Professionalizing TA Training: Commitment to Teaching or Rhetorical Response to Market Crisis?

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Although English Studies as a discipline is often seen as fractured and contentious, there is one subject about which most of us can agree: the job market for new PhDs in English is bad and not likely to improve any time soon. In Bettina Huber's widely cited survey of the results of the 1993-1994 job search, only 45.9% of candidates found tenure-track jobs. The recent report from the MLA Committee on Professional Employment projects similar figures for the foreseeable future. The fact that the number of graduate students with PhDs in English—especially those with concentrations in literary studies or creative writing—far exceeds the number of jobs available has led to such competition among prospective job candidates that "wise" graduate students begin putting together a professional career from the moment they are accepted into graduate school, and those who work with graduate students are admonished to support them in this professionalizing process (Mangum, Pemberton, Wolfsom). Analyses of the job crisis differ, as do proposed solutions, but again, most commentators agree that if new PhDs want to have a chance at tenure-track employment, then everyone—graduate students and their mentors—needs to do more and do it better. The "more" that graduate students need to do usually refers to activities associated with being a research scholar such as publishing articles and giving conference presentations. But there is some recognition that professionalization should go beyond publication of research to include the professional representation of one's teaching, administrative work, and academic service. Eric Curren, who launches a cogent attack on the profession from the perspective of a graduate student displaced by the depressed academic job market, puts it

this way: "Our departments tell us that the most we can do is what they have always been telling us to do: finish our dissertations and prepare to sell ourselves as best we can... But, they add, perhaps with more candor, just to be safe we should create a teaching portfolio, give conference papers, find or construct our own network of contacts, publish articles, and start turning our dissertations into books when we have time" (58).

As writing program administrators responsible for preparing graduate students to teach college-level writing courses (Amy is Co-Coordinator for Composition at the University of Nebraska and Carrie directs the Reading/Writing Center and Computer-Supported Writing Classrooms at Florida State), our first response to these calls for increased professionalization might be a smug, "Well, we've been doing this for years." Even faculty not responsible for TA training concede that graduate students typically have more systematic preparation for being teachers than for being scholars. Teresa Mangum, a literature professor at the University of Iowa, observes in her essay "Identity and Economics; or, The Job Placement Procedural," "[M]ost of the English departments I am familiar with have assembled thorough, finely tuned programs to train graduate students to teach, to monitor and address their problems in the classroom, and to evaluate their progress. The quality of students' initiation into non-teaching activities is far less dependable..."(22). Although Catherine Latterell's survey of TA training programs led her to conclude that many rely on practice-oriented practicums that fail to convey the complex contexts within which college-level writing instruction occurs, the detailed descriptions of graduate-level courses dealing with composition teaching featured in the Fall 1995 issue of *Composition Studies* suggest that many graduate students do, indeed, have the opportunity to engage in substantive reading and reflection about the college teaching they are asked to do. Still, as Nedra Reynolds warns, while many graduate students work in writing programs with extensive professional development apparatus, these programs can "take the form of 'policing' the teaching of TAs rather than developing it" (202). The relationship between TA preparation and a graduate students' professional development, then, does need to be explored. To what extent does TA training represent a site of professional development? And what sort of profession, what sort of development, are we offering these beginning teachers?

Perhaps surprisingly, calls for an increased emphasis on the professional development of graduate students have begun to generate some opposition. In "Preprofessionalism: What Graduate Students Want," John Guillory argues against this trend of expecting graduate students to be successful professionals before they have even obtained jobs. In his words, "This prematurity is phantasmic: it telescopes professional careers into the time period of graduate school and conflates graduate education with self-marketing, as though getting a job were somehow the culmination of a successful career" (92). Other critics respond that pressure to professionalize too early can result, ironically, in job candidates being less qualified for many faculty positions, since writing publishable essays and conference presentations requires a narrowing of interests at the very time when graduate students should be broadening their interests to meet the demands of institutions seeking faculty who can teach a wide range of courses, serve on numerous committees, advise students, and, in whatever time is left, produce scholarship (Fienberg; Hutner). Of course, many critics point out that it is universities, especially those reliant on large pools of temporary instructors (including graduate teaching assistants) rather than tenure-track faculty, that need to change (Dasenbrock, Nelson). But continuing drops in government funding for higher education make changes in university hiring practices unlikely, at least in the near future.

We admit that our title for this essay creates to some extent a false opposition between a commitment to teaching and a rhetorical representation of that commitment, between preparation for teaching and for being a professional. Programs that train and support TAs can, of course, be invaluable sites for introducing graduate students to the profession of college-level teaching. Still, we wish to sound a cautionary note, a warning for us and other WPAs to consider the degree to which discourses of professionalization can misdirect our goals, leading us to focus more on the needs of TAs' academic careers than on the benefits to the undergraduates whom they are hired to teach. Given the limited resources that most TA preparation programs rely on (and as untenured faculty members at large, Research I institutions, we feel keenly our own limited resources of time and energy), those

responsible for this preparation must be conscious both of the pressure to do many different things and of our reasons for choosing to do what we do.

To better understand what we are calling a discourse of professionalization, we wish to explore three forces currently at work: the crisis in the academic job market, public attacks on higher education, especially teaching, and the rise of composition studies as an academic discipline.

Professionalizing to Beat the Odds

We have already suggested that the limited number of tenure-track jobs combined with an overproduction of PhDs is an obvious force leading graduate students and the programs they work in to place greater and greater emphasis on professional development. Graduate students want marketable credentials—and who can blame them—but in our reading on this subject and in our own experience at PhD-granting institutions, we've noted at least two potential dangers. The first is that overconcern with professional development, that is, with preparing graduate students to *become* professional academics, can lead to a reduced focus on pedagogy as the *raison d'etre* for TA preparation programs. These programs, especially ones that provide graduate students with graduate-level pedagogy courses, teaching workshops, mentoring, and advice on constructing teaching portfolios can become targeted as the only place where graduate students receive support for becoming professionals (and where composition faculty are thus the only ones responsible for providing it). Training TAs to be effective teachers in the classes to which we assign them already requires more time and personnel than most departments are willing to commit; being expected to also prepare graduate students for the job market—whether that expectation comes from the department, from graduate students, or from our own desire to be responsible mentors—can put an unrealistic burden on overtaxed resources. Conversely, departments that see the need to provide professional development opportunities related to scholarship may seek a reduction in what graduate students are required to do as part of their teaching appointments in order to make room for panel presentations on producing a marketable dissertation or on writing a successful conference proposal. One of our colleagues recently argued that the pedagogy workshops we offer shouldn't be required because graduate students could gain more in terms of professional development by attending a talk by a visiting Shakespearean scholar. While we certainly want graduate students to attend lectures and workshops by visiting scholars, we do not believe that programs designed to prepare TAs to teach undergraduate writing should be conflated with graduate student professional development in ways that subvert attention to pedagogy and to TAs' actual work in writing classrooms.

Another potential danger we wish to note is a related one: justifying to TAs the value of the TA preparation program by claiming that their participation in the program will result in a more successful job search. Not only is such a claim impossible to make (much as we wish it were true that the best prepared teachers would surely get good jobs), but it can lead to an overemphasis on the *representation* of teaching practices, as lines on a vita or in an elegantly written teaching philosophy, at the expense of critical thinking about one's teaching. Certainly both new and experienced teachers can benefit from systematically reflecting on their teaching, especially when that reflection takes place within a supportive community of other teachers. But we are concerned that too often teaching portfolios are often touted as a means of professionalizing graduate students for the academic job market, an objective, we would argue, that can be quite different from helping new TAs become thoughtful and effective teachers. When the teaching portfolio is constructed with objectives like those we emphasize in our writing classes—to represent change and growth over time—it can provide TAs with the opportunity to reflect on their development as teachers by taking a critical stance toward their work. However, in our experiences as readers of job candidate recruitment and merit review files, the value of the teaching portfolio is measured not in terms of growth or development but in the degree to which teachers represent themselves as successful.

This distinction between self-reflection and self-promotion is a fine one, to be sure, but it is a distinction with real consequences. For example, when a committee that one of us serves on recently met to choose the winner of a TA teaching award, it was forced to decide between a relatively new teacher who had submitted an exemplary teaching portfolio and a teacher with six years of experience, most of it spent in a writing center setting,

whose teaching portfolio was comparatively thin. The letter nominating the writing center teacher praised her ability to work with students of all races, all languages, all disciplines, all abilities—work that couldn't be represented by printing out a sample of class handouts. And yet the persuasive value of the other teacher's portfolio, full of essay prompts and guidelines for peer response, was hard to dismiss, especially when a former teaching award winner serving on the committee commented that when he was nominated, he took time out of other things (his teaching perhaps?) to put together his portfolio because he wanted that line on his vita. What he was implying, of course, was that if the writing center teacher really wanted the award, she should have spent more time on her portfolio. The quality of the writing center teacher's work was never questioned, only the quality of her representation of that work.

We want to make clear that we are not opposed to the use of teaching portfolios as part of an award or job application. We wish only to caution TA educators to be clear about their purposes for requiring new teachers to write teaching philosophies and construct teaching portfolios—sometimes before they have even set foot in a classroom or while they are teaching their very first class—and to realize that this rush to employ teaching portfolios with a view toward professionalization (i.e. representing one's teaching for the job market) might shortchange the type of reflective inquiry and self-criticism that, according to Christine Farris, promotes more effective writing programs and teacher change (173). Perhaps it would be more appropriate to require a course portfolio, as Nedra Reynolds recommends, a compilation of materials intended to show what the TA has learned in a particular composition pedagogy class or course of training. Or, even more importantly, those responsible for TA training need to make clear that teaching is, to borrow from Susan Jarratt, a "rhetorical act," and so is the representation of one's teaching in a teaching portfolio. Teaching portfolios constructed as vehicles of self-reflection are necessarily different from those constructed for purposes of self-promotion.

Naming Teaching as Scholarship

If the idea of requiring new teachers to construct teaching portfolios is related, in part, to the trend toward portfolio evaluation as the preferred means of assessing writing, the TA teaching portfolio can also be seen as part of a larger movement to make all university teaching more visible and, concomitantly, open to scrutiny. Witness the number of universities now requiring teaching portfolios as part of faculty tenure, promotion, or merit evaluation and the consequent proliferation of books and articles advising faculty on how to construct these portfolios (Diamond and Adams; Edgerton et. al.; Selden). And it is interesting to note how new the teaching portfolio is, at least within university settings. In the ERIC database, the first listing for teaching portfolios is in 1991. By 1996, there were over thirty references to teaching portfolios. It seems like more than a coincidence that the increased use of teaching portfolios is occurring at a time when higher education is under attack.

Public criticism of higher education is widespread, due in part to a mismatch between the public's valuing of quality undergraduate instruction and the university's valuing of research, a mismatch that, according to the MLA Committee on Professional Employment, may have its roots in two Cold War-era government aims: the commitment to provide higher education to all or most of its citizens and the commitment to fund research. As the MLA Committee noted, it is very difficult for institutions to succeed at both of these aims; faculty who are rewarded for doing research are unlikely to be interested in providing labor-intensive instruction in the basics. According to a 1994 report issued by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, of the 3500 institutions of higher education in the United States, only 88 are classified as "Research I" universities, with another 37 classified as "Research II," meaning that a significant part of their mission is doctoral-level education and research, and yet, these universities seem to dominate discussions of higher education. Unfortunately, in many research universities undergraduate education has not received the attention it deserves. As the Carnegie Commission (renamed the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates) put it in a recently published report, "Tuition income from undergraduates is one of the major sources of university income...but the students paying the tuition get, in all too many cases, less than their money's worth." The report notes that many students graduate

"without ever seeing the world-famous professors or tasting genuine research. Some of their instructors are likely to be badly trained or even untrained graduate students...some others may be tenured drones who deliver set lectures from yellowed notes" (5). None of the Commission's findings are new to those who, like us, are frustrated by the present system that rewards research productivity more than undergraduate teaching, but the gap between the recommendations of the Commission and the practices of the universities we know well is so glaring that it is easy to see why the public believes the university is not doing its job. And it is not just research universities that are in need of reform. Although research universities produce the PhDs who will become the next generation of faculty, a simple calculation reveals that only a small number of those new faculty will themselves teach at a research university. According to Cheryl Glenn, a member of the MLA Committee on Professional Employment, "In the United States over 90% of English programs and most likely between one-half and two-thirds of the total number of professorial-rank appointments are located outside doctorate-granting research institutions" (3). Colleges and universities compete nationally for the brightest-and best published-new PhDs, who, not surprisingly, carry the values of their research institution training with them, even when those values conflict with the needs of the institution they are hired to serve (Gaff and Lambert 38). Even at small liberal arts colleges that value undergraduate teaching, faculty expect and are expected to do research and may receive release time from teaching to pursue research projects.

Criticism of state-supported institutions is also fueled by the tightening of state budgets and the subsequent need to scrutinize every expenditure. The same obsession with "downsizing" that is leading universities to replace tenure-track lines with temporary, part-time appointments and to depend on an increasing number of TAs and adjuncts to staff undergraduate courses is also leading to pressure on tenure-track faculty to teach more classes with more students and to prove that the work they do constitutes a full-time job. Thanks to public outcry over a number of well publicized exposes of unethical behavior by university professors, such as Charles Sykes' *ProfScam* and Martin Anderson's *Impostors in the Temple,* many legislatures have begun to mandate changes in teaching loads and tenure criteria and to insist on post-tenure review of faculty. As the AAUP's Committee on College and University Teaching, Research, and Publication reported, "almost half the state governments are turning toward direct intervention in the inner workings of the academy" (Clausen 41-2). For example, Christopher Clausen narrates the story of Pennsylvania's State Representative John A. Lawless who, while chairing the Select Committee on Higher Education, held a series of public hearings hoping to verify his belief "that faculty were paid far too much for too little work; that the state should immediately do away with tenure; that sabbaticals and even summers without teaching should likewise be abolished" (41). In Ohio, legislators proposed a bill requiring faculty to teach and meet with students a minimum number of hours weekly, after one legislator noticed that several faculty were meeting classes only two or three days a week and concluded that faculty were working only ten hours but being paid for forty. Perhaps that conclusion is what led a new community college in Texas where one of our graduate students was recently hired to stipulate that faculty must work in their offices at least 35 hours a week—a clear message to the public that faculty aren't wasting precious taxpayer dollars. Teaching portfolios provide another means of documenting the work that faculty actually do.

At the University of Nebraska, the faculty senate recently voted to create mechanisms for further evaluating faculty once they have tenure beyond the current departmental merit reviews. As some critics have pointed out, the plan does nothing to reward good teaching even if it is successfully documented—it is solely punitive in nature. But this punitive tone is emblematic of much of the discourse surrounding the debate. In the fall of 1996, Florida enacted legislation requiring that teaching be given more credit in tenure evaluations and that tenured faculty submit to a post-tenure review every seven years. While the legislation recommends that faculty with outstanding evaluations should be rewarded, there is no guarantee that the legislature will include merit pay in its budget. However, there has been some talk that faculty whose reviews are poor and who fail to improve in those areas should receive a cut in pay, something not difficult to budget for.

Although some faculty and administrators admit that teaching has not

been valued as much as it should, attempts to change the seemingly entrenched value system of the university are often met with opposition or are short-lived. A more palatable strategy has been to address the attacks on university teaching, faculty workloads, and tenure as an opportunity to convince the public of the value of faculty work. Recently, department chairs at one of our institutions were asked to compile a list of faculty research projects and to describe the benefit of that research to the state's constituents. Some of this information was later reprinted in a glossy brochure. Perhaps this awareness of the rhetorical nature of the situation—the desire to find a way to minimize this mismatch of values—helps explain why even calls for an increase in the value of teaching are couched in language that tries to bridge the gap between the public's values and those of the university. For example, Ernest Boyer's widely cited *Scholarship Reconsidered* seeks to revise the concept of scholarship to include a "scholarship of teaching," and Russell Edgerton, Patricia Hutchings, and Kathleen Quinlan have titled their book similarly—*The Teaching Portfolio: Capturing the Scholarship in Teaching*. Both of these books reconceptualize teaching by tying it more closely to its scholarly component, the making of new knowledge. Both also emphasize the reciprocal nature of teaching and research, in the hopes of raising the value of post secondary teaching in the eyes of faculty and their evaluators. Boyer's book, in particular, proposes a radical reassessment of how faculty work could be valued in the academy, suggesting that faculty might follow different models that suit their interests and abilities rather than forcing all faculty into the same research-oriented mode. Yet Boyer's models also perpetuate the notion that teaching needs to be professionally represented within the same language as research in order to gain legitimacy within post-secondary settings. As Boyer points out, "Teaching, as presently viewed, is like a currency that has value in its own country but can't be converted into other currencies....For teaching to be considered equal to research, it must be vigorously assessed, using criteria that we recognized (sic) within the academy, not just in a single institution" (37). Likewise, Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan argue that the teaching portfolio makes visible the "scholarship of teaching" with the assumption that teaching "relies on a base of expertise...that needs to and can be identified, made public, and evaluated" (1). In keeping with the assumption that teaching should be evaluated in the same currency as research, Larry Keig and Michael Waggoner assert that faculty reluctant to participate in collaborative peer review must recognize that "having classes observed and materials assessed by colleagues for the purpose of instructional improvement no more should be considered a threat to academic freedom than would having colleagues critique a proposed manuscript for publication."

What all these authors seem to agree upon is the notion that the production by faculty of written material intended as evidence of teaching ability parallels the production of scholarly writing as evidence of a faculty member's intellectual prowess. While we are attracted to the concept of teaching as a form of scholarship, as an intellectual activity requiring expertise, we worry that the language of professionalization is supplanting the value of teaching for its own sake. As Clausen reminds us, "Contending that higher education is the best route to a better life for a state government's constituents remains one of the most effective ways to argue in its defense, but the argument also has some drawbacks. If teaching is everything, then why aren't faculty members doing more of it?" (43). What the public wants, arguably, is for university faculty to care more about their students than they do about themselves. Attempts to address these concerns through appeals to professionalization and through the promotion of teaching as the equivalent of research, thus, seem off the mark since to do so displaces the beneficiaries of teaching from students to teachers.

One might ask what these examples of faculty teaching have to do with TA training within English Departments. We think that is precisely the problem. For the most part, discussions about TA training and professionalization do not respond to larger university and public discourses about what teaching is, how it should be represented, and how it relates to the research and service that are also a part of being an academic professional. And yet these discourses are inevitably interrelated. While we within the academy tell ourselves that graduate teaching assistants are receiving valuable training for their future careers as college and university teachers (at least the 45% who will go on to get academic jobs), the television show "60 Minutes" presents the use of TAs as a sign that faculty have abdicated their

teaching to those who are inexperienced and unprepared. Those of us responsible for training and supervising TAs know that many of them are inexperienced and underprepared, in addition to being overworked and underpaid, and the burgeoning movement among graduate students to unionize confirms our sense that many TAs, not just those in our institutions, feel exploited (Leatherman). Arguing that teaching assistantships are good for graduate students because of the professional development opportunities they provide begs the question of whether these assistantships are good for the undergraduate students they teach or good for the faculty who teach the same number of classes for substantially higher pay. While most of the TAs we work with are dedicated to and enthusiastic about their teaching, to describe the often exploitative conditions under which many of them work as professional development opportunities seems a stretch, particularly when, as Eileen Schell has pointed out, they are not viewed or compensated as professionals, either by the public or by those within the institutions in which they teach. Public skepticism about university teaching necessarily implicates TAs and the training they receive. Creating a flurry of mechanisms to promote TA professionalization—through teaching portfolios, mentoring groups, peer evaluation, and so on—while perhaps professionally enriching to the individual TA and the writing program in which he or she works, does not really respond to the public's larger concerns about who is doing the majority of teaching in post secondary classrooms and who is receiving the lion's share of the university's rewards.

Professionalizing Composition Studies

Thus far we have been suggesting that public discourses of crisis about the collapse of the academic job market and about the failure of higher education are at least partly responsible for having set into motion university discourses about the value of teaching, discourses characterized by the elevation of teaching to the status of scholarship. But the field of composition has also contributed to the professionalization of TA training for reasons that go beyond a concern with what public or university audiences think of teaching or a concern for whether graduate students will be able to get jobs. Compositionists have a vested interest in seeing—and making others see—TA training as work that requires their professional expertise. Perhaps the concern with professionalization is especially acute among compositionists because so many of us continue to struggle against perceptions that the kind of teaching and research we do is not scholarly and thus not "professional" in the narrow sense of the word. Many narratives of coming into the profession of composition studies detail reactions to our work that vary from subtle scoffing to denial of tenure and promotion (see Enos, Gebhardt and Gebhardt). Ironically, those of us who would define our research interests as related to literacy and our teaching interests as reading, writing, and rhetoric, come closer to fulfilling the public's expectations for what university faculty ought to do—teach "useful" skills to the state's young people—than many whose work earns more accolades for its "scholarly" nature. Still, the discourse surrounding the contended legitimacy of composition as a part of the profession of English Studies can lead those of us responsible for TA training to play out our anxiety about our professional status on our TA preparation programs.

While we believe that preparing TAs to teach undergraduate writing is best done by those trained to do such work, there is a danger in conceptualizing TA training as an introduction to composition studies as an academic discipline. Such a conflation may be the result of institutional coincidence—perhaps a "Theories of Composition" course was created so that TAs would benefit from substantive engagement with pedagogical research and theory and then later, a concentration in composition studies and other graduate-level classes in rhetoric and composition were added. But it is clear from the descriptions of "gateway" courses in composition published in the *Composition Studies* survey that at many of the universities represented the required course for TAs teaching first-year writing is the same course required of students whose academic concentration will be composition, which means that the objectives of the two courses—to prepare new teachers to teach first-year writing and to introduce graduate students to the academic discipline of composition—remain linked. The relationship between preparing teachers of writing and professionalizing graduate students within composition is elided by our professional organizations as well. For instance, the 1992 report, "Tentative Recommendations of the

CCCC Committee on the Preparation of College Teachers of Writing," recommends the following: "Early in the program of preparation, the teacher should learn the importance of joining professional organizations and knowing how to locate professional resources. The teacher should receive guidance in *becoming a professional in our field*" [emphasis added]. This professionalization, as the committee details it, should include attending and presenting at conferences and conducting classroom research.

Of course, some might argue that this conflation isn't necessarily a bad thing. After all, this required composition pedagogy course often invites students into composition as an area of study, an area with which most are unfamiliar prior to taking such a course. Perhaps the self-evident good of these recommendations explains why Carrie didn't think twice about requiring the new TAs enrolled in her pedagogy workshop to attend a colloquium presented by a visiting scholar in rhetoric and composition. This speaker gave a talk arguing that student texts can be as rich and complicated as other texts, if only we take the time to read them from multiple perspectives and he demonstrated his point by reading a single student text through the lens of a psychologist, an anthropologist, and a Marxist critic. Because Carrie, along with her composition colleagues, found the talk stimulating, she was shocked when the TAs in her workshop complained that the information presented had no practical application to their classrooms. With fifty papers to respond to, they complained, they could never devote the kind of time the speaker lavished on his single student text. Carrie explained that the purpose of the talk was not to recommend a teaching practice but to theorize the reading of student writing as literary and cultural critics theorize the reading of other kinds of texts, thereby bridging the gap (to use Comley's metaphor) between composition and literature. Still, the new TAs were unable to see how the presentation might be relevant to their teaching. Although many have argued that rhetoric deserves to be reinstituted as the master discipline, very few English departments have declared it to be so. We shouldn't be disappointed, then, when the TAs who take our (required) pedagogy seminars are less enamored than we with our discourse theory and our sociolinguistics and our research on the politics of remediation (Zebroski). Of course as compositionists we believe that engaging with these issues can inform and improve classroom practice. We agree with Libby Rankin who says that "[w]e must find ways to read our teaching, our relationship with students and peers, as carefully and as subtly as we read the other texts we are used to studying" (126). TA training programs can and should serve as a site where these types of readings can be encouraged and performed. But we believe it is important to distinguish between how we might use published research and theory to prepare teachers new to composition and pedagogy to effectively teach undergraduates and how we use that work to introduce graduate students to the professionalized discourses of composition studies with which scholars are expected to be familiar.

Further evidence that being a professional college teacher is being conflated with being a composition professional appears in the essay, "Beyond Apprenticeship: Graduate Students, Professional Development Programs, and the Future(s) of English Studies." Here, Mark Long, Jennifer Holberg, and Marcy Taylor argue—rightly—against the perception that TAs are mere apprentices when, in fact, they are given complete responsibility for teaching college-level classes. We agree with the authors that TAs ought not to be treated as passive recipients of a writing program administrator's pedagogical wisdom and that TAs ought to be invited to help shape the programs they teach in. Yet, we want to caution against an assumption that everyone who teaches in a university writing program as a graduate student will benefit—professionally—from involvement in the administration of such a program. While we agree that graduate students ought to be treated as colleagues, ought to be given the opportunity to contribute to curriculum decisions and program policy, and ought to be utilized as mentors to incoming TAs, we believe we have an obligation not to sell TAs on the value of such work without also acknowledging that administrative work continues to be undervalued, especially in research institutions. In arguing that we need "to reconceive the professional development program and the graduate student's position in it, as preparation for the future of English studies, and the full range of rights and obligations that comprise membership in the professoriate," Long, Holberg, and Taylor conflate the rights and obligations of compositionists with other scholars in English Studies, suggesting that all members have equal responsibilities in such administrative work (67). While

we would like to believe that changing the model that WPAs use in providing professional development opportunities for graduate students will alter how faculty reward systems define and value academic work, our own experiences suggest that most WPAs continue to have little power to "redefin[e] the value of academic work not confined to its traditionally conceived boundaries" (76). Rarely are scholars outside of composition hired with the expectation that they will do administrative work. And although most jobs for rhetoric and composition specialists involve administration, this work must be undertaken cautiously with a full understanding of an institution's standards for promotion and tenure. Unless a WPA produces scholarship about the success of a collaborative model for program administration, as Long, Holberg, and Taylor do, such work will probably not be valued within the reward systems that most institutions use. Consequently, we must be careful not to burden graduate students with administrative work in the name of "professional development." Moreover, although Long, Holberg, and Taylor suggest that increased public pressure to attend to teaching and service will redefine the nature of academic work, our experience suggests that universities seem to be responding to the public's demand for more attention to teaching and service by simply insisting that faculty do more of everything and do it all better. (See, for example, the report of the MLA Commission on Professional Service or the speech given by William C. Richardson, head of the Kellogg Foundation.) Such demands do not seem to be fulfilling the calls for "balance" in the work of English Studies professionals, so much as they illustrate the push for greater "productivity"—more results for less cost.

A second danger that the professionalization of composition studies must contend with is the identification of compositionists as the only purveyors of pedagogical knowledge, with compositionists being just as likely to fall into this trap as other members of a typical English department. Although all of us have colleagues in literary studies and creative writing who are exemplary teachers, we may hesitate to involve them in TA preparation and mentoring because pedagogy is not their academic specialty. Given that in most departments the undergraduate writing program is large and the composition specialists few, it can be self-defeating to claim that only professional compositionists should be responsible for preparing TAs to teach. Of course, many of us might argue that compositionists are the ones who have fought—and continue to fight—for institutional structures that support and value pedagogical training. Without these efforts, graduate students' "professional development" might still be limited to finding a book and syllabus in their mailbox with the admonition "good luck." But it might also be the case that compositionists who are finally having their professional expertise recognized and valued are unwilling to acknowledge the pedagogical expertise of non-compositionists for fear that to do so will have a negative effect on their professional status.

Ironically, having exclusive "rights" to train TAs can also hurt compositionists who do not have the skills or interest necessary to successfully manage a large undergraduate writing program. While it is generally accepted that not everyone on the English Department faculty would make a good department chair, it is often assumed or expected that all compositionists should be willing to do the specialized work of program administration and TA preparation. When composition faculty decline to do administrative work because of a lack of management skills or a recognition that such work can interfere with their research (which, at most universities, is still the primary criteria for tenure regardless of public relations statements to the contrary), instead of being seen as professionals who are making wise choices, they are seen as not fulfilling their responsibility to the department, even when they teach a full load of writing courses, serve on committees, supervise graduate students' work, and publish their own research on par with other colleagues. Locating the work of the WPA as providing professional development opportunities for graduate students is thus a double-edged sword. On the one hand, WPAs can assert their value to the department in working with graduate students to help professionalize them for the job market. On the other hand, they can be burdened with increased amounts of work abdicated by other faculty and also have the original priorities of their TA training programs misdirected.

In examining the discourses of professionalization that touch on discussions of TA training, we do not mean to diminish the efforts of compositionists who fought hard to secure resources to create TA training programs

where previously there had been nothing. Clearly what attracts many to composition is the feeling that the area offers opportunities to merge theory, practice, pedagogy, and research in vital ways. Recognizing the importance of TA training doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't reflect upon our own contributions to the current discourses about professionalizing graduate students. Indeed, because our efforts to establish effective TA preparation programs have been so successful, we are now in a position to examine the goals of these programs and to articulate how they intersect with or contradict others' views of what these programs should be like. We need to consider also whether behind our desire to professionalize TA training might be a desire to make TAs see us as professionals and to value what composition professionals do. The assumption that we ought to be replicating ourselves or our experience as graduate students when we train and supervise TAs is often invisible but still powerful. Certainly we want to help new teachers provide well informed and effective writing instruction, but we also need to be aware of the degree to which we are also influenced by our own scholarly interests, our own professional need to turn teaching into something that can be written about and published, something that can help us earn tenure and promotion as we secure a legitimate place for ourselves and for the field of composition. (Even the production of this article illustrates the current emphasis on turning talk about teaching into scholarship that can be measured by research standards.)

Conclusions

The crisis in the academic job market and the public discourse of crisis in university teaching require those of us privileged enough to be working in institutions of higher learning to think hard about the ultimate value of what we do—and what we train graduate students to do. In George Levine's words, "Those in large research departments should be...rethinking their teaching responsibilities. They should be taking far more seriously than they at present do the disparity between their sense of what constitutes useful work in English and what the state and most people who send their children to universities think such work is" (44). Reed Way Dasenbrock describes how his department did just that, by convincing the administration to replace graduate student stipends with tenure-track faculty lines, a move that reduced opportunities for people to do graduate study in English while increasing the number of tenure-track jobs available for those who complete their degrees. Dasenbrock acknowledges the skepticism with which we are likely to respond to his department's successful strategy—and it is indeed an exceptional solution—but notes that "What we had going for us, as would anyone in a public institution, was the deep concern about public perceptions of the typical English department if they found out that none of the required English classes their children take is being taught by a regular faculty member" (41).

Though we have been critical of an unreflective co-optation of TA training by professional development advocates, we acknowledge that any program that helps prepare graduate students to do college level teaching is, of course, preparing them to be professionals. And certainly, preparation to teach writing is important given that most of the faculty positions our graduate students will eventually hold will require the teaching of some composition courses. But we also agree with John Guillory's contention that "[W]e will lose a crucial opportunity if the job crisis does not become also the occasion for inquiry into the modes of professionalization we have internalized in our practice" (97). An overemphasis on professional development, which so often takes the form of advising graduate students how best to promote themselves, does not seem likely to fulfill such an aim. Hugh Sockett, in his book, *The Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism*, makes an important distinction between "professionalism" and "professionalization," which we believe should also inform the way WPAs think about the professional development they provide for TAs:

> *Professionalism describes the quality of practice. It describes the manner of conduct within an occupation, how members integrate their obligations with their knowledge and skill in a context of collegiality and of contractual and ethical relations with clients. . . . this concept of professionalism [is distinguished] from professionalization, which is the process whereby an occupation (rather than an individual) gains the status of a profession. When we professionalize teaching we change its*

status; but a teacher's professionalism is apparent in his or her practice. (9)

Ultimately, we would like to see TA preparation programs continue to emphasize not academic *professionalization,* but teacher *professionalism,* which Sockett describes as having four dimensions: the professional community, the professional expertise of the teacher, professional accountability to those the teacher serves, and a professional ideal of service (16-17). Such a TA program would go far in meeting Long, Taylor, and Holberg's objectives of redefining graduate student teachers as colleagues rather than apprentices and would do so in a way that does not falsely privilege writing program administration or scholarly work in composition as a career goal. Teacher professionalism is also an arena in which faculty of all specializations might be willing to contribute.

We recognize that even the best TA program, one that helps graduate students become teaching professionals, will not be able in and of themselves to resolve the public's complaints about the poor quality of undergraduate instruction, nor will a serious commitment to pedagogy do much to improve the job prospects for new PhDs. Those of us concerned both about the preparation of graduate students and about the quality of education that undergraduates in our institutions receive must continue to seek solutions to these very real problems. The truth is, while we continue to debate how much theory TAs need to read, it's not clear the degree to which undergraduate students benefit when their TAs read this theory. What is clear is that undergraduates would benefit if teachers had more than a few days or even a few weeks of preparation before teaching their first class, and they would also benefit if their teachers had fewer of them to teach. To help our TAs and their students, we need to work for more reasonable teaching loads, better compensation, and a full semester of study, observation, and mentoring before TAs enter the classroom. In addition, faculty need to be willing to teach more, including lower division writing and literature classes, in exchange for asking graduate students to teach less, and standards for promotion and tenure need to change to reward faculty for teaching more. None of these changes is likely to occur if we do not first challenge what it means to be a professional in English studies.

Because we recognize the highly contingent nature of graduate students' experiences with professionalization at the different institutions in which they work and those they seek to enter, we hesitate to make sweeping recommendations about the role TA training should play in preparing graduate students to be professionals. What we would like to offer, rather, are some cautions. First, we believe that WPAs and those who work with graduate students need to recognize that calls for increased professionalization often implicitly—if unintentionally—lay blame on graduate students rather than on the market economy in which there are too few jobs. While it may be true that some graduate students are unprepared for the professional duties required of newly hired tenure-track faculty, our experiences suggest that graduate students generally are professionals, especially in their classrooms, even though they are often not rewarded as such. WPAs also should be wary of how arguments for professional development for graduate students can be used to dismantle TA preparation programs that emphasize pedagogy. There must be a balance between inviting other faculty to participate in the professionalization of graduate students and maintaining spaces for discussions about pedagogy that focus on teacher professionalism. Lastly, those who do genuinely seek to professionalize TA training on the basis of public calls for reform need to acknowledge that utilizing the language of research, while perhaps persuasive to members of a particular institution, might not go far enough in addressing the public's larger concerns. While rhetoric is reality, the rhetoric of educational decline which speaks to a wide audience seems ultimately more powerful than the rhetoric of professionalization, addressed to a much narrower audience of academics with, some might say, overly narrow concerns. Until there is more critical engagement about what the professionalization of teaching is for, what it seeks to do, and how it benefits students in the classroom, the discourses of professionalization will seem more a rhetorical response to a market crisis than a genuine expression of a commitment to teaching. Perhaps the most important contribution WPAs can make to graduate students' professional development is to provide them with opportunities for such critical engagement.

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