Program Administrators Affiliate held at California State University, Los Angeles, 5 October 1996. [Editor's Note: *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction* was reviewed by Kirsti Sandy in *WPA* 20.1-2 (Fall/Winter 1996): 104-107.]
2. For two collections of essays on this subject, see Bazerman and Russell and Herrington and Moran.
3. I would like to thank Joan Graham, Director of the Interdisciplinary Writing Program, for sending me copies of syllabi and assignments from more than twelve writing link courses at the University of Washington.
4. For a discussion and examples of further models for writing courses, see Shamoon, Linda K., with Robert A. Schwegler, John Trimbur, and Patricia Bizzell, "New Rhetoric Courses in Writing Programs: A Report from a Conference for New England Writing Program Administrators." *WPA* 18.3 (Spring 1995): 7-25. [ed.]

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# Reinventing First-Year Composition at the First Land-Grant University: A Cautionary Tale

*Margaret Baker Graham, Elizabeth Birmingham, and Mark Zachry*

The major questions facing our institutions revolve not around whether they will change, but by how much. The organization of academic life that served the nation well in the 20th century is unlikely to be adequate for the 21st. (1997 Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities)

Absorbing the values of corporate America and adjusting to the post-cold war mentality, universities and colleges across the country are being restructured and reinvented. First-year composition, because it is often the largest undergraduate program, is especially vulnerable to restructuring and reinvention. At the 1997 WPA Conference, Ira Shor gave an impassioned speech asking WPA to address the situation that occurred when the writing program at the University of Minnesota was restructured while its director was out of the country, and WPA administrators across the country have used on-line forums to discuss the political and economic stresses their programs are facing. Commenting on the vulnerability of academic programs to restructuring, Jim Perley, President of AAUP, argued that WPA has a responsibility to take an active political role in the future of composition programs.

The purpose of this research is to examine the restructuring of first-year composition that is taking place at one land-grant university, Iowa State University. We have used a case study approach to our research because naturalistic inquiry allows us to examine in detail a moment when the practice of composition instruction at one site has ruptured and a new institutional practice appears to be emerging. Thomas Lindlof in his book on qualitative research argues that naturalistic inquiry is an appropriate methodology to examine organizational practices. "A practice," Lindlof writes, "constitutes a *way of doing things* that is sanctioned by a social collectivity" (16). He continues: "Practices inform us about how the role requirements in a social system are enacted in specific contexts. . . . They do not change easily over time, but *will* change if a performance can be considered to have solved a problem, created a problem, or opened possibilities for changing practices" (18). In the current political climate at Iowa State University, the absence of tenure-track faculty in the first-year composition classroom has emerged as a problem, a problem that has required faculty to reconsider their practices as faculty of English Studies.

In 1996, at the behest of upper administration, the Department of English at Iowa State University began a new initiative whereby tenure-track faculty

from all areas of the department—creative writing, literature, linguistics, and rhetoric and professional communication—would regularly teach first-year composition. This essay traces the political, economic, and disciplinary factors affecting this change—specifically, why tenure-track faculty left first-year composition two decades ago; why upper administration wants them to return; and why faculty are complying in spite of political risks to English as a department and a discipline. To identify the factors affecting change, we interviewed administrators, faculty, and teaching assistants. Interviews with administrators included Provost John Kozak, Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences Elizabeth Hoffman, Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence Steven Richardson, retiring chair of the Department of English Dale Ross, and incoming chair of the Department of English Thomas Kent. We also interviewed from the Department of English sixteen tenure-track faculty, five adjunct instructors (permanent staff without tenure-track status), and thirteen teaching assistants. These members of the English Department included people who voiced support for the change as well as those voicing opposition. In all, we interviewed 39 people.<sup>1</sup>

Although Iowa State University's situation is unique in some ways, the unfolding story demonstrates the complex motives and factors that influence the shape of composition programs. Such complexity makes faculty resistance difficult yet offers them a contested space within which to insert their own ideas for change.

## Exodus from First-Year Composition

Steve Richardson, Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Iowa State University, identified "two great events of the last century" that created the university system. One of these, he said, was "the development of the department in the late nineteenth century which came from the German research model." The second was "the move toward general public education, as opposed to the previous system which educated an elite." This populist impulse led to the Morrill Act of 1862 to establish land-grant institutions, and Iowa State University became the country's first university to accept the terms of the Morrill Act.

These two competing value systems, populism and elitism, help to explain why tenure-track faculty at Iowa State used to teach first-year composition regularly and why they later abandoned that role. As others in English studies have argued (e.g., Gere; Crowley; S. Miller), first-year composition was a response to the populism movement that produced, for the first time in our country's history, an influx of students who were not necessarily from more affluent or better educated families. The effects of this populism were especially pronounced at land-grant institutions. For much of its history, the English department at Iowa State was defined almost solely by first-year composition. When Dale Ross, our retiring chair, began teaching at Iowa State in 1966, "we all taught it, we all talked about it, we all met together, we all argued about it. . . and in spite of the fact that it was a hell of a lot of work, there was a kind of esprit that grew up around this program." Even then, though, first-year composition

was marked as having a lower status than other courses because it was seen as a service course, and service courses, although they embrace the populism mission of land-grant institutions, do not fit the specialization model imported from Germany. English faculty in the 1960s studied literature as an area of specialization; first-year composition, despite efforts to bolster it with literary texts, did not fit into that discipline (Friend; Salvatori).

Faculty at Iowa State responded to the political reality of service courses by creating a hierarchy in which faculty with high status taught first-year composition less frequently than did faculty with low status. Dale Ross reported that junior faculty taught three sections of composition a term, but senior faculty might teach one section of composition and two of literature. A woman teaching for over 30 years observed that women in the 1960s taught more sections of composition than men did. The disparity, she noted, ended in 1972, when a committee of women presented data to a new chair documenting the gender disparity. But first-year composition remained marked as low status.

Although the impulse for tenure-track faculty to abandon the composition program was in position early on, at Iowa State they did not flee until the late 1970s and early 1980s. Dale Ross, the retiring chair, cited two conditions that prompted the exodus: "One [was] the expansion of the graduate program [and] the recognition that we needed to support graduate students with graduate teaching assistantships. The second, frankly, was the need to recruit faculty, new faculty, young faculty, at a time when other departments were turning out Phd's, training them increasingly in a narrow fashion for doing research and focusing on specialization. The argument that they would also be expected to teach composition put you at a disadvantage if you were recruiting." Both of these conditions stem from a disciplinary shift within English studies where specialization, following the German model, became essential. Generalists were no longer valued, and graduate programs were seen as increasingly necessary to train future faculty in a specialization and to provide current faculty with the courses they were trained to teach. An associate professor in literature who came to ISU in the late 1970s did not fondly recall composition instruction and rejected the idea of returning to such teaching: "Some people still have a sort of nostalgia that I don't share for the good old days when the one thing we all did was freshman English. You know we could swap our stories of the most outrageous error over coffee in the lounge . . . I'm wasted in the freshman English classroom."

Ironically, the emergence of composition studies as a disciplinary field, which people often date as beginning in 1963 and reaching full status by the mid 1970s (e.g., Corbett; Gebhardt), hastened the flight of faculty from first-year composition. If composition were a valid specialization, then faculty in other areas of English studies were not qualified to teach it. A full professor who published a well-cited article on composition in the early 1980s remembered how he felt forced to leave that area of English studies:

I was real excited to go to 4Cs in the mid-70s when I first started to go to read papers. . . . People felt like they were on the cutting edge of something new. . . . We literature people sort of had mixed feelings about it

because we had always been taught that freshman English was a burden and not something we should get terribly excited about. . . . But you could tell some people were just inventing themselves, reinventing themselves, inventing a discipline. So it was sort of exciting. . . . But by the early 80s it had gotten too complicated. You couldn't do both [literature and composition].

In spite of his interest in composition studies, he chose literature, the area his doctorate degree had prepared him to teach.

The increased emphasis on specialization and research meant that even some faculty in rhetoric and composition did not feel qualified to teach first-year composition. A member of the rhetoric and professional communication area who has specialized in professional communication theory admitted, "I don't really know how to teach it [composition] any more." Another full professor in literature summed up the irony that became part of the professionalization of composition studies:

It was crucial for the life of the department that we be able to say that just not anybody can teach freshman writing because there is a body of theory and knowledge here that is enabling, and that is part and parcel of the tendency toward increased professionalization of the department. And we turn right around and dump most of the teaching of freshman writing on the least professional group [teaching assistants] we could imagine.

## Why Upper Administration Is Mandating Tenure-Track Faculty's Return to the First-Year Composition Classroom

For political and disciplinary reasons, tenure-track faculty at Iowa State left composition in the hands of teaching assistants and temporary instructors. Now at Iowa State new factors have prompted a reconsideration of first-year composition. This reconsideration began approximately five years ago when administration at the dean and provost level began asking tenure-track faculty across the university to teach "frontier courses"—courses that first-year students take or that introduce undergraduates to a specific discipline. Reasons that are both economic and political have prompted administrators' attention to who teaches these frontier courses.

Tuition is an economic incentive. From 1986 to 1995, the annual number of incoming undergraduate students at Iowa State dropped by approximately 2,300. In terms of current tuition rates, that decline equals a loss of nearly 2.7 million dollars in tuition per semester. Administrators speculate that one reason for this loss of revenue is that the public is disenchanted with universities where the research mission is perceived to dominate at the expense of educating undergraduates. Certainly, private colleges in Iowa are using as a selling point the attention students will receive from tenured faculty. This claim is not lost on students and parents, nor has it been overlooked by the state's Board of Regents. The recent Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universi-

ties, a group of twenty-five university presidents including Iowa State's Martin Jischke, highlights the problem of the public's view of universities: "A skeptical public appears convinced that students are ignored, that research is more important than teaching, and that we have built a research-driven faculty that knows more and more about less and less." Iowa State is particularly vulnerable to criticism that it has abandoned its undergraduate mission because recent years have been dedicated to obtaining Research I status, which was granted by the Carnegie Foundation in 1994.

Dean Elizabeth Hoffman justified the new emphasis on having tenure-track faculty teach frontier courses: "Freshmen [will] get better connected with the university if they take courses from regular faculty as soon as possible . . . This is not to put down TAs . . . but the fact is students and their parents don't view them in the same light as they view the tenure-track faculty." The Dean argued that "when word got out that this was the way university faculty felt about teaching [that it "didn't count"], people got really angry and they went to their state legislatures, and they went to their boards of regents, and they said this is not acceptable." Provost John Kozak concurred: "In the private institutions these students are exposed to the best, the brightest of the faculty. You are really placing our kids at Iowa State at a competitive disadvantage. . . . I think that we do not market as well as we should."

Because composition is one of only two university-wide required courses (the other is a one credit course in library science), it is an obvious place for the university to make a statement about commitment to undergraduate education. However, some faculty are highly resistant to the efforts of the Provost and other top administrators to "market" first-year composition specifically or higher education in general. Dale Ross, for example, stated, "The notion of the student as a consumer is crazy. When consumers buy a car, they have a notion of what kind of car they want. But when a student comes to college, she's not in a position to say what a baccalaureate degree should be. We now find ourselves catering to what students want, rather than teaching them." Thus, the struggle over first-year composition is part of a larger struggle over the very nature of the university: Is the university a corporation following capitalistic practices, a humanistic enterprise practicing the principles of progressivism, a combination of the two, or something else?

Fiscal responsibility and an accompanying utilitarian emphasis, characteristics of the corporate model of higher education, have also influenced the new attention to undergraduate teaching. Retiring department chair Dale Ross confirmed "a greater demand for accountability through legislative mandates of one sort or another," while Provost Kozak acknowledged that university administrators must make decisions based on interaction with a "wide constituency. . . tak[ing] the temperature of regents, legislators, and parents." The political climate surrounding universities' relationships to the public and legislatures has, according to Steve Richardson, Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, a "dark side" because "when people call for accountability, it means they don't think we're doing a good job."

One reason the public may think we are not doing a good job has been recently articulated by J. Hillis Miller. The political climate has shifted as the West has moved away from the cold war mentality to utilitarian and capitalistic concerns. In this new climate, corporate officers who are increasingly involved in the funding of universities "as well as university bureaucrats who govern for them may have a predisposition to think that the humanities are primarily of use to teach 'communication skills'" (12). Only those English departments that can prove "indispensable utility" are "likely to flourish in the new conditions" (13). Although Miller is more interested in finding ways to prove the utility of *Beowulf* and Toni Morrison, a new attention to first-year composition is an obvious way to demonstrate utility.

Dean Hoffman argues that the new direction administrators are taking is an ethical one because it is in the best interests of our students. She talked at length about her own commitment to teaching in the field of economics and her push to have full professors, including herself, teach frontier courses in the Department of Economics. She stated, "It's important to establish the ethic that a faculty member has responsibility to teaching at all levels." An associate professor in the English Department voiced her support for upper administration's actions: "[Some faculty would] like to think that they [upper administration] had some nefarious, darker motive. . . . Could it be that possibly they think this is a good idea? That teaching is important? . . . Maybe I'm being duped, but maybe they could have good motives for it." Other faculty in the English Department are more skeptical, referring to the new initiative as "purely political" or "just some sort of publicity stunt."

## Why the Department of English Is Cooperating

Although for several years the Department of English has resisted upper administration's plan to return tenure-track faculty to first-year composition, change is at long last occurring. In a time of declining enrollment and decreasing budgets, there are economic pressures that Tom Kent believes the chair of the English Department can no longer ignore: "There are realities to running a department; you've only got so much money. . . . I think that by appearing to be and trying to be cooperative . . . it opens up gates instead of closes them." Kent's observation seems to confirm Zack Bowen's point in *ADE*: "though commonplace and mundane, the budget is as fundamental to the psyches of department administration as the mirror image to Lacanians, or dialogics to the Bakhtinians" (11).

Dean Hoffman suggested the consequences to the English Department if compliance was not forthcoming: "Frankly, by refusing to teach freshman English the department was putting itself in *severe* political jeopardy in the long term" (emphasis hers). Departmental resources that upper administration control include travel allowances, new hires, and salary increases. Although Kent acknowledged the political situation between the department and the university, he objected to seeing departmental cooperation as a kind of surrender. To the contrary, he asserted that "we fall too easily I've discovered into this kind of binary thinking—that's us and them, that's administration and the department,

and somehow how there aren't mutual goals."

Faculty in the English Department are more willing to pursue these mutual goals in a time of economic difficulties. The lower enrollment at Iowa State has affected the English Department, resulting in the cancellation of courses for undergraduate majors and graduate students. Faculty members cannot easily resist teaching first-year composition when their courses do not make enrollment.

Disciplinary shifts within English studies also seem to have played a role in moving tenure-track faculty from all areas of the department back into the first-year composition classroom. Kent, himself a member of the Rhetoric and Professional Communication area, does not define first-year composition as the exclusive turf of rhetoric specialists: "Maybe . . . we take it to be an academic writing course, an introduction to academic writing. Some other universities don't take it that way. They take it as an introduction to critical thinking, or they take it in some cases as an introduction to cultural studies, or . . . an introduction to literary studies. So that first-year writing courses can be made into lots of things, I think legitimately so."

Kent also observed that he can accept the inclusion of all English faculty in the first-year composition classroom because he can separate research from teaching: "I would make a distinction, perhaps, between teaching and conducting scholarship in writing. . . . I don't think necessarily that you have to be a composition scholar in order to be a good undergraduate teacher of writing. . . . I know I could teach courses in nineteenth-century American literature . . . although I'm not a scholar in nineteenth-century American literature."

In the 1960s and 1970s, when composition and rhetoric studies seemed defined exclusively by pedagogy, there was an important need to stake out the first-year composition classroom as belonging to composition experts. Kent's comments on the difference between teaching and doing research suggest that need may no longer exist. Today the vitality of research in rhetoric (e.g., dialogism, narrative studies, hermeneutics) extends far beyond the composition classroom. In fact, Kent stated that he thought the proposal to have faculty from all areas teach composition could help end the turf wars in the English department because it would help "the distinctions between discourse production [composition] and discourse reception [literature] close." Kent's argument has carried weight in departmental debates about first-year composition because of his rhetoric expertise. As editor of *Journal of Advanced Composition* and author of *Paralogic Rhetoric*, which won a NCTE award for best book, Kent can not be dismissed as an administrator who does not understand the disciplinary issues involved.

Other members of the English Department share Kent's inclusive view of rhetoric. One TA working on a master's in literature identified rhetoric as the core of all of English studies: "Rhetoric is the taproot all the rest springs from. That's the core of how we make language and literature. . . . The main point ought to be . . . to give our students the tools they'll need to communicate, the

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most important of which is rhetoric." Similarly, an associate professor specializing in writing-across-the-curriculum identified "rhetorical issues" as the main emphasis of composition, an emphasis that faculty in each area of English studies can contribute to: "One of the great virtues of bringing people together and having them see what the others are teaching and what the students are writing and reading [is that it ] will help to sort of demystify the [act of] writing . . . potentially."

## Potential Risks in Cooperating—Or Not Cooperating

At the same time that there are advantages to bringing tenure-track faculty back into the first-year composition classroom, there are also political risks. Tenure-track faculty's escape from first-year composition two decades ago was seen as symbolic of the professionalization of English studies. Thus, to focus on first-year composition may be to redefine English as a "service department," a designation identified by many as low status. An associate professor in literature commented, "I feel like the attempt to re-emphasize it [teaching first-year composition] is an attempt to return us to a service department. . . ." Sharon Crowley makes a similar point in her essay, "Composition's Ethic of Service," where she argues that a program whose mission is to provide "continued surveillance" for "the unentitled" (229) will not garner status within the academy.

Faculty also commented on the risk individual faculty might take because teaching first-year composition would divert them from other enterprises—research and graduate teaching—that are more likely rewarded in the academy. An associate professor of rhetoric and professional communication commented, "There has to be some professional reward—some intellectual and human reward—for doing this." An adjunct instructor noted, "Classroom teaching, particularly undergraduate, in-the-trenches kind of work, hasn't been seen as all that important."

Dean Hoffman refuses to accept these arguments. She asserted that being a service department is not necessarily negative. In fact, because in a university of science and technology like Iowa State, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is often called to play a service role, she believes "service" has a positive designation: "Let's look at the great departments of this college. Chemistry is a service department. More than ninety percent of chemistry student credit hours are service courses . . . service to [the College of] Engineering, to the biological sciences, to the College of Agriculture . . . and they have full professors teaching all of those courses. . . . [The Department of] Statistics too . . . almost all of their student credit hours are service." Dean Hoffman further argued that being designated a service department has granted the English Department advantages rather than disadvantages: "The reason you have sixty-two tenure-track faculty members is because you're a service department. If you weren't a service department, you'd have ten faculty members, let me guarantee it."

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An associate professor who has held administrative positions shared this reasoning: "I don't know how that [offering service courses] hurts English studies, *per se*. For example, in our department it only helps them because if we didn't have the composition program, we wouldn't have TAs. If we didn't have TAs, we wouldn't have a graduate program. . . . It would be a much smaller, downsized operation."

Indeed, in a time when decisions about the academy are driven by data and dollars, the service designation, although traditionally troublesome, may become increasingly beneficial. Ross observed, "If numbers are going to drive [the academy], then departments with more numbers are going to do better than those with lower numbers—in terms of enrollment and dollars generated and credit hours and research grants." The "ethic of service" that Crowley laments may be transformed into the "economics of service."

Kent said he understands the historical reasons "service" has been problematic to composition specialists and described the "political position of writing programs" as being "relegated to the basement." He insisted, however, that service should not require a loss of disciplinary status: "We [the Department of English] are professionals, we are the experts, I think, about composition and writing. We should be calling the shots." Still, he accepts the role service courses offer in the university. "I'm not adverse to the idea that somehow the English Department should be 'serving' the rest of the university. I see it as an ethical task . . . to help in the liberal education of students."

Dean Hoffman admitted that universities have traditionally undervalued teaching, particularly at the undergraduate level, but she believes that has changed. She suggested, "Participating in the teaching of freshman English should be viewed as a positive part of your [tenure-track faculty's] teaching portfolio. . . . As we recruit new faculty, as we go through the promotion and tenure process, we ought to be looking to the long-term goal that every faculty member can and does participate in the teaching of freshmen." Although research is still necessary, Dean Hoffman has encouraged and supported cases for tenure and promotion to full professor where the primary criterion is excellence in teaching.

The quality of instruction to students in first-year composition is another potential risk. One associate professor in rhetoric and professional communication observed: "I view this program [i.e., the plan to have faculty from all areas teach first-year composition] as simply a departmental administrative response to an uninformed demand by central administration. We're kidding ourselves if we think otherwise, since the program itself is based on a cynical if not degrading perception of what the teaching of writing is all about." TAs are also skeptical that tenured faculty will address upper administration's concerns about retention, recruitment, or better service to our undergraduates. One TA wondered about the value of having first-year students taught by "unwilling or uninvolved or bored or smug tenure-track faculty." Another said, "I don't think tenure-track people teaching comp will necessarily increase retention. . . . Maybe

they're better teachers and maybe not." A third TA agreed: "It blows my mind to hear people talking about the importance of getting tenured faculty back into the composition classroom because I start thinking, what if they don't want to be there? What parents would want their children taught that way?"

Other members of the English Department, however, are more sanguine about faculty from all areas teaching first-year composition. An associate professor in creative writing noted, "It's not brain surgery. . . . If people don't do a good job, nobody dies." An adjunct instructor, who described composition instruction as "central to her career," had a similar response when asked about non-specialists teaching composition: "We're not teaching rocket science here. I do feel that it's important for the people who take on the job to educate themselves about composition pedagogy. . . but I think [for] lit people that's not a very big step." As this and another adjunct instructor who teaches first-year composition regularly pointed out, tenure-track faculty in the area of rhetoric have rarely taught first-year composition, so it is difficult to defend the idea that the plan deprofessionalizes first-year composition instruction.

## Looking Ahead

In the fall of 1995, only one of the sixty-eight instructors teaching regular first-year composition was a tenure-track faculty member. One year later the proposed change went in effect, and nine tenure-track faculty (from creative writing, literature, rhetoric and professional communication, and linguistics) taught first-year composition. In the fall of 1997, the second year of the tenure-track faculty's regular participation has begun.

As a case study, the specifics of this research cannot be generalized to other universities. Nonetheless, the political and economic factors that precipitated the changes at Iowa State University are national, and English faculty at other institutions should heed the warning implicit in this statement by the university presidents who wrote the Kellogg report on state and land-grant universities: "In the next century, a new kind of university will be in place. Most of us are already in the process of inventing it."

Thus, one lesson of this cautionary tale is that departments of English must be sensitive to economic and political pressures if they are to address potential problems before someone outside the department does it for them. Despite faculty's complaints about upper administration's intervention in curricular matters, the fact remains: By abandoning first-year composition to teaching assistants and temporary instructors, the Department of English at Iowa State became vulnerable to intervention. The department could not reconcile the need to have a large number of tenure-track faculty because of service responsibilities and at the same time turn over those responsibilities to others. The English chair and Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences believe this vulnerability exists at other universities as well. "Rethinking what the role of the English department should be," Kent noted, "is a national phenomenon." Dean Hoffman put it more bluntly: "Somehow, at some point, English departments, frankly in

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my opinion, started to get away with murder. . . . English departments that don't take back freshman English will find themselves getting downsized."

Another lesson is that cooperating with upper administration may lead to other benefits. At Iowa State, agreeing to upper administrators' request has garnered their cooperation in restructuring our TA training program. For the past several years, TAs were required to teach two courses in their first semester of their masters program, a condition faculty objected to as exploiting new graduate students. Because of department's cooperation, upper administration worked with the department to restructure the number of courses taught in the fall so that TAs no longer teach until their second semester of graduate school. The Center for Teaching Excellence also awarded the first-year composition program a \$25,000 grant to improve our TA training program, and Dean Hoffman grants an honorarium to tenure-track faculty who teach first-year composition and work with new TAs.

This newfound cooperation between the department and upper administration does not necessarily mean a happy-ever-after-ending. For example, we cannot yet determine how the curriculum is changing now that tenure-track faculty are regularly teaching first-year composition. Faculty are provided some of the same materials (e.g., readings on theory and practice, and descriptions of course objectives and assignments), but they expect and receive much more autonomy than graduate students and temporary instructors do. We do not yet know if this autonomy will produce a better and more vital first-year composition program or lead to a program in disarray. It is also too soon to judge the department's status within the university or the reaction of students, parents, and legislatures. And it would be naive to ignore the possibility of future mandated changes for departments across the campus or the English Department specifically.

In this time of restructuring and reinvention, administrators and faculty in English departments and first-year composition programs who recognize how political and economic pressures affect departmental and disciplinary structures may be best able to position themselves to shape or contest the changes that are coming.

## Notes

1. Subjects were asked to discuss what advantages and disadvantages they perceived in the new program, why they thought the new program was created, and what effects the new program might produce. Interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. We are grateful for the interviews granted us, and we especially appreciate the administrators' permission to use their names.

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# Negotiated Independence: How a Canadian Writing Program Became a Centre

*Judith Kearns and Brian Turner*

Readers of *Writing Program Administration* will be acquainted with histories of new and emerging writing programs (Kirsch; Little) and with accounts of changes to existing programs (Bean and Ramage, Howard, Little and Rose, Rankin). Reading evaluations of program effectiveness (Olds; McMullen and Wellman) and more theoretical articles (Gale, Carson, Gunner), many of us have focused particular attention on the case studies used as illustrations. Each of these narratives gives WPA's an opportunity not merely to place our own experiences in a broader context but also to learn strategies for strengthening programs and improving their institutional status. As Carol Hartzog has pointed out, these accounts also make a formative contribution to the field as a whole, insofar as efforts to develop sound programs parallel the larger effort to consolidate the identity of composition as a field: "the form and coherence of individual writing programs bear on the nature and status of the discipline itself" (148). In a sense, then, histories of particular programs help to construct an emerging discipline.

The history we contribute in this essay is of a writing program at a small Canadian university—more specifically, of this program's transformation from a sub-division of the English Department, isolated from the University's Writing in the Disciplines initiatives, into a separate, interdisciplinary Centre for Academic Writing, with the potential to reinvigorate WID. After describing the origins of the program at the University of Winnipeg, we recount the processes of review and transition the program underwent on its way to becoming a new centre. Our account yokes curricular and administrative/structural revisions, since the two were closely connected throughout negotiations. In a concluding section, we speculate about the extent to which the transformation of the Writing Program is—or is not—a distinctly Canadian story.<sup>1</sup>

## The Origins of the University of Winnipeg's Writing Program

The University of Winnipeg is a small, undergraduate, liberal arts institution (7500 full- and part-time students) located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, a city which also contains a larger research university. Its Writing Program—as the current Centre for Academic Writing was then called—was formally instituted by the Senate in 1986, and began operations as a subdivision of the English Department in fall, 1987, with a full-time faculty of seven. The Program was to be reviewed after five years of operation.

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As originally conceived, the Writing Program was overseen by a Director, who reported to the English Department on curriculum and to the Dean of Arts and Science on more general program matters; he alone of the Program's faculty members held a professorial rank (Associate Professor). That the others were instructors, a rank for which a PhD was not needed and which required neither scholarly research nor scholarly publication, says much about the attitude towards the program in its early years and, indeed, towards the teaching of writing. We were seen by many faculty as "remediators," hired not to do "real" academic work but to help students who should have been taught the fundamentals before arriving at university. And while the University of Winnipeg was in some ways unusually advanced in its thinking, hiring composition faculty into full-time positions which would allow them to apply for "continuing appointments" (the instructor level equivalent of tenure), the appointment of the Director to a permanent position (rather than the term position customarily given to department chairs) suggested the kind of relationship normally associated with GTAs and their directors, one which assumed that the instructors simply were not—and never would be—qualified to lead the Program. As an undergraduate institution, the University was never in a position to employ GTAs to teach writing, but the hierarchy initially established bore some resemblance to the inequitable treatment of composition faculty often described in the literature. Jeanne Gunner's account of "the myth of the novice" seems apt: those "outside the power system" may be "doomed to an unending apprenticeship" (12) regardless of their scholarly background or teaching experience—as long as their job title requires them to be seen as novices. In our case, fortunately, the apprenticeship did end. The University began hiring Writing Program faculty in the professorial ranks and has since converted the ranks of two instructors with PhDs to Assistant Professor. As things turned out, moreover, the Director's position was not permanent; within two years, he had been replaced by a three-person coordinating committee. But the difficulties created by the original structure were not easily resolved, as we will explain later.

With strong guidance from the Director, the Writing Program originally designed its own curriculum. Before the inception of the Program, it was the English Department, as in most Canadian universities, that had offered the few writing courses available at our University—courses that taught "the modes of discourse" and drew examples from traditional *belles lettres* anthologies. When the Writing Program took responsibility for the first-year composition courses, such anthologies were quickly dropped in favour of a process-oriented approach. The primary focus was on fulfilling the University's access mandate and meeting the needs of first-year students, a population which included a relatively high proportion of non-traditional students (ESL, aboriginal, mature, and so on). It offered only two courses. One was an ungraded preparatory course, Developmental Rhetoric, designed for "at-risk" students and intended, as the University of Winnipeg *Calendar* put it, to help them "work confidently and successfully at the university level." The other was a compulsory course, Rhetoric I, intended to strengthen the skills of graduates of Developmental Rhetoric and of all other

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first-year students, with the exception of those who had achieved “honors” in high-school English. (This exemption policy for some students reinforced the attitude that instruction in writing is remedial, an attitude we—like many writing programs—continue to battle.)

Both courses depended heavily on what was called “the common curriculum.” All instructors used the same text, a book written by faculty with Writing Program students specifically in mind (*The University of Winnipeg Writing Program Coursebook*), and all depended on similar classroom lectures and activities, produced largely by committee. In many ways, the focus of this common curriculum was expressivist, designed, according to *Calendar* descriptions and the Program’s promotional material, to “reduce anxiety and stress about writing among new students” (De Long 10). On the other hand, the current-traditional paradigm always lurked beneath the surface, leaving students with a mixed message about what is important in writing.

The use of a common curriculum was as much an administrative convenience as a statement of educational and social principles. After being approved, a Program of some kind simply had to be up and running in a hurry; faculty had to be hired and courses designed, and since the Writing Program was unprecedented in Canada, there were no helpful models near at hand. The common curriculum was a means of implementing the program quickly and of minimizing the administrative problems likely to plague an endeavour of this sort. Moreover, in a country which at that time had virtually no PhD graduates in rhetoric or composition and whose immigration laws made American hirings difficult, the common curriculum seemed to be a way of bringing new, untrained, non-compositionist faculty on board with minimal disruption. Commonality seemed fool-proof; it would allow even those with MAs on *The Dunciad* or e.e. cummings to teach composition effectively—and thus transform insecure, marginalized students into competent university writers.

Or so went the theory. After three years of applying the common curriculum, however, several faculty members—among them our first, newly hired assistant professors—saw it as inadequate, if not stifling. Some avenues for creative differences had been permitted (in the form of “experimental” sections), but the curriculum enshrined in the *Coursebook* remained the standard. And it was, in any case, not this particular curriculum at which the dissatisfaction of some faculty was directed, but the very notion of a common curriculum.

## The Self-Study

The nature of our disagreements about curricular issues of this sort and about other matters became clearer as the Writing Program entered a formal process of preparation for the five-year review. This self-study involved three main elements: a personal statement, in which each faculty member was to speak about his/her experiences in the Program, professional goals, and aims for the Program as a whole; subcommittee reports on the central curricular and administrative issues facing the Program, as well as on “Possible Futures” for the Program; and long weekly meetings, which were intended as planning sessions

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for the Review that lay ahead but which in fact often became forums for undirected polemic and rancorous digressions. Although these meetings exposed how deep our differences were, we were unable to air our differences frankly. This may have had something to do with the bond we felt as marginalized faculty; for some of us, it may have been typically Canadian diffidence. Whatever the reasons for our reticence, we simply couldn't look our colleagues in the eye and say "you're wrong."

If this process of making personal statements, writing committee reports, and meeting weekly brought the fact of our difference more clearly into focus, it simultaneously revealed that our administrative structure gave us no means of breaking the stalemate. "[A] system of governance designed for flexibility [had], as our external reviewers were later to observe, "become rigid" (Pare and Segal 7). In a well-intentioned effort to facilitate democratic consensus, the Program had, since the departure of the original Director, avoided giving a single person the authority to make decisions, and had instead given this responsibility to the three-person coordinating committee, which was guided by and had to report regularly to the entire Program faculty.

Each member of the coordinating committee represented a subcommittee. This arrangement in itself favoured the status quo; it made change of any kind slow, and it offered no means of effecting changes recommended by a significant minority. But red tape was not the only problem. What exacerbated these difficulties was the nature of the committees the coordinators represented, whose functions were no longer appropriate for an evolving Program. The committees assumed a common curriculum and a faculty composed entirely of instructors, and so they dissipated the energy of assistant professors—and, it must be said, of a growing number of dissenting instructors—in what they felt to be peripheral activities (such as *Coursebook* revision, the preparation of curriculum material for the entire faculty, and grammar workshops). Moreover, the division of labour in these committees failed to take into account such mundane but essential administrative work as budget, staffing, and timetable—tasks which were instead "farmed out" to individual faculty members on an ad hoc basis and received little support or acknowledgement.

This committee structure advanced the task of writing in the disciplines no better than it had addressed internal administrative tasks. Those of us who wanted to effect curricular change within the Writing Program were also interested in strengthening WID, and in fact, the University had originally intended the Writing Program to do so. But the University had not articulated the Program's role in WID clearly, and, having been driven from the beginning from predominantly expressivist assumptions, the Program itself had devised committees that were blind to WID. Moreover, an absence of both democratic means by which we might vote on priorities and administrative procedures for acting on such a vote left us powerless to grapple with WID. The low status of Program faculty again played a role in blocking our initiatives; for example, without a senior professor who knew the ins and outs of university politics, we found it difficult to consult with other departments to find out what they

considered important about teaching writing and how we might work together.

In short, the self-study revealed that an increasing number of us were ready to reinvent the Writing Program and prepared to compromise with colleagues who wanted less radical changes. However, without a strong administrative path for effecting such change, radical or otherwise, we could not proceed.

## The Five-Year Review

Even if avenues had been available for consulting with other departments about WID, members of the Program were not sure of a warm reception. Insecurity was to some extent inevitable among faculty who, as we have said, knew that some members of other departments felt that we should be a "fix-it shop," if in fact we should be there at all. But these were not our only reasons for anxiety. After five years, resentment lingered over the way the Program had been funded and implemented, even among some who believed in the value of stressing writing at university. There was also fear that we might become a new department with its own majors, entitled to a slice of the financial pie or neglectful of our obligation to first-year students. Admittedly, support for the Writing Program was generally strong at the University. But the skeptics were a significant minority.

Given these differences of opinion, it was imperative that we be assessed from diverse perspectives. The Internal Review Committee was therefore comprised of faculty and non-academic staff from a wide range of departments: Chemistry, Classics, Geography, Sociology, the Dean's Office, and the Library. Their perspective was complemented by the perspective of external reviewers, who were not so familiar with the University but who, as compositionists, were better able to take our measure as a writing program and to make recommendations informed by knowledge of other, successful programs.

It was imperative, as well, that both review committees conduct an open process, to ensure that differences among Writing Program faculty could be aired and that critics as well as supporters of the Program could speak freely. Accordingly, between January and April of 1993, the Internal Review Committee, having studied the information already collected through the Writing Program's self-study, held meetings with a wide range of groups to gather further information and opinions; they met with all Deans concerned, with past and present Chairs of the English Department, with faculty and students, with support staff and academic advisors, with Writing Program faculty, and with Lillian Bridwell-Bowles (who led a Writing in the Disciplines workshop at the University of Winnipeg in March of that year). The external reviewers were on campus for a much briefer time, but they too consulted widely and examined the Writing Program's self-study documents; they also interviewed every member of the Program faculty.

The thoroughness of this process culminated in two extensive reports and sets of recommendations. Not surprisingly, the internal reviewers, lacking

knowledge of other writing programs and of current thinking in the field of rhetoric and composition, focused mainly on practical matters and issues distinct to this institution. They noted, for example, that some of the problems in the Writing Program could be rectified simply by improving the University's record-keeping and registration procedures, and that more sections of writing courses should be offered in evenings and during the summer. But the committee also made broader suggestions. Some of these were slightly disconcerting; in recommending linked sections, for instance, the committee seemed to relegate writing instructors to a subordinate status, suggesting that they "would focus on the expressive, stylistic and technical aspects of the writing while the disciplinary faculty would concentrate on the disciplinary content" (De Long 35). More often, these broad recommendations were insightful (and, as it would turn out, remarkably in accord with those made by the "expert" external reviewers). Recommending that we eliminate both the common curriculum and the exemption policy suggested not merely sympathy for our status as marginalized, "second class" academics, but an appreciation of how these unorthodox practices weakened the Program; apparently, the internal reviewers had come to understand that a lockstep curriculum which was stifling for faculty would undermine the teaching offered students and that exemptions sent the implicit message that writing courses are punitive.

The external reviewers agreed with both of these recommendations. But they were also able to notice and suggest remedies for problems which are not merely local but endemic to writing programs and which are discussed in the scholarly literature. Readers of *WPA*, familiar with our discipline's long history of marginalization, will not be surprised to hear that an issue of particular concern to the external reviewers was autonomy. While both committees recommended that the Program become autonomous—a step that would help us play a greater role in WID, streamline administration, and boost the morale of Writing Program faculty—it is telling that the Internal Committee proposed a Centre, and the External Committee, a Department. The Internal Committee echoed concerns about empire-building and proliferating upper-level courses in rhetoric: "It is . . . possible that some elements of the present WP which serve broad university goals . . . might be neglected or even abandoned within a separate departmental structure" (De Long 43).<sup>2</sup> The External Committee did not dwell on such fears; indeed, rather than weighing the relative merits of making the Writing Program a department or a centre, they seemed to assume that departmental status was appropriate. We believe that this assumption was rooted in their sense of rhetoric and composition as an emerging discipline, that could ill afford to be treated differently from other disciplines. As Little and Brown argue, in speaking of the writing program at San Diego State University—a program, incidentally, to which our reviewers referred—"departmental status acknowledges a disciplinary identity for composition studies" and "institutionalizes that identity in a familiar organization structure" (197). This may be why the external reviewers strongly recommended elimination of the two-tiered system,

the hiring of only PhDs in rhetoric and composition, the development of more upper-level courses, and university support for research and publication in the field.

## The Transition

Anticipating that its formal restructuring would involve a lengthy process, the Writing Program took steps towards an interim restructuring immediately after receiving the reports of the two review committees. Late in the spring of 1993, faculty members voted to replace the Coordinating Committee with a Transition Committee charged, as its name implies, with the responsibility for guiding the Program until its new status was determined. Omitting curriculum, assumed to be a concern of all, faculty members elected a representative for each of five important areas: ESL students, the Writing Centres, administrative concerns, linked and upper-level writing courses, and WID. Electing a representative to look at our WID connection would, for the first time, allow us to define more clearly the role of the Writing Program in the University's WID initiative, and perhaps even reinvigorate that initiative. The election of an ESL representative, in turn, acknowledged the risk posed for second-language students by the process of transforming our curriculum; such questions as the impact of ESL students on classroom activities and the relative merits of integrated or segregated classes had been matters of concern since the early days of the Program. A third member of the Transition Committee spoke to the concerns of those who administered the Program's two Writing Centres and argued strongly for the common curriculum, believing it essential to an efficient peer tutorial system.

This was not a happy time for the Writing Program. Those of us who advocated radical changes had to push hard for the Transition Committee; indeed, it was created only through the tenacious efforts of one faculty member, who, importantly, had been with the Program almost since its beginning but had come to disagree with the status quo. Despite the use of a democratic vote (the first in our history) to make the Committee represent all points of view, the factiousness that had come to characterize the Program only intensified. Somehow, though, the Committee managed not only to conduct the Program's regular business, but also to play a leading role in the larger meetings we soon began with the Dean. These biweekly meetings, often lasting several hours and extending over a year, were initiated to discuss the observations and recommendations of the review reports. Regular participants included all members of the Writing Program, the English Department Chair, the Dean, and the Associate Dean in charge of curriculum; other faculty members and administrators joined as demanded. It was agreed that, rather than simply accept or reject each recommendation, we would focus on the critical perspectives offered by the two reports, and, in the light of their insights, debate specific, practical means of improving the Program. In theory, this process was to offer time to debate alternative visions of the Program and to provide an open forum to compare the merits of different positions, in the expectation that some sort of consensus might emerge. As things turned out, the process was not consensus-building in the way

we expected. The continuing reluctance of faculty members to speak frankly left the Deans with an incomplete picture of the issues. When one or two faculty members committed their understanding of the issues to paper in order to inform the Deans and expedite the debate, opposed positions became entrenched, deepening divisions.

Yet what seemed at first like a wrong turn soon led to more efficient discussion. For one thing, the demanding process of committing positions to paper was epistemic; it helped members of each faction see more clearly what kind of Program they wanted and why, and it helped the Deans see more clearly the options that lay ahead. For another, it helped Program faculty recognize their true audience. It was the Deans who had to be persuaded. If this realization was temporarily unsettling, our uneasiness was quickly dispelled by remembering who our Deans were—a remarkably open-minded pair, who would never impose reform unilaterally, and who were not predisposed to a particular kind of curriculum or status. Their presence ensured that advocacy would not turn into self-promotion or, even worse, the pursuit of political victory at the expense of the best future for the Program. For the Deans, neither time nor money was the issue. The issue was the future of the Writing Program. Whether it came from one member or from the Writing Program as a whole, they were looking for a proposal that could accommodate differing philosophies, and that would better serve the writing instructors, the students, and the university at large.

In the end, what the Deans accepted was a radically revised series of course offerings, which defined the goals of courses but left instructors to pursue those goals as they saw fit. Only then did discussions turn to the question of institutional status. There were good arguments for remaining under the “protection” of the English Department, not the least of which was the full support of many English faculty and especially of the Chair (who, as good luck would have it, had taught and even written about composition for many years). Nevertheless, the reasons for becoming a separate unit were stronger. As the Dean repeatedly said, “Curriculum decisions should drive administrative decisions,” and, certainly, autonomy would better suit our new course offerings. What Little and Rose say about San Diego might well apply to the University of Winnipeg:

Although a separate writing program might indeed be more vulnerable, the SDSU composition program’s former position within the English Department isolated it from the university and limited its opportunities to explore the interdisciplinary nature of composition studies. . . . [O]ur centralized program will develop relationships with other disciplines that ensure a more general awareness and appreciation of writing as an integral part of all disciplines. (21)

Just as our new curriculum focuses on writing in the disciplines, so our independence from the English Department sends the message that writing is everyone’s business at university.

Rather than making the Writing Program a Department, however, the Dean announced that we would become a Centre, with a Director appointed on a

three- or five-year term. (To avoid confusion, the original Writing Centres were re-named the Tutoring Centre and the Computer Writing Lab.) Administratively, the Centre has been modeled on a traditional Department: its Director, like the Chair of a Department, has a limited-term appointment, is responsible for budget and faculty/staff evaluation, and reports directly to the Dean. We differ from a Department in two crucial respects: we do not offer a major (although our upper-level Rhetoric courses can be applied to a major in English) and our allocation of resources to first-year and upper-level courses will be more carefully scrutinized by the Dean than is the case elsewhere in the University. With these provisos, Senate approved our independence as the Centre for Academic Writing on 9 February 1995.

## The Centre for Academic Writing

Our new Centre operates on the assumption that university writing courses can't be all things to all people. We haven't rejected the expressivist paradigm so completely that we force students to suppress their own voices; however, we do agree with WID theorists such as Charles Bazerman that a voice which ignores the language and culture of its auditors is a voice without influence. We now concentrate on writing for the university, recognizing that in some cases this means writing for "the" academic community, and in others writing for more specialized, disciplinary communities.

The Centre's new curriculum package offers both students and faculty much greater variety than the old, two-course sequence. We teach mainly three kinds of first-year writing courses. In *Academic Writing: Multidisciplinary*, a student who has not yet planned his major or who is unsure about university expectations may compare one disciplinary rhetoric with another, distinguish academic writing from other kinds of writing, or learn what it is to write as a member of a disciplinary community by working on a common subject area, such as advertising, gender, or language. In *Academic Writing: Linked*, a student who has already anticipated her major area of study has an opportunity to write about it and, to some extent, to think like a member of that disciplinary community; we have in the last two years offered seven different links of this sort (some in multiple sections)—with Biology, Business, Classics, Environmental Studies, History, Philosophy, and Sociology. Finally, in our *Academic Writing* courses that focus on the Humanities, the Social Sciences, or the Natural Sciences, a student who has not decided on a major but does recognize his academic inclinations has a chance to study the topics, genres, and methods of research in a discipline area; we have already found *Academic Writing: The Natural Sciences* to be an especially popular new addition. A fourth first-year course, *Academic Writing: Extended*, runs for two terms rather than one, and is offered to at-risk students in place of the former *Developmental Rhetoric*. As much as they have provided options for students, these new courses have provided creative outlets for faculty desperate for change and challenge. So, too, have our upper-level courses; three have now been taught (*Professional Style and Editing* and *Rhetoric in the Disciplines* several times, and *Rhetorical Criticism* once), and

two more will be delivered next year (Orality and Literacy, and Rhetorical Theory). All have been so popular with students that they are usually oversubscribed.

These curricular changes have encouraged faculty in the new Centre to think more clearly about our relationship with other disciplines. Indeed, even during the meetings with the Deans, as it became evident that the Centre would concentrate on academic/disciplinary writing, some faculty began to open channels with other departments by means of an interdisciplinary newsletter and a Rhetoric of Inquiry research project. At this point, we have done little to advance WID at the University, but channels for consultation and discussion remain open, and we are confident we will be able to take advantage of them in the near future.

We don't want to paint too rosy a picture, however. Problems of the kind the External Reviewers seemed to anticipate have, in fact, materialized, especially in personnel matters. Some of the faculty who played a large part in creating the original common curriculum and who opposed change in the Program are still reluctant to teach the new courses. More important, our first applicants for tenure were successful only after overcoming many obstacles, obstacles of the sort that will be familiar to those in rhetoric and composition. It would have been nice if, as Charles Shuster recommends, a senior scholar in the field, someone capable of assessing the special conditions faced by writing teachers, had been hired into the Program.<sup>3</sup> It might have helped, too, if we had been made a full department rather than a centre, since such a designation would have institutionally verified that we were entitled to the same academic status as colleagues from other disciplines; indeed, it would have acknowledged that composition and rhetoric were a discipline. Without such a person and without such status, our tenure applicants were more vulnerable to the misunderstandings of the University Personnel Committee, whose members knew little about the teaching of writing, and who may have been somewhat scornful about the kind of research that compositionists do.

## The Canadian Context

When we began this account of the University of Winnipeg's Centre for Academic Writing, we anticipated telling *WPA* readers that ours was a Canadian story, rooted in Canadian educational traditions and reflecting a current situation that bears little resemblance to the American one. Our conclusion was to run through a list of contrasting circumstances: America's long-standing fascination with oratory and its development of Speech Communication Departments, neither of which has any counterpart in Canada; its early and continued stream of commitment to practical writing instruction for the professions and for business, compared with sporadic interest of this sort in Canadian universities (Berlin 58-60; Graves 25-26); and, perhaps most important, the twenty-year history of support for WAC in the U.S. (Russell 282-92), where (according to recent estimates by McLeod and Soven) 50% of post-secondary institutions have WAC programs, compared with Canada's 8% (Graves 48). In short, we had

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expected to compare the rather meagre support for writing instruction in Canadian universities with the support at American universities, which—however marginalized American composition teachers have at times felt—seems to us enviably strong and deeply-rooted.

Yet as the article took shape, as we read accounts of other writing programs and thought more closely about our own, it became apparent to us that the Centre's history was remarkably similar to histories of American programs. American influences no doubt explain some of this similarity: the Dean who first promoted a writing program here and who pushed for its funding is an American (trained in psycholinguistics at American universities), as was the first Director; and at various stages of research and planning—indeed, all through the processes of forming and transforming the Program—the many people involved necessarily looked to American examples, since so few were available here.

But it seems to us that the similarities between our program history and the histories of American writing programs are better accounted for by factors that have little to do with national boundaries and backgrounds. As Carol Hartzog explains, the success of any writing program depends on a range of conditions. It may succeed because of support from one's colleagues—from the administration, from the Chair of an English Department, from English Department faculty, and from other departments. At the University of Winnipeg, we can say, without much qualification, that we enjoyed all of these. It may succeed because of "the character" of the university in which it operates; at our University, size, commitment to access, and a tradition of liberal education played key roles. Finally, success may be the result of timing and circumstances—good luck, in other words. In our case, the Program came about partly because new funding was available at a time when administrators saw the need for writing instruction, and it has gathered increasing support, we believe, not only because the provincial government encourages initiatives that distinguish one post-secondary institution from another, but also because, having distinguished ourselves nationally with this Program, we have attracted favourable public attention.

It goes without saying that unsuccessful writing programs are the result of local fortuities as well. But in closing, we would suggest that they are also victims of deeply rooted attitudes towards language, attitudes against which all of us in composition and rhetoric continue to struggle. That rhetoric is a substitute for real thought, that knowing must precede writing about one's subject, are long-standing notions in our culture, reaching all the way back to Plato. They urge us to think of words not as epistemic and formative but as the price to pay for communicating. "An unfortunate necessity," is the way Richard Rorty describes the western world's stance towards language (Culler 90). The same phrase might be used to describe the academy's prevailing attitude towards writing programs. As long as most academics, heedless of the "rhetorical turn," believe that "content" is primary and "expression" secondary, such programs will be seen as a refuge for second-class professors and a service for the "real" disciplines.

## Notes

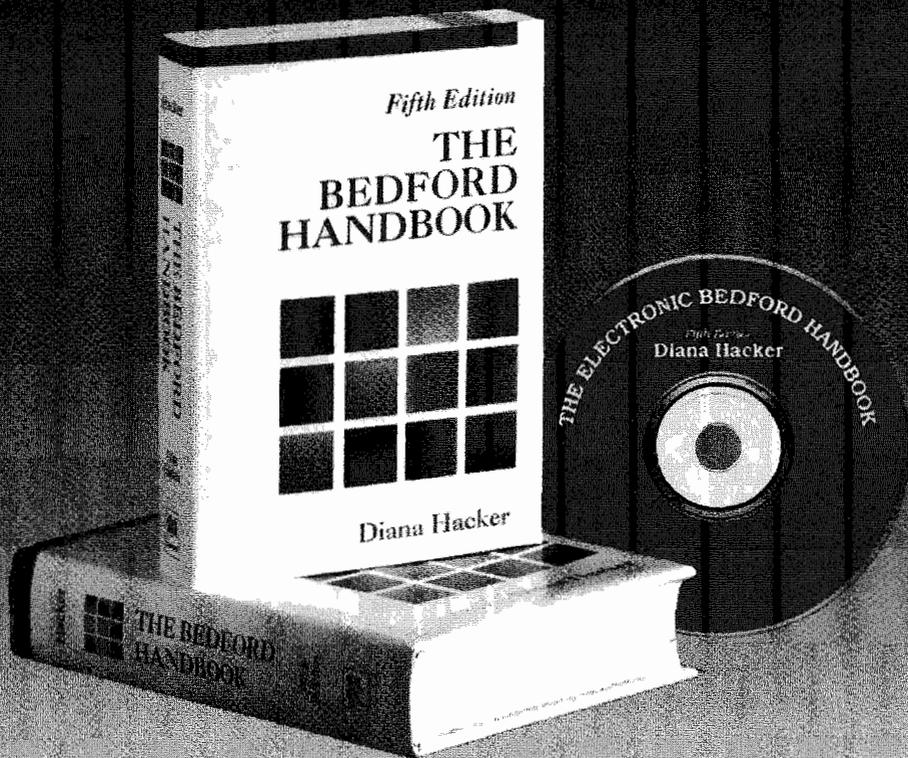
1. What follows is not, of course, an official program history. We offer the perspective shared by two faculty members who strongly advocated revision of the Program's curriculum and administration. We would note as well that limits on space have kept us from discussing features of the Program that, while important, were not at the heart of our debates—for instance, its Writing Centres and the needs of its ESL students.
2. Similar fears are described by Rebecca Howard, as she speculates about the reasons for changes to the name that Colgate's Department of Interdisciplinary Writing had originally proposed for itself, the "Interdisciplinary Rhetoric Department" . . . "rhetoric" seems also to have been considered a dangerous term that would open the floodgates for the department to teach an expanded range of theoretical courses while avoiding our true mission—fixing comma splices (43-44).
3. In "The Politics of Promotion," Schuster argues that "Departments need to hire at a senior level so that a representative of the writing interest will be free to speak, to serve, to vote, to support the growth and development of writing within the department and the university, and to protect assistant professors" (94).

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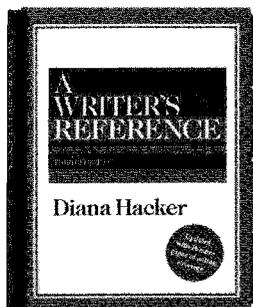
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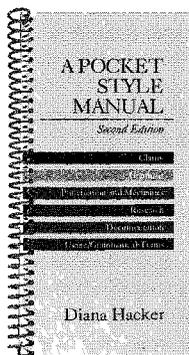
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# Redefining Composition, Managing Change, and the Role of the WPA

*Geoffrey Chase*

WPAs have the unenviable task of serving many constituents, all of whom have different perceptions and, often contradictory, expectations about the aims and goals of composition. Meeting the expectations and demands of faculty and instructors within the writing program, colleagues in the department, colleagues from other departments, department chairs, other university administrators, students, and parents, and serving as a mediator between these many stakeholders is both critical and stressful. More so perhaps than any other program "a writing program is itself part of its institutional context, constantly shaping other features of the institution and constantly being shaped by those features" (Witte and Faigley 45).

Because of the unusual, even unique, niche which composition holds within the larger system, it is not surprising that composition has often sought to redefine itself in relationship to the university, or that the university has often sought to redefine composition. What is different about recent calls for reform or for the abolition of the composition requirement all together, as Connors notes (24), is that these calls are now coming from inside the field. WPAs have become proactive voices in this debate and are in the position to redefine their own roles as well as help alter the terrain of higher education. No longer content to tolerate programs which have grown organically, and which exploit part-timers, adjuncts, and graduate students, or to oversee writing programs that are "not so much planned or organized as inherited and casually coordinated" (White 136), some WPAs have begun to call for the end to the composition requirement while others seek dramatic reforms.

The question of whether to abolish the freshman composition requirement, or whether to pursue reform within composition programs, is a question about systems and the complicated interrelationships that define both composition and the academy at large. Thus, as WPAs, we need to think on both theoretical and practical levels about this relationship. Currently, composition courses still represent a major site of writing instruction in the academy (Bazerman 258), and it is unlikely, and perhaps undesirable, that the requirement for composition will be dropped quickly at institutions that are unable to provide alternative comprehensive sites for writing instruction. If, however, we perceive that the relationship between composition and the larger institution is problematic, we must look closely at ways in which this relationship may be redefined. We must find and create other sites for writing instruction in the academy—something WAC programs across the country already do—and we must be open to fundamental changes in composition programs themselves at the same time we address the pressing and legitimate issues raised by the New Abolitionists. It is

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unrealistic to assume that the relationship between composition and the academy can change if composition does not change. Moreover, it is also unrealistic to assume that the academy will remain static and that pressures to change coming from outside and inside composition will cease.

My goal in this article will not be to argue for or against the first year composition requirement. The answer to that question, as I hope to show, is, "it depends." The question that seems most cogent to me is, "How do we know how far and in what directions we should move to address the problematic position of composition in the academy?" Composition programs are complex, dynamic systems; when we tinker with one facet of a program, that tinkering will impact the entire program. Consequently, whether we engage in reform efforts or move to abolish the composition requirement, we need to take a comprehensive, holistic approach that acknowledges how the various levels of any composition program are interconnected, and the way those levels interact with the larger institution. What I propose is a model for examining the complex relationships that determine the day-to-day practices in our composition programs and in other sites for writing throughout our colleges and universities. Specifically, we need to think about the *local conditions* at our institutions, evaluate the *internal coherence* of our programs, and consider the degree to which our programs are *externally relevant*. By examining local conditions, focusing on internal coherence, and asking ourselves about external relevance, we can assess the effectiveness of our composition programs in relation to a host of complex factors which speak to the comprehensive nature of higher education. Finally, I will move to describe how considering the interplay of these features at our institution led us to make dramatic, and in some cases controversial, changes in our composition program. Thus, finally, I propose to place composition, not just writing, in a "broader view," and in that way "remain responsible to a larger social need" (Bazerman 258).

## Local Conditions

Local conditions are those features of our colleges and universities that make our institutions distinct from each other. Budgets, teaching loads, requirements, building design, pay scales, computer availability, and the students themselves all point to differences among our campuses. These, in turn, shape attitude and morale, which also translate into powerful differences. At times, it may seem that because there are general statements we can make about higher education, all our campuses are essentially the same. This is, obviously, not the case and we would be wise as we pursue changes in our programs to focus on these differences and on how local conditions shape the programs and opportunities at our schools.

Perhaps the most overt feature of local conditions is the budget. Generally, we are in a time of fiscal constraints when budgets are not likely to increase dramatically. Thus, we are often in the position of finding "creative solutions" to bridge the gap between resources and needs. Unfortunately, higher education has in recent years, particularly in state-funded institutions, turned to stopgap

solutions. Raised caps, part-time and adjunct instructors, and technological short cuts all stand as prime examples of these stopgap measures. The problem is that these solutions become permanent and, thus, over time, change the nature of higher education through ad hoc means. Stopgap methods sometimes take on the aura of "temporary" army barracks built during WWII: decades later they are still standing, and they have changed the landscape.

Fortunately, most local conditions, though determining features of our programs, are themselves dynamic and open to change. It is imperative that we consider dynamic conditions as we entertain openings for change within them. One way to begin this process is to examine the coherence of our programs in relation to these conditions.

## Internal Coherence

A good deal has been written about the importance of coherent programs (see, for example, White, Witte and Faigley, and Hilgers and Marsella) and so there is no need to go over this ground in detail. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a composition program must be constructed so that individual sections work together to provide a coherent educational experience at the same time that the program remains conscious of its place in the larger institution. Internal coherence rests on a programmatic footing comprised of four components: (1) common goals specific and detailed enough to be meaningful and useful, (2) common assignments, (3) standard methods for evaluation and assessment across multiple sections, and (4) a commitment to examining and discussing these shared features openly. In one way, planning for internal coherence is the easiest part of what we do. It is the area over which we have the most control, and it is the facet of administration most directly linked to the training we receive as graduate students and junior faculty.

When internal coherence is sacrificed, or abandoned, to the wishes, beliefs, and predilections of individual instructors (faculty, graduate assistants, or part-time instructors) who may have no training in teaching composition, or who may be completely unaware of the developments in this field in the last thirty years, or who may argue that they have academic freedom and thus the right to teach whatever they want, it becomes impossible to talk about a program at all and thus impossible to talk about what the relationship should be between what we do in our programs and the larger institution. Moreover, when a program lacks internal coherence, the opportunity for collaboration and cooperation among instructors is limited. Everyone is on their own. It becomes nearly impossible to talk about the overall effectiveness of the program and, finally, it becomes nearly impossible to talk about composition as it relates to the larger educational experiences of students within the program. Internal coherence, then, is essential.

## External Relevance

We need also to examine the extent to which the internal coherence of our writing programs contributes to the larger educational experience of our students. That is, we must also gauge our effectiveness on the basis of the extent

to which our programs are externally relevant. We must ask ourselves how the writing that students do in our programs contributes to the overall mission of the college or university, how it contributes to what they do in the major, and how it contributes to their liberal or general education.

I am not suggesting, however, that we need only to make our programs conform to the needs and expectations of others in the university. Clearly the training, background, and experience that we have as writing instructors and as WPAs enables and compels us to help the university community think about the links between composition programs and the rest of the university. We must become spokespersons for writing who are able both to listen carefully to external expectations and to articulate clearly how these expectations might better line up with internal program goals. On this two-way street WPAs need to be adept outside their programs as well as within, able to discuss how their program contributes directly to the experience of students within it.

Before discussing how a consideration of local conditions, internal coherence and external relevance prompted us to make significant changes at my institution, let me make one other critical point. Because we are dealing with dynamic systems, and because the components of those systems—local conditions, internal coherence, and external relevance—differ, our composition and writing programs must necessarily differ also. Consequently, it is essential that we recognize that composition programs will differ widely too. In some writing intensive programs, for example, students may never take courses in composition. Instead, the writing they do may be integrated into course work. At other institutions, students might be required to take twelve hours of composition, or six, or four, but we should understand that, as Carol Hartzog notes, “no single model, no single prescription will work in all cases” (Hartzog 12). Thus, I present the following illustration as one example, *not* as the model, of how composition programs may be defined.

## Local Conditions, Internal Coherence, External Relevance: Our Situation

For several years in the 1980s and on into the 1990s, enrollment demand and static budgets levied a heavy toll on the composition program at Northern Arizona University. Thus, like many comp programs, the one at our university became in part something of an unfunded mandate. To meet demand, more part-time instructors were pressed into service, and the teaching load for GA's remained consistently high: two sections a semester with 24 students in each section while they were also enrolled in nine hours of graduate course work. Whereas at one time GA's might have received a slightly reduced load, at least in terms of preparation time, by working in the Writing Center, they were by the early 1990s committed every semester to cover additional sections, and the number of graduate assistants actually staffing the writing center dwindled to three or four per term. In addition, most of the graduate assistants in this program were working toward master's degrees and thus represented a popula-

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tion with a high rate of turnover. Finally, as a result of these conditions and constraints, the perception throughout the university community was that English composition GA's were overworked, that the writing center was not providing enough support, and that the level of instruction being offered by part-time instructors was very mixed at best. At the same time, the program was perceived by administrators as expensive and, as a result, was not likely to receive additional resources.

Thus, by the early 1990s many recognized that, in the words of external reviewers, although there were strengths, there were also significant weaknesses. And, the primary suggestion made by external reviewers was to increase budgets. When it became clear, however, that the administration could not follow these recommendations—additional resources were not going to be pumped into the program to alleviate pressures caused by increasing enrollment—we realized that we had two options. The first was to continue with business as usual and to tweak the program where possible to try to alleviate some of the pressures it faced. The second option was to overhaul the program completely. We decided to pursue this second option.

As I suggested in the opening section of this article, reforming or reformulating a composition program is a complex, systematic process in which different elements must be considered in relation to each other. Thus, although I will write about this process as though it happened in a linear fashion, it really did not; it was recursive and layered.

The most obvious changes we proposed were to shift from a two semester, six-hour composition requirement for all students to a one semester, four-hour requirement, and to impose a twelve-hour prerequisite for that four-hour course. These changes were both highly controversial and initially seen as a cutting back on our commitment to teach undergraduate writing. But these changes also provided us with several advantages.

As Table 1 shows, the change from a six-hour to a four-hour program requirement was a strategic move to help reduce graduate assistant workloads. Because at our institution (local conditions), it is impossible for graduate students to teach more than six hours a semester, we knew that by shifting to a four-hour course we were creating a program in which a GA's teaching load could not easily be doubled should enrollment increase. Second, by imposing a twelve-hour prerequisite we were reducing the number of incoming students we would need to accommodate in composition classes. Because we have about a 25% attrition rate at the end of fall semester for entering students, and a total rate of 33% by the end of the spring semester (these attrition rates did not change when we implemented our new program), a twelve-hour prerequisite would significantly reduce our student enrollment pressure. These changes enabled us to move away from using part-time instructors altogether and to lower class size. Thus, we moved to a program with no part-time instructors and one where GAs could teach smaller numbers of students in four-credit-hour classes, with other assigned duties for two other credit hours.

**Table 1**  
GA Responsibilities Under Old and New Programs

	<b>Semester 1</b>	<b>Semester II</b>
Old Program Structure	Enroll in 9 graduate hrs. <i>and</i> 2 sections of ENG 101 (24 students/section, total 48)	Enroll in 9 graduate hrs. <i>and</i> 2 sections of ENG 102 (24 students/section, total 48)
New Program Structure	<b>Semesters I and II</b>	
	Enroll in 9 graduate hrs. <i>and</i> 1 section of ENG 105 (24 students/section), <i>and</i> 1 section of ENG 205 (2 credit elective open to all students having met composition requirement, 16 students/section), <i>or</i> Tutor for 6 hrs./week in Writing Lab, <i>or</i> Mentor beginning GA's, <i>or</i> Work with faculty teaching writing intensive courses across campus.	

These changes allowed us to use GA's in more varied ways. In addition to teaching a required four-hour course, they could undertake such other responsibilities as working in the writing center, working with faculty and students across campus to help writing efforts in courses outside of English, mentoring new graduate assistants coming into the program, or finally, teaching a two-credit elective writing class for students who had completed the required writing class. Thus, with these shifts we were able to address issues of external relevance (the writing center and using GAs to work with other departments), and internal coherence (providing mentors for all new GA's). At the same time we reduced GAs' overall workload.

As I have already suggested, however, internal coherence is a key component of any program, and the mentoring we provided using experienced GA's was only one way to build that coherence. To move further toward greater coherence within the program, we made several other key changes. First, we rewrote the curriculum and asked GA's to teach from standard syllabi. Second, we implemented an assessment program that worked vertically through the program. Let me elaborate on each of these changes in turn.

Because most of the instructors teaching in our composition program were students working toward their master's degrees, most of them had no experience as teachers and no substantive awareness of how to teach writing effectively. We realized that if we were going to use these inexperienced students as the primary instructors in a required course, we had an obligation to provide as much guidance and support as we could. The standard syllabi helped do so by

giving these graduate students a scaffolding. The standard syllabi also provided a common experience for instructors and students in the program. That is, the composition program became a core experience that students could share outside the classroom. Further, it provided a common experience for GA's so that they could work together as a community to address the challenges of teaching a required composition course to a diverse range of students. The standard syllabi thus went a long way toward creating possibilities for focus and coherence.

At the same time, the standard syllabi were written with the university mission, and thus external relevance, in mind. First, the course was designed to help students become more effective readers and writers by providing them with a range of texts (poetry, fiction, essay, letters, autobiography, encyclopedia entries, academic journal articles, etc.). Learning to analyze these texts rhetorically, students could develop broad-based strategies for reading that would help them work more effectively in any other courses that they might take in liberal studies or in their major. More specifically, we sought to design a curriculum which would help students "evaluate new discourses as they became visible and relevant;" at the same time we provided them with "the tools of rhetorical analysis that [would] allow them to explicitly recognize, analyze, and respond to the particularities of the discourse systems and situations that they may move into" (Bazerman 257-58). Second, the course was thematically focused on issues of environmental sustainability. Our university sees as part of its overall mission the need to help students address environmental issues as well as the more specific problems facing the Colorado Plateau on which we are located. The course, then, was designed to dovetail with the larger curriculum both in terms of the skills it helped students achieve and its larger philosophical and pedagogical orientation.

Another key component of the program which helped us move toward internal coherence revolved around issues of assessment. On one hand, we wanted to do a good job of assessing the work that students in the program did; we wanted measures that were valid and reliable. Thus, once again, in part because we would be working with so many inexperienced teachers, we wanted to provide a strong framework for assessment that would work not just in individual sections but across the program. Accordingly, we implemented a portfolio assessment program that would work program-wide. All students would submit portfolios at the middle and the end of every semester, and their portfolio would be read and evaluated by at least two or three other instructors. The instructors would, in addition, take part in norming sessions at least three times a during a semester: at the very beginning, just before the midterm portfolios were to be evaluated, and just before the final evaluation process at the end of the semester. As a result of what was for us a new approach to assessment, we could spend more time training instructors in assessment and, once again, provide opportunities for them to discuss a common practice.

Finally, in terms of assessment, we rewrote the course evaluation forms instructors give to their students. The new forms reflect more specifically the common goals of the course and provide opportunities for students to assess

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their own progress and commitment. We abandoned the generic evaluation instrument that was used across our college in favor of one which asked questions such as, "How often did your instructor make connections between what you were reading and your writing?" and "How well did your instructor describe the portfolio approach to evaluation to you?"

I suggested that budgetary realities and constraints must be a part of our thinking as we contemplate the ways in which we might reform composition programs. One key is to consider the relationship between what we can do with what we have, what we would need in order to make our program stronger, and what are reasonable financial requests. In our case, for example, to stay with the old program, to put people back into our writing center, to stop using part-time instructors, and to lower class size would have required that we increase our budget by about 30%. While we might argue that such an increase is desirable, we also recognized that it was not likely given current budget constraints. At the same time, as I have already suggested, to continue with the program as it had evolved would have meant continuing with a program that was problematic. We were, in essence, promising to deliver more than our budget limits allowed us to offer.

As it turns out, our new program costs about the same as the old program; we haven't saved a lot of money. What we have been able to do is use our resources in different ways. The result is a series of trade-offs, the biggest two of which involve dropping the number of required hours from six to four, and the imposing of a twelve-hour prerequisite. On the other side of the scale, however, we now have GA's who teach in an effective and coherent program, who are gaining a range of teaching experiences, and who, because they are not pushed so hard, are more effective. We have returned to a fully staffed writing center, and we are able to provide more support for writing-intensive courses across campus.

In all, we have achieved a balance which is workable here. The university community supports the new program which has been running full tilt for four years, and students in our courses are positive about the instruction they receive. Most importantly, students and faculty across campus agree that the program is making a difference in the way that students write. And, finally, faculty across campus are grateful for the support and direction they now receive from the composition program.

Still, I would want to reiterate the key point—because local conditions differ, composition and writing programs will differ. It is unrealistic and unwise to assume that what works effectively on one campus is well suited to another campus without local adaptation. If local configurations and their relationship to each other remain in the foreground as WPAs undertake composition reform, we are more likely to develop effective writing programs anywhere.

Composition programs need to change and develop over time. Ours certainly does as we continue to find ways to integrate what we do more effectively with the larger institution. Thus, I fully expect that in coming years,

our program will develop in new directions, respond to new demands and, thus, will not be the same program it is today. This is as it should be. What will remain constant, I hope, is that these changes will continue to reflect judgments that are locally responsive, internally coherent, and externally relevant. In this way, effective programs will be able to address complex, dynamic forces and all the facets inevitable in a university setting.

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# What Happens to the Writing Program Administrator When the Writing Requirements Go Away?

*Sherrie Gradin*

Recently, sweeping reforms within general education have brought radical changes to traditional writing requirements at many institutions around the country, extending even, in some cases, to the elimination of those requirements. Portland State University, a comprehensive urban university with an FTE of about 15,000 but an actual head count of 31,000 students, currently finds itself at the forefront of these reforms. When the change became inevitable, faculty at Portland State decided to be in charge of their own reform. (When I arrived in 1994 the changes were a done deal.) Through a process of faculty interaction and research, they decided on a program that completely dissolved the previous structure that consisted of distribution areas. The result is that everyone who teaches and studies at PSU is or will be affected by this change.

Until the new reform, our students were required to pass, with a C- or better, our lower-division writing requirement (WR121) and our upper-division requirement (WR 323). With the new program in place, only those who entered the university under a catalogue prior to 1994 are required to take these, or any writing classes. Let it be said that we did not lose the writing requirements without a fight. Nonetheless, the newly configured general education curriculum at Portland State does not include a required writing course at any level. The crux of the changes is that writing is now to be the province of those teaching in the new general education program. Four major elements are expected to be common to all courses in the program, with an emphasis on four educational goals:

1. Communication with writing at the core but also including numerical, graphic, visual, and oral communication.
2. Critical thinking and inquiry skills.
3. Human experience with special emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism.
4. Ethical issues and social responsibility.

The first and second goals are particularly relevant to the Writing Program although all of them relate to a certain degree. The first goal is communication defined to include writing as the core and the third goal is inquiry and critical thinking. (See Figure 1.)

There are many issues raised when writing instruction and general education merge—or, as it may be, collide. Several transformations caused by the absorption of our writing requirements into the new curriculum are already

**Figure 1**  
**General Education at Portland State University**  
 (as of September 1994)

<b>Old Requirements</b>	<b>Cr.</b>	<b>New Requirements</b>	<b>Cr.</b>
18 credits from two departments from each of the three academic distribution areas.  18 upper division credits must be earned in the distribution areas with no more than 12 in one department.		Freshman Inquiry  One 15 credit course taken over a year.	15
Two courses (6 credits) of diversity coursework from the approved list.  Courses must be taken from two different departments. These credits may be included within the above distribution requirement.	54	Sophomore Year  Three 4-credit courses selected from different interdisciplinary programs or general education cluster.	12
Writing 121	3	Junior and Senior Years  Complete one interdisciplinary program or general education cluster (four 3-credit courses).	12
Writing 323	3	Senior Capstone Experience	6
PHE 290	3		
Minimum	63	Total	45

apparent. For example, we have had to design new placement strategies and new ways of gathering outcomes for these strategies. More difficult has been envisioning what we can do for and with displaced TAs and adjunct writing faculty. Rather than teaching only Freshman English, since the number of Freshman sections has dropped to four per quarter, TAs now have several roles within the writing program, the English Department, and the university. Several are writing assistants in the upper-division writing-intensive courses, several teach the upper-division writing course, several tutor in the writing center, some assist in large literature sections, a couple teach the Freshman Inquiry Communications course (a one-hour course in writing specifically meant to support the first-year general education students), and one works as Assistant Director of Writing. These transformations in TA roles have certainly changed our approach to training and supervision. There are other transformations beginning to arise and many relate to my job as Director of Writing.

With the elimination of the writing requirements, I find myself wondering what our mission is as a writing program and what my role is as an administrator. I knew that my job as Director of Writing would be different from the way it was constituted prior to the changes in our program, but I wasn't sure what those differences would be. Since we are currently sustaining both the old and the new program, I remain somewhat unsure as to further transformations once

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the old writing requirements are completely phased out. We have thus far introduced the Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior courses into the curriculum. Currently we are scrambling to put in place enough interdisciplinary capstones for the fourth year of the program. While the entirety of the new four-year program will be in place by 1997-98, I will continue to balance both the old and new programs through 2001 since the life of the catalogue at Portland State is seven years.

When I first asked myself the question, "what does a writing program administrator do when there are no writing requirements?" I was able to imagine some probable scenarios. As most of us probably would, I foresaw myself acting as consultant, leading workshops on integrating writing into the general curriculum for those now responsible for teaching writing, looking for ways to ensure that sound and appropriate writing instruction continues, creating new writing electives within my home department, teaching more graduate-level courses in composition and perhaps even teaching in the new program itself. No surprises here; I have been doing most of these things. I also retain administrative responsibility for a thriving writing-intensive course (WIC) program, professional writing minor, and writing center, though I do have help from three compositionists who coordinate these programs for me. What I'd like to highlight here are some of the things that have come as a surprise or that have warranted more time than I would have thought, things that I had not so readily imagined I'd be struggling with or doing. I have faced enormous challenges and many frustrations, but from these have also come unforeseen and promising consequences. I don't necessarily have answers or clearly framed plans of action for all of these challenges or consequences; thus, in this essay I narrate a story that I hope adds to the cumulative wisdom that we might share as WPAs.

## Assessment

It is in the troublesome area of assessment that I will spend the most time, for while it may not be accurate to say assessing writing in the new program has taken most of my time, it certainly has been a continuous worry. I see a very important part of my job as conducting ongoing assessment; indeed, I have been formally asked to do so as part of a program-wide assessment by the Dean in charge of general education. When I first took over as Director of Writing in 1994, I was immediately asked by the Chair of English and the immediate past Director of Writing to think about assessing writing in the new program. Assessment, then, was from the beginning to be part of this newly configured WPA position, and at their bidding, I drafted a naturalistic research protocol that called for interviews and surveys, as well as the examination of syllabi and assignments, student portfolios, and observations of actual classrooms.<sup>1</sup>

Making headway with this protocol has been torturous. Perhaps the most unforgiving barrier to our hope to begin the naturalistic study has been the general education faculty themselves. Our attempts to look at what is going on with writing in their courses have been met with resistance and a certain degree of hostility. It took several weeks of asking (it felt at times like pleading) before

we were granted an audience with the Freshman Inquiry Council—a group made up of one representative from each Inquiry team (the first-year program is made up of five interdisciplinary faculty teams) that works as a liaison between administration and Inquiry faculty. In part, they see themselves as a clearing-house for all persons wishing to have any sort of communication or dealings with the Freshman Inquiry teams. This group is fiercely loyal and clearly wants to protect those teaching in the new program, whether it be from criticism, extra work, or assessment.

The posture the Council strikes is easy enough to understand if one wants to be charitable. Frankly, these teachers are exhausted and very stressed. Those of us in Writing Program feel charitable only up to a certain point, however. My chair suggests that we have lost a writing requirement and gained a program, but it is also true that in that equation we have yielded control over writing instruction at Portland State. On top of all of the concerns this raises for placement procedures, provisions for at-risk students, writing development of the students, among others, we also have to deal with the reality of dislocated instructors and graduate assistants. When even our attempt to apply for grants to assess was met with hostility by the Freshman Inquiry Council, our charity was at its limits.

For any of you facing similar issues in your own universities, I can not stress enough how important it is to lay the groundwork, to touch base with everyone involved, for even the most limited research or assessment. For me, this included apprising the dean of general education of our plans and receiving his support, connecting with the team charged with the task of assessing all aspects of the program, and making as clear as possible to faculty teaching in the program what we wanted to accomplish.

We initially started our assessment by asking five faculty members to respond to a questionnaire. We also asked those five faculty to choose, with no specific criteria for the choice, three of their students to fill out a questionnaire designed to get student perspectives on writing. The five faculty that we chose were faculty who had some understanding of the teaching of writing before beginning to teach in the new program. Three of them, for example, are English Department faculty and two—one from anthropology and one from theater arts—have experience, either formally or informally, with using writing as a main curricular component in classes. It might seem strange to look first to those who would most likely exhibit success if our goal is to find out more broadly what is happening with writing. We had three reasons for our choices. First, we knew that these five would be less resistant than other faculty. In our frustration with the protectiveness of the Freshman Inquiry Council, we felt the need to get information in any way we could. Second, if nothing else useful came of starting here, we could at least pre-test our questionnaires. Third, we felt that if we identified problems and issues for those most experienced in the teaching of writing, we could assume that those less experienced would be facing some of the same problems. We also realized that if we could identify specific ways in which these five instructors were using writing successfully, we could share

those successes with others. If, as we try to address particular problems and issues, we face comments like “you just don’t know what it’s like down here in the trenches” (and we have), it will be very useful to point to particular instances of how their colleagues are making it work. Of the initial surveys we conducted, we received responses from three faculty and one student. It was a disappointing start indeed.

Perhaps the most fruitful research has been the two classroom observations we have participated in spring and winter quarters of 1996. These studies have shown us that at least Freshman Inquiry (the first year of the new program) is a rich literacy experience for students. It looks very different, though, from what goes on in the writing classroom. Both of the studies make it clear that students were engaged in reading, discussion groups and other kinds of collaboration, oral presentations, peer review, personal writing, email writing, and storytelling. However, these studies also suggest that there is little or no attention paid to the metarhetorical aspects of writing and to revision. The writing seems most to resemble writing-to-learn. What we don’t know yet is whether these rich literacy environments produce competent writers. But then again, we don’t really know, finally, whether the traditional writing requirements produced competent writers. In fact, as is the case in most colleges and universities, we would be hard put to agree on a definition of competent writing across schools and disciplines.

One researcher/observer noted that the only place revision was not a perfectly normal event was in the written work because “imagining how things could be different was integral to the most mundane aspects of the class—reimagining the furniture every week—as well as to the most visionary—creating a utopia or thinking about a society without racism” (Zenger “Discussion” 11).

Briefly, we have also found that there are very few formal or longer writing tasks; and there is a wide disparity among classes as to the amount and kind of writing assigned. Almost all instructors are struggling with basic readers and writers and they are particularly at a loss as to how to teach writing to ESL students. Faculty have suggested a need for mandatory testing and placement because of their struggles with ESL and basic readers and writers. An analysis of our first two years of *non-mandatory* testing and placement reveal that in 1994-95, 15% of the students did not take our recommendations and that 35% did not take our recommendations in 1995-96.

While I have spent a great deal of time with assessment, then, for the past two terms things have come to a standstill. Faculty have been so resistant to assessment that I no longer attempt any that is not directly set in motion by the assessment advisory team and the Dean of general education. This is, perhaps, as it should be. But while we have many research plans, those responsible for getting them started have, for whatever reasons, dropped the ball. And while I continue to try and get the ball back on the playing field, I have not been successful, thus far. Assessment seems to have been derailed by faculty resistance, burnout, and stress, and to a certain degree, my frustration with the

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faculty. What I need, then, is to find ways assessment can be negotiated to minimize faculty resistance and my frustration.

## Funding

Perhaps, when the traditional writing requirements were abolished, I should have been prepared for the chaos I would be facing regarding budgetary resources and commitment, but I wasn't. With the loss of an overarching concept of writing instruction, we are facing a rather bizarre fragmentation of our budget. The previous Director of Writing, like many of us, was already in the less than perfect situation of having responsibility for the program but no authority over the budget. Resources for the required writing courses were allocated from a stash of soft money, term by term, to the Department Chair through the Dean's office. Every term the Chair, sometimes with (but usually without) the Director of Writing, would walk down the hall to the Dean's office to plead for money. While it was never adequate, we would get enough money to limp along from term to term. This unfortunate situation continues, but this time with a twist.

There is no longer one lump sum given to cover the Writing Program. Instead, our budget is cobbled together from the various constituencies that we are now serving. For example, in the summer following the first full year of the new program, our work with placement was paid for by student services, our work with faculty development by the Center for Academic Excellence, and the Writing Center was funded by the School of Extended Studies. But it was not until the summer session was over that we knew there would be at least some pay for those helping me in these areas. One colleague, in fact, did not get paid until October. Even now the various controllers of funding sources continue to quibble over who is paying for what and when. There are power plays taking place that we have no control over but that definitely have important consequences for us. One result is that I spend more time than before trying to convince deans that someone needs to take responsibility, tracking down elusive money, and generating budget proposals.

One budget proposal that never needed to be done previously and that has taken a great deal of time and attention is a comprehensive budget that expresses the needs of the writing program in its entirety. This is a new move for us precisely because of the fragmentation mentioned above. While the writing courses may have been eliminated, our resource needs have shifted but most certainly not been eliminated. If anything, our needs have increased. For example, the comprehensive budget asks for funding for faculty development and training, placement and courses related to placement needs, the professional writing minor, a growing WIC program, and a now over-burdened writing center that has had to turn students away because of inadequate staffing. My attempt to curb the fragmentation in this way has been virtually ignored, however. While the budget makes its way up the chain of command from me to my Chair, from Chair to Dean, and Dean to Vice Provosts, and finally to the Provost, there has been little acknowledgment of the comprehensive budget and

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the Writing Program's expanded needs.

Since I have taken so much time and care to let the appropriate people know what the new general education program requires of the Writing Program, I have been surprised when the time comes to deliver that no one in the university has taken this comprehensive budget into consideration. A typical example of the various high-level administrators' lack of consideration and commitment to the comprehensive budget surrounds placement needs. Placement, and the newly proposed course I have recommended to support placement, are both needs created by new university requirements and requested by the dean of general education, but not a single dean in control of money for specific university requirements is willing to commit funds or acknowledge that this request would be forthcoming—funds I might add that would come to under \$30,000 a year. To be fair, I now know that the new program faced a \$100,000 cut this past year; however, the deans have even gone so far as to suggest writing placement and the corresponding courses should be an English Department budgetary issue. My latest stand has been a firm "no resources, no placement and no course." If we go this route the consequences should be interesting. Last year we did conduct non-mandatory placement and made recommendations for at least those 900 students who came to orientation. With this limited placement, faculty are deeply concerned over the students' reading and writing abilities. Their concerns are likely to magnify with no placement. The good (and the bad) news is that the Dean of general education wants to locate grant funds to support placement and subsequent courses.

Perhaps I have been naive to expect some response to the comprehensive budget that I had hoped would help mitigate the fragmentation of budget we have faced. Nonetheless, it is important that I continue to work on tactics for convincing administrators at different levels of the absolute need for a comprehensive budget. This will be crucial for me, as the WPA, to do my work to both my own and to their satisfaction.

## Service

With the changes at Portland State I find myself spending more time than I had expected outside the department in university work and politics. While I could have predicted that more of my time would be spent outside the department at the university level, I had not imagined the numbers of requests I have had to do so—especially for committee work. Certainly I had expected to spend most of my time with faculty training. However, even though we have made repeated offers to do faculty development follow-up training throughout the year, no entity—not the general education teachers, nor the Center for Academic Excellence—have taken us up on our offer. In part, this is because people are unbearably busy, but also because the appointed faculty leader for the Freshman Inquiry teachers has said repeatedly that they all know how to teach writing. Basically, the message has been a not so subtle "we don't think we need you."

Interestingly enough, however, the requests for my time in other places

seem to belie the notion that writing instruction is going along swimmingly in the new program. (Counting working subcommittees, I worked on a total of seventeen committees during the 1995-96 academic year.) I have been asked to work on several ad hoc committees as well as the General Education Assessment Advisory board and the University Curriculum Committee. As I have mentioned, the Assessment Advisory board helps shape assessment of the new program and the University Curriculum Committee has final jurisdiction over determining whether the new program is putting together a curriculum that meets its own goals—including the communication goals of which writing is at the center. Additionally, I have been working on two other committees (called not by me, but by others across the university) specifically constituted to address reading and writing issues. One committee is working on writing placement and the other on what to do with the students who are failing in the new program from perceived lack of reading and writing abilities. Occasionally I succeed in getting these two committees to talk with each other. My reason for laying this out is simply to say that I spend between five and seven hours per week in meetings surrounding these issues. This does not include the time I spend doing other related things like writing new placement exams and creating new courses meant to ensure that struggling students have a place to go to get prepared for success in the program.

## Staff and Staffing Needs

Finally, I have had to concentrate on staffing needs different from but just as demanding as those required by the traditional writing courses. I had not anticipated, for instance, the ways in which the transformation of my job would impact my work with teaching assistants in the department. I find myself spending more time than previously trying to meet the needs of the TAs. Certainly, supervising TAs always takes part of the WPA's attention. What I am finding, however, is that as their roles have become diversified, their needs have changed and grown. Rather than teaching only Freshman English, TAs now have several roles within the Writing Program, the English Department, and the university. The fact that they are no longer sharing the same teaching experience extends their training in valuable ways, but it also changes my approach to training and supervision. As we work together, we don't have the stabilizing factor of constructing teaching philosophies, syllabi, and core methodologies for a single course. Every teaching duty they are assigned has different expectations, different appropriate methodologies, sometimes very different time requirements, and almost always different power structures and hierarchies they have to traverse. I find myself doing a great deal more troubleshooting, in part because the TAs feel a great deal of angst around the decentering of the writing program and their roles. As they find themselves in foreign territory they want more concrete directives from me, but I am rarely able to give them the kind of handbook response they feel they need. I am scrambling right along with them, trying desperately to prepare them for roles that are still creating themselves.

Likewise, the fixed-term writing faculty have found the rug yanked

rudely from beneath their feet. No longer the captains of their own classrooms, they have needed pushing to reimagine themselves and their work for this new structure. We have been working on forming a network of consultants whereby we would work with individual instructors or faculty teams on their self-identified needs. I have urged them to become involved in other areas of the university, say community service writing through our serve and learn program. I have begun to offer development seminars on teaching writing through distance learning and other on-line means. I have had to find ways of sparking their transformations as well as working to curb their resistance and panic.

I need staff as much as ever, and my staff need support in ways never required of me before, not just emotionally, but budgetarily as well. For instance, one writing instructor has been asked to consult with the new general education program at the sophomore level and with a pilot capstone. The reality is that this consultation is as demanding (time and preparation wise) as an additional course; this pushes her well over her fulltime four-course load for the Department. Since her consultant work does not break down into simple FTE like it would if she were teaching a course, we've hit another budget snag: nobody is paying her for this work, and the Department can not afford to simply release her from a course.

## What Next?

The standard workload for WPAs is almost always unbearable but also almost always fairly routine. The channels for the work of the WPA are reasonably well in place. The loss of writing requirements has transformed my job, but not done away with it. I survive through fluidity; I am in the position of inventing new channels as I go. While much of what I have written here might seem negative, it isn't overwhelmingly so. Right now my job is a like wild ride at the carnival, about as predictable as the weather. But it is also exciting, enables me to be innovative and critically important within the department as well as the university. In fact, the transformation of my job and the elimination of the traditional writing requirements have opened up doors I would not have known to look for. I am thinking specifically here of an opportunity to change the relationship of the Writing Program to the rest of the English Department.

As difficult as the economic and political complexities that this program change has thrown me into are, I think I now have a creative space between current reality and program vision. Consider, for instance, how the abolition of writing courses decenters not only the traditional funding sources, but the Writing Program and writing instruction as well. Consider that this decentering may well create a number of exciting possibilities for reimagining writing within the department. In its more "centered" spot the writing courses include an almost universal construction of writing as custodial service courses disdained by the university at large and especially by many of my literature colleagues. This decentering, however, changes the relationship between writing and literature and gives us a chance to change that pervasive disdain about the

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teaching of writing. For the first time I have had literature colleagues, in their distress over losing writing and what that has previously brought to the department, express a belief that there are theories and practices—an actual discipline of composition and rhetoric—that would require disciplinary study.

While I know that I want to capitalize on this shift in the attitudes of my literature colleagues, I remain unsure as to what moves I will actually make. I intend, however, to consider the possibility of moving the Writing Program out of the English Department into a Writing Studies Department. Aware of all of the dangers involved in that move, however, I simultaneously want to examine the potentials for working within the department on an extensive composition and rhetoric graduate degree and other programmatic changes that would move writing to the center of the department's work.

The changes at PSU represent larger reconfigurations of the university that many WPAs will need to grapple with, and how we do so is the challenge of the future. We need to be proactive, to take charge as best we can within these transformations. And while reconfiguration may remain localized with different scenarios for each of us, it will require us to reimagine who we are and what we do. At Portland State I may not have traditional writing requirements to shepherd, but my work as Director of Writing remains challenging, complex, and very rich.

## Post Script: January 1998

A year and some months after finishing this essay I find it necessary to supply readers with a brief update. Some, if not many of you, are now undergoing similar kinds of innovations in your institutions, and you may well wonder what has transpired more recently.

Let me say first of all that as we move into the halfway mark of the fourth year of the program my job remains both exciting and frustrating. Several trouble spots remain and are likely to for quite some time. The budget remains fragmented and a rather nightmarish endeavor for the chair of the department. Money is supposed to be transferred to our budget for the various aspects of the Writing Program, but as our chair found out earlier this year when he was told the books show him as \$100,000 over budget, it more often than not is forgotten or placed willy nilly into a services and supplies or other inappropriate account. The accounting system at PSU is such that it can take hours to track down where the money might be hiding. The chair and I have, of course, learned to be much more scrupulous in following up on the transfer transactions of our many different funding sources.

Assessment of writing in the new program continues slowly but steadily. The dean of the program will report on assessment, including writing assessment, to the faculty senate at its next meeting. Several discontented faculty are prepared to launch an attack against the program at this meeting in hopes of returning to the older program. Some may use the argument that students coming out of the Freshman Inquiry sections can not read or write well. I neither

sanction nor support this attack; we simply don't know enough, and the program hasn't had enough time to make such accusations.

Since the program was already conceived by the time I got here, one simple but very useful step I have taken is to reexamine the original document presenting the University Studies program to the university. This is the document that the faculty senate voted to accept. Returning to this document has allowed me to assess how well we have implemented faculty wishes regarding writing. For instance, the document calls for a writing specialist on every team, something that has never been enacted (mostly because some argue that if a writing specialist is necessary so is a math specialist, a computer specialist and so on). Pointing this out has given me a strong basis from which to argue for more direct involvement from writing faculty. My report will be part of what is presented to the faculty senate next month, making it possible that the faculty will request that this original expectation be met. The document also states that appropriate writing assessment and placement of incoming students will be mandatory. This is an invaluable piece of information for me. The first two years assessment was available only to those who attended orientation, and placement into courses was merely a recommendation which only a handful of students took. Bringing this disparity to the attention of the upper-administration has resulted in a quasi-mandatory assessment and placement. While students have been told that this is mandatory, there is not yet a system in place to enforce it. The result is that I had to spend time hunting down individuals to take the assessment, and 48% of the students placed in writing courses ignored the placement. These dismal results, coupled with the fact that approximately 20% of our students do not meet our already loose admissions standards, have startled the right people into working with me to create a viable plan. They have realized that this need is not based solely on the Writing Program's self interest but on the need to support a large percentage of high-risk students that had previously received intensive writing instruction.

While things are still in the disruptive state that innovative transformation creates, much has fallen into place both for writing as it relates to the new general education program and to my job as it has transformed itself in response to this program. While I continue to serve on as many as fifteen committees, I am now tenured. We have in place a variety of consulting models for those across the university seeking support for the teaching of writing. As with most of us who direct writing programs, the discussion about writing with colleagues from across the disciplines is one of the most enjoyable parts of my job. Recently, more and more faculty are seeking me out for ad hoc discussions on teaching writing—they are now interested in the theoretical background really needed to teach writing. Writing faculty are branching out into community service writing, distance learning, and other teaching now that the regular writing courses are dwindling. They find themselves less panicked and more intrigued by the opportunities that these changes afford them.

Within the department, along with others, I am focusing my energies on

strengthening the courses in composition and rhetoric, developing a center of excellence in writing at the MA level, and reconfiguring the English Department's programmatic vision to include an integrative cultural studies approach that holds writing and rhetoric as central to its mission. My role as Director of Writing has changed drastically, but in spite of the many frustrations I remain challenged, excited, and more than willing to stay the course.

As I bring this postscript to an end, I'd like to caution that what is happening here at PSU is still in process, still unsettled, and thus what I have written here is not meant to stand as any final assessment of this new program, nor of the role writing plays in it. Rather, it is to tell a story, a story that is still being written, but one nonetheless that may help others in similar situations anticipate what they might face within their own institutional transformations. While we could all narrate our own stories of conflict, and mine may not be typical for everyone, it does reflect contemporary concerns of the field and the everyday (and not so everyday) stresses of being a WPA. This story like so many others of institutional and pedagogical change makes it clear that there is not one master narrative that represents our work. As participants in this community we are interested in its members, intrigued by dissimilar as well as familiar situations, and we need to listen to each other and help each other "read" the politics of our work. Our narratives may well mirror our postmodern world, and if so, your stories and my stories also are our key to surviving in it. In the ambiguity of postmodernism, one response is withdrawal. Another is oversimplification. But these responses will not make the ambiguity present in every situation, every text, every interaction, go away. We need to acknowledge the complexity of issues. Hopefully I have done that here, and in some small way have increased our ability to act wisely when conflict and transformation (inevitably) arise.

## Note

1. Thanks to a generous grant from the WPA and a small faculty development grant from PSU I was able to take action on this research protocol.

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# WAC at Century's End: Haunted by the Ghost of Fred Newton Scott

Susan H. McLeod

There is a *fin de siècle* feel about some of the present conversation in academe, much of it having to do with massive changes in the American economy that are just now beginning to affect institutions of higher education. As the notion of lifetime employment in one corporation has become a memory in the business sector, its academic equivalent, tenure, has also come under hard scrutiny; in various states trustees and legislators are beginning to talk about abolishing tenure, to the extent that a keynote speaker at the 1997 National WAC conference predicted that it would disappear in the next five years (Sternick). Those writing about the corporate world predict a future where full-time employment is not a likely option for most Americans (Aronowitz and DeFazio). In academe, faculty lines are being lost as universities are told by legislators to emulate corporate downsizing models and "outsource" teaching to adjunct faculty, stretching budget dollars by creating a stable of permanent part-time workers (see Faigley). California State University, Hayward provides an extreme example of implementing this policy: the percentage of adjunct faculty there went from one quarter to nearly one-half of the total between 1992 and 1995 (Leatherman). Public universities are being told to do more with less—getting smaller pieces of the state budget pie as legislators talk of accountability, efficiency, and an increased faculty workload while they shift state spending priorities from higher education to prisons, Medicaid and K-12 education (Gold and Ritchie). There is talk of virtual universities and classrooms, and a revolution in teaching and learning brought about by technology (Gilbert), but the brave new world promised by technology in education brings with it even steeper tuition costs, making a college education more and more difficult for even the middle class to obtain. There is even talk of the disappearance of higher education as we know it. Peter Drucker, the management guru who predicted the influence that the G. I. Bill would have on American society, had this to say in a recent interview:

Thirty years from now the big university campuses will be relics. Universities won't survive. It's as large a change as when we first got the printed book. Do you realize that the cost of higher education has risen as fast as the cost of health care? . . . Such totally uncontrollable expenditures, without any visible improvement in either the content or the quality of education, means that the system is rapidly becoming untenable. Higher education is in deep crisis. (Lenzner and Johnson 127)

Yet even as we speak of massive changes in higher education, writing across the curriculum as an educational movement seems to be soldiering on. Recent articles are fairly sanguine in their appraisal of the future of WAC (Walvoord;

Jones and Comprone); at the National Network of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs Special Interest Group meeting every year at the Conference on College Composition and Communication there continue to be many new faces, people who have come to discuss starting a WAC program at their institutions. The third National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference (1997) had the best attendance in its history. Are those of us involved in WAC so deeply involved in our own programs that we can't see these disconcerting trends in higher education? Are we, like the legendary band on the Titanic, just carrying on business as usual while the ship goes down?

I hope not. But there are two clouds I see on the horizon with regard to the future of WAC programs, both of which are danger signs in terms of program survival. The first has to do with the way many WAC programs are structured. Because they are by definition cross-curricular, such programs do not fit into a recognizable academic compartment (known to administrators as a "unit" and usually identified with a discipline—e.g., English, sociology, chemistry); they are therefore often located administratively and physically outside the usual departmental structures. As David Russell has so carefully documented, the disciplinary/departmental organization of higher education is a powerful institutional force, one that resists innovative structures and ideas. Any program that lies outside the hierarchical structure of the academy or that goes against the usual way of doing business is always in danger of being absorbed into a more recognizable structure. Russell points to the history of earlier general education reform movements in secondary and higher education (the Social Efficacy Movement, the Cooperation Movement, Deweyan Progressive Education). He demonstrates convincingly that the disciplinary structure of institutions, with its emphasis on departments and on specialization, eventually mitigated against all these reforms.

When cross-curricular programs seek to modify the attitudes and compartmental structure of academia, when programs seek to broaden access to professional discourse communities, they become forms of resistance, threats to the institution (or to the century-old conceptions of it). Thus, as with all movements to extend literacy, WAC has political, economic, and social consequences. (306)

There are some WAC programs which are located in a unique structure created just for that program, as a result of an outside grant or an institutional initiative funded on a one-time basis—back in the days when funding was more plentiful. In the present budgetary atmosphere, where in the absence of increases many institutions are under pressure to reallocate budget dollars internally, such programs in danger of going under. They are so different from the usual institutional "unit" that they stand out as anomalies, vulnerable to the administrative ax when it comes time (as it now has almost everywhere) to raise faculty salaries or fund new initiatives by forcing the institution to cannibalize itself.

The second cloud on the horizon has to do with WAC leadership. A colleague and I recently completed a study of 138 WAC programs which have

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been in existence for a decade or more (Miraglia and McLeod). Our findings were consistent with what Walvoord and others have been saying about WAC—that it has grown and transformed itself in myriad ways, becoming part of new initiatives (critical thinking, assessment, electronic communication, service learning) as these arise. But one of our findings was startling. Of the 138 programs we studied which had been up and running for a decade or more, fully half of them still had the original WAC leader involved in the program in some way. These programs continue to thrive on their respective campuses because there continues to be one person on campus who makes WAC happen.

But the very strength of such programs (a dedicated leader) is also a weakness; these programs are heavily dependent on just one person for their health and continuation. As WAC has matured as an educational movement, so has its leadership; many programs are now headed by someone at the top rank of the institutional ladder. (We might call this phenomenon as “the graying of WAC.”) In lean budget times, institutions quite naturally replace full professors who retire with beginning assistant professors, for a significant salary savings. But junior faculty are exactly the wrong persons to be involved in program administration, since they usually cannot give the program their full attention and also do what is necessary to qualify for tenure, and since in an institution that is based on hierarchical power relationships, they are on the lowest rung of the ladder. And of course, some institutions, in the present atmosphere of downsizing, will choose not to replace the WAC administrator at all when he or she leaves. Our research shows, perhaps not surprisingly, that when the WAC director is not replaced, the program dies a quick death. One of the respondents to our survey, a long-time WAC director, summed up the problem of the one-person show WAC program despondently but succinctly: “God knows what will happen to WAC on my campus when I retire.”

The history of writing instruction at the University of Michigan in this century provides a cautionary tale for both kinds of problematic WAC programs—the one-person show and the unique structure. First, let us consider the now-familiar story of Fred Newton Scott. Scott, one of the founders of NCTE and its first president, almost single-handedly created the Department of Rhetoric at the University of Michigan in 1903. He was a productive scholar, evidently a brilliant teacher, and a gifted, even charismatic, leader; time and again he was elected president of various professional organizations, including the MLA. The Department of Rhetoric flourished as a separate unit for more than 30 years under Scott’s tireless leadership, attracting large numbers of gifted graduate students who went on to do ground-breaking research of their own (see Stewart, “Fred Newton Scott”; “Rediscovering”).

But it was not to last. Clarence Thorpe, the historian of the Department of Rhetoric at the University of Michigan, stated that “[t]he department of Rhetoric came into existence as a separate unit—mainly, it is said, because Professor Scott wished it so” (560). It continued as long as it did because of his powerful leadership. But as one of his own students said in discussing the history of the

department, the Department of Rhetoric was Fred Newton Scott (Shaw). His program was essentially a "one-man show" (Brereton 24) and as such could continue only as long as his energy sustained it. Two years after his retirement the department which had flourished for more than three decades under his leadership was absorbed back into the English Department from whence it came (Stewart "Two Model Teachers" 128). Although he had created a departmental structure for his program, it did not have enough other faculty of equal power and prestige to prevent a larger, more powerful unit from reclaiming it. Once Scott was gone, the Department of Rhetoric sank back into English without a trace.

Now let us consider the more recent history of the English Composition Board at the University of Michigan. The ECB, as it has become known, was one of the first WAC programs formed at a large research institution, providing a model for other research institutions. It was created in 1979, in the words of its first Director, Daniel Fader, "by a vote of the faculty of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts to assume responsibility for the teaching of writing in the College. Creation of the Board was proposed to the faculty by a Graduation Requirements Commission which found that both students and faculty were deeply dissatisfied with the quality of students' written English. The ECB was charged with proposing a plan which would remedy that dissatisfaction" (Condon et al. 1). With Fader as its driving force at the beginning, and with continuing leadership under Directors Jay Robinson and Deborah Keller-Cohen, the ECB's mission developed to include assessment, the teaching of introductory writing courses, a tutorial service, assistance to faculty teaching courses that fulfilled the upper-division writing requirement, research, and outreach (2-3). An outside review conducted in 1984 stated that the ECB was a "nationally recognized program that has exerted a major influence on composition instruction in American colleges and universities" (Condon et al., Appendices to "Self Study").

As academic structures go, however, the ECB was anomalous within the institution. It was a College unit, but unlike other units it had no tenure track faculty except the director, no graduate program, and responsibility for writing courses that could be seen by an administrator as infringing on the autonomy of other units (such as, for example, the English Department). It was, to use Russell's words, a "form of resistance" to the institution and its structures. As the ECB evolved over the years from a faculty oversight committee to an independent unit (still reporting to the Dean of the College), the functions that the tenured faculty from across the disciplines used to serve as members of the committee were turned over to full-time (untenured) staff members. As this transfer happened, the ECB lost its authoritative voice. Without powerful tenured faculty involved and without tenure lines within the unit, the ECB was put in a vulnerable position. The exact sequence of events which led to its recent demise as an independent unit are best left for those involved to tell, and for my purposes here are not important; the fact is that as of August, 1997 the ECB has been consolidated with the English Department, to be headed by a department member whose research specialty is medieval literature.

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Will the ECB survive and keep its integrity within a departmental structure? Probably not. The ECB has lost both its autonomy and its leadership—all ECB contracts are being converted into English Department contracts, and all of its recent administrators (the Director and Associate Directors) have left the institution for other positions. My sense, informed by Russell's work, is that the Board will suffer the fate of Michigan's Department of Rhetoric. Unless it can be revived in the university's new Writing Center, or unless Michigan chooses to follow the example of the University of Arizona and hire a half-dozen tenure-track faculty in Rhetoric and Composition to provide a core of scholarly leadership for it, the ECB as we once knew it—a model WAC program for research institutions—will shrivel and die.

What can we learn from these two stories about writing instruction at one institution? Different people will no doubt have very different takes on the events and their meaning, and I invite them to respond to this piece to give their views. I for one do not interpret Michigan's story as one of good vs. evil, of yet another chapter in the saga of composition's struggle for legitimacy in higher education—or as Janangelo puts it, in the "ceaseless and righteous battle with institutions that we name and dismiss as deliberately malevolent . . . and eminently soulless . . . others" (14). While I think what has happened is unfortunate, given the excellent record of the ECB, my administrative sense is that its anomalous structure and position in the institution was a fatal flaw. What happened was tragic but inevitable; the story of the ECB is a homily illustrative of the two storm warnings mentioned earlier and which may serve to guide us as we try to preserve WAC programs on our own campuses.

One way to protect WAC programs which have a unique or anomalous structure during times of academic retrenchment is to locate them in more familiar and accepted institutional units. For example, many WAC programs are now locating themselves in writing centers or teaching and learning centers. These two structures, although outside the disciplinary/departmental organization of the institution, are by definition support rather than instructional units and therefore are put in situations where they must compete on an unequal basis with departments for resources. Further, writing labs and teaching/learning centers often have reporting lines higher up the academic hierarchy than the college level, and therefore positioned differently than departments within the academic community. They have the protection (and the accompanying status) of a Vice Provost or a Vice President rather than a Dean, of central rather than of middle management. I do not mean to suggest that all WAC programs should locate themselves in such academic support units, since the structure of WAC programs varies markedly from site to site according to institutional missions and histories. But in a time of scarce resources, wise WAC directors should take heed and think about where best to house their programs and what administrator might shelter them during the budgetary storms.

Those of us involved with WAC should also ask ourselves what would happen to the WAC programs on our campuses if we left town tomorrow. If the

answer is that the programs would die, it is time to start thinking about involving others in the programs that are now one-person shows. This should not be difficult; the best WAC directors I know have a leadership style that is naturally collaborative and collegial. One step is to involve an assistant director, someone to mentor who will take over at some inevitable point. WAC directors should also ensure that there is a network of powerful faculty on campus involved with the program and a structure in place (a senate or presidential committee) from which these faculty can help set policy and if necessary guard the program. Wise WAC directors will also look for outside funding for their programs (corporate donors are often more interested in support for writing programs than are university administrators), and will integrate their programs with other important campus initiatives—assessment, technology, general education reform, so as to braid WAC into ongoing issues rather than having it as a free-standing (and more vulnerable) entity.

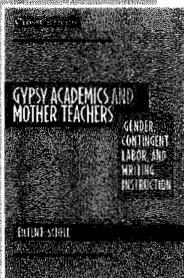
As we approach the end of the 20th century, let us for the sake of argument assume that Peter Drucker is right—that higher education as we know it is in deep crisis. Post-secondary education has faced other crises in the past—changing demographics after both World Wars, open admissions, curricular reforms of all stripes, and has adapted and survived. The strength of the WAC movement during its 25-year academic life as an American educational movement has also been, as Barbara Walvoord points out so well, its adaptability and transformative power, its ability to focus on writing broadly conceived as an essential component of thinking, learning, and teaching. Some part of me remains sanguine about the lasting effects of WAC programs on faculty and curricula. My hope is that, like general education programs on our campuses, WAC is here to stay. But I remain haunted by the ghost of Fred Newton Scott. Wayne Butler, the last Director of an autonomous ECB (and now with the Daedalus Group), posted a message about the fate of the Board on the Writing Program Administration Listserv with this title: "For Whom the Bell Tolls." Let those of us involved in WAC take heed—it tolls for us as well. Their effects may be lasting, but our WAC programs as institutional structures may be more fragile than we imagine.

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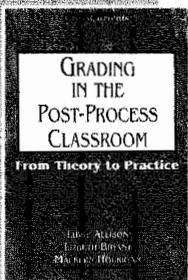


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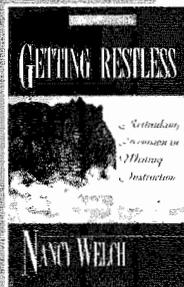
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# Theory Made Visible: How Tutoring May Effect Development of Student-Centered Teachers

Jane Cogie

Composition classes, particularly those at public universities, are increasingly multicultural and multigenerational. This fact is attested to not only by the experience of many of us and our graduate teaching assistants but also by statistics in a recent *New York Times* article showing that between 1984 and 1994 the number of students classified as "minority" or "foreign" rose 27.8% and the number of undergraduates 22 and older rose 49.8% (Menand 48). This growth in diversity highlights how essential it is to train teaching assistants to be responsive to the individual students in their classes. Without an awareness of the diversity of students and a willingness to test alternative strategies for teaching them, new teachers or those teachers retooling for student-centered classrooms are more likely to yield to what can easily seem the safer course: following the well-established conventions of the hierarchical classroom, an environment more suited to teaching the rules of writing than writing. As Salina Shrofel's research into teacher training confirmed, top-down teaching is extraordinarily resistant to change. For the first-time teachers in her study, Shrofel found the resistance derived from exposure to teacher-centered classrooms and fear of losing control of students perceived as ill-prepared for student-centered classrooms (163). "Much teaching behavior really stems from an unwarranted fear of things falling apart," as Peter Elbow observes (71-2). Another reason top-down teaching persists is the lack of opportunity for novice teachers to observe in action the varied writing processes of their students. Teaching composition solely in a large-group setting can mask the complex, individual nature of the writing process (Harris 14-15) and thus the need to find alternatives to the traditional teacher-centered approach.

A central issue, then, in training composition teachers is how to understand student needs and how to practice student-centered theories. With an eye to the potential role of the writing center in teacher training, I will discuss the results of my qualitative study of the effects of writing center tutoring on the classroom teaching of ten teaching assistants. All ten had taken or were currently taking a course on the theory and practice of teaching first-year composition. After summarizing the results, I will focus on two case studies. The first, Jenny, was an experienced teaching assistant working toward a PhD in rhetoric and composition and returning to the classroom after tutoring in the writing center; the second, Frank, was an MA student in literature, teaching for the first time after tutoring in the center. Before turning to the results of the study, however, I will review some facts related to the current training of composition teachers. While the main focus of my study is the training of TAs in a university writing

program, I include in this review as well the training of secondary composition teachers because these teachers face similar barriers while making the transition to classroom teaching.

Student-centered approaches have become part of many training programs for both secondary and college composition teachers. Yet to what extent have these programs allowed novice teachers to gain not only the theory but also the first-hand knowledge and experience they need to be motivated and prepared to risk these approaches in the classroom? A 1992 survey by Peter Smagorinsky and Melissa Whiting on secondary education methods classes provides a useful perspective on both the student-centered goals of such classes and the difficulty of realizing them. In studying 100 syllabi from methods classes at 81 universities, the researchers found that while 27 of the syllabi reflected the traditional survey approach, 23 reflected the more student-centered workshop approach, based on modeling of collaborative and process-oriented strategies (10, 14). Yet the authors of the study make clear that although this latter format may, in theory, seem effective for training student-centered teachers, it fails to prepare them for the "harsh reality of students who don't do the activities or assignments that appear so worthwhile in a lesson or unit plan" (14-15).

The danger of the workshop or modeling approach cited by Smagorinsky and Whiting is confirmed by Shrofel's teacher research in her own methods class. Shrofel initially tried to promote student-centered teaching by her methods class students through presentations emphasizing the advantages of student-centered pedagogies. This attempt failed in part, she feels, because in the field her preservice teachers were "paired with teachers . . . using a traditional teacher-centered methodology, or . . . not teaching writing at all" (161). Yet her attempt to compensate for such limitations through modeling student-centered techniques in her own classroom likewise failed. Once teaching themselves, her preservice teachers followed none of the student-centered strategies she had modeled. The student teachers blamed their failure to carry out the modeled strategies on the disconnection between "what they were learning at the university and what they were observing in the classroom" and on "difficult" and "lower ability" students they felt were ill-equipped for the responsibility of student-centered work (162-63). Faced with the traditional approach of the cooperating teacher and the real complexities of the composition classroom, these student-teachers gave way to the less threatening teacher-centered approach. Neither lectures on student-centered theory nor participation in a student-centered model helped them overcome these impediments.

## Issues in Training GTAs

While more varied in amount and kind than the training for high school composition teachers, training for graduate teaching assistants is more widespread and substantial than it was in the recent past. According to Paul Connolly and Teresa Vilardi's 1986 study of college writing programs, TAs "are more thoroughly trained and supervised than in the past, through courses, staff meetings, and classroom observation" (3). Indeed, Catherine Lateral's study, "Training the Workforce: An Overview of GTA Education Curricula" published

in the Spring 1996 WPA, backs up this positive assessment of GA training programs, at least among the 36 universities studied, all of which offer an English doctoral degree with a specialization in rhetoric and composition. Latterall observes that "Given the recent growth in rhetoric and composition graduate programs and the vitality of many teachers and scholars in this field, we can generally claim that GTA education programs are doing more and are doing a better job" (7). Yet Latterall emphasizes that while all of the programs studied provided significant training somewhere along the spectrum from apprenticeships and practica to teaching methods courses and theory seminars, a full three-fourths of the programs prepared new teachers of writing through a practicum, a course usually taught by the director of the writing program (18). Latterall praises the guidance such practica offer new composition teachers as they get started. She questions, however, the lack of theory to help ground the guidance and the "skills-based," "contentless," "WPA-centric" format: "The prevalence of this type of course may suggest that the rhetoric and composition field teaches teachers within a pedagogical model that relies on translation-based approaches to theory and writing instruction and on one-way modes of communication: GTA educator to GTAs, GTAs to first-year students" (19).

What seems to be lacking, then, in the training of many graduate assistants is an effective interface between theory and practice. Few would dispute that TAs lacking such an interface, will, when first teaching, tend to mirror the teacher-centered models they likely experienced as students. Certainly, the TAs at institutions requiring a theory seminar are likely to gain an intellectual framework for student-centered teaching, and those in practica are likely to build up helpful ideas for assignment sequences and in-class activities. Yet when faced with twenty-plus composition students, these TAs, though further along in their education than Shrofel's preservice high school teachers, are likely to find similar difficulties in translating this knowledge into the classroom. Indeed, not surprisingly, many articles on training teaching assistants cite the insecurity of beginning TAs and their propensity to deal with that insecurity through asserting teacher authority (Allen & Rueter, Irmischer, McBroom, Rankin, Reagan). In her study of five new teachers in a university writing program, Elizabeth Rankin comments that:

it often takes time for young TAs to adapt to their new roles and establish comfortable relationships with students. For most, the crucial issue is authority—or more precisely, their sense of their own authority. . . . They don't yet feel the authority they've been given, so they try to act it out in ways that feel false even to them. In the process, what they lose is the chance to relate easily with students, the chance to use their youth and shared culture to advantage in their teaching. (5)

In light of the continuing need to help teachers straddle the gulf between student-centered theory and its practice, one-to-one teaching in a writing center becomes a natural candidate for a more central role in the training of teaching assistants. Indeed, it was writing center tutors at my institution testifying to the value of tutoring to their growth as teachers that initiated my interest in studying this issue. A further impetus came from a study by Robert Child on the effects of

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tutoring on first-time and experienced classroom teachers. Others—including Bruffee, Magnusson, Clark, Rottenberg, Gadbow, Broder, and Zelanek—have published observations and informal studies on the training value of writing center work for composition teachers. And indeed Shrofel, in the third stage of her teacher research, investigates the effects of tutoring on the teaching of the preservice teachers in yet another methods class (165-75).

Child's article, however, was the first on TA training to ground discussion of this issue in a formal study. The study involved observing the classroom teaching of two subjects and twice interviewing each of these subjects concerning the positive and negative effects of tutoring on their teaching. The first TA was returning to the classroom after tutoring. Concentrating his studies in British literature, he saw teaching composition as an inevitable but peripheral part of his career; he had no interest in the theoretical issues of teaching composition. The other was teaching in the classroom for the first-time after tutoring in the writing center as part of a practicum. He saw teaching composition as central to his career (173-74). To test the validity of the results, Child interviewed four more TAs—two experienced in the classroom and two inexperienced. Concerning the benefits of tutoring for classroom teaching strategies, the results of Child's study were unequivocal. All six teachers reported that writing center work had positively effected the following aspects of their teaching: "establishing agendas, dissuading authority, presenting materials, questioning, modeling, and testing performance" (172). Yet one striking difference between the results for the two groups was that the experienced and inexperienced teachers had, after tutoring, sharply divergent attitudes toward classroom teaching. The three experienced teachers, returning to the classroom, felt liberated from the role of authoritarian teacher. But the three inexperienced tutor-teachers felt anxious and frustrated by the restrictions imposed by grading and large-group work despite successfully using student-centered techniques of the writing center—such as modeling and flexible agendas—in their teaching (180-81).

## Aims, Procedures, and General Results of the Study

If tutoring before teaching did indeed cause frustration and anxiety in first-time teachers, not only would educators not press to make writing center tutoring part of their training, they would advise against it. One aim of my study, then, was to follow up Child's work to discover whether my five first-time teachers felt a similar frustration and anxiety upon entering the classroom after tutoring. Another aim was to look at the effects of tutoring experience for TAs returning to their classrooms, already immersed in student-centered pedagogy before their writing center work. For both groups, not represented among Child's experienced teachers, I thought it interesting to see if prior theoretical immersion makes the practical experience of writing center work less valuable. In the case of both groups, the findings might help suggest the timing and amount of one-to-one experience advisable in the training of teachers.

In following up Child's study, I used essentially the same method, though increasing the number of TAs studied. I interviewed ten subjects, asking each to respond to an open-ended prompt on the positive and negative effects of

tutoring on teaching; then, I observed and took notes on one class taught by each tutor-teacher; and finally, I interviewed each of them a second time, asking specific questions raised by the observed class and the first interview. The effects cited by my tutor-teachers fell into two major categories: effects on the tutor-teacher's perceptions of themselves as teachers, their students, and the writing process; and effects on actual teaching strategies. The five experienced classroom teachers included four PhD students, with three of the four specializing in rhetoric and composition and the remaining one specializing in literature; the fifth experienced teacher was an MA student in rhetoric and composition. All of the first-time tutor-teachers were MA students, with three of the five concentrating in rhetoric and composition and the remaining two in literature and creative writing. During the study, the latter five were taking a seminar on teaching composition, required of all first-time teaching assistants and aimed at providing them with both a theoretical foundation and practical support. Thus, like the PhD students in rhetoric and composition, the first-time teachers faced the challenge of integrating theory and practice.

My findings on the effects of tutoring on the classroom teaching of my subjects were as unequivocally positive as Child's. All felt that tutoring, with the behind-the-scenes insights into students and the workings of the composition classroom it provides, shed light on the individual nature of the writing process, the needs of their students, and the importance of listening and responding to each student with care. They also felt that as a consequence of these deepened perspectives and the chance to practice a range of one-to-one activities, they were more motivated and prepared to experiment with a variety of strategies and types of assignments in their classrooms. My findings, however, on the effects of shifting to classroom teaching specifically for the first-time teachers in my study differed sharply from Child's. Unlike Child's first-time teachers, those in my study did not express frustration or anxiety at the differences posed by graded, large-group work. While one of my subjects in this category felt less at home in the classroom than in the Center, she stated that tutoring helped prepare her for the transition by making her aware that her class was not one undifferentiated mass but rather a group of distinct individuals with distinct needs and concerns.

As to the group of four experienced teachers specializing in rhetoric and composition, all of them felt that writing center tutoring was a valuable addition to their training. In various ways each of them said that it allowed them to understand the practical implications of student-centered theory and made them significantly more committed to practicing it in the classroom. Before turning to the case study of Jenny, I would like to quote a comment by Todd, another of the four experienced classroom teachers specializing in rhetoric and composition. It is worth quoting at length since it helps make clear an important link between writing center work and student-centered teaching:

After one-to-one work in the Center, you start seeing students in the classroom with attitudes toward traditional classroom learning that your writing center students have given you the chance to understand. That has led me to actively pursue a more fully interactive approach to teaching. I know three years ago, before tutoring, I'd say, 'I'm an interac-

tive teacher and I don't like lectures.' And then I'd walk into my 102 class and forty minutes later I'd say, 'Are there any questions?' . . . That's not happening now.

## Jenny

Jenny also saw herself as an interactive classroom teacher before her stint in the Writing Center. Under the influence of Peter Elbow, Mina Shaughnessy, and Paulo Freire, she began her writing center work with a student-centered teaching philosophy already in place, viewing students as "individuals," the teacher as "guide" rather than "manipulator," and the writing process as "individualized." Yet in her two interviews, she emphasized that her writing center work helped ground her theory-enlightened views in individual examples and thus enhanced her teaching in a way that theory alone could not. For instance, she stated that her personal interactions with her writing center students allowed her to see first-hand not only how sociolinguistic baggage can block student writing but also why teachers need to address this baggage in their teaching. Before her writing center experience, she had "divorced herself" from what then seemed to her purely personal issues. After tutoring, however, she began to leave time at the outset of class for her students to "purge" personal concerns about writing projects before expecting them to settle down to work. Another instance of writing center tutoring grounding theory for her was in the perspective it gave her into the writing processes of individual students: "When you're reading composition theory, you tend to get stuck in a kind of process rut. . . there are the different stages that theory has established that we follow. Being in the Writing Center has reinforced the idea that the writing process is a very individualized activity. And as a result, I'm constantly rethinking the theoretical aspects of composition and teaching."

Thus, after her writing center work and the behind-the-scenes insights it gave her into students and their needs, Jenny found herself far more open to "[letting] go of the teacher authority and [letting] the needs of students control the flow of the class." In addition to giving students time to deal with their concerns in class, after her own experience with peer work in the Center, she felt more adept at "orchestrating" such work in class and experimenting with variations of peer interaction. For instance, having gained insight in the Center into the often underrated abilities of inexperienced writers and the damage often done to their writing from lack of confidence, on editing days she asked students who had mastered one aspect of editing to serve as consultants on that aspect for their peers. This practice, Jenny felt, reinforced learning for both peer and peer consultant—just as writing center tutoring had reinforced her own learning as a teacher. It also helped to break down the traditional teacher-student lines of authority. And, finally, seeing the struggle of her writing center tutees with inflexible or vague writing assignments, she made a point of devising paper topics that balanced flexibility and guidance.

In the class session I observed (a special admissions section of English 101), Jenny used several of the writing center techniques she had discussed in her first interview, modeling and peer response, as well as a related technique she

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had not mentioned: open labeling of her varied roles in the classroom. During the class, she played a variety of roles and labeled those roles for her students as she went. She became a "modeler" of strategies, a "reader" of essays, "peer respondent," "grader," and "writer" of her own essays. For example, she modeled for her students the high, middle and low style the students were to investigate in their current research paper on language (which could take the shape of either a traditional research paper or a dialogue with research integrated into it). Her flexibility in modeling the three styles was matched not only by the flexibility of her assignment but also during peer discussions of student drafts, by her easygoing movement from group to group, modeling peer response and asking open-ended questions as needed, and then providing her students the context in which to practice the modeled techniques. In her class, then, the emphasis she expressed in her interview on "letting go" of teacher authority translated into a highly adept, self-reflexive interaction with her students in response to their needs. In her second interview, she attributed her ability to vary her role in the classroom to the variety of roles she was able to practice in the Writing Center. She deliberately labeled her roles for her students not only to help break down views of the classroom structure as static but also to encourage in her students the flexibility and playfulness they needed to assume the various perspectives involved in writing. For students who see themselves in the role of "poor writer," as so many special admissions students do, such flexibility and playfulness is no small matter. If Jenny's use of labeling is "teacher-talk" (Heath 1), it is teacher-talk of a highly self-reflexive kind.

## Frank

Like Jenny, Frank, one of the five TAs teaching in the classroom for the first-time after tutoring, felt that his writing center experience gave him insight into his students, into what he referred to as "the different baggage" each of them brought to the classroom, and into the need in many of them to be encouraged as writers. In turn, these insights, he felt, helped give him the determination to find ways to interact meaningfully with his students. During a discussion in the seminar for new TAs, he realized that such a commitment to student-centered teaching set him apart from a number of other first-time teachers in the class, who perceived breaking down the classroom hierarchy as risky:

One of my peers told me that if the instructor came across as just another student struggling with writing, the class would be inclined to slip into apathy, but I have yet to find this problem. . . . In fact, after I brought a draft of my own to class and participated in peer groups with my students, they have been more responsive to exercises we do in class.

This is not to say that achieving a balance between relating to students and setting the expectations necessary to a productive classroom is easy, particularly for first-time TAs. It is rather to say that writing center work—providing, as it does, knowledge of student needs and low-risk practice with student-centered teaching strategies—can build a confidence and commitment to student-centered work that can help TAs find that balance sooner and with greater sureness.

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Writing center tutoring affected not only Frank's perspectives on his students and himself as teacher but also his teaching strategies. In the class I visited, he began by modeling on the board how to use mapping to brainstorm. He then divided the students into groups and had them brainstorm maps of the topic for their next paper. Once all their maps had been copied on the board, Frank and the students discussed how each map might be used to focus an essay. It was evident in both his interview and in his classroom demeanor that he thoroughly enjoyed the dynamics he had initiated in the large group setting. It is also clear that he had found effective ways to move students beyond what Douglas Barnes refers to as "presentational talk"—the talk typical of students concerned with the "right answer" and the teacher's evaluation—to the far rarer "exploratory talk" in which students have the chance to make information and ideas their own (50).

## Conclusion

Certainly, not all the flexibility and commitment to interactive teaching evidenced by both Jenny and Frank—and by the other eight TAs in the study—can be attributed to their stint in the Writing Center. Each of the ten subjects, however, made clear that their insights into student-centered theory and their comfort level with new roles and new classroom strategies stemmed in large part from their experience with one-to-one teaching in the Writing Center.

Yet can one make a case for expanding the role of writing center tutoring in the training of classroom composition teachers on the basis of this study—or even on the basis of this study combined with Child's and with the numerous articles testifying to its value? The answer is both "no" and "yes." No, because one should not presume to apply the results of a qualitative study beyond the study's specific context. And yes, because, if not scientifically, then intuitively one must assent that few activities provide as firm a ground for the transition of teachers to the classroom. In the writing center, free of the "fear of things falling apart" imposed by the large group setting and the power of the grade, tutors can explore translating student-centered theory into practice. They can discover first-hand the causes for an individual student's writing problems, try out strategies for overcoming those problems, and gain insight into how specific approaches in a student's class succeed or fail for that particular student. Such experience can give teachers the confidence and insider knowledge they need to center their classrooms on students as individuals learning to write.

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# Bloom's Laws

*Lynn Z. Bloom*

Long ago and far away, in a moment of weakness (I was actually close to meltdown and didn't know it) I accepted a new administrative post. Some have greatness thrust upon them, I thought in my delirium, and this was a rare opportunity. So I decided, as any self-respecting (read desperate) academic would, to prepare for this status nouveau by reading up on how to do it. Book after book, article after article on administration passed under my keen eye, written by the reputable and the revered—efficiency experts; analysts of academic politics and procedures; department chairs who had been there, done that and that and that. At the time, in the dark days before WPA (imagine!), writing program administrators had no public forum and no identifiable voices, so I could glean no wisdom from that corner. I confess that from this blitz reading no authors and no titles linger. In fact, only one nugget remains in memory, the metaphor that epitomizes this exalted status: "An administrator"—not the author's exact words—"is to a department as a fire hydrant is to a dog."

Would that canines possessed opposable digits, I would write the following observations from the dog's point of view, my personal favorite, the border collie. The border collie's marginal stance embedded in its politically correct name makes it the ideal metaphorical equivalent of an administrator—a life on the boundary between institutional structure and the locus of great change, poised on the border to bring order, even structure, out of potential chaos in the combat zone. For border collies are smart, energetic, and let's face it, bossy, born to round up strays and laggards and keep them on a course predetermined by others which they have adopted as their own. But alas, I am fated to write from the human perspective that has dogged me from that day to this, as administrative duties have adhered to my various jobs, irrespective of official title, as lint to velcro. Thus I offer here Bloom's Laws, developed over the years in an attempt to interpret low situations—crises, confrontations, conflagrations—according to principles that I wish were higher than they are.

## Love in the Time of Cholera

1. Anything that can be administered will be. Including many things that can't.
2. No one was born wanting to be a writing program administrator. Or a department chair. Or a dean. No one ever entered college—or even graduate school—wanting to be a writing program administrator. Where did we go wrong?
3. WPAs don't think something is fun unless it requires three hundred (not enough? five hundred? a thousand?) hours of community service.
4. The grungier and more time-consuming a job is, the more eager the WPA is to tackle it. "Let's go out to the old barn and read placement exams, organize a conference, start a journal. . . ."

## The Long Day's Journey into Night

5. Anything that looks simple isn't. A ten minute job will take two hours. A two hour job will take eight hours. Nothing takes ten minutes.
6. Whenever you, the administrator, are in your office, someone else will be in there with you.
7. Work is whatever goes on in your office. Therefore, when you leave at (fill in the number—5, 6, 7, 8 . . . ) p.m., you will have done a full day's work.
8. High drama at (fill in the number—5, 6, 7, 8 . . . ) p.m. is low comedy at 8 a.m.

## The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin(g)

9. What isn't written down will be:
  - a) Used against someone—maybe you.
  - b) All screwed up.
  - c) Soon forgotten.
  - d) Misremembered, and reinterpreted to suit the (mis)rememberer.
  - e) Therefore, write everything down.
10. Whatever gets written down will be:
  - a) Used against someone—maybe you.
  - b) Lost.
  - c) Soon forgotten.
  - d) Misfiled.
  - e) Therefore, write nothing down.
11. If a meeting's agenda can disintegrate, it will. Therefore, write everything down in advance (see Laws #9, 10).

## Civil Disobedience

12. Doing a study precludes—not precedes—taking action.
13. Procedure preempts principle.
14. Procedure preempts policy.
15. Procedure preempts substance.
16. Complexity kills. Substituting extraordinary procedures for ordinary ones really screws things up. Adding more administrators to fix things really fixes things.

## Pride and Prejudice

17. Computers are a black hole for money. We can't live without them.
18. Email is a black hole for time. We can't live without it.

## The Beautiful and the Damned

19. People who threaten to quit if you don't appease them won't.
20. People who will leave will leave.
21. You, we may assume, are expendable.

## Culture and Anarchy

22. A new paradigm for teaching writing is, as Sam Johnson has said of a second marriage, a triumph of hope over experience.
23. A new administrative job is, likewise, the triumph of hope over experience.

Nevertheless, we soldier on. When I succumbed to the lure of yet another administrative job I taped the insight *du jour* into the center drawer of my desk. "You are expendable" (Law #21), I read every time I reached for a pen, a paper clip, or more and more often as the job—dare I say—progressed, one aspirin, and then another and another. . . .

The moment of truth came, as the truth often does, in bed—one dawn at 5 a.m., my usual time for an hour of creative drowsiness before I had to get up. This time I awoke, bolt upright. Instead of rejoicing because I had solved yesterday's problem—I had finally found offices for the adjuncts, converted music practice rooms, their soundproof quality significantly intact—I was fretting because I couldn't get doorknobs for those very rooms. In a flash I leapt out of bed, "I didn't get a research PhD to worry about doorknobs! I'm going to quit this job" (see Law #19). And so I did. My successor did just fine.

But I couldn't stay away (see Laws #4, 23). Indeed, I feel another Law coming on: "Solving one problem only leads to another problem to be solved." After all, the new millenium is coming, and with it as the night follows the day will come changes, crises, problems to be solved. Once a WPA, always a WPA, born to set things right (Laws #22, 23). I would like to come back as a border collie.

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