Council of Writing Program Administrators

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The Council of Writing Program Administrators is a national association of college and university faculty who serve or have served as directors of first-year 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.

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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 and between writing and other academic 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 editors welcome empirical research (quantitative as well as qualitative), historical research, and theoretical, essayistic, or reflective 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. The editors aspire to respond within three months after the receipt of the submission.

Authors whose works are accepted for publication will be asked to submit final versions in both print and electronic form. Articles should be saved on 3.5 inch disks as rich text format files (files using the extension .rtf) or as MS Word files (using the .doc file extension). Tables should be saved in the program in which they were produced; authors should indicate program type on the disk. Illustrations should be submitted as camera-ready copy. Authors will also be asked to submit a 100-word biography for inclusion in the “Contributors” section of the journal.

Reviews

WPA publishes reviews of books related to writing programs and their administration. Publishers are invited to send appropriate professional books to Marguerite Helmers, who assigns reviews.

Announcements and Advertising

Relevant announcements and calls for papers will be published as space permits. Send them in electronic format to David Blakesley
(blakesle@purdue.edu) by October 15 (for the Fall/Winter issue) or March 15 (for the Spring issue). Advertisers should contact David Blakesley for deadlines and publication rates.

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A Letter from the Editors

On Economy

Over the past year, as manuscripts began to arrive in the WPA office in Houghton, Dennis noticed an interesting trend: WPAs were thinking beyond the writing program and talking about administration at the level of the institution. As he describes it, a special issue on administering beyond the English Department, began to take shape. Together, Dennis, Marguerite, and David are happy to bring readers this special issue.

Although the essays in this volume have a common theme of connecting writing program administration with concerns beyond those of the first-year classroom, we can also consider this to be an issue on various types of economy. Greek and Latin roots of the term economy refer to the management of a household. For many WPAs, this type of management and order is the norm of their professional life. However, as Charles Schuster points out in his essay, higher administrators are concerned with the modern sense of the word economy: the “careful management of resources,” as the OED terms it.

The contributors to this issue explore the nature of management from the perspectives of WPAs, Writing Center Directors, and an Associate Dean. Behind each essay is a concern for political economy or power. In each university, department, or program, who is allowed to make decisions regarding the distribution of resources? What shape do those resources take? Is there ever an equal distribution of theoretical knowledge, practical application, and rewards?

Rita Malenczyk opens our issue by discussing the principles behind the founding of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915. The AAUP brought to fruition policies governing the protection of academic freedom. Malenczyk notes that the early activism of the AAUP is similar to that of the WPA. Opening with her own experience, she examines that experience in the wider context of academic freedom. As she describes, her academic freedom as a WPA was challenged because higher administration did not value her expertise as a compositionist and WPA; rather, her decisions were seen as “negative.” Two lessons for all WPAs are embedded in this story: first, the higher administration viewed composition courses in terms of cost-benefit relations, while Malenczyk saw her decisions emanating from a discipline with particular expertise; second, academic freedom may too often be expressed only in terms of classroom teaching and research products—not administration.
From Malenczyk’s personal and institutional history, Richard E. Miller turns to the stories that compositionists have created about the profession. These stories have something of the Beowulf about them, in which valorous teachers of writing stave off the administrative barbarians at the gates. But as Miller points out, higher administrators do not view composition programs or writing centers in such glorious terms. Their viewpoint is more technical; it is “the business of managing an instructional work force.” Composition is a gatekeeping course and can be quantified in numbers: how many sections of composition can the institution afford to offer each semester? How much will the instructors be paid? How many students will pass the first-year writing requirement? The administrators want numbers: 6000 grades, 206 sections, 112 instructors. Thus, for Miller, the question is ultimately one of discourse. With two groups speaking different tongues, the ability to successfully communicate is compromised.

Thomas P. Miller also senses dichotomies between groups in the profession of composition and rhetoric, but these are of a more theoretical nature. Miller’s work points toward a way of reconciling service learning with the classical rhetorical principal of civic leadership. While he opens with the question of how directors of graduate programs will train the next generation of WPAs, he moves beyond the work of course design and TA training to situate writing programs in an academic culture that is divided between belles lettres and public responsibility. The duty of graduate instructors in composition is to develop “critical intellectuals” who may “advance institutional reforms.” As Miller notes here, this imperative is more than just management training. It demands a return to the ideal of the public intellectual that has been rearticulated since the eighteenth century.

Valerie Balester and James C. McDonald contribute a piece that is timely for the WPA organization, on the relationship between Writing Center directors and WPAs. Currently, the Council is working with the National Writing Center Association (NWCA) in some new ways. First and most immediately, the leadership of both organizations has approved a three-year term for the NWCA to participate in the WPA Consultant Evaluator Service. Second, and more generally, Kathleen Blake Yancey, President of WPA, has invited Paula Gillespie, the Vice President of NWCA, to write to WPA members in our newsletter about ways we might work together. In this issue, presenting the result of a survey of 176 WPAs and WC directors and comparing the results to Olson and Ashton-Jones’s survey of 1988, Balester and McDonald examine the working relationship between writing program administrators and writing center directors. The results of their research are unsettling. Underlying the relationships are distributions
of power, money, and status. Not surprisingly, these are often unequally assigned, leaving the writing center marginalized in the composition program. All too frequently, WPAs and WC directors do not share ideas or resources; agreement on “philosophies and goals” is scarce. Finally, most of the WC directors had little or no training in administrative decision-making, adding to their sense of disenfranchisement. On a more positive note, however, Balester and McDonald note that relationships between WPAs and WC directors have improved since the 1988 report.

To close this issue, we hear from former WPA President Charles Schuster. Schuster brings readers the reflections of a WPA who moved temporarily into higher administration. The first part of the article examines Schuster’s adjustment to the culture of higher administration, especially to the difficult task of saying “no” to nearly everyone who asked for programmatic funding. Behind the economic realities of administration, however, are professional organizations, publications, and predictions of trends in the university. In other words, as Richard E. Miller introduced in his article, higher administration speaks a different discourse than that of academic departments. Schuster warns WPAs that they must learn about the changes predicted to affect the university world—the world of recruitment and retention, distance education, and first-year experience programs. WPAs must adjust, and economize successfully, or their academic freedom will be challenged.

What we learn from these pieces is that composition’s dream of common goals and purposes in composition programs are always interrupted by realities of power and exchange. When power is unequal, the theoretical symmetry in programs is difficult to achieve. When conceptions of economy are not aligned between higher administration and WPAs, writing programs are challenged from the outside.

Bringing together writers whose voices, styles, and theoretical backgrounds differ is a journal editor’s job. When these voices, styles, and theories merge in such a harmonious result is more than serendipitous. It points to a ground of concern among those who teach, write, and administer.

Dennis Lynch, Michigan Technological University
Marguerite Helmers, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
David Blakesley, Purdue University
Getting fired tends to be something WPAs talk about in private rather than in public, though the firing narrative—perhaps it is a disciplinary genre—tends to be immediately recognizable. A WPA just out of graduate school steps on a dean’s toes by suggesting that perhaps first-year writing classes are too large; a writing center director’s long view of student development unsettles the university president who, owing to pressure from the state legislature, wants “immediate, measurable results” each semester. Off, then, with the WPA’s head. The WPA, bloodied, tries to show that he or she is unbowed by getting another job or contesting the dismissal. The circumstances that actually caused that dismissal remain largely undiscussed, in part because they are often difficult to pinpoint for certain, and in part because WPAs—their field being, after all, rhetoric—tend to be careful about making claims without evidence.

Yet for other faculty, getting fired has been the subject of public discussion for some time, due in part to the American Association of University Professors’ (AAUP) articulation of criteria and standards for academic freedom and tenure. In this essay I explore some of the historical reasons why, academic freedom and tenure notwithstanding, retaliation against WPAs remains rather invisible as well as rather commonplace. I also suggest that despite our continuing feelings of “otherness,” our habit of seeing ourselves as “handmaids to our institutions” and sites of exploitation (Janangelo 12), there is actually a good deal of historical connection between many WPAs’ and writing teachers’ present job circumstances and the circumstances that prompted the founding and activism of the AAUP; that connec-
tion has, however, been lost to our sight as other disciplines have gained (or maintained) ascendancy over composition and rhetoric. In this essay I try to re-establish it. I hope to show how some local circumstances—my own—perhaps foreground some lost history, history that might help WPAs think about at least one possibility for action in the area of their own job security.

Some Local (and Personal) History

In 1994, I was hired into a tenure-track position as director of freshman writing and writing across the curriculum at Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU). Prior to my appointment, the WPA position had been held for several years by a children's literature specialist who had managed to establish an extensive WAC program bolstered by a University Senate bill. However, despite her success as WPA—or perhaps because of it—my predecessor remained committed to returning to full-time teaching in her field, as everyone else who had previously held the position had done. Faculty across the disciplines, as well as outside reviewers, felt that the scope of the new WAC program justified the creation of a new faculty line in the English Department for someone with a commitment to working in composition.

Things went swimmingly for that someone—me—until the spring of 1995, despite some problems of the kind Thomas Recchio and Lynn Z. Bloom have described as initiation rites for new WPAs. I did not, for example, receive the secretarial support I understood the administration to have promised me in my job negotiations, and my computer was a semester late in arriving. Furthermore, consistent with Gary A. Olson and Joseph M. Moxley’s reflections on the WPA and the limits of authority, I did not have control over the hiring of freshman writing instructors—a number of whom were tenured, full-time members of the English Department—though I was usually consulted by the department chair about the appointment of part-time faculty. However, I was working well with the cross-disciplinary University Writing Board and the rest of the WAC faculty, and was managing to interest members of my department—all of whom were literature specialists, but most of whom taught writing courses as well—in new developments in the field of composition. Furthermore, I had with the faculty’s support started a new peer tutor program and piloted a training course in composition theory for those tutors, a course which has since become a permanent part of the English Department’s curriculum.

Around the middle of my first year, however, the Connecticut State University system had a good deal of its funding cut by the state legislature,
and noises were made about raising class sizes in writing-intensive courses, noises which I responded to publicly. Furthermore, I came under some pressure to replace our in-house writing placement test with standardized testing, another move I publicly opposed. Then, in December 1995, my reappointment—in most cases a formality—was quashed by a member of the higher administration, with no reasons given, even though it had been enthusiastically recommended by both the English Department and the dean of Arts and Sciences. The university president upheld this administrator’s decision, so as of May 1996 I would, as things then stood, be out of a job.

At that time, then, I began to work with our faculty union, the ECSU chapter of the AAUP, to get my nonrenewal decision overturned. (AAUP is in itself not a labor union, though it sometimes functions as a collective bargaining agent; see Policy Documents and Reports, 215-33.) Our chapter president felt that there had been possible academic freedom, and therefore procedural, violations because my nonrenewal appeared to have been based on my refusal to change the writing placement test. Several months earlier, immediately following a meeting in which I’d spoken against standardized testing, I had been peremptorily summoned to the office of the higher administrator who later refused to support my renewal; there I was told that “this university cannot afford negative people,” that the WAC program had to justify its existence, and that I should strongly consider changing the placement testing procedure and implement pre- and post-testing procedures without consulting the University Writing Board (which oversees such matters). My refusal to make these changes was based in large part on research in the field of composition—specifically, assessment and WAC. Hence, our AAUP president felt my nonrenewal violated an academic freedom. The union and I requested an extension of time to file a grievance contesting my nonrenewal—a formality when an alleged contractual violation takes place between semesters. Following that request, discussion with union representatives, and written protests over my nonrenewal from faculty within and outside of my department, the university president reversed his decision and renewed my appointment.

I’m still here, having just received tenure in Spring 2000.

Some Organizational (and Parallel) History

What I believe happened to me in December of 1995 was not all that unusual, though retaliation tends, as I have already said, to be something WPAs talk about in private rather than in public. At the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Milwaukee several months after these events, I gave a talk in which I made reference to my disagree-
ments with the ECSU administration and subsequent nonrenewal, and was struck by the way the circumstances I described seemed to hit home with the audience and my co-presenters: one audience member shared the bare bones of a similar situation, and one of my co-presenters commented, “You know, this happens all the time.” I felt as if there was some relief in my having broached a taboo subject, though one that is burned into the consciousness of WPAs as well as other members of the English profession. When I was on the job market, an MLA official cautioned me against taking a tenure-track position as a writing program director for the simple reason that, unlike other assistant professors, untenured WPAs don’t have the luxury of keeping quiet and not saying what they think. When one has program responsibilities, one has to take positions and to do so publicly. And research in the field of composition and rhetoric has given WPAs many reasons to take positions against, for example, reductive assessment procedures, invalid placement procedures, preexistent course syllabi, and larger curricular requirements that do not reflect attention to the way students actually learn to write over time.

What is ironic is that those who potentially risk the most by exhibiting and applying their knowledge in their discipline—i.e., untenured WPAs and other untenured faculty with administrative responsibilities—are also the least protected by that which protects other faculty who do the same thing, albeit in the context of research or classroom teaching: the idea of academic freedom, as it has been articulated and is presently understood. The history of the AAUP, and the university structure that set that history in motion, goes a long way toward explaining why. In 1913, a letter went out from members of the Johns Hopkins University faculty to professors at nine other universities, suggesting that a professional organization be formed to advance the “institutional and societal interests” of faculty across the disciplines. Two years later, with 650 professors as charter members, the AAUP was established. One of the issues that brought these faculty together was, as might be expected, academic freedom: the American Economic Association, American Political Science Association, and American Sociological Society had been investigating what seemed to be the politically motivated dismissal of their members from institutions (Hofstadter and Metzger 442-43; Warren 696). These founders of the AAUP felt that a concerted joint effort of faculty across the disciplines was needed to counteract what seemed to be a pattern of punishing professors for the public expression of certain economic, religious, and political views (Metzger, “The First Investigation” 206-07).

Of course, academic freedom was not the only problem facing professors at the end of the nineteenth century. Another fighting issue for
the AAUP was “the inadequacy of the rewards, especially the pecuniary rewards” available to college faculty, and of even greater concern was the gradual increase between 1869 and 1908 in the number of faculty members on probationary appointments. During those years, writes Walter P. Metzger, “the proportion of full professors on the nation’s faculties had shrunk from two-thirds to one-fifth, whereas the proportion of instructors and assistant professors had gone up from one-fifth to one-third” (“Origins of the Association” 231). In what sounds remarkably like a recent description of the lot of the teacher of writing and/or the overworked WPA, Metzger describes the quandary of “the typical assistant professor” at this time:

Typically, his [sic] primary function was to relieve his seniors of the burden of elementary instruction and the tedium of examination grading; at the same time, he was obliged to carry on his own research in order to qualify for promotion. But, typically, he did not know when that promotion would be considered, since the length of the probationary period had not been stipulated, and the ultimate decision, when arrived at, was likely to be made by the department head, whose judgment might be capricious but whose recommendatory word was often law. […]

The system [. . .] exploited and retarded apprentice scholars in the very years when they were asked to prove their worth. (“Origins” 233)

One of the reasons for this burgeoning of junior faculty positions was the transformation of the American university after 1870 from an embodiment of the liberal arts tradition to a more compartmentalized institution based on the German model. This transformation gradually caused academic departments to become more and more isolated from one another, an isolation which in turn resulted in a more hierarchical organization for the departments themselves. As John C. Brereton points out, after 1870 “professors immersed themselves in their studies or laboratories to produce research, the disciplines organized themselves on scholarly rather than pedagogical lines, and universities slowly abandoned much low-level teaching to an underclass of instructors and graduate student assistants” (5).

Changes in the idea and structure of the American university caused not only a disparity between the working conditions of senior professors and those of their junior colleagues, but also a rift between faculty and
administration. Prior to 1869, universities had been governed, as Metzger puts it, “en famille,” due primarily to the fact that administrators as well as faculty were clergymen with “a shared religious purpose, a common pedagogic function, [and] a similar intellectual background” (“Origins” 235). However, increasing specialization, coupled with a dramatic increase in the number of undergraduate students, led to an increase in enrollment in graduate programs, producing a larger and more heterogeneous faculty: between 1883 and 1913, the number of university professors in the United States more than tripled (Brereton 7; Metzger, “Origins” 231). These professors, furthermore, were increasingly more loyal to their disciplines, and less loyal to their institutions, as the arbiters and determiners of truth; in the late nineteenth century, clerical furor over Darwin’s theory of evolution had eroded scientists’ confidence in the ability of the clergy who still headed colleges and universities to “control the dominion of knowledge” (Hofstadter and Metzger 350; see also 320-66). The scientific method (and, eventually, discipline-based methods of inquiry generally) replaced the clergy and the board of trustees as the ultimate reference point for validity in academic inquiry; what constituted truth—insofar as truth could be known—was now, academics felt, determined by disciplines and their growing bodies of knowledge.

Faced, then, with larger faculties, the members of which no longer had that much in common, university presidents “abandoned teaching and research to concentrate on administration: the cleavage of academe into two vocations ended the harmony of a shared routine” (Metzger, “Origins” 235). This “cleavage” became more pronounced when presidents proceeded to delegate authority to vice presidents and deans, thereby moving farther away from the faculty and their concerns. As a result, presidents and faculty began to look on each other with a good deal of suspicion:

[W]ith the delegation of executive authority to a graded lieutenancy of deans, the relations of the president to the faculty became less direct and more impersonal. Separation, if it did not automatically create hostility, did create discordant self-perceptions. [. . .] the president, perched atop a hierarchy, was likely to regard the faculty as subordinates to whom he could state wishes as commands. But the faculty, as it gained prominence in the specialties, was likely to regard the president, who was a specialist in nothing but administration, as organizationally very powerful but academically second-
class. [. . .] the stage was set for that clash of expectan-
cies, that divorce of legitimacy from power, that has
troubled faculty-administration relationships to this very
day. (Metzger, “Origins” 235)

Administrators, then, in an attempt to curry favor with a faculty that
was becoming increasingly hostile to them, left departments to themselves:
“[Administrations] recognized the need to demarcate certain institutional
provinces where the professional spirit could be accommodated and which
the professional man [sic] could call his own. Thus, they recognized the
classroom as the teacher’s sanctuary and fenced it off from administrative
patrol” (Metzger, “Origins” 235). Faculty, in turn, began to see themselves
by definition as other than administrators.

Connections and Disconnections

The first three of the aforementioned historical circumstances—arbi-
trary dismissal, indefinite probation, and the founding of the AAUP—
resulted, ultimately, in the tenure system as we know it. From 1915 until
1940, and in collaboration with the Association of American Colleges
(AAC) and other professional organizations, the AAUP worked to develop
a statement of policies and procedures on academic freedom and tenure;
in 1940, and after negotiation and some compromise, the statement was
adopted by both the AAC and the AAUP (Hofstadter and Metzger 474-90;
AAUP 3-7). Though colleges and universities seldom granted the policy
“official” status—by incorporating it into their bylaws, for example—it
nevertheless became de facto policy at most American colleges and
universities, where administrators as well as faculty saw the need for a
uniform agreement on probationary periods and tenure rules (Hofstadter
and Metzger 474-90).

What became the standard practice articulated in the 1940 state-
ment—tenure, after a probationary period—was, of course, justified in part
by the assumption that it would guarantee academic freedom, defined
as freedom in responsible, informed teaching and research within one’s
discipline. In the statement, academic freedom and tenure are presented
as having a reciprocal relationship: “Tenure is a means to certain ends:
specifically [. . .] freedom of teaching and research” (AAUP 3). However,
due to the widening gap between administration and faculty—and
what Metzger describes as administrators’ desire to “demarcate certain
institutional provinces which the professional man could call his own”—the
concept of academic freedom articulated by the statement was circum-
scribed by the boundaries of the classroom, the library, and the academic
journal or book: “Teachers,” says the statement,

are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publica-
tion of the results, subject to the adequate performance
of their other academic duties. [. . .]

Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in
discussing their subject. [. . .] Limitations of freedom
because of religious or other aims of the institution
should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the
appointment. (AAUP 3)

Nowhere within the statement is there a sense that academic freedom
exists beyond the bounds of the classroom or the research article—e.g.,
in a meeting between someone who directs a writing program and a higher-
level administrator; in the pages of a faculty handbook articulating how to
develop a writing-intensive course; in a faculty senate meeting arguing for
the merits of the current placement-testing system vs. standardized testing.
In other words, academic freedom does not exist in the halls, where
WPAs do much of their work. That composition studies—of which writing
program administration is a subfield—evolved differently from, and at a
different time than, other disciplines undoubtedly has much to do with
the omission of the halls from the university’s free spaces. The idea of
academic freedom itself, however, is probably more to blame: based in part
on the German concepts of Lernfreiheit and Lehrfreiheit—freedoms, loosely
translated, to learn and to teach—it meant freedom from “administrative
coercion” (Hofstadter and Metzger 383-412). And the very thing a WPA
tries to do in the halls, of course, is influence what goes on in the
classroom.2

Where to Go Next

This activity does not, however, necessarily make the WPA an
administrator in the same sense that deans and college presidents are
administrators. Though WPAs have managerial and administrative duties
and often hold administrative appointments—hence, as one reviewer of
this piece pointed out to me, the “A” in WPA—I would argue, as has
the WPA Council, that the difference between a WPA and a dean or a
higher-level manager is that WPA work, like the work of more traditional
academic disciplines, is grounded in research and scholarship and is
ultimately intellectual and pedagogical rather than managerial (“Evaluating
the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration”). WPAs should,
therefore, be entitled to academic freedom in the halls when, to borrow
and modify Christine A. Hult’s formulation, they apply disciplinary and theoretical knowledge to solve curricular and programmatic problems (120). Unfortunately, WPAs weren’t around at the end of the nineteenth century, when the terms “faculty member” and “administrator” were in the process of being defined; if they had been, they might have been able to promote a wider view of where freedom of research, teaching, and inquiry should take place. (WPAs are good at such things.) Admittedly, sometimes WPA work is, yes, just managerial; it would be helpful if the complexities of WPA positions—as described throughout Tim Peeples’s fine essay, “Seeing the WPA With/Through Postmodern Mapping,” on the shifting roles of the WPA—were immediately apparent all day, every day. Postmodernity notwithstanding, however, university politics and the realities of labor law often require that WPAs be defined—and therefore define themselves—as one thing or another; so the faculty/administration split that began not so long before the establishment of the tenure system, and that continues to widen today, effectively bars academic freedom for WPAs unless the WPA is—as I have been—a faculty member in an AAUP chapter with status as a collective bargaining unit and a good deal of power on campus.

The push in composition studies has been for WPAs to establish themselves more firmly within the faculty camp, and, therefore, take some of the precariousness out of their strangely dual roles, by presenting their work as intellectual; this has proved, needless to say, an ongoing and difficult task. As Hult’s “The Scholarship of Administration” and the document on the intellectual work of the WPA make clear, composition specialists must continually labor to redefine their work so it will be understood and valued adequately as faculty work: “WPAs,” Hult observes, “need to do a better job of persuading others in the academy of the scholarly merit of the work we are engaged in” (120). Doing a better job might ultimately—the argument implies—result in more faculty appointments for WPAs, more promotion and tenure, and less frequent occurrences of the firing narrative.

I wonder, however, if it really would. Tenure, for one thing, does not always prevent removal from WPA duties: a tenured WPA could, for example, be returned to full-time teaching and see his or her program taken away. It seems that, in order for the stories WPAs tell to change, faculty in other disciplines might have to begin seeing work done in the halls as the same as work done in the classroom: as, in other words, something that needed to be protected for everybody’s good. And this kind of vision is rare. If I might revert back, for a moment, to personal narrative: during my nonrenewal proceedings, the officials of our AAUP chapter with whom I worked—a biologist and a sociologist—saw my
case as a potentially successful academic freedom grievance. However, its potential was never tested; I received renewal papers without actually going to grievance. I have since been appointed to the Connecticut State University Academic Freedom Panel, and similar cases have suggested that very traditional views of academic freedom (e.g., if it’s in the classroom, it’s protected; if it’s not, it’s not) still prevail.

There are, of course, many arenas in which WPAs—and perhaps the Council of Writing Program Administrators—should work to better the lot of WPAs generally. I would argue that one of these is AAUP, because of AAUP’s historical—and continuing—commitment to protecting disciplinary expertise, and because of the fact that our current circumstances mirror those that prompted the founding of the organization in 1915. We have, in addition to all our other ongoing and difficult jobs, some catching up to do, some blanks to fill in. Here are some suggestions:

• When AAUP President James Perley, a biologist, addressed the 1997 WPA Conference at Michigan Tech after having sat in on sessions for two days, he commented not only on the validity of writing program administration’s claim to disciplinarity but also on the fact that, before coming to the conference, he had known very little about that discipline. Individual WPAs might be more vigilant about requesting AAUP investigations when they feel their disciplinary prerogatives have been violated. By requesting investigations, we might bring the existence of our discipline as a discipline to the attention of a national organization of faculty in other fields, who can then begin to see our work in a larger context than its immediate institutional one. We can then begin cross-disciplinary dialogues about where our common interests lie.

• Members of the Council of Writing Program Administrators might talk with AAUP Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure about how the Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure might be rethought to accommodate such disciplines as our own, which have evolved since the last time the statement was revised. The 1940 statement is predicated on a faculty/administration divide that may need to be reconsidered in light of
the way certain disciplines—e.g., composition—not only apply but also construct knowledge.

- WPAs might be aware that AAUP also concerns itself with such matters as due process, curriculum, and governance, not simply with academic freedom (see, for instance, AAUP, Policy Documents and Reports 177-213). If the Council of Writing Program Administrators is unable to expand the definition of academic freedom, WPAs might consider asking for more investigations in these other areas when they feel retaliation has taken place without just cause.

- Those of us in unions—AAUP or other—might become more knowledgeable about whether our contracts define us as faculty or administration, and work to change those aspects of our contracts that might endanger our jobs if we exercise our disciplinary judgment. If our contracts classify us as faculty, we might also work to demonstrate solidarity with other faculty members by taking active roles in our unions (e.g., becoming grievance officers), demonstrating good faith with other faculty and thereby initiating dialogue about what we have in common with them. Such issues as class size, for example, and exploitation of part-timers are concerns not only of WPAs but of other faculty, as well (AAUP 50-61).

- Since—as Marcia Dickson has pointed out—WPAs are sometimes perceived as threatening individual faculty members’ academic freedom, we might point out organizational and theoretical work in our field that preserves that freedom (271-72). Barbara Walvoord’s work in WAC, for example, stresses the importance of cross-disciplinary dialogue in WAC curriculum development and has recently called into question the notion of the WPA as missionary; the Spring 1998 issue of WPA: Writing Program Administration, guest-edited by Jeanne Gunner, gathers into one place our discipline’s recent thoughts on administration, collaboration, and authority. Furthermore, those of us who have been working to develop the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year
Composition are also developing supporting materials that suggest how the Outcomes Statement might be used to help writing programs articulate common goals while allowing a variety of individual approaches to the first-year composition course itself; such materials might be used to demonstrate our discipline’s commitment to individual instructors’ autonomy in the classroom (Harrington, et al.).

Obviously, AAUP is only one organization with which we might work to better our working lives. But I think it is one with which we need to work because historically it has had a good deal to do with how disciplinary expertise is perceived, honored, and protected. In any case, working with a cross-disciplinary organization may help us feel less isolated. After my nonrenewal debacle, I got myself elected to the ECSU-AAUP union council, and when I get together with my colleagues in other disciplines and discuss the matters we discuss—class sizes, hiring policies, promotion and tenure practices—I am struck not by how different I am as a WPA from many others on the faculty but by how much I have in common with many of them in terms of concerns, fears, and hopes for the future. And if one of those hopes is that the genre of the firing narrative will, at some point, become a genre of the past—well, I’m there, I’m a member, sign me up.

Notes

1 For a more detailed discussion of a very similar situation, see my essay in Myers-Breslin, 146-64.

2 Metzger gives a full explanation of the German idea of academic freedom and how it both did and did not transfer to the United States; see Hofstadter and Metzger, 367-412.

Works Cited

English/Hesse/intellec.htm>


Malenczyk, Rita. “Productive Change in a Turbulent Atmosphere: Pipe Dream or Possibility?” Myers-Breslin. 146-64.


Because Composition takes student writing as its central object of study, our discipline has emerged as the only place in the academy—outside Schools of Education, of course—where teaching is valued both as an activity in itself and as an area worthy of scholarly investigation. Indeed, it is safe to say that Composition understands itself to be and would like to be understood by others as the institutional preserve of sound pedagogical practice. We are the ones who are interested in process, not product. We are the ones who have student-centered rather than content-driven courses. And we are the ones who are committed to thinking and learning, equal access, group work, collaboration, and all the other pillars that support the democratic ideal.

It is easy enough to understand why those of us who teach composition have been so taken by this image of ourselves and the work we do; toiling away in obscurity, teaching on the margins of the academy, we have all had the experience of helping non-performing students succeed, and we have all heard tales about how those same students have been willfully neglected by other teachers in other disciplines. We have the evidence of our experience and, because of this, we know in our bones that the heavy demands placed on those of us who must read, assess, and respond to so much student writing differ considerably from the demands placed on our colleagues elsewhere in the system. About this, we are not wrong.

But it is also true that this familiar, reassuring image of the diligent, noble composition instructor haunts much of our scholarship, influencing both what we do and how we discuss what we do. It is there,
lurking behind all those conference papers and research projects that describe how a pedagogical intervention—a class discussion, a sequence of assignments, a passing comment, a face-to-face meeting—helped release a student into language. This image of the benevolent instructor is there as well when we put together our research projects and when we set about the task of constructing the history of our field. And so, it is with relative ease that we find ourselves moving through the archive to recover our field’s great teachers and central figures (Aspasia, Fred Newton Scott, Mina Shaughnessy, Theodore Baird, and Richard Young, say) and then tracing out the steady evolution in thought that the work of these individuals has made possible. This way of telling our story is both comfortable and comforting; it organizes the fractured, chaotic past into a comprehensible whole, and it lends to that past a shape, a direction, and, a fortiori, a drama.

It’s hard to resist the structuring power of this way of narrating history, where the evolution of our discipline is cast as a story about how, against considerable odds, dedicated individuals managed to work together to battle faceless bureaucrats, an indifferent institution, smug, lethargic colleagues. But, as pleasurable as it would be to tell such “veterans’ stories on the porch,” as Lester Faigley terms the activity of trading favorable interpretations of the past, in what follows I want to argue for the value of looking at Composition from the perspective of that other central player in the drama of higher education—not the teacher or the student, but the administrator. If in this drama it is the role of the students to resist and of the teachers to liberate, what is the administrator’s function? When the administrator surveys the work of composition, what is it that he or she sees? By learning to look at the business of writing instruction from the administrator’s point of view, it is possible that, in addition to finding ways both to rewrite the history of the discipline and to redefine the focus of classroom research, we might just uncover ways to materially change the working conditions of those who teach writing. Consider this, then, a thought experiment, an exercise in a different kind of boundary crossing, one that sets out to blur the distinctions between those who teach and those who manage.

Composition as the Perpetual Training of Novices and Newcomers

In Rhetoric and Composition graduate programs, the discipline of Composition appears as a set of engaged and conflicting theoretical positions, a place to foster the ability to read and assess student work, and a profession occupied by an array of thoughtful writers, theorists, and
practitioners; this, at least, is what it looks like to those of us who see the work of writing instruction as a scholarly, intellectually engaging venture. However, from the administrator’s point of view, Composition is not its central figures or a reading list comprised of the groundbreaking articles and monographs in the field. It is, rather, composition with a small “c” and it is defined as the business of managing an instructional workforce whose very labor is made necessary by the requirements for graduation and credentialization. In other words, from the administrator’s point of view, being in the business of composition comes means being in the business of gatekeeping—of regulating the flow of students into, around, and out of the university. Because the first-year writing course provides one way for the university’s central administration to sort through all those entering students, the requirement also produces a staffing problem that the administration must confront: who will teach all those students to write? The most frequent solution to this problem at all institutions with graduate programs—including those with programs in Rhetoric and Composition—is to appoint a tenured or tenure-track faculty member to oversee the temporary employees whose job it is to provide the bulk of writing instruction to the entering students; that is, a faculty member or a handful of faculty members is assigned to manage the labor of the part-timers, the teaching assistants, and the instructors on non-renewable contracts. 1

When looked at in this way, composition begins to lend itself quite readily to numerical description. For example, when I served as the acting director of the writing program at Rutgers University in the spring of 1998, composition was 206 sections of writing courses offered at four different levels of instruction; it required one hundred and twelve teachers, including TAs (who receive health benefits and teach two courses a year) from English and other disciplines, instructors (who teach a 4/3 load, with health benefits, on annual contracts renewable up to four years), part-time lecturers (who teach whatever is left unstaffed for a flat fee, without benefits); it required the administrative support of seven assistant directors, four of whom charged with coordinating work in the different writing courses and three of whom had primary responsibility for managing a writing center on one of our three campuses; it involved folder review with each teacher at midterm and at the end of the semester to ensure parity of evaluation between courses, relative pedagogical alignment, and the delivery of an acceptable level of instruction; it required a support staff that includes an administrative assistant, three full-time secretaries, a part time secretary, a handful of work study students, and countless undergraduate writing tutors. At the end of the semester, once the 112 teachers had finished teaching the 206 courses and the seven directors and
I had reviewed the student folders, all this instructional and supervisory work ended up generating some 6,000 grades, 81 of which were appealed (a process that involves an additional day of folder review, commenting, judging, adjudicating split decisions, and resolutions), 12 of which were granted.

When looking at composition as something immersed in all these layers of instruction, administration, oversight, and review, one can’t help but realize that the pedagogical project blinking atop the tower at command central is not necessarily the one received in the outer provinces. That is, for all the excellent, dedicated teachers who diligently do their jobs, one inevitably finds the persistence of less competent instruction: there are those who teach for a semester or two and then disappear from the system; there are those who disagree with the program’s pedagogical approach and consistently hand in performances that are just above mediocre; there are the last minute hires who have been inadequately trained; and there are those who, for whatever complex set of reasons and/or circumstances, prove unequal to the task in any given semester. No amount of supervision or mentoring will change the fact that, at a large university such as ours, the composition classroom underwrites the work of graduate students, many of whom, reasonably enough, see their teaching responsibilities as detracting from their scholarly endeavors. No amount of enthusiasm or collegiality—often the only capital a writing program administrator has to expend—will guarantee that either full-time instructors or part-time lecturers will feel included in the program’s larger pedagogical mission. However hard one may work to eradicate these problems—and the director, the associate director, and all the assistant directors work hard indeed to do so—the variable commitments of the teachers in any given semester to the task of providing writing instruction of the highest quality means that students inevitably find themselves in the hands of a labor force composed almost exclusively of temporary workers on their way to other destinations. Most of these teachers do a good job. Some don’t.

From the administrator’s point of view, then, composition is not simply the theories that prevail about how best to teach others to write or the disagreements that preoccupy the field, nor is it best captured by narratives describing triumphs in individual classrooms, where an isolated instructor introduced an innovation that enabled a handful of students to respond in a more lively, engaged way to a challenging assignment. Composition is also an unevenly trained, unevenly committed workforce; it is the litigious labor of pursuing plagiarism cases; it is an ongoing series of meetings with disgruntled students and protective parents; it is plaintive
memos to chairs and deans seeking additional support to handle the ever-growing entering classes; it is X number of students and Y number of teachers and Z number of grades. Composition as a specific pedagogical approach does not disappear in this view, but the preeminent status accorded to pedagogy as the organizing force behind what occurs in the classroom is rescinded in order to bring into view the other forces that structure the work of writing instruction. Obviously, one would hope that an administrator would have pedagogical commitments of some kind (though this, we must all concede, is not necessarily a requirement for the job), but whether the administrator does or does not possess such interests, taking the administrator’s view of composition allows one to acknowledge that what happens in the classroom is as dependent upon local admission standards, the available labor force, and the prevailing salary structure as it is, say, on what texts happen to be assigned in a given section or which version of the writing process a given teacher holds in the highest esteem.

By taking these larger forces into consideration, it becomes possible to recast composition’s master narrative so that it includes the discipline’s actual labor force, one that is, by and large, oblivious to all but the most local forms of composition studies, one that sees itself, like so many of the students who pass through the required composition courses, as on its way to something bigger, better, more important. Along with this inescapable aspect of what it means to work in composition, there is, as well, the ready evidence that such work is not particularly valued by all of the students who are compelled to attend these courses. There are the hallways at the end of the semester, littered with graded folders, unclaimed and then eventually disposed of. There is the abiding belief among teachers that there is, somewhere, a frat file filled with re-usable papers, a persistent sense that there is a place out there, like www.schoolsucks.com, where students meet to undermine the business of learning how to write. There are the conferences with the parents of the students who have failed—the parents who speak of their child’s high SAT scores, their sense that composition is just a requirement, a hoop to move through, an impediment to a successful career in pharmacology. There is the flattening of the writing process into the writing regime: prewrite, write, revise, move towards clarity, the unifying theme, the iron clad thesis. There is, in short, the sense from the students and many of their teachers that composition instruction ought to be more instrumentalist and less exploratory, on the one hand, and, more personal and less academic, on the other.

The prevalence of these working conditions helps to explain why our field has, of late, been preoccupied with “resistance”—ours is a field
where many who are present would prefer to be somewhere else doing something else, some place where they might reasonably hope to receive something more than the prospect of additional part-time work as a reward for a job well done. There are many ways to respond to this fact of life in composition: one can ignore it, bemoan it, insist against all evidence to the contrary that it isn’t true—or at least that it shouldn’t be true. While I am sure that each of these responses has its virtues, I am equally convinced that official accounts of the theory and practice of composition would be significantly altered and improved if they commenced with the admission that there is considerable play between whatever one might mean by an ideal pedagogical practice and the actual modes of instruction available to a given teacher, at a given institution, at a given time. In a program as large as ours, for example, we have had to concede that not all of our teachers are terribly interested in either composition or pedagogy as areas of possible research. And this, in turn, has meant shifting the supervisory emphasis away from a fine grained analysis of what happens in the classroom to a careful consideration of the quality of the writing the teachers are able to elicit from their students. So, when assessing the teaching that our instructors have provided, we don’t go into the classrooms and we don’t demand loyalty oaths either. Instead, twice a semester, we meet with the teachers and look over the work their students have produced. We pay particular attention to the failing students, the teacher’s comments, the assignments. And what we learn over and over again during the labor-intensive process is that the presence of the same textbook in the various classrooms does not guarantee a homogeneous experience of Expository Writing 101 for students across the university, nor does the mandatory orientation for new teachers, nor does the required seminar for first time TAs. Inevitably the program fragments into heterogeneous sections, where work of variable quality and interest is generated. All students in the required course use the same reader; they all write and revise six papers; they all are subject to the same grading criteria. And yet, upon inspection, it is clear that not all of the students have taken the same course. Even in a program with a relatively coherent pedagogical mission and a well-trained and committed staff eager to disseminate that mission, composition resists reification and becomes, instead, compositions.

It is not hard to imagine a preferable situation, one where teachers felt such a sense of community that they regularly convened to discuss recent work in the field and to assess a range of innovative pedagogical practices, one where it was possible to retain and promote good teachers, one where working with first-year students was understood to be a
privilege rather than a chore to be abandoned at the first opportunity. But the truth about our program is the truth about composition studies more generally: one does the best one can with the materials at one’s disposal. Or, to put it another way, work in composition is inevitably pragmatic and thus, like all good teaching, the administration and dissemination of writing instruction necessarily involves a series of compromises and concessions. While this inescapable aspect of our working conditions is typically cast as lamentable—i.e., in a better system, one wouldn’t have to deal with an unwilling workforce, low wages, and a disengaged student clientele—it is also true that the discipline’s abiding interest in pedagogy emerges out of these same working conditions. That is, composition has become the preeminent site for thinking about the theory and practice of teaching precisely because of its high turnover rate: to be in composition is to be endlessly involved in providing instruction to beginning students and/or the training of new teachers. Thus, since composition’s labor force and its clientele are always predominantly novices, the field is forever faced with the task of introducing newcomers on both sides of the lectern to the idea of the writing process, sequenced assignments, group work, journals, revision, peer review. In such an environment, when the conversation veers too far afield from the daily business of moving teachers and students through the course, someone’s bound to say, “This is all very interesting, but what am I supposed to do on Monday morning when the papers are due and no one will talk?” To work in composition—to read its journals, to go to its conferences, to train its teachers—is to work in an atmosphere saturated with such practical concerns; to work in composition is to be endlessly harassed by the mundane problem of learning how to make one’s words do things in the world.

Who Should Teach Writing? Survival Strategies in the New Service-Oriented University

I must admit that I, too, tire of the “what do I do on Monday” question and am keenly aware of its potentially conservative effects. (It’s not hard for me to imagine, for instance, the reader who finds little of value in the project of re-assessing the role that the bureaucrat plays in the master narrative of the classroom.) Nevertheless, I think the reliable question about Monday morning has considerable heuristic value, because it helps to keep composition mired in the real: while elsewhere in the academy, the desire to know the practical implications of any given piece of research is often met with derision, research in composition is driven, in large part, by an interest in determining what is to be gained by the adoption of any given approach to writing instruction. Thus, whenever
research and scholarship is pursued in the field, it is implicitly understood to be done in the service of some overarching pedagogical mission. Consequently, no matter how lofty the aspirations of any given project in the field—linking postcolonial theory with the basic writing classroom, say, or postmodern theories of the visual with computer-assisted instruction, or liberatory pedagogy with the fight against globalism—ultimately, to be in composition, the project in question must include an obligatory bow towards the practical. And this is because, at some point, we all want to know what difference all this word-shedding is going to make in our daily lives as teachers of entry-level students, of beginning graduate students, of degree individuals new to the field.

With the ongoing professionalization of composition, some have come to see the persistence of this commitment to serving the needs of novices as more and more of a burden. Sharon Crowley, one of the most vocal advocates of the “Abolitionist” position, insists that composition must sever its ties to the first year required course if it is ever to have a chance of escaping from the basement of the academy. The problem, as Crowley defines it, rests squarely with composition’s commitment to the “instrumental service ethic of the required composition course,” which has “kept the traditional goals of disciplinarity—the pursuit of knowledge and the professional advancement of practitioners—beyond the reach of composition studies until very recently” (253). This commitment to serving the university’s need to sift and sort through the entering class has not only severely hampered the growth of composition as a discipline in its own right, it has also forever linked work in composition to the exploitation of the vast majority of its teaching force. The first-year requirement, Crowley’s argument goes, not only makes everyone who teaches composition appear intellectually inferior to their colleagues in the other disciplines, it also makes all writing programs into dens of the worst sorts of inequities, where “rhetoric slaves” are forced to do degrading work under appalling conditions (118ff.). If composition could only sever its ties to the albatross of the first-year course, it would then rise to a more envious level of intellectual rigor and disciplinary purity: no longer would valuable time be spent, for instance, on “one of the more appalling surveillance functions of Freshman English—the placement exam,” functions which Crowley elsewhere terms, “discursive gangbangs” (244). Rather, freed of the burden and the stigma of the required course, armed with their PhDs in rhetoric and composition, writing specialists could begin both to generate advanced, respectable research and to develop an “elective vertical curriculum” capable of meeting the needs of those students who wish, voluntarily, to receive extensive undergraduate training in “public discourse” (263).
Whatever the limits of Crowley’s vision for composition may be, who but an utter beast could resist the attraction of eliminating one’s involvement with the business of exploiting others? And this, surely, is the primary appeal of Crowley’s latest proposal: it promises those who work in composition greater prestige and less guilt, more research and less service work. But, however attractive it may be to think that washing our hands of the first-year requirement will prove beneficial to those who survive this academic version of corporate downsizing, I think embracing this narrow model of professionalism will only serve to guarantee that those who remain in composition after the purge will be returned to the furthest margins of the academy. The “rhetoric slaves” will have been liberated, the “discursive gangbangs” will have come to an end, and the disciplinary machinery will have been freed—all to produce what exactly? What would the work of composition be if it were not centrally concerned with the issues I’ve raised here—the training of novices and newcomers, the pragmatic business of finding practical applications for theoretical insights?

Obviously, in the rhetorical situation that Crowley sets up in her collection of polemical essays, where all nonbelievers are, ipso facto, supporters of slavery, the most prudent response is to remain silent. (And, for those who study the dynamics of educational reform, there’s another reason for remaining silent as well: it’s clear enough that historically polemics generate a good deal of talk but end up changing very little, so why bother responding?) In this case, though, I believe it is worthwhile to engage with Crowley’s argument because I share her desire to think through what it might take both to improve the working conditions of writing instructors and to extend the intellectual scope of work in the field. But, whereas Crowley believes our best bet is to abandon the ethic of service that binds us to the first-year course and to pursue advanced research to bolster our disciplinary status, I’ve come to think the discussion of what composition might become would be greatly enriched if we began by questioning the very assumption of specialization that has made our professionalization possible. That is, I think we would do well to ask the kind of question an administrator might ask about composition: does one really need to have an advanced degree in the field to be a good writing teacher? Aside from conferring credentials, what is it that graduate programs in Rhetoric and Composition actually provide? Or, to put this another way, exactly how many graduate courses does one need to take in order to become a proficient writing teacher?

Posing these questions helps to flush out the central assumption shared by all members of the profession: namely, that the training provided
by the discipline is valuable and necessary. And yet, in the case of writing instruction, there are many reasons to withhold one’s assent to this credo. First, there’s ample evidence that one need not have a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition to do a good job teaching entry-level writing courses: much of the burden of writing instruction is currently handled by those who lack a doctorate in writing—first-year graduate students, part-time teachers with masters degrees, and teachers from other disciplines. Second, there’s ample cause to doubt the notion that the acquisition of the PhD in Rhetoric and Composition establishes either the ability or the commitment to do a good job of teaching; indeed, it’s safe to say that the professionalization of composition has produced its fair share of degree-holders who are every bit as committed to teaching graduate students and to staying out of the first-year classroom as are their counterparts from the other disciplines. And finally, there’s the pesky historical fact that composition was created by people who came from other disciplines—English, of course, but also linguistics, communications, anthropology, and creative writing, to name the most obvious examples. Any discipline must at some point face the logical antinomy of its moment of origin—that time when it was brought into being if not out of nothingness, then out of a concatenation of contingent forces and chance encounters between seemingly and/or suddenly like-minded individuals. The older a discipline gets, the easier it is to efface the randomness of these events and to superimpose on the past a narrative involving necessity or destiny or foresighted individuals. Indeed, many of the senior members in our field came from the time Before Composition. Ann Berthoff, Peter Elbow, Andrea Lunsford, Donald McQuade, David Bartholomae, Nancy Sommers, Patricia Bizzell, Mike Rose, Linda Flower, Joseph Harris, Kurt Spellmeyer, Louise Smith, John Brereton, Shirley Brice Heath—not one of these folks has a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, and yet each one has exercised considerable influence over the shape and direction of the field.

My feeling is that composition has been very well served by this eclecticism and that it will be ill-served by buying into the logic of credentialization that informs the other disciplines. While it may seem reasonable to restrict work in composition to those holding advanced degrees in the field, think for a moment about what would be made possible if the first-year writing course were reconfigured as one staffed by interested teachers from a wide range of disciplines. What would happen, in other words, if the work of composition were not understood to belong exclusively either to departments of English or to graduate programs in
Rhetoric and Composition? From the administrative point of view, this would mean that teaching in the writing program would cease to be work largely reserved for English TAs or Rhetoric and Composition TAs and instead would become work that was available to any graduate student from any discipline who applied and agreed to receive training in the field. This in turn would mean that work in composition and rhetoric could become truly interdisciplinary—that is, interdisciplinary not just through the texts assigned in its courses but also by virtue of the labor force it trains and employs.

The benefits of going in this direction are, I believe, unmistakable: a writing program that sought to employ an interdisciplinary work force could begin to generate a curriculum that was more fully responsive to the needs and concerns of all students in the required course and in the advanced, elective courses. That is, a writing program of this kind could cease trafficking in texts and assignments that appeal almost exclusively to those training for careers in English Studies or in Rhetoric and Composition and turn its attention, instead, to developing curricular materials that capitalize on the remarkable pedagogical possibilities that are made available by the first-year course’s uniquely heterogeneous population. And by rethinking who could or might be qualified to do the work of teaching composition, it becomes possible to reconsider where this work should be done (should composition be housed in English departments or not?) and what the content of this work should be (should all students be taught the persuasive essay? close reading? cultural critique?). In sum, then, looking at composition from the administrator’s point of view allows one to ask a question that must be of central concern to anyone who is committed to teaching: whose interests are served by the current dominant practices for organizing the labor of writing instruction?

In raising this question, I mean to draw attention to the fact that, by and large, the curriculum for the first-year writing course has been designed—reasonably enough—to serve the needs and reflect the interests of the course’s labor force. And, broadly speaking, this has meant that the first-year course has tended to fetishize the power of language, fostering the belief that the key to social change rests with effective argumentation or the mastery of academic discourse or the voyage to one’s inner sanctum. But, if we re-imagine composition not as a set of texts, a series of important figures, or a prescribed position on the writing process, and recognize, instead, that the field’s sole claim to coherence comes from its institutional position as the place where first-year students, regardless of disciplinary interest or political leanings, are collected together, it becomes easier to entertain the possibility that the best way to re-invigorate the field, both
intellectually and professionally, may be to make it more responsive to the
students it serves. And, one way to make this happen is to open up the
teaching of the course to people outside the disciplines of English, and
Rhetoric and Composition.

I realize that this suggestion is bound to seem like a breach of
disciplinary solidarity, but I think we need to ask what is gained by
restricting the instruction of undergraduate writing to those who have
received advanced training in English, Rhetoric, or Composition. While
I readily understand the benefits of reserving this work for people who
have earned advanced degrees in these disciplines, I believe these hiring
practices ignore the fact that writing plays a central role in the advanced
work of nearly every discipline: like graduate students who have been
trained by programs in English, Composition, or Rhetoric, graduate students
from other disciplines have the experience of pulling together a mass of
evidence, organizing and shaping that material, and putting it into a form
that is recognized and valued by those who work in their disciplines. I
believe that anyone who has had a writing experience of this kind who
also possesses the desire to work with entry-level students on their writing
has the potential to do a good job in the composition classroom. All
such a person needs to succeed is some additional training in writing
process pedagogy and ready access to an experienced and helpful support
staff—and these are services that any writing program should be well
positioned to supply.

I didn’t always think this way. Indeed, when I came to Rutgers
seven years ago and learned that the writing program offered teaching
assistantships to graduate students from history, philosophy, economics,
sociology, anthropology, art history, comparative literature, and political
science, I was as surprised as anyone trained in composition would be.
And yet, over time, I came to see the benefits to this arrangement. First,
and foremost, the presence of these graduate students in our program upset
our assumptions about what constitutes “good writing.” Faced with an
audience of eager, but skeptical, beginning teachers, we had to acquire
new ways of describing and justifying the content and the requirements
of expository writing. The ensuing discussions generated a wealth of
pedagogical materials, a range of new research courses, a number of
textbook projects. All of this new work became necessary because, as
we began to listen to the teachers from the other disciplines, we came
to understand that their frustrations were not with the course, per se, or
with the goal of introducing students to academic discourse. Rather, what
troubled these teachers was the required textbook’s overriding commitment
to discourse analysis and our program’s abiding interest in close reading.
There are other ways to read and other ways to argue, these teachers told us again and again, ways that are highly valued elsewhere in the academy and that ought to be available for inspection and evaluation to students in the introductory course.

The presence of these teachers helped us to realize something else that had utterly escaped our attention. While what I have referred to here as composition’s master narrative serves to highlight the low-status of our work, it also manages to conceal the fact that writing programs actually possess resources that may well be highly-valued elsewhere in the university—namely, teaching assistantships. The critique of English that is usually mounted by those who work in composition is that English thrives off of the required course, using it as a place to warehouse all its graduate students while it goes about the merry business of generating trenchant analyses of post-colonial relations, the master-slave relationship, and economies of exploitation. And the truth is, historically, composition has been a colony of the English department. But, what may have escaped our attention as a result of our field’s determination to keep our embattled status uppermost in our minds at all times is the fact that we are a resource-rich colony: all the work that is created by the first-year requirement and that is performed by teaching assistants is work that is of considerable interest to other, resource-starved departments looking to fund students in their graduate programs.4

It’s certainly entertaining to imagine scenarios where composition stages its own Boston Tea Party and breaks free from the tyranny of the past. But, as long as that hoped for event remains unrealized, I think it more fruitful to focus on how those who administer writing programs might use their control over these valued resources to assume a more central role in the university. That is, the question that most interests me as I consider where composition has been and where it might go is this: what would happen to work in the field if composition understood its role to be better serving both the students and the entire university community? What we are just beginning to discover at my institution is that composition has much more to bargain with than it might at first seem. It has all those teaching assistantships. It has access to all those entering students. And it has its commitment to pedagogy. These are considerable assets, ones that, if managed correctly, could establish composition as the preeminent site for training undergraduates and their teachers how to master the business of writing within and across the disciplines.

But what of graduate work? What role would it play in this new, service-oriented writing program that employs not only teachers from English, and Rhetoric and Composition, but also teachers from other
disciplines? For my part, I would like to see advanced training in Rhetoric and Composition come to incorporate sustained work in acquiring what I have called here “the administrator’s point of view”; that is, to complement the intensive study of language and pedagogy, I would like to see the addition of courses that focus on management theory, historical and ethnographic work on how institutions change, labor studies, and unionization, for starters. It is not difficult to anticipate the critiques that will rise up in response to such a proposal. To go in this direction will surely mean reducing a purely intellectual endeavor to mere job training. To encourage teachers to learn the ways of administrators will necessarily result in a corruption of the labor force, saturating the field with the kind of repugnant managerial ethos that thinks of students as consumers and education as info-tainment. If there’s anything the academy is good at, it’s producing people who are horrified at the very notion that education might be treated as a business.

While our shared revulsion at the idea that market forces might be allowed to impinge on the world of ideas dependably binds us together as a community, it also prevents us from effectively responding to the changes that are going on all around us. The corporate bulldozers arrive and we retaliate with heartfelt, but clichéd, proclamations about the power of literacy, the importance of reading, the joys of a good book. If those of us committed to providing high quality instruction by teachers fairly rewarded for their labor don’t learn to respond to the changes the academy is undergoing in other, more compelling ways—that is, if we don’t learn how to make ourselves vitally useful in this shifting environment—we are willfully consigning ourselves and the discipline itself to oblivion.

Although I have deep reservations about the current tendency to grant extraordinary powers to the act of representation (change the signifier, change the world), I do believe that the future of composition studies will be shaped, in large part, by the ways that we decide to represent the work of composition to ourselves. This is not to say that learning to look at composition in the ways I’ve suggested here will guarantee the survival of the discipline, for no one can say with any certainty whether or not, over the next twenty years, the increased use of the World Wide Web and proliferation of distance education institutions will do away with the composition classroom as we have known it. However, looking at composition from the administrator’s point of view can enhance our sense of what role composition might play in the evolving university, opening up new areas for research and pedagogical innovation, thereby allowing the discipline to change as the form, function, and mode of delivering higher education changes. Learning how to think like an administrator also
enhances one’s ability to fight more effectively to preserve what one values about the work that is or might be done in the composition classroom. There is much to be gained, in other words, by thinking about composition as something other than a course taught by a large congregation of like-minded individuals, equally committed to the task of delivering the highest level of instruction. For, from the administrator’s point of view, “composition” is not the research that shows up in our journals or the talks given by our most eminent figures. It is, rather, a locally-incarnated entity, whose course content and intellectual goals are almost entirely shaped by a host of utterly contingent forces and issues—administrative styles, institutional expectations, the residential pedagogical culture, the available work force, and the perceived ability of entering students. In this realm, where pragmatism reigns supreme, the future may well belong to those who can tell the best stories about what their discipline has to offer—to the students, who need to be attracted and retained; to the teachers, who need to be intellectually engaged and justly remunerated; and to the administrators, who increasingly find themselves in need of palpable, credible evidence that their students are being well served.

Notes

1 And, of course, at institutions without graduate programs, the work of providing writing instruction falls most heavily on teachers of English and then on others whose specialties reside in the humanities, a situation that tends to promote programmatic incoherence. As I discuss, composition’s general reliance on a labor force trained in English has profoundly shaped the discipline’s sense of what could or should be accomplished in the first-year writing course.

2 At my institution for example, very few of our nearly 200 teachers have received additional training in composition beyond a week-long orientation and the one-semester graduate course offered by my department; many of our teachers have had less training than this. This is not necessarily a bad thing; it would only appear so if one felt that extensive reading in the research on composition and rhetoric was necessary to become an adequate teacher of the first-year course.

3 See Patrick Bizzaro’s recent essay, “What I Learned in Grad School, or Literary Training and the Theorizing of Composition,” for a discussion of the literary dissertations written by scholars who have subsequently gone on to play a central role in composition’s disciplinary success.
And, as the Boyer Commission’s report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*, makes clear, access to first-year students is an increasingly important commodity in the evolving university: “research universities need to be able to give to their students a dimension of experience and capability they cannot get in any other setting, a research experience that is genuine and meaningful” (38). Composition, which is central to nearly all undergraduates’ first-year experience, can provide the place where such invaluable experiences are fostered: we have the students, we have the small classes, and we have long exposure to service work.

“The Portland Resolution,” the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ response to the Wyoming Resolution, stipulates in its discussion of what constitutes adequate preparation for the job of managing a writing program that familiarity with business practices is a “desirable supplemental preparation” for the job.

**Works Cited**


Why Don’t Our Graduate Programs Do a Better Job of Preparing Students for the Work That We Do?

Thomas P. Miller

It can be hard to raise such questions because the profession has historically distanced itself from the world of work. We have all encountered colleagues who dismiss teaching business or technical writing and think teaching writing is generally about mechanics. Such integrally related attitudes are a product of the conflicted history of the discipline, reaching back to the establishment of college English as a field of scholarly research centered on literary studies, with publications on rhetoric and composition largely confined to the mechanics-driven textbooks identified with the “current-traditional” paradigm. Much of the work we value was placed beneath the concerns of the profession as professors came to think of themselves as disciplinary specialists rather than educators. Such assumptions enable those of us who teach in research institutions to assume that our graduates

Profession: The declaration [. . .] of one entering a religious order; hence, the act of entering such an order; [. . .] a particular order of monks, nuns or other professed persons; [. . .] the occupation which one professes to be skilled in and to follow; [. . .] the function or office of a professor in a university or college. (Oxford English Dictionary)

“Professionalization” and “academicization” are not neutral principles of organization, but agents that transform the cultural and literary-critical “isms” fed into them, often to the point of subverting their original purpose, or so deflecting them that they become unrecognizable to outsiders. What goes in is not necessarily what comes out, and this is one reason why the things the institution seems self-evidently to stand for to insiders may scarcely register on outsiders. (Graff, Professing Literature 5)

I must confess that I have always hated English and feel that anyone who would choose this subject as their profession is totally whacked out of their skulls (from a student’s course evaluation)
will carry on the studies they began with us, though they will likely do quite different work than we do—if they get jobs.

Such assumptions continue to operate at a tacit level even as the profession begins to pay more attention to teaching than it has since the MLA established itself as a scholarly organization and closed down its Pedagogy Section a century ago. Nonetheless, whenever a colleague passes us in the hall and asks us what we are working on, we immediately respond by talking about our scholarship, for “work” in such commonsensical exchanges means research, not teaching and certainly not service “obligations.” Colleagues with heavy “teaching loads” and little time to do research tend to fall into an awkward silence in such conversations. Just as we define our “work” as research in such professional pleasantries, we generally understand our area of work as a field of scholarship, and our graduate programs are largely oriented to teaching students to understand the work of the field in just such terms. As a result, students are presented with a conception of the profession that inevitably excludes most of them and much of what they do, for those who go on to teach four or five classes a semester in community colleges and other broad-based institutions will have learned to think of themselves as occupying marginal positions in “the field” as readers of work done elsewhere. In this respect, graduate studies in English do not simply ignore teaching and service, they systematically misrepresent the work that most of our graduates do most of the time—if they get jobs.

Writing program administrators take pride in being more pragmatic about all this. We know how to get the job done, ignore holier than Dow attitudes, and chuckle at the studied absent-mindedness of colleagues, when we have time. We are the pragmatists who manage budgets, determine what gets taught, and train the teachers. We like this work, and many of us are good at it, surprisingly good given the fact that we were never taught how to write a budget and English professors do not generally have much business sense. But all that is changing. Those of us who have graduated since the eighties have had access to professional studies in rhetoric and composition. We, in turn, are offering WPA seminars to the next generation of compositionists so that they can understand that writing program administration is a profession and not an avocation. We WPAs have established our own research tradition, complete with the scholarly journal that you hold in your hands. Richly textured accounts of the work we do are being published by respected university presses. Linda Myers-Breslin’s Administrative Problem-Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers (1999) presents detailed scenarios to teach compositionists how to cope with the problems that confront WPAs on a daily basis. Myers-
Breslin and her collaborators provide future WPAs with a sophisticated and nuanced sense of the complexities of training teachers, staffing classes, securing needed resources, establishing writing centers, and building writing across the curriculum programs—while producing the publications needed for promotions in the profession. While it should become a standard text in WPA seminars, *Administrative Problem Solving* also merits close ideological analysis because it provides multivalent texts for critiquing the institutional assumptions, constraints, and priorities that define writing programs.

Composition programs contain some of the richest sites in the academy for assessing the institutional and ideological possibilities and actualities of public access, general education, and the teaching of literacy. Faced with overwhelming responsibilities and underwhelming support, WPAs tend to devote much of their time to crisis management. In considering how to prepare the next generation of WPAs, I want to expand the frame of reference to look beyond the confines of the field to include outreach, community literacies, and the varied points of contact between public and academic discourses. This broader frame of reference is essential if leaders of writing programs are to be effective as critical intellectuals committed to the broad-based reforms needed to make state universities into institutions of public learning. This is the most valuable work that I can imagine for us and our students.

Despite the establishment of graduate studies in composition, the teaching of writing remains largely invisible in the discipline. Professions tend to view teaching and writing as transparent and unproblematic, and this tendency became even more problematic with the reduction of English studies to a disciplinary specialization. While WPAs have helped make writing, teaching and learning more visible, we need to continue challenging the hierarchies that define academic work, and we need to help teachers of writing organize to redress the worst working conditions in higher education. These efforts are critical to fostering democratic public education. To prepare students to advance this project, we need to exploit disciplinary trends to forge links with broader institutional and social needs.

To prepare people to do the work that we value, we need to think hard about the terms employed in writing programs. Because so many of our responsibilities do not fit within the limits of the profession, professionalism mystifies much of what we do. English professors do
not view high school teachers let alone community literacy workers as part of their profession, and college teachers are divided by disciplinary boundaries that limit their abilities to engage in general education, outreach, and minority recruitment and retention. The work of the academy is evaluated by the traditional hierarchy of research, teaching, and service (Denham, et al.). The constraints imposed by this hierarchy are compounded by the opposition of functionalist and belletristic values that make the humanities impractical and writing merely mechanical. The assumptions upon which these hierarchies are based are being called into question by technological and institutional changes that are can be exploited to open up critical space for reconsidering the purposes served by such value systems. A rhetorical stance on writing and learning can help us to develop a practically engaged and politically oriented response to the broader changes that are redefining what it means to be literate.

To prepare students to transform public higher education, we must help them develop the critical awareness and practical skills needed to make productive use of converging institutional, disciplinary, and public trends. Several important trends converge on a civic sense of rhetoric and composition. Our identification with the civic tradition of Isocrates, Aristotle, and Cicero has strengthened our concern for political discourse and the arts of citizenship. As we became aware of how The Rhetorical Tradition idealized the virtues of being an educated white male, we expanded our histories to include the rhetorical practices of women, workers, people of color, and others with few opportunities to study how to give virtue to power. This research carries over into studies of social movement rhetorics, which have been a mainstay of scholarship in communications but remain overshadowed by the focus on academic discourse in composition studies. These trends are particularly important now because rhetoric is becoming reestablished as a field of study with its own courses and majors (see T. Miller, “Rhetoric”). These trends contribute to the social turn in composition studies. Rather than being defined by the individual
composing process, academic discourse is being taught in more openly political and rhetorical terms as composition courses expand beyond editorializing to include activist modes of inquiry such as service learning, ethnography, and institutional critique.

These civic engagements open up new possibilities for writing programs’ outreach to schools, literacy centers, and community colleges. These efforts have the critical potential of instituting a broader public stance in general education. However, they need to be founded on an activist political orientation to ensure that they are more than a pragmatic professionalism that is consistent with the popular tendency to invoke civic virtues to foster volunteerism as a solution to social inequities. Pragmatic professionals in college English such as Stanley Fish tend to accept established disciplinary borders as boundary conditions for raising pragmatic questions about how received conventions serve the needs of practitioners. Such pragmatic questionings also serve the purpose of gaining competitive advantages for the questioners by demonstrating their disciplinary mastery of the conventions of the interpretive community. Of course other sorts of pragmatism are possible, including the pragmatism of Dewey that Bushman has cited as a model for WPAs and the “prophetic pragmatism” of Cornel West that Linda Flower has used to frame her community literacy work.

To combine institutional critique with practical action, I will analyze the hierarchies that have defined college English. I will then review a couple of models for how literacy programs can contribute to public learning and conclude by noting how graduate students are advancing such projects in my own department. The relations of English departments with rhetoric and composition are currently in flux, and many of us are imagining what it would be like to be able to define our work in our own terms. The opposition of functional and belletristic values within English studies has been extremely debilitating, but these oppositions are not confined to English departments and will not be left behind by departing from them. Teaching, and the teaching of writing in particular, are caught up in the institutional work of initiating novices into disciplines that tends to be invisible to experts in a field. Cynics tend to assume that such processes work best when ignored, for then only the best make it in. Even otherwise astute professionals can assume that learning and writing are unproblematic formal processes, with anyone of reasonable intelligence able to figure them out when supplied with the needed data.
How it became unprofessional to be a teacher or writer, let alone a teacher of writing

With the formation of a modern sense of literature, students were taught to read what they could not hope to write, and literary studies assumed a privileged position above the teaching of literacy, as Susan Miller, Sharon Crowley and others have discussed. David Russell has examined how requiring freshman composition enabled disciplinary specialists to ignore how their expertise was rhetorically composed. The functionalist tendencies of composition are the historical counterpoint to the belletristic trends that made tasteful self-restraint a higher priority than persuasive argument when the classics were translated into English at the origins of public higher education. Reflecting upon the historical construction of such professional hierarchies can help us to imagine alternative models and modes of preparing critical intellectuals for institutional leadership.

David Russell’s *Writing in the Academic Disciplines* has provided a rich historical account of how writing courses contributed to the establishment of specialized disciplines by reinforcing the assumption that writing was an unprofessional concern involving basic skills that any adequately prepared student should already have learned elsewhere. Russell has argued that marginalized freshman composition courses cannot teach academic discourse because there is in fact no “academic Esperanto” (33). The only way that students can learn to write in a discipline is to work with experts within the conventions, audiences and purposes that constitute a field of expertise. Russell’s research is cited by Crowley and others, such as Joseph Petraglia, to conclude that the first-year requirement could not serve its stated purposes even if did not depend upon systematically exploited teachers. While I believe that rhetorical analyses and reflective writing of the sort that Russell himself provides can help students develop general critical and practical aptitudes, I am still thinking through these far-reaching critiques of our work.

Russell’s analysis has helped me understand how ignoring writing preserves disciplines’ cultural capital by limiting not just access but critical awareness of how disciplinary authority works. This dynamic explains why modern institutions of learning established incentives and structures that systematically devalue teaching and

The modern university is defined by its research mission even though it has produced more educators than researchers (Burke). Teacher preparation has low status, in part because teaching has been a major conduit for upward mobility for lower-class students since before state universities evolved from normal schools. Unlike those in other
My own scholarship has focused on the translation of the learned culture into English a century before the research university was established. I have recently been studying how the subordination of rhetoric to belletristic criticism contributed to the emergence of the profession in nineteenth century America. Robert Connors’s *Composition-Rhetoric* documents how reductive textbooks came to define the teaching of composition when surges in enrollments outstripped the supply of trained teachers, ending up with rhetoric confined to such textbooks as scholarship became oriented to literary studies. The modern opposition of belletrism and utilitarianism within English departments can readily be related to the modern opposition of critical and technocratic intellectuals (Boggs). Nonetheless, we are right to get annoyed when literary critics reductively identify composition with the instrumental rationality of capitalism because such arguments tend to divorce the creative freedom of the critical intellect from the work of the world. This stance inevitably defines the teaching of literacy as a service function, and by assuming it, academic critics become alienated from the broader audiences and institutional contexts they work with every day. On the other hand, we should be concerned that the increasing integration of education into the prevailing market economy threatens to have a definitive impact on writing programs that move outside established academic departments. As I see independent programs being set up as service units without majors or tenure-track faculty, I become more interested in the possibilities posed by comprehensive English departments that include applied linguistics, creative writing, literary criticism, cultural studies, composition, and rhetoric. The challenge is to develop models of the field that enable effective collaborations among those who work with the linguistic structures, artistic possibilities, historical traditions, and productive capacities of literacy.

Such possibilities remain elusive because even activists in the profession tend to look down on literacy work, and even while our major professional organization attempts to bridge discontinuities between graduate studies and the jobs of graduates, it continues to
ignore or misrepresent rhetoric and composition, which has become the largest area of hiring in English, accounting for 28% of all jobs from 1993 to 98. Neither advocates for graduate students such as Cary Nelson or the past president of MLA Phyllis Franklin really understands the work that we do, and the MLA and the ADE have misrepresented hiring by failing to develop procedures that account for the intellectual work of our graduates. As Stygall discusses, the reports published by these groups represent composition as a staffing problem not an area of scholarly work. Stygall painstakingly documents how dissertations in our area are ignored or counted in ways that distort the numbers of graduates and discount areas such as technical writing, which grew from 10% of jobs in composition to 19% in 1998.

Stygall provides these percentages for other areas of rhetoric and composition:

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<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhetorical theory/history</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Literacy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Assessment</td>
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<td>Community/service learning</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>47</td>
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Over the last half century, “higher education deliberately and as a matter of public policy gathered a student body that, from one point of view, would be described as ‘increasingly ill-prepared.’ Over the same half century, however, the institutions of higher education cultivated with equal deliberateness a particular kind of faculty ambition for which the best working conditions and salaries and the highest professional reputation were ever more closely linked to intellectual capacities expressed through specialized research. How could the student body’s escalating need for ‘basics’ be reconciled with institutional demands for faculty members to engage in ‘advanced research.’” (MLA Committee on Professional Employment 1164)

Stygall’s essay appears in the Rhetoric Review issue that surveys 65 graduate programs in rhetoric and composition (380). The mission statements document how these programs are positioned, often within the
profession, sometimes with respect to teaching, but rarely by reference to broader social or political needs.

While it is unclear that all of the positions advertised in Stygall’s first category were for administrators, she discusses them as if they were, and she offers numerous other points of information and supporting analyses that are crucial to consider as we reflect upon how to prepare critical intellectuals for institutional leadership (382-82). The growth in the administrative class is in and of itself significant. Does this group represent an increasingly professionalized managerial class of “composition bosses,” to adopt James Sledd’s term? If so, how do its fortunes relate to those of the class of part-timers who do most of the teaching of writing in American colleges? Has this administrative class grown up simply to oversee the most exploited groups of teachers in academia, or is there potential for it, for us, to serve more critical functions?

Managing to make a difference

While scholarship in rhetoric and hiring in the discipline converge in support of expanding our frame of reference, there are even stronger institutional imperatives to seek out new paradigms. Composition programs tend to be the largest area of general education. They are often the most involved in outreach to the schools, and sometimes the most committed academic partners in bridge programs and retention efforts for minority students. These collaborations have the power to transform our service function if we can make them integral to the “student-centered” learning that goes on in writing centers and classrooms, and to our work with the technologies that are redefining literacy, learning, and the learned. While these pedagogies and technologies form an institutional base with considerable potential power, the possibilities for institutional transformation become even more promising when the project is expanded to include partnerships with schools, social service agencies, adult education programs, and community colleges. In addition to having broad institutional potential, these trends also have specific importance for English departments, which are beginning to consider the implications of the fact that many undergraduate majors and most graduate students will teach for a living. In some departments, rhetoric and composition specialists are hired on lines that used to be devoted to English education, and so we bear a significant portion of the responsibility to help prepare teachers who understand the constraints and responsibilities of institutions of public learning.

One institutional model for how to achieve the civic potentials of outreach is provided by Linda Flower and her colleagues at Carnegie Mellon University. Carnegie Mellon has been a center of
service learning and community-based research ever since Wayne Peck, a local clergyman, attended the graduate program there and went on to help found the Community Literacy Center in his church’s community center (Peck, Higgins, and Flower). These collaborations have had a dramatic impact on Flower’s work. She has developed models of collaborative inquiry characterized in terms of a “prophetic pragmatism” that draws on Dewey, intercultural theory, and an overreaching commitment to developing dialogues that foster hope by enabling communities to advance purposeful inquiries into the social problems they face (“Partners in Inquiry”). This work has led to her directing the Center for University Outreach at Carnegie Mellon and developing initiatives such as the “Community Think Tank” that match up academics and community groups (see http://www.cmu.edu/outreach). Flower has formulated civic models of deliberative discourse designed to enable diverse groups to collaborate on shared problems (Flower, Long, and Higgins). Flower has been one of the most influential scholars in composition studies almost from its beginning, and the expansion of her frame of reference beyond the individual composing process to cross-cultural rhetorics provides a model for scholarly trends of public significance.

The civic possibilities that open up as we look beyond the teaching of academic discourse are included within the work of writing programs in Parks and Goldblatt’s “Writing Beyond the Curriculum: Fostering New Collaborations in Literacy,” which reports on the Institute for the Study of Literature, Literacy, and Culture at Temple University (see http://www.temple.edu/isllc/). The authors capitalize on the...
possibilities of a comprehensive English department to expand trends in writing across the curriculum, noting that “the growing involvement of college writing teachers in various community, technology, and school initiatives signals a shift in writing program emphasis that invites us to reconsider the original social compact out of which WAC was formed” (585). Parks and Goldblatt provide the model of a comprehensive writing program shown in Figure 1. In order to foster collaborations among academic disciplines and “knowledge-producing institutions,” including community-based organizations, the Institute at Temple supports classes, workshops, lectures, and publishing projects that bring creative writers and academics together with school teachers, community activists, and various social groups. In addition to neighborhood projects, the Program also supports socially-engaged creative writing, progressive political movements, and labor organizing at a national level, for example, by working to revitalize the Teachers for a Democratic Culture. In their conclusion, Parks and Goldblatt address concerns that “writing beyond the curriculum” will spread WPAs’ efforts too thin. They stress that a more expansive sense of our core objectives may open up expanded sources of support, and that one of our central goals needs to be teaching graduates and undergraduates to become involved outside the academy, which is after all “where we live” (604).

The programs at Carnegie Mellon and Temple present models for how work with writing can achieve the civic potentials of institutions of public learning. Many other programs and scholars in composition are involved in community outreach, service learning, collaborations with schools, and interdisciplinary initiatives concerned with fostering a rhetorical sense of the civic possibilities of writing and learning. Such reforms in general education are often identified with the Boyer Commission report when they are discussed in the Chronicle and other

Major recommendations of Boyer Commission:

1. Make research-based learning the standard
2. Construct an inquiry-based freshman year
3. Build on the freshman foundation
4. Remove barriers to interdisciplinary education
5. Link communication skills and course work
6. Use informative technology creatively
7. Culminate with a capstone experience
8. Educate graduate students as apprentice teachers
9. Change faculty reward system
10. Cultivate a sense of community

(http://notes.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer)
broadly read periodicals such as *Change* magazine. *Change* devoted an issue to civic education in 1997 that includes accounts of community-university partnerships, an essay on activist methods of “Researching for Democracy and Democratizing Research,” and bibliographies of sources ranging from Belenky through Putnam and Bellah to the National Civic League (Ansley and Gaventa). Such journals document the social currency of the civic paradigm, and also provide opportunities for critiques of the purposes it serves. Some of the accounts of value-added education and public service openly espouse a corporate liberalism that assumes that the primary mission of higher education is to prepare people for jobs. Such assumptions are consistent with more subtle forms of pragmatic professionalism and with the politics of volunteerism. Rhetorical analyses of such influential accounts can help us to exploit the critical possibilities of conflicted popular values, institutional changes, and disciplinary trends that cluster around civic *topoi*.

**How graduate students are learning to lead**

A civic approach to preparing WPAs can help us make productive use of institutional and ideological contradictions in general education and outreach, and it advances scholarly inquiries and pedagogies of public significance. I have tried to position models for this approach in the broader development of college English to underline their historical significance. The historical dialectic of functionalism and belles lettres has demarcated the teaching of literacy from critical interpretation, reducing the former to mere mechanics and orienting the latter to masterworks divorced from utilitarian needs and political purposes. Rhetoric has been identified as a way to unify and expand English studies ever since critics lost faith in the canon and compositionists established themselves as scholars (Scholes, Lanham). However, the subordination of the teaching of literacy to scholarship on literature is still the central disabling dualism in college English. Perhaps the savviest professional commentator in the field, Stanley Fish steadfastly defines “the profession” as if it were all about publishing criticism on literary works—a stance that maintains the freedom of literary studies from the world of work by systematically ignoring the institutional work done...
by the teaching of literature. Faced with such pragmatic professionalism, many graduate students struggle to understand why their seminars are divorced from their work as teachers, and some graduate students respond to such disempowering discontinuities by refusing to give up their local communities to join the profession, deciding instead to find locally advertised and therefore fewer professional teaching positions. Faced with such choices, students from more diverse backgrounds often resist our efforts to professionalize them.

College English is experiencing an identity crisis that is manifested in an intensifying concern for the perpetuation of the profession according to Stephen M. North in *Refiguring the Ph.D. in English Studies* (see also Burmester). With the graduate program in “Writing, Teaching, and Criticism” at Albany as his point of reference, North argues that the traditional triad of language, literature and composition needs to be infused with a new sense of the centrality of writing. North’s analysis takes on broader social and institutional significance when positioned in the context of Russell’s study of how instituting required writing courses enabled disciplinary specialists to ignore their dependence upon writing because North’s model speaks to the centrality of writing and teaching in the work of not just college English but higher education more generally. North’s analysis is also aptly complemented by James Sosnoski’s argument that most English professors can only be “token professionals” if the field defines itself by the research published within it precisely because such a definition excludes most of the work most of us do most of the time. Such points are crucial as we consider how to respond to the continuing tendency to equate English studies with literary studies in proposals on revising graduate studies such as the Conference on the Future of Doctoral Education held at Madison in 1999, the proceedings of which were published in the October 2000 issue of *PMLA*.

To make sense of our work, we need locally-situated, politically-engaged accounts of what English departments do. The graduate and composition programs at the University of Arizona share a commitment to maintaining close ties among research, teaching, and service. The current and past heads of the English Department have

The websites for our composition and graduate programs:

- `<w3.arizona.edu/~Ecomp>`
- `<www.arizona.edu/~rcte>`

Graduate students have helped make the composition program a center of innovation in general education, working on grants:
committed considerable time and resources to addressing the inequitable working conditions faced by graduate students teaching in our field, but the challenges involved are daunting. In response to these challenges, we have created over twenty course-release positions for graduate students to work with service learning, computers, writing across the curriculum, writing centers, custom-published textbooks, and other grant-funded initiatives. Graduate students edit the textbook we use to collect our best teaching practices and student writings, with the royalties used for graduate student travel to conferences. Graduate students have also helped create an anthologies emphasizing the literature of our region and the writings by faculty from across our institution. The writers in these anthologies speak to first-year students in interdisciplinary symposia on public controversies. These opportunities enable our graduate students to play leadership roles in general education and document their expertise in professional publications.

In addition to these institutionalized collaborations, our graduate students have been organizing to change their working conditions. Like administrators elsewhere, we have tried to improve those conditions but have achieved at best marginal changes. Graduate students are less invested in keeping the system running and are thus more willing to challenge its assumptions. At the University of Arizona, as elsewhere, graduate students have organized teach-ins on labor issues and have made institutional critique part of what they teach. Graduate students at the University of Arizona are also publishing scholarship of activist pedagogies that expand rhetorical studies to foreground institutional critique, as described by Porter et al. (Chaput, Braun). As a scholar and teacher, I

- with Professor Roxanne Mountford to create an educational MOO:
  <oldpueblomoo.arizona.edu>
- with Professor Jun Liu to create on-line support for ESL writers:
  <www.gened.arizona.edu/eslweb/>
- with Professor Ken McAllister to create an on-line writing course:
  <www.ic.arizona.edu/~profcomm/new1/pc_bg1.htm>
- and with faculty from across the university to develop resources that make faculty research on the region a resource for general education:
  <http://www.library.arizona.edu/swp/>
support these efforts. As an administrator, I worry about them. At what point does teaching institutional critique diverge from addressing students’ literacy needs, and whose assessments of those needs are to be used in setting the goals for composition (see Hindman)? Will graduate students damage the position of composition programs by making them centers of labor unrest? Is that a bad thing given the labor conditions we have helped make manageable?

The stratified structure of English departments may serve the needs of the tenured professionals who work at the top of the hierarchy, but English departments have deprofessionalized so much of the work that they do that the viability of the profession itself is at risk. Composition courses generate a majority of the credit hours in many English departments, and those courses are at risk of being outsourced to online offerings, community colleges, and dual enrollment programs in high schools precisely because composition courses have long been treated as contract work unrelated to the real mission of college English studies. If we want to prepare graduate students to be critical intellectuals with the historical awareness and rhetorical skills needed to change this situation, then we need to be thinking about more than strategies for teaching and administering writing. We need to expand our frame of reference beyond the internal workings of composition programs, or even writing across the curriculum. Many of our students graduate with the institutional expertise, intellectual sophistication, and social commitments needed to lead general educational reforms, technological innovations, and outreach programs. If we adopt a civic stance on graduate studies, we may be able to place graduates in positions where they can use their leadership skills beyond as well as within departments of English.

“The institutionalization of a multitiered faculty sharply divided in its levels of compensation and security of employment […] threatens the communication of basic intellectual and academic values. Put at risk is the capacity of the academic profession to renew itself and pass on to the future the ideal of the scholar-teacher—the faculty member who, while pursuing new knowledge takes active responsibility for the institution, the department, and all parts of the curriculum.” (“Report of the ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing” 4)
Works Cited


The status of WPAs, both writing program directors and writing center directors, has been an issue of central concern for the last two decades, as reflected in position statements such as the Portland Resolution (Hult et al.), “Evaluating the Work of Writing Program Administration,” and “What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concerns” (Simpson) as well as many articles arguing for more power and better working conditions for WPAs. Writing center directors, however, often feel that compositionists, and sometimes even other WPAs, have particularly neglected the work that they do. The 1989 draft of the CCCC Executive Committee’s “Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” argued forcefully for the importance of WPA work, especially in tenure and promotion decisions, but, as Valerie Balester pointed out, it overlooked the work of writing centers, presenting writing centers as “supplemental to the English department curriculum, useful for training graduate teaching assistants and lightening the burden on faculty by giving their students individual attention” (167). Muriel Harris has described the frustrations that writing center directors feel when “colleagues in our departments who are otherwise interested in and knowledgeable about the teaching of writing” do not understand the functions and practices of writing centers (19), while Mark L. Waldo’s “What Should the Relationship Between the Writing Center and Writing Program Be?” charges that when a writing center is “the service appendage of the writing program” (76), “composition teachers become the elite while center staff become the
“coolies” (77). Gary A. Olson and Evelyn Ashton-Jones’s 1988 survey of 188 first-year composition directors supported these concerns, revealing respondents’ tendency to regard center directors “as a kind of wife” (23) and to define their work as mainly service and administration, not as teaching and scholarship, less valuable and less professional than faculty work.

Still, no study has looked closely at how program directors and center directors work together, and although center directors’ background and working conditions have been the subject of several surveys (Murray and Bannister; Wright; Healy), no previous survey has compared the situations of program directors and center directors. Recent movements to professionalize WPA and writing center work, to define administrative work as scholarship, to appoint composition scholars in WPA positions, and to create free-standing writing programs and writing centers, as well as numerous recent publications urging WPAs to take power and learn to work with other administrators—all should potentially affect these two positions and the relationship between them. What do people holding these positions expect from each other, and what working relationships have they forged? How do issues of power, status, and professionalism affect these positions and the relationships between them?

Each of us has directed a writing center and then gone on to direct the first-year writing program at our respective universities. After developing, administering, even nurturing a writing center, we found ourselves to some extent overseeing our successors. Our experiences led us to wonder about the relationship of writing program directors and writing center directors nationally. We believe that writing centers cannot reach their potential as long as directors are treated as some lower species of WPA. We know that writing center directors can only provide quality services if they are well trained, well funded, and well educated. For writing center directors to collaborate productively with their writing program peers, they need equal (or at least respectable) status.

With this study, we are interested in viewing the relationship between the foremost writing program director at a college or university and the writing center director. We wanted as well to compare the nature and status of the two positions and the background of the people who hold them, and to see how well they work with each other and how their status, background, and ideas about teaching and administration affect that relationship.
The Survey and the View

We distributed surveys in three ways: a mailing to all members of the National Writing Centers Association and the Council of Writing Program Administrators, postings on the listservs WPA-L and WCENTER, and distributions at the 1997 CCCC and the 1997 and 1998 NWCA conferences. In all we distributed about 850 surveys, not counting the listserv postings, asking respondents to pass a copy of the questionnaire to their counterpart in the writing program or writing center. We received useable responses from 176 people. The sample therefore is biased in favor of WPAs active in professional associations for writing directors and informed about the scholarship and politics of writing program administration. A larger survey or one with responses from a different distribution of institutions and WPAs might well provide a different profile of the two positions and their relationships to each other than we do here. Of the 176 responses to our survey, 62% (n=109) came from university faculty and staff (see Chart 1). Another 23% (n=41) came from those at four-year colleges. Community college administrators represented 10% (n=19) of the responses, while only 1% (n=3) of the responses came from two-year college faculty. We also heard from administrators from one high school, two four-year professional schools, and one four-year technical institute. Forty-two percent (n=72) of the responses came from schools with fewer than 5,000 students, 25% (n=44) from schools with an enrollment between 5,000 and 10,000, and 30% (n=52) from schools with an
enrollment of between 10,000 and 30,000 (see Chart 2). Only 3% (n=6) were from institutions of more than 30,000 students. We received no information about the enrollment of two schools. Sixty-seven percent (n=117) of the respondents were from public institutions, and 33% (n=58) from private (with one not reporting). However, we found no pattern in the

Chart 2. Enrollments of Respondents’ Institutions

![Pie chart showing enrollment distribution]

data aligning the size or nature of the school or the nature of the position consistently with any one answer to any of the questions.

We solicited information about participants’ positions, background and experience, rank, reporting lines, and their working relationships with counterparts (see Appendix for the questionnaire). Of our 176 responses, 61 were from writing program directors, 100 from writing center directors, and 15 from those who serve both functions, representing 142 institutions. For purposes of classification, we defined the writing center director to include directors of learning centers that devote significant resources to writing. We defined the writing program director as the primary administrator in charge of the writing courses at an institution. Because the primary writing program director could be anyone from the director of the first-year composition program or of the WAC program to the chair or head of a department or division of English, writing, or humanities, we asked the respondents to identify the primary writing program director themselves if a campus had more than one director of a curriculum of writing courses. Most respondents identified the director of first-year composition courses.

Clearly there are limitations to a survey that asks a WPA to describe a relationship with another WPA in their institution, even with the promise of
Respondents may be reluctant to criticize a colleague for many reasons, and an outside observer might describe a relationship differently than the participants. Most questions asked for straightforward information about matters such as the WPA’s background and education, hiring procedures, and reporting lines, though some questions required more interpretation on the part of the respondents. Our central prompt, “Describe your working relationship with your counterpart,” gave respondents a great deal of latitude in deciding what to reveal.

Information on the Positions

The information respondents provided about their highest degrees and areas of specialty, their previous experience as writing administrators, and the process for hiring or training writing program or writing center directors provides some indication of the professional status of these positions within their institutions, including the extent to which institutions have been hiring faculty best qualified to serve as WPAs and the extent to which directing a writing center has become a desirable and viable career path.

Writing program directors generally have higher qualifications in rhetoric and composition than writing center directors. Eighty-six percent (53 out of 61) of the surveyed program directors had doctoral degrees (including EdDs), while only 53% of the center directors (51 out of 96) had doctoral degrees. (One program director [1%] and three center directors [3%] were ABD.) Seventy-one percent of the program directors (n=41) identified themselves as specialists in rhetoric, composition studies, or composition in conjunction with literature; only 26% (n=15) saw themselves solely as literature specialists, while 3% (n=2) identified law
or English education as their academic field (see Charts 3a and 3b). In contrast, 57% (n=48) of the center directors identified their primary field as composition, 39% (n=32) as literature, and 4% (n=3) as English education. In general, institutions seem to place a higher priority on hiring a composition specialist to run a writing program than to direct a writing center.

Hiring practices as well as degrees and areas of specialization are also important indicators of an institution’s view of a WPA position and the qualifications it values. Answers to this question (#7, Appendix) were sometimes difficult to interpret, and the number of useable responses was low. But according to those responses, most institutions select someone “in-house” to direct the writing program or run the writing center: 48 program directors and 72 center directors were appointed or elected to their position after an internal search (see Charts 4a and 4b). National searches were conducted to hire 40 program directors (39% of the instances) and 43 center directors (34% of the instances). Regional searches were uncommon, with 8 program directors and 5 center directors selected by this means. Although there are good reasons to appoint someone internally and although some programs hire several well-qualified composition faculty who take turns in WPA positions, a national search often indicates a desire to find someone highly qualified rather than simply to find someone willing to fill a slot. Still, the lower number of useable responses to this question suggests treating such conclusions cautiously.
Given the complexity of writing program administration, professionalization should, but usually does not, include training in non-curricular skills such as budgeting, management, and marketing. Respondents reported that institutions almost never offer anything more than mentoring and/or consultation to train WPAs. Since graduate programs in composition or related fields generally also neglect education in the management and
administration of writing programs and writing centers, this represents a significant problem for professionalization efforts. One center director ironically wrote of his training, “I got a tour of the building!” while a program director answered the question with “WPA Workshop and Fire. Not in that order.” Ten respondents mentioned the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ annual workshop for new WPAs as important to their preparation for writing administration.

The issue of WPA training is especially important in light of the responses to the question about previous administrative experience. In some sense both positions are often “entry-level” college administrative positions, for almost half the program directors (45%, n=27 of 60) and half the center directors (47%, n=47 of 99 responses) were in their first administrative position (see Chart 5). The remaining 55% (n=33) of program directors had held one or more administrative positions before beginning their current position, averaging 2.4 previous administrative positions. Fifty-three percent (n=52) of the center directors had previous administrative experience, averaging 2.2 previous administrative positions. However, we found that our situations, serving as a center director as preparation for serving as a program director, were atypical; only 12 program directors had been center directors previously (15% of the 78 positions listed), close to the same number of center directors who had

![Chart 5. WPAs' Previous Administrative Positions](image-url)
been program directors (15 or 13% of the 114 positions listed). More commonly, program directors had previously held positions as a writing program director or assistant director. Of the 78 positions held previously by program directors, 33 (42%) were writing program director positions; of these, 22 (28%) were director positions and 11 (39%), assistant director positions. Similarly, the normal career path to center directorship, when the position was not entry-level, was previous work as a center director or assistant director. Twenty-eight (24%) of the 114 positions previously held by center directors were in writing centers; of these, 20 (17%) were director positions and 8 (7%) were assistant director positions.

Program directors were far more likely to have a tenured or tenure-track faculty position than center directors. While 81% (n=50) of the program directors were tenured or tenure-track, only 17% (n=17) of the center directors were on tenure track. Similarly, while only 18% (n=11) of the program directors reported being nontenure-track, 82% (n=82) of the center directors so reported. There was little difference, however, in the percentages of WPAs at a part-time or full-time lecturer or visiting faculty rank—8% (n=5) of program directors compared to 10% (n=10) of center directors. Frequently center directors held nontenure-track professorial
rank: fifteen assistant professors (15%), eight associate professors (8%),
and one full professor (1%) were nontenure-track, compared to only two
assistant professors (3%) and one associate professor (1%) among the
program directors. Another 10% (n=10) of center directors listed other
nontenure-track classifications at their institutions, such as “instructor” or
“faculty.” No one listed graduate student or teaching assistant as their
rank (see Charts 6 and 7).

The position of writing center director (40%, n=42) was far more
frequently classified as staff, professional staff, administrator, or academic
professional than the writing program director position (8%, n=4). This is a
complicated category regarding status and job security, and our survey did
not provide a clear picture about the professional situation of WPAs in this
category. These positions sometimes are equivalent in status to a secretary,
sometimes to a dean. Usually these positions are not faculty positions and
are not tenure-track, although one administrator indicated she had tenure.
But some of these staff or administrative positions may be more desirable
than a faculty position. One respondent indicated that she had been
Acting Director and Interim Director of the writing center at her institution
as a graduate student, and when she completed her PhD, the center
directorship was changed from a tenure-track to a nontenure-track position
so that her department could hire one of its graduates as Director, at a
salary considerably below most faculty pay. Several years later, she filed
a grievance to get salary commensurate with her duties and qualifications

Chart 7. Ranks of Writing Program Directors
and, after extensive and complicated negotiations, the position was changed to 76% administrative, 24% part-time lecturer, nontenure-track, to accommodate her demands. This solution sidestepped the tenure process but acknowledged her exemplary administration, teaching, and scholarship. This story illustrates how fluid the nature of a writing center directorship can be in an institution and how difficult it can be to assess the position of a director based on faculty or nonfaculty status.

Fifty-two of 61 program directors and 74 of 100 center directors answered the question about how long they have held their current position, although the design of the questionnaire made it easy to overlook this question. About half of both the program directors (56 n=28) and the center directors (48%, n=36) were relatively new in their positions (three years or fewer), indicating frequent turnover in both positions (see Charts 8 and 9). Only 14% (n=7) of the program directors compared to 34% of the center directors held the position for at least four but no more than eight years. Those figures were almost reversed for WPAs in their current position for more than eight years: 29% (n=15) of the program directors and 18% (n=13) of the center directors have held their present position eight or more years. Writing program directors, in general, have made longer careers in their positions than center directors; the mean for writing program directors was three years, while for writing center directors, the
mean was two years. The most common time in the position for a program
director seems about four years. Of the 16 program directors who have
been in their positions for eight or more years, only one was not tenure-
track (an administrator at a community college that does not grant tenure).
In contrast, only four of the long-term center directors were tenured
or tenure-track, while eight were nontenure-track. However, these long-
term writing center directors without tenure often wrote that they had
professional status and job security “equal” to tenure-track faculty (see
Chart 9).

The information provided by our respondents strongly suggests that
institutions tend to grant writing program directors more status than
writing center directors, often significantly more. While many colleges and
universities require their writing program director to have a doctorate and
to specialize in composition studies, many of the same institutions do
not expect the same from their writing center director. Despite the fact
that a number of writing center directors hold powerful and prestigious
nonfaculty positions, the percentage of center directors with faculty or
tenure status is disturbingly low given concerns that the teaching and
scholarship involved in directing a writing center often go unnoticed.
Our study, however, does suggest improvements in writing center director
positions compared to earlier surveys, and comparisons to previous studies
may well suggest gains in the professional status for WPAs in general. That almost half the WPAs in this study were in their first administrative position, that these positions experience frequent turnover, and that most of these WPAs received little formal training in management and administration before beginning WPA work suggest that too many WPAs are not prepared for their positions. It is not surprising that administrators with little training in administration often feel powerless and marginalized in their positions.

The Relationships

Eighty-four of the 100 writing center directors and 60 of the 61 writing program directors surveyed described their relationship with their counterpart in overwhelmingly positive terms. Sixty-five percent (n=94) of all 144 useable responses were entirely positive (often glowing), and there was no difference here between the responses of program directors and center directors: 65% of the program directors and 65% of the center directors seemed very satisfied. Twenty-three percent of the center directors and 22% of the program directors wrote generally positive descriptions of their relationships but also expressed some complaints, usually a desire for more collaboration, more opportunities to work together, or more knowledge of composition studies for the other director. Only 10% of the center director responses and 15% of the program director responses (or 12% of the total responses) were dominated by descriptions of problems or frustrations.

Most of the descriptions expressed a strong collaborative ethic about administrative work. In this sense, the respondents echoed Waldo and Wingate, who each argue that writing center directors need to enter into collaborative relationships with other administrators, especially the writing program director. In contrast to a model in which the writing center takes care of students’ grammar problems to free up classroom teachers’ time, Waldo argues that the writing program and the writing center need “a common theoretical perspective” (74) and should have an “equal,” even “symbiotic” relationship (75). The most common descriptive terms in the respondents’ positive comments were “collaborative effort,” “supportive,” “work[ing] collaboratively and harmoniously,” “shar[ing] goals,” “good communication,” “collegial,” “respect[ing] each other’s territory,” “close contact,” “trust,” and “work[ing] together to solve problems.” Most complaints about these relationships mentioned lack of contact or communication between the two WPAs or differences in perspectives or expertise regarding composition instruction. Another set of phrases that appeared almost as frequently—“clear division of responsibilities,” “autonomy,” “agreeing about roles,” and “respect for territory”—implies limits to col-
laboration and sometimes complementary approaches to working with others smoothly and effectively within a hierarchical structure. The success of the relationship between the two WPAs may depend on how they are able to develop a sense of collaboration while also respecting each other’s territory in a hierarchical, often confusing university administrative structure.

The relationship between the writing program director and the writing center director is in part a function of the location of the two positions in this structure. Waldo argues that when center directors must report to a program director, it is difficult for them to maintain an equal relationship between the program and the center. Wingate also claims that “honest and trusting collaboration becomes more difficult when one collaborator has significantly more power” (101). One of our survey questions (#10, Appendix) asked who has the authority to make important decisions for the writing center. Twenty-five of the 59 program directors (42%) who answered this question said they report primarily to one person, most often a department chair or head, a dean, or a vice-president or provost. Thirty-five of the center directors (35%) report to primarily one person, but this was most often not a program director but a department chair or head, a dean, a learning skills director, or a similar director. Program directors seldom were cited as a center director’s main supervisor: only three center directors mentioned reporting only to or primarily to a program director. Thirty respondents (30%) cited a program director or first-year composition director as one of the center director’s reporting lines. In most cases, then, the writing center director is not institutionally subordinate to a writing program director, even though the writing program director may often have a higher rank or a higher position in the administrative structure.

Other responses showed that WPAs often contend with complex, frequently confusing reporting lines. Most appeared to report primarily to two or three people: 31 (52.5%) of the program directors and 57 (57%) of center directors. Eight writing center directors reported primarily to four or more people. And three had five or more primary reporting lines. Some reported to one person regarding budget and equipment, another regarding staffing, and perhaps another regarding pedagogy and policy (although most typically the center director acts autonomously in this last area). Although the numerous administrators to which a center director reports may provide a number of allies, it is difficult to see this situation as beneficial overall. Still, most respondents reported that the center director had the most authority for making important decisions regarding writing center policy, budget, and personnel, and at times this authority is shared with a program director or a committee.
Despite the different places of program directors and center directors in the college and university structures, respondents’ descriptions of the personal relations between the two WPAs often echoed each other. Positive descriptions of relationships often mentioned sharing similar goals and assumptions about teaching and management; respecting each other’s authority and knowledge; supporting one another emotionally, politically, and often materially; having a strong personal relationship or friendship; and, most persistently, maintaining close contact and collaboration. For example, one program director wrote, “The Writing Center coordinator and I work collaboratively and harmoniously. We share similar goals and strategies for working. Yes, I am satisfied with the relationship; we are mutually supportive.” A center director noted, “Our relationship is excellent—collegial, productive, mutually supportive.” Occasionally, a feeling of “us” versus the institution helped forge a strong relationship between WPAs: “We are [. . .] our own support group, being the only two untenured administrators in the department and two of only four composition specialists in the department.”

While “communication” and “collaboration” were the most frequently occurring terms in the positive comments, communication problems, lack of contact, and a sense of being “oversupervised” were most often mentioned as problems in the relationships. When someone mentioned a complaint in a generally positive description, the problem often involved a desire for greater communication or collaboration. The most negative comments expressed little trust of one WPA toward another, some respondents describing their counterpart as “paranoid” or “insecure.”

Often, center directors credited the program director’s open-door policy for helping to build a positive working relationship: “We just talk when something comes up,” wrote one. But when lack of time, overwork, or physical distance between offices makes spontaneous, informal discussion difficult, the working relations seem to suffer unless formal lines of communication are established. One program had recently appointed a teaching assistant to serve as a liaison between the writing program and the writing center to improve communication and collaboration.

Not surprisingly, maintaining communication was often a problem when the writing center and the writing program were located in different departments or divisions. “We work well together,” one program director wrote sarcastically about the director of a learning center located outside the English department. “I tell him everything. He tells me nothing.” One center director wrote of the relationship, “We are housed in different divisions. Frequently the Writing Program Coordinator forgets to inform the
writing center of important decisions. Currently, we have a good working relationship. It does take extra effort, though.”

Agreement concerning the function and goals of writing programs and writing centers, theories about and approaches to writing instruction, management styles, and the role of the writing center were frequently mentioned by respondents; establishing an effective collaborative working relationship apparently depended on these shared assumptions. “We are independent yet tend to think alike,” one program director wrote. “We have an excellent working relationship, share similar goals and ideals, and work together with what support we have,” another program director wrote, echoing many others. Similarly, a center director wrote: “We work well together. We consider ourselves a team (Writing Center staff, English faculty, and supervisors) and have a great relationship. I have freedom to create, develop the Center, but I have total support to put ideas into place.”

Many respondents, echoing Waldo’s concerns, were unhappy when the program and the center differed seriously in their perspectives about writing instruction or the function of a writing center. Several center directors complained about perceptions of the writing center as a place that primarily provides remedial instruction. Respondents sometimes wrote that hiring practices and background in composition studies often helped determine how well the two WPAs worked together, suggesting that they may view agreement about fundamental goals, roles, pedagogical practices, and management styles as a precondition for collaboration rather than a result of collaboration. Some were able to extend their collaboration into their research, co-authoring articles and conference presentations, because they shared research interests in composition. Conversely, lack of a composition studies background was often reported as a hindrance to the working relationship. One center director mentioned that serving on the hiring committee for the program director was an important “opportunity to choose the person I could work most effectively with.” Another program director claimed that because the learning center director, while “notably cooperative” with “good impulses,” was “not a specialist in writing” nor was she likely to develop such an interest. Consequently, the program director stated, “the writing program does not lean heavily on what is offered in the Learning Center.” In this case, the hiring process for the writing center director and a problem in the working relationship between the two WPAs were linked to the marginalization of the writing center from the writing program. A few responses, however, suggested that if one WPA lacked a background in composition, the two could still work well together if they shared goals and established a strong personal
relationship, and many respondents indicated that their collaborative working relationship was helped by a strong personal relationship or friendship.

Respondents’ frequent mention of respect for each other’s “territory” generally implied respect for the other’s authority, without which attempts to work together could be perceived as interference, oversupervision, or dependence. One program director described friction with the center director in terms of “turf”: “Close personal relationship, sometimes a bit tense over turf and public image, but mostly pretty much OK.” A pattern of expectations, roles, and responsibilities emerged in the relationships that many respondents described or desired between the program director and center director, especially when the writing center director reported to the program director or depended on the program director for resources, faculty support, or other needs. At a minimum, writing center directors usually expected the program director to respect the autonomy of the writing center to set policies, establish the pedagogical principles of the writing center, and train tutors. Failure to recognize the director’s authority and autonomy often was regarded as a territorial intrusion. Most program directors who discussed territory expected the center director to establish the writing center’s policies and principles and to develop a tutor-training program. A writing center director who did not make these decisions independently might be seen as intruding on the program director’s time.

Outside this defined territory, writing center directors often express a desire for “support” from the writing program director. Often “support” seemed to refer mainly to emotional support and to counsel and collaboration about strategies to solve problems, improve the writing center, or change faculty perceptions about the center. Several center directors discussed support in more tangible terms, however, expecting program directors to help promote the writing center and to provide resources. One center director discussed support of the writing center almost entirely in terms of the program director’s support in changing faculty perceptions:

“I receive adequate support. It could be better. I’d like more ties to the writing center from all English 101-102 teachers. Before I came, the center was remedial only. Given our limited funds, it is very difficult to change that conception.”

The ability or inability of a program director to provide resources was a frequent theme in the comments of center directors. Interestingly, program directors seldom mentioned providing resources for the writing center as one of their responsibilities. The department chair that did mention “providing resources [and] finding new resources” for the writing center as part of his role likely had access to funds as department chair
that other program directors may not have. Without a budget, a program director still might take the responsibility of trying to obtain resources from others for the writing center, like the program director who sometimes made budget requests to his dean on behalf of the writing center, and it's likely that some respondents had budget and resources problems partly in mind when they mentioned collaborating to find solutions to problems. Program directors, however, might also reasonably believe that acquiring funds and resources should be a responsibility of the center director, depending on the status and experience of the center director, or of another administrator, such as a department chair. But being able to provide material support, or at least making a good effort to do so, was often important in center directors' positive descriptions of their relationships with the program director.

While writing center directors often looked to program directors for support, resources, and help in solving some problems, writing program directors often wrote that center directors should be responsible for the center operations, open to communication and collaboration, “receptive to suggestions,” and “enthusiastic about trying new things.” Several program directors, in fact, said that they frequently looked to the center director for assistance with program activities such as TA training, workshops, and faculty outreach. For the most part, by effective communication, program directors meant being informed about the writing center and being able to consult their counterparts for advice, although some responses suggested a less reciprocal consulting relationship, mentioning only how important it was that the center director consult the program director. For example, one program director wrote, “We work closely together on all matters pertaining to the composition program. We co-direct the WAC Program. WC Director has full responsibility for the center but keeps me informed and consults with me when necessary.” Another program director who wrote of having “a very close working relationship” with the center director complained only that “I get little or no info on the Writing Center because the director has a reserved style and does not share info easily. We nonetheless have a very positive relationship.”

Conclusion

Our survey suggests that writing program directors regard writing center directors more as partners and less as helpmates than they did in Olson and Ashton-Jones's 1988 study and that the relation of the program director to the center director is more collaborative than supervisory. Collaboration and communication, many respondents believe, enable them to accomplish their goals effectively; they can pool their knowledge
and political savvy and present a united front. These WPAs establish collaborative working relationships in order to minimize the hierarchical nature of academic administrative structure. Collaboration and communication are a means to overcome potentially destructive differences in power and status between them.

Still, the survey also suggests that program directors enjoy a more privileged place in institutional structures and that the professionalization of writing center directors is lagging. Writing program directors were more likely to be in a tenure-line position, more likely to be a composition specialist, and far more likely to have faculty status. In addition, there are indications that WPAs may often define the territorial boundaries of the writing program and of the writing center in ways that permit and encourage the program director to make suggestions for the writing center but may discourage the center director from trying to exert as much influence on the writing program. Some writing center directors participated in the writing program by conducting workshops, taking part in orientation for teaching assistants, and participating on committees, while some writing program directors sometimes suggested ideas for changing the writing center, such as establishing an on-line writing center, and were pleased or disappointed about how willing the center director was to pursue their ideas.

More frequently, however, WPAs seemed to define their territories in ways that discouraged them from becoming involved in the policies and practices in each other’s domain. Their ability to collaborate in such a way that the writing program and writing center could support each other and develop and maintain consistent pedagogical goals and philosophies usually depended on their holding similar knowledge and ideas about composition. Respondents almost never described coming to an agreement about philosophies and goals as a result of their collaboration. And when the two WPAs had a fundamental disagreement over goals and philosophies (for example, over whether the writing center should focus on grammatical errors), the writing center might have an uneasy, even marginal position in the composition curriculum. In order to assure agreement about basic goals and philosophies, many respondents mentioned how important it was for a WPA in either position to be a scholar in composition studies, even though one-fourth of the program directors and one-third of the center directors were literary scholars. To accomplish this, many departments need to change their hiring patterns, either to conduct national searches for both writing program directors and writing center directors or, if the WPA is to be appointed or elected from the existing faculty in the department, to hire a greater number of composition
specialists on the faculty to ensure a good pool of potential WPAs to select from.

Because almost half the program directors and center directors in our survey were first-time administrators with little or no training in management and administration, it is important that graduate programs in rhetoric provide some training in administration and that institutions take more responsibility in preparing and training faculty for administrative positions. Center directors often expected program directors to act as problem solvers, but when both WPAs are inexperienced, as is often the case, they must try to solve problems, or even decide whether to ignore the problem, based on limited knowledge of the workings and politics of their institution. Inexperienced and untrained in the ways of administration, program and center directors easily become frustrated and sometimes fall prey to conditions that prevent their promotion or tenure. Supporting each other emotionally and putting their heads together to develop strategies for dealing with problems then becomes mainly a survival strategy. Clearly, collaboration should be more than that.

While our survey presents an optimistic view of working conditions and working relations, we still observe that too often WPAs working together are accorded less than equal status or authority or are isolated from one another in such a way that they can improve neither working conditions within the profession nor the quality of writing instruction at an institution. Professional associations for composition teachers and WPAs would do well to remember that directing a writing center requires as much experience, knowledge, and professionalism as directing any other writing program.5

Appendix: Survey Instrument

Survey Concerning Writing Center/Writing Programs Relations

With this survey, we hope to learn more about how writing centers and their directors work in relationship to writing programs administrators. In particular, we are investigating the official institutional relationship and the personal working relationship between the writing center directors and the writing program directors nationwide.

If you are a writing program director or a writing center director (and do not hold both positions jointly), please complete this survey. DO NOT USE THE REPLY OPTION TO ANSWER THIS SURVEY. SEND YOUR RESPONSES OFF LIST TO: Valerie Balester (v-balester@tamu.edu) OR James McDonald (jcm5337@usl.edu). Results of the final study will be presented at the CCCC in March 1997. ALL PERSONAL OR IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.
Definitions

Writing Program Director: The primary administrator in charge of a writing program at an institution; the person whose job title indicates that his/her primary responsibility is to administrate writing courses; the administrator under the level of Head or Chair with the most authority for making decisions about the institution’s writing program, whether that program consists only of one first-year writing course or multiple writing courses that undergraduate students enroll in over several semesters or other variations. The WP Director position does not exist at every institution. At some, the WP Director position may be held by the Director of WAC, or the Director of a program or division.

Writing Center Director: The primary administrator in charge of the operation of a writing center, writing lab, or learning center that tutors students on writing assignments. The Writing Center Director may or may not have primary responsibility for making decisions about the center’s operation.

1. Name and current position (including title and dates held)
2. Institution
3. Type of institution (community college/ 4-year college/ university/ public/ private)
4. Number of undergraduate students at the institution
5. Your rank, tenure status, highest degree, and area of specialization
6. Previous writing administration positions you have held, including the title, dates, and institution of each position.
7. How is the writing center director selected at your institution? The WP Director?
8. What, if any, orientation or on-the-job training is provided for a new writing center director? For a new WP Director?
9. To whom does the writing center director report in your institution? Mark all that apply, and indicate with an asterisk (*) which the WC director works most closely with.
   ___ Dean
   ___ Vice-president for Academic Affairs or Provost
   ___ Department Chair or Head
   ___ Division Head (e.g., Division of Writing and Rhetoric, Humanities Division)
   ___ Writing Program Director
   ___ First-Year Composition Director
   ___ WAC Program Director
   ___ Other _____________________________
Comments/Clarifications on reporting lines:

10. Who has the authority to make the major decisions for the writing center, including staffing, budget, policies, pedagogy, assessment, and equipment decisions? How are these decisions made and carried out?

11a. If you are a writing program director, describe your personal working relationship with the writing center director. Are you satisfied with the relationship? Do you feel you receive adequate support?

11B. If you are a writing center director, describe your personal working relationship with the writing program director. Are you satisfied with the relationship? Do you feel you receive adequate support?

12. Please provide a phone number, e-mail address, or snail mail address for your counterpart (Writing Center Director or Writing Program Director) so that we may ask him or her to fill in a survey.

Thank you for your help. Send your responses off list to:

Valerie Balester (v-balester@tamu.edu) or James McDonald (jcm5337@usl.edu). If you prefer to send your response by mail, the addresses are

Valerie Balester
Department of English
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-4227

James McDonald
Department of English
P. O. Drawer 44691
University of Southwestern Louisiana
Lafayette, LA 70504-4691

If you prefer to reach us by phone, e-mail James McDonald (jcm5337@usl.edu) for a toll-free number.

ALL PERSONAL OR IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. BY ANSWERING THIS SURVEY, I UNDERSTAND THAT MY RESPONSES MAY BE QUOTED OR PARAPHRASED, BUT WITHOUT IDENTIFYING INFORMATION.
Notes

1 See, for example, Janangelo and Hansen, Bishop and Crossley, Bloom, and Janangelo on WPAs, as well as North and Wingate on writing centers.

2 We pretested the questionnaire with five writing program directors and five writing center directors, and, after refining the questions, sent it to the members of the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the National Writing Centers Association. After coding many of these responses in a data base, we decided to clarify some items for further survey distribution through the listservs and at the conferences.

3 See Gunner on the profiles of WPA members.

4 Note that these percentages are of all the previous administrative positions reported by those who were not in their first WPA position, not percentages of respondents who had held each position.

5 We wish to thank all those who responded to our survey and Leslie Schilling of the UL-Lafayette Humanities Resource Center, who designed the charts in this article.

Works Cited


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Scenario 1

In October of 1998, the dean pulls me out of a college staff meeting. I wonder what’s up, but I’m unprepared for what he has to say: he asks me to take on the job of Associate Dean of Humanities. I’m stunned, mostly because the current associate dean has only been on the job for slightly longer than a year and is doing fine. I hate the idea; my wife hates it even more. But it is hard to say “no” to the dean, especially when your current job depends entirely on his good will. And it is alluring, no doubt about it, to move directly into the halls of power, to step behind the curtain hoping something more substantial resides behind the stage other than ropes, pulleys, wisps of white cotton, and bits of polished thread. After a week of uneasy deliberation, I say “yes” and spend the rest of fall semester descending into anxiety, self-doubt—even self pity—as I mourn the loss of my current life as Director of the Edison Initiative, a job that allowed me the freedom to do creative programming, keep my own schedule, run freshman seminars, create the peer mentoring program, spearhead faculty development, manage my own budget, and forge partnerships with university and community groups. It was the dream job I created for myself, with strong support from the dean, and I did so in lieu of applying a year earlier for the associate deanship, a job that I considered to be dreary and thankless and that I knew I did not want.

Scenario 2

It is three months later, January 15, 1999 to be exact. I’ve had a few orientation
sessions with the outgoing associate dean. I’ve learned a bit about his responsibilities, his filing system (no small matter), the issues that press upon the college. Now I walk down the second floor hallway toward my new office. I am on the college administration floor, where few faculty and almost no students enter except if summoned, or if in search of money, or if they are involved in an official investigation. As I pass the door of a long-time college staff member, someone I’ve known for years, she greets me in friendly fashion, welcomes me to the college. After talking for a few minutes, she says: “We’re glad you are here, but we hope you won’t be a nice guy. You can’t want to be liked in this job. We hope you are tough enough to say ‘no.’” I think about that as I turn the key to my office door. Within a month of taking on the job, I receive a variety of requests from faculty friends and colleagues:

- Can I have extra travel money to deliver a paper?
- Can you provide me with a research assistant for this crucial project that I am doing for the good of the college?
- Can you give me a bigger office?
- Can I teach an overload during the regular semester and receive extra pay?
- Can I have $1,200 for a new computer for my departmental secretary?

The answers are all “no,” and what I must develop is a way to keep the conversation going, to convince faculty that I have their best interests at heart, even as I reject most of their requests. For every allocation that I grant, we must find the money somewhere else within the college: every $100 given to Professor U gets taken away from Professor Not-U. There is no secret pot of money, one of the first real disillusionments of my job. My dream of finding even a little pot of gold buried somewhere in the basement of the college proves illusory.

**Scenario 3**

I have approached the dean with what seems to me a surefire proposal: in order to bolster the teaching of foreign language on campus, we’ll fund the second year of a three-year lab modernization proposal. Without this second year, the money spent last year is wasted; the foreign language lab lacks both the hardware and the software to be useful. The dean, however, says “no.” In his view, the college spent too much in the first year and he thinks the foreign languages are being wasteful. For two months, I work with the language faculty to hone their proposal to a razor
thin edge. The dean finally approves it, and I write a letter in his name congratulating them. I am pleased with my success, but the language faculty keep their pleasure and approval to themselves, probably unhappy with my perverse concern for economy, certain that I have made them jump over so many hedges that I have hobbled their horse for life. Meanwhile I look forward to working with them to implement Phase 3.

**Scenario 4**

Oversight of the various research centers are distributed among the associate deans. The associate dean of social science helps me to hire an historian who will run the Center for Latin American Studies, which is my responsibility. Meanwhile, I help him hire a professor from English/film studies to run the Center for International Studies, which is under his supervision. He and I spend countless hours every week conferring, discussing, collaborating, mulling, problem sharing, trying to figure out how best to share our meager resources, build collaborative structures for students and faculty, and strengthen our mutual centers and departments. Meanwhile, we are asked to co-chair a building renovation committee, which will determine lecture and classroom space, along with a computer lab and building lounge. Neither of us has time for this, but we accept because control of space lies at the center of campus power and influence. In addition, he and I join with the associate dean of the business school in formulating the curriculum for a new joint degree program in global management. Given the amount of time that we spend together, we decide to inform our wives that we are giving up all pretense to a personal life—and moving into an efficiency together so that we can talk both day and night about college issues. Thankfully, our wives demur.

**Scenario 5**

On the face of it, it is a simple request. A faculty member in a foreign language department wants to move to the English department where he has many personal and professional friends and with which he has been intellectually affiliated for many years. Since the university lacks a policy on this matter, it is left to the college to make a decision. I talk to the other associate deans, but they have not faced this problem and have little advice to offer. Surely, however, there is not an issue here: faculty are not indentured servants, are they, who must remain in a department against their will? If the faculty member is forced to stay in his current department, he will be unhappy, frustrated, and possibly embittered. But the foreign language department does not wish to lose him, for it is concerned not just about maintaining its faculty strength but also about loss of student
credit hours and budget, reasonable concerns in this time of enrollment and revenue targets. Should the department be compensated for its loss? Does the English department owe them a replacement position? Does the college? Do we cut the foreign language department’s operating budget and transfer that sum to English? Should we allow any faculty member to transfer to the English department, no matter his or her academic specialty? It is attractive to many of them since English is strong in numbers and reputation, even if it is typically contentious. Perhaps more importantly, because English offers the only PhD in the humanities, its faculty work with extraordinary graduate students and teach a lighter load because they direct so many doctoral exams and dissertations. With the transfer of this faculty member, not only does the foreign language department suffer a loss and become weaker, so does the college (at least budgetarily): we lose 2 courses a year—perhaps 200-300 student credit hours—which means everyone now has to work harder to reach the targets established by central administration. What seemed like a simple issue takes months to resolve and leaves bruised feelings among many faculty, including the individual who desired the transfer.

Scenario 6

The associate dean for the sciences heads up our affirmative action/human relations/academic misconduct effort. She is a marvel of patience, tact, thoughtfulness, care, and firmness. Two cases blow up in the humanities during the spring, both of which carry the potential to be ugly for faculty and students. Some days, she and I spend two or three hours huddled in private conversation, sharing emails, talking to the campus diversity-compliance officer, and otherwise trying to negotiate that line between faculty rights and responsibilities, ethical behavior, student needs, and statutory obligation. The cases are murky; they are *Rashomon* in an academic context. Some days on the walk home, I can feel my skin prickling, and if I had hackles they’d be raised outward in a fan around my head.

Collectively, these condensed case studies illustrate certain truths that I have found to be self-evident about being an associate dean. Many of them bear distinct resemblance to truths that bear upon the life of a WPA:

1. My job is to work on unsolvable problems, the ones that defy solution. Much of my time is spent in mediation, trying to create compromise and uneasy agreement.
This means I spend weeks untangling complex histories, improving embittered relations, trying to purify the polluted waters of departmental and college life.

2. I am “the college”; I do not make a decision, the college makes it. I do not make a recommendation; the college makes it. All the associate deans similarly identify themselves as the college. So does the dean, although he is more personally identified with his decisions than we are. Like the Borg, I am the collective.

3. First and foremost, my job is to protect the college, protect the dean. This requires loyalty and discretion. It also requires, at least in my case, that I like the dean and agree with him about the direction of the college. Even if it invokes his ire, my job is to give him the best advice I can. If I don’t agree, if I can’t be loyal and discreet, I have only one option: resign.

4. One of my primary responsibilities is to keep the dean informed; I write weekly updates and brief him whenever he and I have a free 15 minutes. Few things trouble him more than being blind-sided by the chancellor or another dean; his job is to know the college and every initiative within it. Part of my job is to get out of my office and walk around campus so that I can meet chairs and faculty, TAs, lecturers, and classified staff. Social person that I am, this is one aspect of the job I enjoy, as long as people are still willing to talk to me. But as I take on more work and new initiatives, I become increasingly bound to my chair, my phone, and my e-mail. It does not take long before I begin to feel entombed.

5. The dean has made clear to me that I must help chart the path for the humanities, that is, I am to establish specific curricular and programmatic goals for my disciplines (art history, comparative literature, communication, English, the foreign languages, philosophy). The dean has told me that I need to do this not only for the good of the college but to build my own portfolio in the event that I stay on the administrative track and intend to apply
for a deanship. According to him (and his own meteoric rise supports the assertion), if I am going to move up the chain of command, I have to build programs and be able to claim them as my own.

6. My work, like those of the other associate deans, is deeply collaborative. Most of my decisions, certainly the significant ones, must be made in a college context since they impact other departments and divisions. Whether it is hiring priorities, merit decisions, promotion recommendations, program development, or departmental mergers, all of us associate deans must forge collaborative decisions that are equitable across divisions.

7. If I had to choose a metaphor for my job, I’d call myself a midwife, or maybe a wet nurse. I seldom have the opportunity to create my own child; mostly, I give birth to other people’s children and do my best to nurture them. When a child thrives, it is the parent who gets the credit; midwives and wet nurses fade into the shadows. This observation undercuts number 5 (above), but I don’t seem able to reconcile these tensions.

8. The job is not fun. Given the description of it I’ve offered so far, it is hard to imagine how it could be. It has its satisfactions: improving instruction, playing a key role in hiring, learning about various disciplines, having a say in how budget gets allocated. I also learn a lot of secrets. Unfortunately, I have no one to tell them to other than the other associate deans, who already know them.

9. Nor is the job intellectual. Being associate dean demands strong people skills, tact, a sense of history, patience, and maintaining the good will and trust of one’s colleagues. But it is not intellectually demanding: I do not typically create curricula, do library research on scholarly subjects, win collegial esteem for my ideas, writing, or originality of mind. Being a WPA has many intellectual components, but I have not found the same to be true in my job as associate dean. A corollary to this condition is the loss
of one’s disciplinary specialty: the longer I stay in the job, the more I lose touch with the scholarship in my discipline and with graduate students, which, of course, makes it harder over time to get off the dean track and resume a professorial life.

10. One benefit, however, is learning about other departments in the humanities. My job is to know their curriculum, their needs, and potential for attracting new majors, building new emphases, and establishing interdisciplinary majors. Much of my job involves staying in touch with departments and their faculty, including my own.

11. But staying in touch is different than staying in the department. I have a changed relationship with my faculty friends and colleagues. I have been removed from the faculty; what last year was gossip and good fellowship is now possible grounds for decisions about diversity compliance, harassment, salary increases, and hiring priorities. Because I’m responsible for budget and personnel, I find myself in danger of losing friendships as I build alliances. Being an Associate Dean means establishing a degree of caution and personal remoteness.

So far I’ve dwelt upon a highly subjective view of the associate deanship, based on my first six months of on-the-job experience. At this point, I wish to shift focus and turn to professional concerns. In particular, I want to consider the substance, tone, and tenor of some of the more significant and relevant discussions that we administrative types have been having recently. What I am most concerned about is that major changes are looming, and there is little evidence that college faculty are prepared for them. English departments in particular are often resistant to change, and they remain so at their peril. If change is to occur—and it must—it may be that the best site for exploring the new dimensions of higher education are within writing programs, which have recently been the site for much experimentation. At the very least, I believe writing program administrators (and English department chairs, for that matter) must become major shareholders in these decisions. In particular, I want to focus on three related areas: recruitment, retention, and technology, the constant themes in many deaconal conversations.
James J. Duderstadt, whose essay, “Can Colleges and Universities Survive in the Information Age?,” appears in the aptly titled anthology, Dancing with the Devil, states what I think is an entirely justified anxiety:

Perhaps the most critical challenges facing most institutions will be to develop the capacity for change; to remove the constraints that prevent institutions from responding to the needs of rapidly changing societies; to remove unnecessary processes and administrative structures; to question existing premises and arrangements; and to challenge, excite, and embolden all members of the campus community to embark on what I believe will be a great adventure.

Those institutions that can step up to this process of change will thrive. Those that bury their heads in the sand, that rigidly defend the status quo—or even worse—some idyllic vision of a past that never existed, are at very great risk. (1)

Duderstadt here is focusing exclusively on the challenges of technology, but there are many more crises out there: national and international competition, decreasing state subsidies for higher education, dramatic shifts in cultural and popular value systems, internationalism, and so on. If there is one message I have drawn from the lessons I am now learning as an associate dean it is that we need to be flexible, nimble, entrepreneurial, and aggressive in our abilities to recruit, retain, and graduate our students.

Across the country, increasing resources are being poured into what is called the Freshman Year Experience (FYE). Spearheaded by John Gardner, Betsy Barefoot, and Charles Schroeder, the FYE folks are a coalition of faculty, residence life staff, advisers, and campus health care professionals committed to drawing students into a university setting and keeping them there. They are at the front line of developing freshman seminars that run the gamut from a great books curriculum to individualized topics to new-student orientations. They organize partnerships between academic programs and residence staff to build learning communities that foster productive linkages between freshman classes and dormitory life. They devote themselves to connecting students to faculty and to their peers and oversee peer mentoring programs and senior transition seminars. If most first-year composition directors do not know about this important national effort, they are missing out on a fundamental conversation, one that is
closely connected to the undergraduate reform movement, and thus to national sources of funding and overall institutional health. Too often, first-year composition and its attendant programs are viewed by administrators, including college deans, as a basic but lusterless necessity in the freshman year. As a result, we are in danger of being moved to the second or third tier of funding. We only have to look at those schools where one or even both semesters of first-year composition have been eliminated in favor of writing across the curriculum or freshman seminars to see this pattern in action. My first recommendation, therefore, is that we WPAs point our browsers in the direction of the FYE Web sites and listservs to see what can be imported from them into first-year composition.

To do this effectively, we must imagine ourselves participating in a college or university recruitment/retention meeting. Every institution must find ways to convince high school students to attend its programs rather than other public, private, and virtual universities. So here is the question: will your university's high school recruiters feature the composition curriculum as a way to celebrate your school? Will the first-year composition program be described as central to recruitment, retention, and academic excellence? Or will such a discussion gravitate immediately to freshman seminars, service learning, business internships, study abroad, professional careerism, high tech classrooms, interdisciplinary initiatives, and online learning? Does the dean pump more resources into first-year composition or into that new leadership major that the folks in history, communication, and political science are developing that is likely to draw 100 new students to campus? Yes, composition is a necessity; yes, it will get funded. In order to thrive, however, it needs more than a baseline budget. It needs an infusion of new ideas (and new students), which in turn will attract new money. One way to accomplish this goal is for composition to establish interdepartmental partnerships; another is for it to expand upward into the major (for more on this, see Shamoon et al.'s *Coming of Age*, a book I'd want to cite even if I hadn't been involved in publishing it). Whatever direction we take, composition needs to be one of the primary reasons high school students choose to come—and stay—at the university, not just a useful but largely invisible program.

In order to attract students into our curriculum beyond the first year, we not only have to know what we think is important; we also need to know what the students think is important. Aside from program development, the FYE folks develop and disseminate profiles of incoming first-year students to provide a clearer sense of their interests, values, strengths, and weaknesses. Here are just a few intriguing findings I have gathered from various sources that provide a partial snapshot of incoming
student expectations and concerns:

- In 1966, 15% of high school students earned As, and 31% earned C+ or below.
- In 1996, 32% of high school students earned As, and 14% earned C+ or below.
- In 1966, 82% of high school students said their life goal was to develop a meaningful philosophy of life.
- In 1996, 42% of high school students said their life goal was to develop a meaningful philosophy of life.
- Attrition of undergraduate students is highly correlated to boredom in class.
- By the time students enter college, they have spent 4 of their 18 years watching television—and 1 of those 4 years watching commercials.
- Over the past 15 years, a steady 7% of men felt overwhelmed by all they have to do, but the percentage of women who felt overwhelmed rose from 20% to 38%.
- The chief negative practices that cause students to fail or drop out of college are commuting, part-time attendance, full-time work, watching television, and not feeling they belong to the university community.

What these kinds of data tell us is that our students require more than just academic content and writing skills; they need to participate in a community of learning that takes them seriously, that exhibits a commitment to their overall personal health and welfare, that involves them as genuine participants in the college conversation. My second recommendation, therefore, is that we begin to think of first-year composition as more than just learning how to write academic analyses and arguments; it must become a comprehensive program wedded to recruitment and retention, goals that resonate with college and university administrators.

Here are some of the key questions WPAs might want to start asking. What can first-year composition offer, in addition to the teaching of writing, that will attract high school students to our institution rather than a competing school? What can our recruitment specialists showcase when they go to recruitment fairs? What specific innovations have WPAs
provided which can reaffirm and reinforce the centrality of teaching writing, at the first year and beyond? Other than academic writing skills, how can the composition program enhance the retention of first-year students and connect them to their future majors, to research, scholarship, citizenship, and professional success? Does the composition program have web pages, brochures, and other presentational materials that highlight its accomplishments and speak in sound academic terms to incoming students and their parents?

If these concerns sounds more like those of someone from central administration than those of a writing program administrator . . . remember, they are being written by a former WPA who has now become the Borg.

Speaking of the Borg, let’s move to my last major concern, technology. Higher education is focusing major attention on new technologies: computer-mediated learning, web-based curriculum, CD-ROM technology, compressed video, and the like. In this global economy, universities must internationalize and increasingly offer their curricula across campuses, cities, and time zones. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, for example, is partnering with institutions in Germany and the UK—to name just two—to develop joint curricular efforts in the humanities and social sciences and has also recently become a founding partner of the Global University Alliance. Like most institutions of higher education, we want to remain on the cutting edge and do not want to be left behind if advanced internet technologies become a staple of instructional delivery.

On a more basic level, however, technology represents a significant hope and a great challenge. It is altering the instructional philosophy of the university, given the success of Phoenix University, Virtual U., and other forms of on-line education. According to Kenneth Green, director of the Campus Computing Project, “Information technology has finally emerged as a permanent, respected (or at least accepted), and increasingly essential component of the college experience” (13). As of Fall 1998, says Green, “almost half of the nation’s colleges had a formal plan to use the Internet for marketing the institution to prospective students” (13). Even as we engage in criticism and questioning about the efficacy of technologies in and out of the classroom, we see institutions being pulled toward online instruction, distance education, distributed learning, and Web-based teaching. These changes are driven by societal changes: demands for increased access, the needs of working people at all levels to engage in lifelong learning, technological advances that make interactive learning more possible at virtually any time of the day and in any location that is linked to a line, a modem, a node.
Green posits four Cs, different than from the ones we know:

Content (what is taught),
Context (the learning environment),
Certification (outcome assessment), and
Convenience (ease of use).

Green’s conclusion is that all of us in higher education need “to view distance, distributed, and online learning as a new, fourth sector of higher education, residing alongside (and not behind) research universities, residential colleges, and commuter institutions” (15). And he asks a key question: “Now what do we do?” (15). I would echo this question with a slight modification: given the pressures on institutions to teach more efficiently and to distribute their learning outside the conventional classroom, how can composition participate? How can we be sure that writing instruction does not get left behind as conventional classrooms are transformed into online sites with chatrooms, virtual instructors, and electronic administration centers? Can we teach composition using compressed video? Can we modularize composition, or at least some aspects of our instruction, so that in-class time gets reconfigured? Can we partner with text publishers and find ways to make instruction available 24 hours a day? Can we fuse game technology, MUDing, and MOOing with discourse communities, civic literacy, and composition’s brand of cultural studies?

In a provocative online article entitled “Restructuring Our Universities: Focusing on Student Learning” written for the American Library Association, Alan E. Guskin argues for a related but revolutionary conceptual change in higher education: a shift away from a focus on how faculty teach to one that emphasizes how students learn, a shift that is embedded within changing notions of faculty workload and new technologies. Composition studies, already a pioneer in many of these areas, has not yet become part of the wider campus conversation on restructuring higher education. Unless it gets involved, its influence is almost certain to diminish. For example, one of Guskin’s important points is that universities operate on two increasingly false “overarching, global assumptions: that faculty members teaching groups of students in a classroom setting are essential for effective student learning, and, [that] because of this assumption, increasing the productivity of faculty members requires increasing the number of classes taught and/or the number of students taught in a
particular class.” Guskin offers a different paradigm. His view is that key elements of the learning process can only be accomplished effectively if they are based on three principles:

1. Productive interaction between students and faculty
2. Intelligent utilization of electronic technologies
3. Meaningful peer interaction without a faculty member present

Additionally, such activities should take place both inside and outside the institution. These transformations would necessitate changes in faculty responsibilities, graduate education, the academic calendar, and tenure and promotion criteria. Regardless, they are beginning to feel inevitable. With increasing pressure from businesses and the private sector to reduce cost and increase learning, universities are being asked to rethink how education gets delivered—and who delivers it. Most importantly, Guskin makes clear that the real test of higher education will not be in how we teach but in what students actually and demonstrably learn.

I’d like to conclude, as I began, by offering four brief, hypothetical scenarios for composition in the 21st century, scenarios that demand a different set of challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities for writing program administrators.

Scenario 1

The composition class is a real one with real students and a real instructor. Only in this classroom, the instructor is not paid by section, by student, or by rank. Rather, this instructor earns money based on a comparison between pre- and post-test writing scores based on a set of criteria developed by the state composition board. This class is the natural outcome of Guskin’s argument: in this case, instructors are paid not on the basis of time spent teaching but rather on certifiable progress toward specified outcomes, either determined by or imposed upon WPAs and their programs.

Scenario 2

Students who enroll in composition receive a CD-ROM which combines the graphical and narrative sophistication of a game like Quake or Myst and which requires them to master a laddered set of skill and achievement levels centered on the components of a sophistic argument. It is a game the students play, a story into which they insert themselves as avatars, but the outcome is serious. They wander through a digitized
landscape, forge partnerships with other players to form collaborative
teams, score points as they play a kind of logical chess game, improve their
skill levels, recount their exploits and problems in a chat room—always
without losing sight of their major goal: analyzing the various components
of written argument and producing their own. To win the game, students
must produce a variety of creative expository texts that are evaluated by
a virtual figure named Plato, who turns out to be a composition specialist,
certified by the WPA but who works at home and is paid on the basis
of productive response time, which is monitored by the WPA. And only
by winning the game can these students pass on to the next level, which
we might want to call “sophomore year” or “completion of the English
Composition General Education Requirement.”

Scenario 3

As WPA, you are the master programmer of the expository writing
curriculum. It exists on the web, with students working through options
and exercises and making virtual appointments as they need them with
writing specialists who work both on-line and in-person in a writing center
that is the actual and virtual central ganglion of this system. Students
pay an online fee rather than traditional tuition based on credits; it is
composition by the hour rather than by the credit. Your writing center is
open to both credit and non-credit students, including business people
who may need a quick update on the business letter or how to use a
library database for a research project. It is open 24-hours a day, and when
staff members are not meeting with students face-to-face or electronically,
they are creating curricular innovations, experimenting with Java applets,
using HTML 19.0, and MOOing all the while.

Scenario 4

As WPA, you decide that there is only one way to teach writing:
by hiring poorly paid adjunct faculty to work in classrooms with 20-27
students and with little departmental or institutional support. As learning
gets distributed, as access becomes a major concern, as funding is
increasingly channeled into other curricular areas, as our institutions
lose students to electronic universities that may be lacking in academic
substance but are appealing in terms of support services, community,
technological sophistication, ease of use, and are state-certified to boot,
we are likely to begin to wonder: is it time to change? My call then is
for writing program administrators to begin to think proactively: not of
what first-year composition is but what it can be and what it must be if we are to play a central role in the education of the next generations of students.

Webliography

http://www.uwex.edu/disted/home.html (An excellent site, full of useful news and links. If you visit no other, visit this one, but be sure to figure on spending lots of time)
http://www.sc.edu/fye/ (The First-Year Experience folks)
http://web.missouri.edu/~stulife/ (Department. of Student Life, University of Missouri-Columbia)
http://www.acpa.nche.edu/srsch/charles_schroeder.html (“Developing Collaborative Partnerships That Enhance Student Learning and Educational Attainment” by Charles Schroeder, Vice Chancellor Student Affairs, University of Missouri-Columbia)

Selected Distance Education Sites

Excelsior College: http://www.regents.edu
INTELECOM Intelligent Telecommunications: http://www.intelecom.org
Sybase Education Services: http://www.sybase.com/education/
TheU (Virtual University): http://www.ccon.org/theu/index.html
eCollege: http://www.ecollege.com/student/index.html
Campus Electronique: http://www.campus-electronique.tm.fr
Blackwell Publishers (Electronic Publishing):
    http://www.blackwellpublishers.co.uk/Static/electron.htm
University Continuing Education Association: http://www.nucea.edu/
Peterson’s.Com (Distance Learning): http://www.petersons.com/dlearn/
Virtual Learning Environments, Inc.: http://www.vlei.com/
Ed/X (Distance Learning Channel): http://www.ed-x.com
University of Phoenix: http://www.phoenix.edu/

Also Recommended

Works Cited


In his Afterword to *Coming of Age*, Robert Connors invokes the famous Mark Twain trope about lightning bugs and lightning to dramatize the difference implied in the one-word change recommended by the editors of this volume:

“Advanced writing,” as opposed to “advanced composition,” is not predicated on the idea of a fugitive two- or three-course selection that appears, sputters, and gives up the ghost to a literary undergraduate major. [. . .] The advanced writing curriculum, for which this book is a prospectus and menu, is a much more thoroughgoing and radical idea. It proposes and provides a program for an entirely new conception of undergraduate literacy education, one based on the centrality of writing rather than literature. This conception will be, in fact, the alternative English major for the twenty-first century. (147)

This “last” prophetic word is a fitting conclusion to one of the most exciting and timely professional books I have read in a long time. Like many in composition
studies, my department colleagues and I are in the early stages of designing a new undergraduate writing studies concentration. *Coming of Age* set me to jotting down notes, consulting my university’s course catalog, and mapping curricular ideas from the first page of the introduction to the last electronic text on the CD-ROM.

Both the content and form of this text are future-directed. As the Preface explains, *Coming of Age* is a “print-linked publication,” which combines the print mode of publishing with at least one other [mode]," in this case a CD-ROM (xi). Together the print section and CD-ROM create a whole text in which neither part is ancillary nor subordinate to the other. The print essays in Parts I and II argue for the shift from discrete advanced composition courses to a fully articulated undergraduate writing studies curriculum, while the electronic essays in Parts III and IV offer a sampling of advanced writing course descriptions and syllabi as well as pragmatic advice about creating an undergraduate writing studies program. Short abstracts of the electronic essays in Parts III and IV appear in the print volume, offering readers a preview of the CD-ROM’s contents and an opportunity to surf the virtual texts according to interest.

One of most useful essays for those who are just beginning to think about an undergraduate writing curriculum is Rebecca Moore Howard’s brief introduction, “History, Politics, Pedagogy, and Advanced Writing.” As long as our field is identified and defined primarily by our work in first-year composition, argues Howard, advanced writing courses will remain an “afterthought” with no clear curricular purpose. Within the framework of a carefully conceptualized writing studies curriculum, however, such courses not only take on clear and multiple purposes but also work together to fulfill an unmet curricular need: preparing students to be writers in the broadest sense. Speaking for the editorial team, Howard proposes a writing studies curriculum organized around three objectives: (1) historical and theoretical courses that provide disciplinary knowledge; (2) a wide range of practice-oriented writing courses that prepare students for careers as writers; and (3) courses in civic or public literacy that prepare students for “using writing as a means of participating in the public sphere” (xv).

The five essays that make up Part I, “Redirecting the Field from Advanced Composition to Advanced Writing,” expand upon the ideas introduced in Howard’s essay. In “Advancing Composition,” for example, Lynn Z. Bloom demonstrates the need for a coherent advanced writing curriculum by offering a historical overview of the hodgepodge of courses that have fallen under the rubric of “advanced composition.” Robert A. Schwegler, in “Curriculum Development in Composition,” explores what it
might mean to conceptualize the writing curriculum in terms of “activity fields” (29), while Linda K. Shamoon, in “The Academic Effacement of a Career: ‘Writer,’” argues for curricular reform in terms of student need. Specifically, Shamoon interviews five full-time writers who testify to the academy’s failure to prepare them for their current careers and to “the need for courses that address the history, the variegated expertise, the public roles, and the ethics of writing as a profession” (43). Offering a counterpoint perspective, Richard M. Bullock, in “Feathering Our Nest,” cautions us to reflect on our self-interestedness in promoting this new curriculum and asks us to consider possible negative consequences, such as graduates with “dismal employment prospects” or the erosion of our field’s experimental and subversive potential through greater professionalization (21-24).

The essays in Parts II and III describe possible courses that might meet the curricular objectives articulated in the introduction. Part II essays focus on sample core courses, and Part III on possible electives. Each of these sections further organizes courses according to curricular aim. So, for example, the core courses described in Part II as “preparing students for participation in the discipline of writing studies” include Andrea Lunsford’s “Histories of Writing and Contemporary Authorship,” Sandra Jamieson’s “Theories of Composing,” and Gail Stygall’s “Discourse Studies,” while the elective courses that accomplish this same aim include Mary Lamb’s “The Rhetoric of Gender as Advanced Writing,” Deepika Bahri’s “What We Teach When We Teach the Postcolonial,” and Dennis Baron’s “Literacy and Technology.”

My response to the rich array of course descriptions in Sections II and III—27 in all—was twofold. On the one hand, I found myself dazzled by the broad range of curricular possibilities and inspired to plan new courses on such topics as “The Rhetoric of Gender” or “The Rhetoric of the Everyday” as well as to figure out how I might incorporate Dennis Baron’s “writing on clay” assignment into my current course on classical rhetoric. On the other hand, I found myself questioning various classifications—both the distinction between “core” and “elective” and the categorization by curricular aim (disciplinary, public, professional). Why, I wondered, was a course like Arthur Walzer and David Beard’s on “Rhetorical Theory” classified as “elective” rather than as “core”? Even more puzzling were some of the categorizations by aim: Howard’s course on “Style, Race, Culture, Context” as “professional” rather than as “public”; Chris Anson’s course on “Below the Surface: A True-to-Life Course in Editorial Practice” as “disciplinary” rather than as “professional”; Diana George’s course on “Cultural Studies: The Rhetoric of Everyday Texts” as “professional” rather
than as “public.” I mention these examples not so much to quibble about categories as to illustrate the challenges entailed in defining and creating this new curriculum. As the authors in the text acknowledge, such work will require a great deal of local negotiation and undoubtedly a great deal of disagreement.

That is, once we shift from our enthusiastic embrace of the idea of an advanced writing curriculum to the real work of designing such a curriculum and getting it approved, things get decidedly more complicated. The five essays that make up Part IV, “Designing and Protecting the Advanced Writing Program,” take up these very issues. Each essay discusses the practical and political realities a particular institution faced in establishing an advanced writing program. As John Ramage cautions in “From Profession to Discipline: The Politics of Establishing a Writing Concentration,” those planning such a new curriculum should anticipate some of the following challenges: “resistance from your increasingly embattled literature colleagues [. . .]; the necessity of collectively defining and enacting a disciplinary identity that is necessarily ‘impure’ from the perspective of any one of the major theoretical versions of that identity [. . .]; the likelihood of having to debate ‘secession’ (from the English Department) and ‘abolition’ (of first-year composition)” (CD-ROM para. 3).

Despite these sobering words, I predict most readers will come away from Coming of Age with their enthusiasm only slightly dampened. This book’s palpably exuberant tone is contagious and leaves one energized for the messy but exhilarating work ahead. Contributing to this excitement is the high level of interactivity offered by the CD-ROM, where readers are invited to download and transform syllabi, to communicate with course designers, and to connect with various hot-links. The formation of an undergraduate writing curriculum seems a natural next step in our discipline’s “coming of age” in that it reflects the range of theoretical and practical work that has long made up our own notion of composition studies. And it seems appropriate that one of Robert Connors’s many legacies is to be among the first to issue forth this call to new identity.


Except for what’s personal, there is really so little to tell. . . .

—Eudora Welty

It is a commonplace of composition studies: expressivism vs. social constructionism, with Peter Elbow serving as expressivist guru and David Bartholomae as social constructivist priest. The debate started at least as early as the 1970s. Yet as recently as the February 1995 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, articles entitled “Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow,” and “Being a Writer vs. Being An Academic: A Conflict in Goals,” found Bartholomae and Elbow still articulating the two sides of this debate. Some grow weary of it—for example, the respondent to the Bartholomae/Elbow *CCC* articles who bluntly states in the same issue, “this debate is getting old” (Bialostosky 92).

Is it? Or could there be something new to add? The editors and authors of the two books under review here think so. One book attempts to provide an enhanced theoretical underpinning for the expressivist view and then to show examples of “informed practices” that are

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**What’s Personal**

Deborah Davis Schlacks

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expressivist in nature. The other book collapses the two sides of the debate, showing the personal in what is usually considered academic.

Charles M. Anderson and Marion M. MacCurdy, editors of *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, as well as Anne J. Herrington and Marcia Curtis, authors of *Persons in Process: Four Stories of Writing and Personal Development in College*—all assume that no matter what our preferred ideological or theoretical stance as writing instructors, we will receive personal writing, and that what the writing students do, whether overtly personal or not, will affect their personal development. Guaranteed. These authors and editors tell us that we had better be prepared when we receive such writing; we had also better learn to recognize the effect of writing on the personal development of students.

For Anderson and MacCurdy, personal writing is not just an inescapable fact of the writing teacher’s work but rather a type of writing with a very positive potential: the potential to heal. These editors have collected essays ranging from theoretical treatises on this idea, to essays that speak of the role of writing in helping writers faced with specific traumas (those associated with AIDS, sexual abuse, suicide, poverty), to essays that describe actual writing classes that emphasize the personal—classes both in the university and in the wider community. Indeed, a major strength of this book is the help it gives us as writing teachers at colleges and universities in viewing our writing classes as sites within a larger field of writing instruction/classes. My favorite section of the book is called “Writing and Healing in the World,” which includes a series of essays entitled “Voices from the Line: The Clothesline Project as Healing Text” (Laura Julier), “The More I Tell My Story: Writing as Healing in an HIV/AIDS Community” (Emily Nye), and “Las Madres, Upstairs/Downstairs: From Soul Maps and Story Circles to Intertextual Collaboration” (Sandra Florence), this last one concerning a writing group for at-risk women held as part of a community education program. The titles alone remind us academics that our writing classes on college campuses are not the only places where the hard work of the writing class takes place. The opening page of this section of the book quotes Jay Robinson in *Conversations on the Written Word* as speaking of “voices not yet heard in our academic conversations” (355). These are voices that Anderson and MacCurdy, in giving us the essays in this section, help us to start to hear—voices in a world of writing that we academic types may know little about.

In a section entitled “Writing and Healing in the Classroom” is another particularly memorable essay: Guy Allen’s “Language, Power, and Consciousness: A Writing Experiment at the University of Toronto,” in which Allen tells the story of his creating a composition class where
personal writing is stressed. Allen maintains that this emphasis has many benefits, among which is improvement of the students’ academic writing through their practice of personal writing. Allen’s essay is interesting not only for the conclusions he has reached about the benefits of the class he teaches, but also for the way he shows us how he worked to start, and refine, and revise this writing class. This book’s real strength is in the particular examples it shows of classroom—and outside-of-classroom—practices, such as those discussed in Allen’s essay.

However, the introduction to the book, the part in which the groundwork is laid, is unfortunately somewhat disappointing. In it, Anderson and MacCurdy attempt to show that an emphasis upon writing as healing is needed today in particular. In the past (30-35 years ago, as they would have it), we teachers “assumed students arrived at college ready to engage in the intellectual mission of higher education” and that “our primary concern as teachers of writing was to develop the intellectual capacities, skills, and abilities of our students” (1). True enough; those were common assumptions (though I do believe instructors have complained for eons about underprepared students). What is troubling is that Anderson and MacCurdy seem to accept that this way was the “right” way for its time. Academically prepared middle-class students of yesteryear did not need the healing of personal writing, they seem to say. However, the authors assume that the situation has changed noticeably. Students are much different: perhaps working class, perhaps traumatized (or, as they would have it, most assuredly traumatized by the horrors of contemporary society), perhaps part of a minority group. Again, true enough; the demographics have shifted, as we all know, and with many effects upon higher education. So the authors argue that academically underprepared, poorer students of today do need the healing of personal writing. Somehow the dichotomizing and the tinge of “golden age” thinking bother me, as does the hyperbolic statement that “PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] has become a central, material fact of our time. We are all survivors” (3). Isn’t it more the case that in earlier decades, trauma may have gone unnoticed or at least unlabeled? The World War II admiral becomes an alcoholic, but no one considers his problem as related to war trauma; the Vietnam vet behaves similarly, and by this time the connection to his war trauma is recognized. Likewise for students of the past, who may simply have known better how to hide their personal traumas under a social mask vouchsafed them by their middle-class upbringings. And isn’t it dangerous to speak of all of us as PTSD sufferers, thus running the risk of trivializing the experience of those who truly are the traumatized survivors of horrific events? Nonetheless, the authors’ effort to establish a sophisticated underpinning
for expressivism is to be applauded; they just did not need the hyperbole.

My other disappointment is that the book fails to emphasize the role of the personal in the required freshman composition course. The course described in Guy Allen’s essay is an elective course—quite a different situation from a required freshman class. And none of the other essays in the volume describes in any detail at all a required freshman composition course. We the readers are left to compare our own experiences as teachers of such courses with the types of classes that are described in the book. That is certainly a valuable exercise, but how much more valuable it would have been for the book to have had within it materials for such a comparison. Still, in all, there are many intriguing and valuable nuggets in *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*.

Anne J. Herrington and Marcia Curtis’s *Persons in Process: Four Stories of Writing and Personal Development in College* features, as the title suggests, four case studies of students who, when the authors first encountered them, were freshmen taking required writing courses at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Herrington and Curtis followed them throughout their years (in one case, it was just one year) at the university, noting and then analyzing the ways in which they developed both as writers and as people—as well as the ways these two lines of development intertwined. They write of Nam, a refugee from Vietnam who had become a United States citizen; of Lawrence/Steven, a young gay man; of Rachel, a young bisexual woman from a middle-class family; and of Francois, a minority student of uncertain background. They show how these students “composed themselves” during their time at the university, in part through their experiences with writing.

Each case study is full of intriguing glimpses into the worlds of these students, with analyses of the connections between their writing and their overall development as people. I enjoyed reading about the progress (and regress), about the twists and turns in the paths of development. I appreciated being reminded of the way the personal permeates so much that we do. Nam, a devout Christian, writes about his faith—an obvious instance of the personal impinging upon college writing. Lawrence/Steven’s essays are a series of (usually) coded references to his struggle to establish a gay identity. Rachel, even when writing academic papers about psychology, is developing personal confidence through mastering the academic conventions of her field. Francois, ever the riddle to his teachers, seems to write to conceal rather than reveal himself, but in so doing, in his own way, is writing a “self.”

Again, however, as with the other book, I would like to have seen a bit more emphasis upon first-year composition, in addition to the very
welcome emphasis upon the developmental writing student that is in such abundance in this volume. Three of these four students started out in developmental writing; only one, Rachel, started out in the first of the two-sequence freshman composition courses offered at that university. Interestingly, too, the case study of Rachel seems not as rich as those of the other three students; her experience seems not as deeply analyzed. Lawrence/Steven, for instance, has his essays mined for ways in which he codes his struggle with his sexual identity; Rachel, who the authors learn during the course of their study is bisexual, does not similarly have her essays examined for ways in which they may reveal any such struggle on her part. Indeed, unlike with the other three students, her essays are not quoted in this book. It is almost as if, because she is more adept at academic writing, she can more successfully code, or hide, the personal material that might be behind what she is writing; there is, thus, from the authors’ point of view, not as much to say about her essays. The others do not manage this feat as successfully, and, thus, there is more “meat” there (so to speak) to analyze for its personal ramifications. This phenomenon has ethical implications: in scrutinizing the writings of certain students who may not be able to choose how much of their “personal” selves to reveal in their writing, are we taking advantage of them in some way? It is a question worth pondering.

Nonetheless, as with the Anderson and MacCurdy volume, there is much to like about Herrington and Curtis’s presentation of these four case studies. They indeed collapse that personal-nonpersonal binary, making us think more about its implications.

“Except for what’s personal, there is really so little to tell. . . .” Both books bear out Eudora Welty’s memorable statement, most definitely indicating how much we as writing instructors need to consider and reconsider the role of the personal in the writing class, and how much we need always to recognize that writing on any topic can have a significant personal dimension. In addition, these points are ones writing program administrators ought to keep in mind as they make curricular decisions and train new tutors and new writing instructors.

Note

1 Vande Kieft 15. Vande Kieft reports in a footnote that the quotation comes from her interview with Welty, March 14 and 15, 1961.
Works Cited


Announcements

Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Web Site
The permanent URL of the Council of Writing Program Administrators on the World Wide Web is now

http://www.wpacouncil.org

Annual WPA Summer Workshop
The Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Annual WPA Summer Workshop will take place July 8-12, 2001, in Tempe, Arizona. The Workshop will be hosted by Arizona State University East.

WPA invites up to 30 prospective and new writing program administrators—as well as experienced WPAs desiring renewal—to take part in an intensive four-day workshop in writing program administration. The Workshop will provide information, strategies, advice, encouragement, and a rich and supportive professional network.

The Workshop is intended not only for those with formal WPA appointments but also for others who are de facto WPAs, having primary responsibility for writing instruction or support of writing instruction on their campuses. Representatives from community colleges are especially encouraged to attend.

Topics will include curriculum and program design, faculty development, assessment, writing centers, and use of technology. We will consider administrative concerns, such as program organization, budget and personnel management, institutional contexts, and the politics of running writing programs. We will address career concerns of WPAs. Participants will also be encouraged to raise issues from their own professional situations.

The Workshop will begin on Sunday, July 8, with an evening welcome reception at the hotel and will conclude on Thursday, July 12, before noon. There will be opportunities to share ideas, including informal conversations, individual consultations, and breakout discussions for participants from different kinds of institutions.

Workshop Leaders
Jeanne Gunner is director of Core Composition at Santa Clara University and editor of College English. David Schwalm is Dean of East College and Vice Provost at Arizona State University East, served as WPA at ASU Main, and is the founder and listowner of WPA-L.
About Tempe, Arizona

Tempe, Arizona, is the home of ASU Main and has been identified as one of the best college towns in the country. Directly adjacent to the ASU Main campus, the recently renovated downtown area offers great food, entertainment, and shopping. Sure, it’s hot in Arizona in the summer, but that’s what air conditioning is all about. For more about Tempe, go to http://www.tempe.gov.

Workshop Location

The Workshop will be held at the new Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, walking distance from all of the attractions of downtown Tempe and the new Tempe Town Lake. Each participant will have a private room with full amenities. Workshop sessions will convene in hotel conference facilities, and breakfast, lunch, and all breaks will be catered. There are recreational facilities at the hotel, including pool and spa, and access to ASU facilities can be arranged.

The Workshop fee of $750 includes all conference materials, the opening reception, all breakfasts, all lunches, all breaks, parking, dinner at Dave’s house on Wednesday night, and four nights lodging. You will have two evenings to explore Tempe eateries and entertainment on your own.

For Further Information

Contact David E. Schwalm, Dean of East College, Vice Provost, Arizona State University East 7001 E. Williams Field Road Mesa, AZ 85212; e-mail: david.schwalm@asu.edu.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) invites you to a participatory conference, Composition Studies in the 21st Century: Rereading the Past—Rewriting the Future, October 5-7, 2001. The program features a plenary address by Peter Elbow. The list of invited speakers also includes Wendy Bishop, Lynn Z. Bloom, Lester Faigley, Keith Gilyard, Gesa Kirsch, Min-Zhan Lu, Harriet Malinowitz, Susan Miller, Gary Olson, Mark Reynolds, Cynthia Selfe, Kurt Spellmeyer, Todd Taylor, and Art Young. In addition, to commemorate WPA’s 25th anniversary, there will be forums with past and present WPA presidents and journal editors.

Each three-hour session, focused on a question central to our discipline, consists of two thirty-minute talks by invited speakers followed by an hour of small-group table discussion and then a concluding hour
of group reports and large-group discussion. Registrants are invited to volunteer as table discussion leaders or session moderators.

The conference fee is $195, which includes a copy of the book and conference essays and responses, edited by conference co-directors Lynn Z. Bloom, Don Daiker, and Edward M. White, to be published by Southern Illinois University Press. Registration is limited to the first 350 registrants. Make checks payable to Composition Studies in the 21st Century, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056. For further information on registration and lodging, call (513) 529-1901 or e-mail Don Daiker at daikerda@muohio.edu.

Council of Writing Program Administrators’
Best Book Award
Call for Nominations

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is pleased to announce the establishment of the CWPA Best Book Award. The award will be given bi-annually to the author(s) or editor(s) of the best book addressing issues in administration of higher education writing programs, including first-year programs, undergraduate writing majors, advanced composition programs, technical/scientific/business/professional writing programs, writing across the curriculum, and writing centers.

The CWPA Best Book Award Committee calls for nominations of a book with a publication date of 2000 or 2001. Nominated books will be evaluated for scholarship and research contributing to understanding writing program administration. Nominations (from author[s] or editor[s], reader[s], or publisher must be received by January 1, 2002, and must include a two-page letter of nomination describing the book and stating its contribution to writing program administration.

Send five copies of both the letter of nomination and the nominated book to “CWPA Book Award Committee, c/o Secretary, Council of Writing Program Administrators, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45046.”

Announcing a New Web Site on Collaboration

Readers are invited to visit—and contribute to—a new Web site designed to encourage collaborative writing and research in higher education. The URL for the Web site, Collaborate!, is http://www.stanford.edu/group/collaborate/.
Collaborate! was developed by Corinne Arraez, Lisa Ede, and Andrea Lunsford in conjunction with MLA President Linda Hutcheon's call for “alternatives to the adversarial academy” (Presidential Forum, 2000 MLA). The site provides a clearinghouse of information on and productive models of collaboration in the humanities and on best practices for institutional change. The models provided on the site, as well as the bibliography and links to related sites, provide a starting point for those interested in collaborative research and writing.

Web sites are always works in progress, but this is particularly true for Collaborate! Institutional change comes slowly—if it comes at all—so the developers of Collaborate! encourage all those interested in collaborative writing and research to work together to develop the kind of synergistic collaboration that can enable such change. For information on how materials can be added to Collaborate!, click on the “how to contribute’ icon at the bottom of each page.

For further information, contact Corrine Arraez at carraez@stanford.edu, Lisa Ede at lede@orst.edu, or Andrea Lunsford at lunsford@stanford.edu.

Call for Submissions (Edited Collection)
Judaism and Composition: History, Politics, Culture, & Identity
Edited by Andrea Greenbaum and Deborah H. Holdstein

While contemporary scholarship in composition studies has labored to expose the influence of race, class, and gender in the construction of classroom practice and institutional politics, there is little discussion of how Judaism, whether as religious doctrine or cultural identity, has influenced the field of composition studies. This chasm in composition scholarship is surprising, given that composition studies has, for the last twenty years, been a discipline that has vigorously claimed to embrace and advocate a politics of diversity. Judaism and Composition: History, Politics, Culture, and Identity seeks to expose and critique the absence of such scholarship and will explore the myriad configurations of Judaic influences in composition studies that have yet to be articulated, but that are made manifest in the theory and pedagogy of radical/critical teaching, service-learning, and narratives of literacy, identity, and politics. Further, we are interested in exploring how Judaic rhetorical texts can be used to reconstruct traditional rhetoric through its use of language, style, and symbolism.
The Editors seek strong, theoretical essays that will cover comprehensive areas of investigation. Some of many possible topics to consider include the role environment plays in the construction of identity, since, for Jews living in the Diaspora, questions of location and identity have always been highly problematic; cultural assimilation; the interrelationship between Aristotelian rhetoric and rabbinic texts, such as the Midrash and Talmud; gay and lesbian Jewish identity; African-American and Jewish interactions (and mixed identities); how the Judaic imperative to do charity and justice has manifested itself in composition, particularly through critical pedagogy and service-learning projects; Jewish radicalism and its influence on composition scholarship; Kabbalah as rhetoric; Jewish-led intellectual movements (i.e. Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School) and their presence in composition theory and pedagogy; use of Jewish humor; explorations in the tradition of Jewish literacy and education.

Please send 2 copies of 1000 word abstracts by June 30, 2001 to: Andrea Greenbaum, Barry University, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Lehman 304, 11300 N.E. Second Avenue, Miami Shores, FL 33161-6695. Electronic submissions are welcome. Please send them to greenbau@hotmail.com.

Any questions? Feel free to contact Andrea Greenbaum (address above) or Deborah Holdstein at d-holdstein@govst.edu.

The Writing Instructor (TWI), was resurrected as a networked journal and research community on the WWW at http://www.writinginstructor.com in June, 2001. Jointly sponsored by Purdue University and California State University San Marcos, TWI brings together a distinguished editorial board, program directors from universities across the country, and importantly, graduate students in rhetoric and composition from these programs. TWI's editorial board consists of people teaching writing at many levels, across a range of venues, from K-12, to two-year colleges, to colleges and universities. TWI aims to bring much-needed coherence to the broad and influential developments in the teaching of writing that have occurred over the past twenty years, with the aim of setting the stage and marking a precedent for the future of writing instruction as a pedagogical and scholarly enterprise. To accomplish this goal, TWI takes advantage of the many resources available to us as our field manifests itself in the digital space of the Internet.
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If you have questions or suggestions, please contact one of the General Editors: David Blakesley, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907; E-mail: dave@writinginstructor.com; phone: (765) 494-3772; fax: (765) 494-3780; or Dawn Formo, Literature and Writing Studies, CSU San Marcos, San Marcos, CA 92096-0001; E-mail: dawn@writinginstructor.com; phone: (760) 750-4199; fax: (760) 750-4111.
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