

Writing Program Administration

*Journal of the
Council of Writing Program Administrators*

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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. For citations of Internet resources, use the *Columbia Guide to Online Style*. 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.

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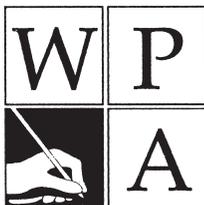
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Extending an invitation to join the Council of Writing Program Administrators

The Council of Writing Program Administrators offers a national network of scholarship and support for leaders of college and university writing programs.

Membership benefits include the following:

- A subscription to *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, a semi-annual refereed journal
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Letter from the Editors

We continue to be impressed with the quality and the range of the scholarship being produced by WPAs and submitted to the journal. In this issue both range and quality are evident.

David Blakesley is concerned with the ethical and moral issues surrounding placement into first-year composition, and he believes that directed self-placement, properly implemented, can have far-reaching effects on “instructor training, instructor-student relations, instructor and student attitudes, and [. . .] student performance.” His article is more than just an argument for directed self-placement; it is a story about persuading an institution to accept change, about how to identify and approach the various stakeholders, about what strategies to consider, and about where to look for potential resistances. Drawing from his experiences at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, he points out that in the process of arguing for and then implementing their program, WPAs there discovered that changes to the placement procedures had implications well beyond the writing program. They were able to “reshape institutional contexts and conversations.”

Theresa Freda Nicolay also is concerned with placement and remediation. She asserts that assessment is based on dialogue, writing, and revision, a thoughtful process of teachers coming to know the students in their classes and WPAs coming to know the students in their programs. In this model of placement, the students take responsibility for their own placement and project which course of the composition sequence will help them do their best work. Because students are “individuals who learn in a variety of ways,” they must be offered the opportunity to make decisions about how they can use their own learning strategies to meet the demands of the university.

Jeffrey T. Grabill and Lynée Lewis Gaillet show us what is involved in shaping a writing program committed to community-based work. Like Blakesley’s piece, this one offers both a concrete description of one particular program (re)design, and a broader vision of the role of writing programs in insitutional change. They argue that as universities interact more with surrounding communities, writing programs are poised to become the institutional home for such community-based work and the new research projects emanating from it. We thus learn both how to build effective relationships between a writing program and the communities and organizations outside the university, and how our identities as WPAs will necessarily change in the process.

Finally, Ruth Mirtz, Susan Taylor, Keith Rhodes, and Kim van Alkemade combined to tell four different stories about “stopping” as WPAs. On the surface the personal reflections look and sound familiar: struggles with colleagues and administrators, frustrations and refusals, and finally just stopping. Yet the stories quickly show us what the authors explicitly affirm: that “WPAs don’t stop in any simple way.” The work we value and the beliefs about student learning to which we are committed linger beyond the tenure of the position. Like the other articles in this issue, this article provides both local stories and a broader view of writing program administration as a whole.

Dennis Lynch, Michigan Technological University
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Directed Self-Placement in the University

David Blakesley

When the institutions make classifications for us, we seem to lose some independence that we might conceivably have otherwise had. This thought is one that we have every reason, as individuals, to resist. Living together, we take individual responsibility and lay it upon one another. We take responsibility for our deeds, but even more voluntarily for our thoughts. Our social interaction consists very much in telling one another what right thinking is and passing blame on wrong thinking. This is indeed how we build the institutions, squeezing each other's ideas into a common shape so that we can prove rightness by sheer numbers of independent assent.

—Mary Douglas (91)

In whatever form it takes, the placement of students in university composition courses is fundamentally an act of socialization.¹ As such, and as Mary Douglas suggests, placement or classification, i.e., *being* placed or classified, naturally breeds resistance among those who feel its effects. On the one hand, placement itself is the most social of acts whereby individuals adjust to the values and judgment of the group with which they identify or aspire to join, all in the interest of social harmony. On the other hand, individuals also sacrifice some aspect of individual responsibility or identity in making such accommodations, regardless of whether their adjustments to social conditions are prompted by self-knowledge and the desire to “fit in” or by the institution that has the power to confer such group identity. Even as we are, in Kenneth Burke's words, “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy” (*Language as Symbolic Action* 15) that perpetuates and rationalizes social groups, we sacrifice allegiance

to self-determination, a value at odds with the normalizing function (or desire) of the institution.

In the broadest sense, placement is a fundamental and familiar process of socialization, a communal act of identification. We may have no choice but to act together, for as Burke writes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, identity itself is contingent upon what he calls *consubstantiality*: “A doctrine of *consubstantiality*, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance [i.e., *identity*], in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, [people] have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (21). While we might naturally resist *being* placed—*identified by the other*—we also find ourselves implicitly identified with the group by virtue of our active involvement in the social and ethical process of communicating and acting together. We choose and yet are chosen to act, from our first words to our last implicated in a give-and-take of identities. Our identifications—our shared substance or consubstantiality—are marked by the rhetorical power of naming and placement, by our answers to questions like “Who am I?” and “Who are you?” and “Who are we?”

I have invoked Douglas and Burke at this early stage because I believe that on the whole WPAs may have greatly underestimated the ethical and moral complexity of writing placement, even as we have worked so hard to show the value of ensuring that students take the course that will best help them become successful writers in the university and beyond. As Sharon Crowley argues in *Composition in the University*, we may have also underestimated the degree to which first-year composition itself functions culturally, and thus hegemonically, to preserve the status quo with regard to both institutional practice and politics, as well as attitudes toward literate practice (see especially “A Personal Essay on Freshman English” 228-49). Even if we had the time for such reverie, who would imagine that writing placement itself could carry with it such wide-ranging questions about identity, the role of the individual in society, or the function of institutions? After all, placement is but one concern of WPAs; our writing programs typically also involve questions of content or curriculum, pedagogy, instructor training, disciplinary status, and more, each of these a complex problem on its own. Nevertheless, the question of writing placement stands out as unique among these concerns. Although it shares with these other questions a tendency to involve social forces and practices beyond the writing program itself, we spend much of our time detailing how existing methods of writing placement might function better or more accurately (setting aside momentarily the ambiguity of “accurate”). We ask, for instance, whether an ACT score alone (or in combination with a placement test) provides the best way

to slot students in first-year composition courses, or whether placement itself is even necessary. We wonder if mainstreaming is the answer to the questions of logistical and economic feasibility as well as predictive validity that attend the politics of remediation. There are always alternatives. Whichever way we go, the ideological forces, or lines of power, that attend the more general concept of placement itself fade into the background as we grapple with the need to justify our means of placement, or even curriculum, with empirical evidence, expert opinion, and rational argument. We get caught up in solving the persistent problems of the moment and rarely have the time to ponder the bigger picture. There is always an urgency of the moment that makes it difficult to see the broader patterns of force, or even the imaginative possibilities, that contain our day-to-day adjustment to conditions.

While it is true that in the past decade composition scholars have paid increasing attention to the politics of writing instruction generally, we have yet to formulate a systematic approach to the question of how our disciplinary and pedagogical practices and the rhetoric we use to validate them function in the wider context of institutional practice and, thus, ideological contexts. Consider the fairly recent and well-publicized events surrounding the actions of the Board of Trustees for the City University of New York, who in May 1998 approved a resolution to refuse admission to senior status of all students who had not passed skills assessment tests in reading, writing, and math. In "Evaluating Writing Programs in Real Time: The Politics of Remediation," Barbara Gleason reports her discovery that "[t]he empirically verifiable account that we were striving for in this evaluation [of remediation efforts] was fatally compromised by the socio-political forces that had gathered around the issue of remediation" (582). We continue to underestimate how such forces of power regulate and forestall change, as well as how they compromise the forms of rhetoric we rely on to support change or rationalize our successes. As James E. Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles argue, we need to develop a methodology of institutional critique that would ground itself as "an unabashedly rhetorical practice mediating macro-level structures and micro-level actions rooted in particular space and time" (612). I won't be reiterating here the methodology for institutional critique that these authors propose, but I do hope to show how our efforts to introduce directed self-placement at my former university was from the start an "unabashedly" rhetorical enterprise and rooted in a context that while perhaps unique in its particularity will also be familiar to many WPAs.

Unfortunately, when I first approached the question of writing placement in my role as the WPA at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), I, too, underestimated the degree to which placement itself (and

thus any changes I might instigate) functioned in the wider institutional context as the expression of power and a symptom of the institution's normalizing desire. And thus my discussion here will be sleight-of-hand, or what Burke would call "prophesying after the event," a phenomenon whereby we substitute logical priority for a temporal sequence (*Language* 85). In retrospect, it is now easy for me to see how a seemingly innocuous and initially well-supported change could ultimately expose the institutional forces that not only govern what is possible in writing program administration but also reveal the function of institutions as static patterns of value. All of which is to say that directed self-placement in the university raises more than just questions of validity, programmatic goals, and curricular integrity. In considering the merits of directed self-placement, we find ourselves cast into a net of conflicting values that force us to re-examine writing placement itself as an institutional practice, and placement generally as a fundamentally rhetorical and thus social act. Therein, I believe, is one of directed self-placement's unintended but delightful consequences. With the emergence of directed self-placement as an alternative means of placement, we will find ourselves revisiting fundamental questions about the role of composition in the university, the function of the university as an institution, and the cult of individuality that runs deep in American culture.

I intend in this essay, then, to articulate the ways that directed self-placement might function to reshape institutional contexts and conversations, what types and sources of resistance WPAs will likely face at the university and among students, strategies for understanding and (perhaps) overcoming such resistance, and finally, how directed self-placement itself can potentially and fundamentally affect every facet of a writing program. In the end, I believe, a writing program that successfully implements directed self-placement will find its effects showing up in instructor training, instructor-student relations, instructor and student attitudes, and, of course, student performance. The consequences of our placement methods run far deeper than we might initially presume.

I began this essay from the top-down by first considering "the institution" as an entity, not an individual with motives of its own, but as the abstract set of principles around which social groups form. I next move to "the university" to consider the ways in which my university manifested itself as an institution, with stress upon the ways in which it conceives and expresses its mission as an educational institution and how this mission shapes the operative rhetorical dynamic (a dynamic that will sound familiar to many). In this context, I then examine the writing program itself to show how its institutional status as an agent of change impacted the move toward directed self-placement. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, I consider the stakeholders, those groups

of people who ultimately had vested interests in the writing program, including mid-level administrators, campus advisors, instructors, and, of course, the students themselves. How, finally, did the prospect and realization of directed self-placement affect them?

The essay by Erin Harvey, Erica J. Reynolds and the author in the forthcoming volume, *Directed Self-Placement: Principles and Practices* (2002), speaks more directly to programmatic details and issues of student performance than I intend to here. I want to note, however, that it is critical that we come to the table with empirical evidence and specific plans to support such a programmatic initiative as directed self-placement. But at the institutional level, such evidence usually doesn't carry the persuasive force that we and other WPAs might attach to it, and so I will focus more here on the rhetorical dynamic at the level of the bureaucracy and hope that I can provide other WPAs with a better understanding of what's involved when we say what we are doing (or want to do) and why we are doing it. At the bureaucratic, institutional level, WPAs often find that empirical evidence, expert opinion, and (even) rational argument fail to produce good results. And yet I still believe that the rhetoric we use to reach disciplinary consensus can play a role in fostering institutional change, provided the institution will confer authority to those who proffer it and that the WPA can show it is warranted. In the end and to those who don't share our disciplinary history, discipline-specific knowledge functions ethically rather than logically, establishing the intellectual integrity of the WPA more than it might rationalize or justify specific programmatic change.

The University

In the strange world of university politics and procedures, the status quo has great momentum. One function of the university, of course, is to preserve the values of the institution which it represents. Momentum never ends, it just changes directions, more often ever so slightly than in great shifts. Consider the following representative anecdote, which has circulated widely on the Internet and that I have adapted for the sake of illustration:

The US standard railroad gauge (width between the two rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. Why was that gauge used? Because that's the way they built railroads in England, and the US railroads were built by English expatriates. Why did the English build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used. Why did they use that gauge then? Because the people

who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building the wagons that used that wheel spacing. So why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England because of the spacing of the wheel ruts.

Who built those old rutted roads? The first long distance roads in Europe (and England) were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The roads have been used ever since. And the ruts in the roads? Roman war chariots first formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for (or by) Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing. The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches derives from the original specification for an Imperial Roman war chariot. The Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the rear-ends of two war horses.

As a complex system, a university naturally resists change, especially the more its tendrils reach into the tidy wilderness of cultural ideology. It is easiest for a university bureaucracy to lumber on, to continue to do things as they have always been done, its dormancy often shored up by nostalgia for a bogus past or for “economic necessities.” But on occasion and (sometimes) at watershed moments, people begin to question the status quo either because old ways no longer seem to be working or because material conditions force (or allow) them to question it. The actors in such a drama at first tend to perceive their efforts as revolutionary, but functionally speaking, such efforts often merely provide the university and its constituents the opportunity to re-assert principles that have withstood such tests countless times.²

I see two ways of understanding how and why the university as an institution might resist directed self-placement conceptually, if not practically. To explain the first, I borrow again from Burke. His phrase “bureaucratization of the imaginative” names the phenomenon whereby amid a myriad of imaginative possibilities, we lean toward just one. The “imaginative” is a world of possibilities; bureaucratization, the carrying-out of but one them. As Burke sees it, the phrase itself names a fundamental process of history, or even dying, and is as “bungling as the situation it would characterize” (*Attitudes Toward History* 225). Unfortunately, the imaginative possibilities of the idea of a university

were reduced to few in number long before any of us arrived. One of those possibilities concerns the university's educational mission. In the most general sense, the university faces the rather schizophrenic task of preserving and disseminating collective knowledge even as it (ideally) prepares students to question that knowledge and perhaps reassemble it for future generations. Operatively speaking, the former possibility—reifying knowledge—usually takes precedence. In order to rationalize its existence, then, the university must identify students initially as outsiders, as the great unwashed or as empty, narrow-necked vessels, waiting to be cleansed or filled up with the wisdom of the academy. It is the lingering hegemony of this identification that rationalizes what Paulo Freire describes as the banking model of education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (passim) and that trickles down to the earliest years of schooling. The status quo has been that the institution should make decisions for the students, even when students might be better served to learn to make those decisions for themselves.

By the time they reach the university, most students in the United States have grown accustomed to being identified as empty vessels, and so there is normally little resistance to the drudgery of college entrance exams, writing placement tests, or any of the other battery of tests that the institution uses to identify just how empty students might be. (Ironically, some resistance will likely show up among students when a university *doesn't* begin with the presumption that students cannot evaluate their own learning.) Much of this sorting goes on outside the immediate sphere of university faculty, having been bureaucratized as the means by which the university selects or accepts students into the system. It is normally a charge carried out by testing and placement offices, recruiting officers, and other people who set and administer admissions policy, a realm most faculty and perhaps even most WPAs either avoid or recognize as beyond their sphere of influence. Because it is also an expression of institutional ideology with deep roots in cultural presumptions about education, the means by which we place students at the university is very resistant to change. There are already complex mechanisms in place that make it work (well or not), and at a large university, there are also hundreds of people involved, each of whom has some stake in the process, even though there may be few opportunities for asserting it. An act as seemingly innocuous as changing the writing placement method to directed self-placement thus requires changing the culture of the institution and rediscovering the imaginative possibilities of higher education. We have to re-bureaucratize them so that we can live with ourselves.

The second reason why the university might resist directed self-placement results from the magnitude of the change and the number of people needed to make it work. At my former university, like many others, the normal avenue for implementing curricular change followed a fairly standard pattern. At first, a select few faculty devise strategies for improving courses or programs, build support for them by discussing their merits with other faculty and (sometimes) students, then garner support from a wider body of policy-making units, such as a faculty senate or council. Recommendations for change are passed to the people who grant the final seal of approval, such as academic deans or provosts, and then the new policy is enacted. When the change is largely content-based or curricular in nature, the process usually runs smoothly, with those not directly affected deferring to the authority and sovereignty of those who are. Problems only arise when changes in one area are likely to impact another.

Implicit in this process is an ideal of shared governance, which asserts that change be the result of compromise and discussion across all levels of administration and not just enacted from the top-down (e.g., by decree of a dean or some other academic officer). People generally recognize that real change needs to occur from the bottom-up, with all stakeholders involved from the beginning. As Barbara Gleason and her colleagues at CUNY learned, it is extremely difficult to involve all stakeholders in decision-making from the outset. Attempting to do so can actually paralyze the process of change. The WPA does, after all, need to make decisions that disciplinary knowledge and immediate contexts warrant. If writing programs were autonomous units, it wouldn't be so difficult to involve all stakeholders—students and teachers—in decision-making. But writing programs, for better or worse, serve the university also when they are charged with preparing students for the rigors of academic writing. And they serve the larger community as well, representing to many the last hope of ensuring a literate citizenry. (Whether or not WPAs see the writing program as “serving” in such a way is irrelevant except when changing that perception is the goal.) Involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process thus is a great challenge for the WPA, who must try to balance the demands of theory with the practical need for support from those outside who may not share the same disciplinary knowledge and who may imagine different goals for the writing program. It is a kairotic moment, with the WPA feeling the need to improve the program even as he or she needs to recognize that the circumstances, some of which may be beyond direct influence, significantly affect the rhetorical dynamic necessary to implement change. In such circumstances, and as Aristotle long ago reminded us, the truth alone may not be enough to persuade.

When arguing for the implementation of directed self-placement, I recognized from the outset that stakeholders needed to be involved, but I significantly underestimated the degree of that involvement, as well as the time it would take to foster it. My philosophy from the outset was that the status quo did have great momentum and that in order for directed self-placement to work as it should, it would need to become the status quo itself. I also believed that if the “official” constituencies supported it, we could make it work. As most WPAs know (or learn), however, even official acceptance is no guarantee of cooperation. The residual status quo can re-assert itself in beguiling and unanticipated ways.

Before I describe more specifically how my attempts to re-bureaucratize the imaginative worked (or didn't), I should say that for the most part, directed self-placement has been a great success at the university and a model for other programs in the university to emulate. And yet, whatever its successes, it has a tenuous future because while it may “work” for the time being, it is a high-maintenance change. Additionally, the forces beyond the writing program that might question it may have been appeased, but they have not been silenced. There may be little hope that the residual, institutional ideology that “imposes universal subjectivity” (Crowley 9) on students has been extinguished.

The Writing Program in the University

To understand the material conditions that attended the introduction of directed self-placement at my university and thus that shaped the rhetoric used to support the change, I need to tell you a little bit about the writing program itself.

In Fall 1998, we created the English 100/101 *Stretch* program, one modeled on the *Stretch* program at Arizona State University and described by Gregory Glau in “The ‘Stretch Program’: Arizona State University’s New Model of University-Level Basic Writing Instruction.” English 100 (Basic Writing) would be the new, three-credit-hour course specially designed to prepare students to succeed in English 101 (Composition I), 102 (Composition II), and other college-level writing courses. Students who placed themselves into English 100 became participants in the *Stretch* program, which allowed them to take English 100 and 101 with the same experienced instructor in consecutive semesters.

Directed self-placement became the new writing placement process. As we conceived it, directed self-placement asked students to select whether they wanted to begin the first-year composition sequence in English 100/101 *Stretch* or in English 101. Students were asked to review their preparation for college-level writing and the course descriptions before making their decision. A first-week diagnostic essay in all sec-

tions of English 100 and 101 acted as a check on this process and allowed the WPA to make further recommendations regarding placement. The brochure we used to distribute information about the process is included in Appendix 1.

SIUC's writing program was well-designed and overseen for many years by outstanding WPAs, so in many respects, implementing these changes at the program level was simply a matter of course. We still felt an enormous amount of pressure, warranted or not, to address what others perceived as substantial problems in the writing ability of the university's junior- and senior-level students. It didn't matter to those placing the blame on the writing program that no one had bothered to ask what we did or why we did it, or that half of our students took their writing courses elsewhere, or that no one had bothered to formally assess the writing of students who passed through our courses, not to mention the writing ability of those students who were reportedly not writing as well as they should be. It was the old and familiar pass-the-buck phenomenon re-asserting itself. At the time, everyone was in on the act, from the provost on down. Hence, the pressure.

Two versions of English 101 were offered prior to Fall 1998: English 101 Regular (ENGL 101), which included regularly admitted students and Special Admission (SA) students who had received high scores on a writing placement test; and English 101 Restricted (ENGL 101R), which included only SA students who had received low scores on a writing placement test. English 102 (ENGL 102) was the second course in the sequence. Both courses were required as part of the core curriculum's "Foundation Skills" sequence.

Prior to Fall 1998, placement in English 101 and English 101R was determined initially by ACT score. Students scoring 19 or below and who were admitted to the university through the Center for Basic Skills (SA students) were given a timed writing test, which was subsequently scored by tutors in the English Department's writing center over the summer. All students scoring higher than 19 on the ACT placed automatically into English 101. SA students who performed well on their written test were also placed into English 101. Those who did not were placed into English 101R.

There were several differences between English 101 and English 101R. The enrollment caps were 20 and 15, respectively. The courses used different primary rhetorics, with the English 101R course also specially designed to meet the needs of basic writers. More experienced teachers were assigned to teach English 101R. However, both English 101 and English 101R shared identical learning objectives. Students in both courses were encouraged to seek help from our writing centers.

In the 1980s and when the courses were originally conceived, English 101R included a tutorial component, which required English 101R students to meet with a tutorial group for at least one hour per week to get extra help with their writing. That component of English 101R was discontinued in Fall 1987 due to budget constraints and the development of the writing center. Subsequently, all students placed into English 101R were essentially mainstreamed, once the tutorial component was made voluntary rather than a principal component of the course. Whether a student took English 101 or English 101R, it was expected that he or she would be prepared for English 102 in one semester, regardless of the student's writing ability at the time of matriculation. The PR (Progress) grade could be used in English 101 or English 101R for students who attempted to do the coursework and who attended class regularly but who did not earn a C or better. It was rarely used, however

The initial impetus for change came as a result of campus-wide discussion led by the university's core curriculum director, Ann-Janine Morey, who had held "town meetings" in all the academic units on the question of what constituted "writing literacy." Those meetings generated all sorts of recommendations (and gripes) from faculty, many of whom were unfamiliar with our curriculum or our attempts to prepare our instructors. Nevertheless, these discussions led to a host of formal recommendations, two of which were that the English department needed to create a basic writing course and a better system of placement. (Many believed that too many students were passed through the courses without learning much.) These recommendations became mandates when they were supported by the university's faculty senate. And thus the WPA's charge was to see that they were addressed. While the discussions among the WPA and other administrators was sometimes heated, the process had worked as the principle of shared governance would dictate. The university, as a collective entity, had certainly asked for change, but it was unknown at that time how ready it actually was for change.

We began the process of addressing the two recommendations—create a basic writing course and a better placement system—with these observations:

- A significant number of underprepared students were expected to "catch-up" to better-prepared peers after one semester of writing instruction in English 101; these students included both those who had placed into English 101R and—it is important to note—students who, because they scored higher than 19 on the ACT, never were tested for writing ability prior to enrolling.
- The university had no placement mechanism for determining the preparation and potential for success of regularly admitted

students, who may have scored above 19 on the ACT but who nevertheless may have had poor writing skills. We believed that as many as 10-15% of our students fell into this category, based on our review of grade distribution and the hypothesis that the ACT alone did not directly measure writing ability, but only predicted success in writing courses at the high end, i.e., for students scoring above the 80th percentile. A significant number of students who needed extra help with their writing were being placed in a course that was too advanced to meet their needs. To some extent, these hypotheses were supported by the data that we had begun to collect:

- A significant number of students were failing English 101 one or more times, ultimately resulting in low semester-to-semester retention of students in required writing courses. Students who did poorly in English 101 would either drop out of the university or would postpone re-enrolling in a writing course, both of which were undesirable outcomes for the students and for the university.
- While the mean GPA of students in English 101R and English 101 sections was very similar, SA students who had passed the English 101R course had a mean GPA in English 102 significantly lower than students who had passed the English 101 course.

Given what we knew and what we believed could happen, we designed the basic writing course and the new placement method, drawing heavily on the Arizona State *Stretch* model and upon the placement method outlined by Daniel J. Royer and Roger Gilles in their groundbreaking CCC article, “Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation.” We also relied on the qualitative observations of English 101 and English 101R instructors, data on the mean GPA of students as they moved through the first-year composition sequence, performance and retention data observed in other writing programs, and what we knew theoretically about the teaching and learning of writing.

Internally, we decided to adopt directed self-placement as the writing placement mechanism for two primary reasons:

1. Directed self-placement had been successfully implemented at at least one comparable university. Royer and Gilles had persuaded us. It didn’t hurt our efforts later that directed self-placement seemed like a relatively inexpensive solution to the problem of writing placement. (Over the course of implementation, we found that rather than pay people to read placement essays, we paid them to talk to students, with the overall expense of

doing either roughly equivalent.) More importantly, however, it also communicated the positive message to students that we respected their judgment. We felt that if students chose to take the basic writing course, rather than be forced to take it, that the classroom dynamic would improve dramatically, an important factor in a course in which students' attitudes toward writing is so crucial to writing growth. Setting questions of accuracy and reliability aside for the time being, we felt that directed self-placement could not only positively transform the learning space of the basic writing class, but also that it would make placement a far less dismal affair than it normally is, for students, advisors, teachers, and administrators. At the point of contact between students and teachers, and students and advisors, as Royer and Gilles say, directed self-placement indeed felt right (61).

2. We suspected but were not certain that students could accurately gauge their writing ability. As Erica Reynolds demonstrates in her essay in the forthcoming volume, *Directed Self-Placement: Principles and Practices*, our suspicion turned out to hold some merit. Research has shown that student self-efficacy—task-specific confidence—positively correlates with writing ability.

Throughout this stage of the process and having received a general mandate, the planning was then merely a matter of reviewing the possibilities, weighing their merits, and formulating a strategy. There was no need at this point, or so we felt, to take the range of possibilities to stakeholders other than those who would implement the change in the program itself or those who would need to approve it as “official policy.”

The tricky part in our implementation came next, when it was time to communicate the new policy to the secondary stakeholders. While we had agreed internally that directed self-placement and *Stretch* could work well together, we still had to rely on others outside the program (secondary stakeholders) to make it happen. That meant that the rhetorical dynamic would have to change. We would no longer be talking only amongst ourselves or with our students (both primary stakeholders), and thus could no longer rely on shared assumptions about how students learn to write. When you remove the bases for easy agreement, cooperation can quickly turn to competition and suspicion. So at the programmatic level, we knew from the outset that we needed to collect data to support and then to justify the changes we were proposing.

As much as baseline data (such as the mean GPA of students moving through the first-year composition sequence) and qualitative observations of English 101 instructors supported an initiative for change, and as promising as *Stretch* and directed self-placement were for improving

students' performance and retention at SIUC, concern among many over the extrapolation of results from other universities was understandable. We knew we would have to prove that directed self-placement could and (later) did work at SIUC. I have included some of our results in Appendix 2, "What Do We Know Now?"

The Stakeholders in the University

We first had to persuade higher-level administrators, such as our dean and the provost, that we could make directed self-placement work and that we would not be simply turning over to students the responsibility for making decisions that many presumed we were more qualified to make. Initially, people failed to appreciate the degree to which the "directed" part of directed self-placement played a role. To some, it seemed "counter-intuitive" that students would self-place accurately or honestly. At the time, we didn't have data to predict that they would. We distributed the articles by Glau in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and a draft of Royer and Gilles's *CCC* article on directed self-placement to help us make the case, and those articles did have a positive influence, even though I now believe it was really the gesture of pointing to existing scholarship that was persuasive, not the substance of the articles themselves. At the administrative level, we actually spent very little time discussing these other models, and it seemed fairly clear to me that the people with whom I worked hadn't considered the evidence in the articles on *Stretch* and directed self-placement very closely. So while I had introduced existing scholarship to help make the case and to shape the discussion, that scholarship had more influence as a demonstration that I had done my homework and that directed self-placement and *Stretch* were not some hare-brained ideas I had invented. That approach seemed to work well to build credibility and ethos. Still, however, to appease the dean and provost, we suggested that we would provide a "safeguard" in the form of a diagnostic essay that would be administered to all students during the first week of either course (English 100—Basic Writing or 101—Composition I) and that students would be given a second-chance to select the proper course using their results for further guidance. The diagnostic essay thus functioned as a trump card that we played to make doubters realize essentially that they (and, of course, the students) had nothing to lose by going along with the experiment. That strategy also worked, and the diagnostic essay became an important rejoinder to charges from the administration or anyone else that the English department was abdicating its responsibility. However, the diagnostic essay functioned as an adjustment, one of those unintended by-products of the imaginative, a necessity of our invention given the need to persuade

others that the new program could work. Conducting a blind, multiple reading of 2,700 essays and distributing the results in two days was manageable, but barely, with the cost being its intrusiveness at the start of each semester and the implicit message to students that we might not trust their judgment as much as we say we do.

To ensure that our plan would be accepted, I also promised to provide the university administration with the hard data showing that we had indeed achieved what we predicted we would. Using data from the Arizona State model, I had said that we would see students who started with English 100 ultimately achieve higher GPAs in English 102 (Composition II) than did their peers who started with English 101. I promised that students would indeed choose English 100 in the first place, even though it meant they would have to take an additional three credit-hours in composition. (At the time, I estimated that 15-20% of the students would choose English 100.) I promised that we would see retention in writing courses from semester-to-semester increase as a result of the changes (something also predicted by the Arizona State model). In sum, I had committed to making the introduction of directed self-placement and the other changes to the program a safe-bet for the administration. Perhaps inadvertently, I had also committed myself and writing program staff to an undertaking in statistical compilation that would require enormous expenditures of time and resources. I didn't realize at the time that no one at the university had *ever* generated such statistics measuring individual student performance and retention across a range of courses, in spite of the obvious benefits of doing so.

Our situation was somewhat different than it was at Grand Valley State University, where it was possible for writing program representatives to meet directly with students during summer orientation programs. Our students enrolled in courses off-site, by phone, or in one-on-one meetings with campus advisors. Campus advising was decentralized, meaning that each college (e.g., Liberal Arts, Education, Science, etc.) was responsible for advising the students who had chosen to major in a field within the particular college. We had no presemester orientation program for newly admitted students. And thus our first task was to make sure that campus advisors were well informed about directed self-placement and that they in turn could help us ensure that their students were well informed when making their placement decisions.

This aspect of the implementation turned out to be the most difficult to manage for several reasons. As we spread the responsibility for ensuring that students were well-informed about their choices, we also created opportunities for people to assert their influence on those choices. Ideally, students would carefully consider the options we presented them, perhaps with parents, teachers, and guidance counselors, then make

their choice. We prepared brochures for students to review, established a website with more information, and invited them to contact me or a placement coordinator if they were uncertain.³ Logistically, simply getting this information to the students proved to be difficult. (On our first pre-semester survey, only about half of the students said they had heard of directed self-placement.) To make sure that campus advisors—who would be the lead contacts with students—were well informed, I and the placement coordinators met with each advising unit multiple times, speaking to more than 100 advisors in all about the change. Most were very enthusiastic. And yet, over time, we saw that we had also created the opportunity for people to intervene by assuming perhaps too much of the “directing” in the space we had created when we asserted that we were not advocating self-placement, but *directed* self-placement. This tendency, I believe, proved to be the biggest challenge to overcome, in large part due to the material conditions that prevented our direct contact with students and the ideological insistence that allowing students to choose was “counter-intuitive.” It is an issue over which the stakeholders themselves still felt conflicted, even if directed self-placement itself had become “official policy.”

In principle, it would seem most efficient for the WPA to be the chief overseer of the writing program and thus responsible for formulating and enacting policy, standards, or guidelines, with stakeholders involved only to the extent that they would support and learn to implement such directives effectively. Of course, everyone knows that good teaching and good administration are not merely matters of formulating and enacting policy, of being efficient. With the healthy state of scholarship in writing program administration, it is fairly easy to design programs and curricula with sound rationale and theoretical support. It is much more challenging to make a program work as intended. Stakeholders need to feel a sense of ownership and that comes only with their active involvement at the conceptualization stage, when the future is a tangled wilderness of possibilities. And so we’re better off sacrificing efficiency in the early going, on the promise that our programs in the long run will be much better because of our efforts to involve stakeholders at every stage. As I mentioned earlier, there are more stakeholders on the periphery of a writing program than one might imagine initially. There are the teachers and students, of course. But aside from them, who are they? And what do they think? What motivates them to have a stake in the first place?

At SIUC, advisors were the ones charged with making sure students take the right courses and thus make good progress in their degree programs. Advisors function as the interpreters of academic policy and thus play an important role in ensuring that it works as it should. They are

also often the first point of human contact a new student has with the university. For these reasons, I knew that I would need to appeal to them for help, since the dynamic of directed self-placement would work best when their contact with students went well.

Initially, the advisors were highly skeptical of the initiative, not so much because they disagreed with directed self-placement in principle, but because it would change the nature of their interaction with students. As I saw it, I was simply asking them to distribute information to students and then to advise them when the students had questions. Previously, however, placement was predetermined before they would ever see a student. So directed self-placement upset a mechanism that functioned daily to make their work with students run more smoothly. In the past, placement was merely a matter of reading the student's transcript on a computer screen.

My first meeting with the group of chief academic advisors came nine months before the Fall 1998 semester, which would mark the time when the policy would be fully implemented. They were a tough bunch and in the end proved to be more concerned about ensuring success for students than any of the other constituencies I met with, with the exception of our instructors. We discussed—argued in fact—what students should be learning in our courses, whether our instructors were well trained, whether it was a wise idea to focus the courses themselves on process and rhetoric rather than grammar, and so on. They also recognized fairly early that I had not fully anticipated how complex a problem was posed by the need to prepare students for their first advising appointment. They knew that it would be very difficult to allow students to move back and forth between English 100 and 101 during the first two weeks of the semester, when both the advisors and students were already overburdened with managing schedules. By the time we had finished debating the mechanism itself, I had promised them I would make their work as easy as possible. That meant that I and writing program staff would manage all student movement during the first two weeks of the semester, that I would provide them with all the information they needed to keep their records straight, and that we would generally do everything possible to make their task simply one of informing students about directed self-placement and answering questions as they arose. By the end of this first meeting and in the days that followed, it seemed I had garnered their support.

I learned later that one reason I had “persuaded” them was that I had simply met with them in the first place. Because directed self-placement reached well beyond the writing program itself, it was absolutely necessary for me to meet with them. Nevertheless, our campus advisors are

normally left out of the loop, with little say in the formulation of curricular policy. Although much of the policy had been formed already, the advisors felt in this case as if their stake was being measured and appreciated. For the next two years, as directed self-placement took hold, the campus advising units, with one notable exception, proved to be the initiative's most vocal proponents.

Unfortunately, we had significant problems garnering the support of the university's Center for Basic Skills, the advising and support unit responsible for ensuring that at-risk students made the adjustment to academic life successfully. These Special Admission students, comprising approximately 20% of the incoming class, were the ones who had previously been tested for writing ability and slotted either in the English 101 or 101-Restricted course depending upon their performance, the writing test itself complementing whatever indications of ability their ACT scores provided. They were also the students we believed had been short-changed under the previous two-tiered system, with clear statistical evidence that their first course was not preparing them to do well in English 102. Early in the process of implementing directed self-placement, we discovered that *all* Special Admissions students had been automatically placed into English 101 and were not given the choice of starting with English 100 in the new *Stretch* sequence. That came as a great surprise to us because several meetings with the unit's director and chief academic advisor led us to believe that they supported the plan. As we did with the other advising units, we had periodically checked with them to ask if they needed our assistance. We were assured that everything was going smoothly. In fact, it wasn't going at all. There had been apparent agreement with the plan, but it was disingenuous. All 450 Special Admission students were placed in English 101, a statistically unlikely result and one that that program's director tried to sell as legitimate in the early going. I knew that many of these students would likely have chosen English 100 had they been given the choice, so I had planned the course offerings based upon my projections. But because these students had been placed (rather than placing themselves) as was eventually admitted, all of our scheduling of courses and instructors would have to be revised because enrollment in English 100 was not meeting our projections.

Suffice it to say there was substantial discussion of our alternatives. When things don't go according to plan in an academic bureaucracy, the war of words can be very fierce, even if on the grand scheme of things the issue may seem rather trivial. Push came to shove, with even our provost issuing an executive order that the Center for Basic Skills cooperate with the dictates of directed self-placement. That order went unheeded, of course, in part because the unit was not perceived as an academic one

and the director himself reported to the chancellor, who was one step higher up in the administrative hierarchy. (At the time, we had only an interim chancellor who was in the midst of leaving office.) I chose to contact all Special Admission students directly to let them know of their opportunity to choose their course. Forty-percent of the students who responded to our letter chose to move to English 100 (and thus, to drop the English 101 course into which they had been placed). We had averted the crisis in the short term. By the start of the first semester of directed self-placement and *Stretch*, 275 students, or approximately 12% of the incoming class, had chosen to take English 100, including 90 Special Admission students.

The rhetorical dynamic that ultimately resulted in this breakdown was clear from the beginning, but no one noticed it. One way of avoiding action is to argue details, with the resulting particularity of the argument distracting attention from the urgency of moving forward, even when there's a fairly widely accepted mandate to do so. Even if one misunderstands the details, simply questioning them works to obstruct the intended action. It is a tactic that those skilled in deliberative rhetoric know well. At the outset, the director of the Center for Basic Skills had said, "Just because [directed self-placement] worked at Grand Valley State, that doesn't mean it's going to work here." We spent little time discussing how the previous system hurt the students or how the new one would benefit them. Whenever I would try to begin that discussion, a new detail would be introduced, so that there was never resolution or agreement on any individual point. This sort of exchange went on for more than a year, well past the time when directed self-placement had been accepted by the rest of the campus community as a matter of policy. Eventually, the new status quo exerted enough pressure to make directed self-placement work, but in patchwork form.

I am often asked what "reason" was given for this lack of cooperation, but there remain no clear-cut answers. Certainly, none were ever offered. I believe now that we were witness to the enactment of an ideology that said students were unable to make good judgments about their writing readiness *because* they weren't good writers. They needed to be led with a firm hand by those who were able to judge them, even if those judgments were unsupported by research and by the record of actual student performance. It is an ideology that transcends our particular circumstances and that Freire so carefully describes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. These Special Admission students, so the argument went, were being saved from themselves and the power would stay firmly in the hands of the ones presuming to save them. The power to place these students, tenuous and unjustified though it might have been, was likely

the only form of power that the Center for Basic Skills could wield, or that its director believed existed. The system, which ensured the stability of the power wielded over these students, would not be sacrificed. So there were no reasons, just subterfuge, denial, indirection, inattention, and simple dishonesty. In the end, some of the students would pay the price of failure, in spite of the best efforts of our instructors. Others would succeed.

We saw in some other cases that a few advisors insisted on making choices for the students because, perhaps, that's simply how it always had been done. But there is also the possibility that some students would rather not make a decision about their placement, feeling it to be too risky a decision. Our surveys of student attitudes, however, showed that students overwhelmingly valued their right to choose their writing course (see the Blakesley, Harvey, and Reynolds chapter in *Directed Self-Placement: Principles and Practices*), so it's more likely that where there was ambiguity, some people seized the opportunity to force choice in a particular direction.

Most advising units took to directed self-placement eagerly. Another of our at-risk populations—students deemed “pre-major”—enrolled in English 100 at about a 25% rate, well above the rate for other students. Pre-major advisors had been the most enthusiastic about the change in placement procedures and had worked the hardest to make sure their students were well informed. By the second year, we discovered that these students had also made the biggest turnaround in terms of their performance throughout the composition sequence, with their overall GPA in the courses higher than all other groups, while in past years, it had been well below. See Appendix 2 for a snapshot of our results. (See Blakesley, Harvey, and Reynolds for even more specific details on these gains.)

As an exercise in consensus building, our implementation of directed self-placement had unintended by-products that served the writing program well. Our campus advisors, because they had a prominent role in placement, knew what we did in our courses and why we did it. They were able to see that their efforts made a difference. It is important for a writing program to have allies beyond its borders, as WPAs know. In the next two years, the usual complaints from faculty and the administration about students who can't write diminished substantially, so that we were left to make improvements to the program without always feeling the need to defend ourselves or the integrity of our curriculum. Perhaps, ironically, those of us who fought on behalf of directed self-placement found ourselves cast into a net somewhat like the one we lay for students when we place them by any means. We felt the ways that the institution asserted its hierarchical system of ordering as we debated the legislative

function of academic policy. But we also emerged from the process with a new spirit of cooperation, a feeling among many that we each had a stake, that we had changed the status quo, if slightly, and that its momentum could be influenced in directions that we chose, not ones chosen for us by necessity or conveniences of the past.

Instructors in the writing program became much more involved in the placement process. No longer did students magically appear in their courses, with the knowledge of how they got there a mystery to the students and the instructors. The instructors play a vital role in disseminating information about directed self-placement in the first two weeks of the semester. Each has to be a spokesperson capable of answering questions for the students. When they read diagnostic essays by students written in other classes, instructors must base their reading not merely on the evidence in front of them but on their conception of the composition sequence, the differences between English 100 and 101, and the goals of the program. Instructors of English 100 had the opportunity to rethink their approach to teaching writing on the knowledge that they would have their students for a full year rather than merely a fifteen-week semester. Sequencing of assignments suddenly became more a matter of scripting writing growth than it did of simply squeezing six (or however many) essay assignments into the calendar. As I see it, these were each positive results and directly attributable to directed self-placement and the *Stretch* model.

For these reasons, I see directed self-placement as a superior method of placement to the standard way writing placement used to operate on our campus, with students forced on the sly to simply accept the decree of administrators long ago who determined that an ACT score would be a good way to sift students by writing ability. That original act, even as it tidily reinforced the university's position as the guarded gateway to higher learning, also placed many students in great peril from the start by virtue of naming them using standards no one quite understood, appreciated, or even, when put to the test, trusted very much. As directed self-placement takes hold, I believe we will also see dramatic changes in the culture of the classroom, if not just the academic culture that supports it. The simple act of providing students some stake in exercising personal agency in such an explicit way can begin the process of achieving that more noble goal of higher education: to prepare a citizenry to write its own future by deliberating on its past. Directed self-placement is an act of restoration, not preservation, to the extent that it asks students to learn from the past to make decisions about their future. I think it will be very exciting and interesting to see whether the institution can withstand relinquishing to its subjects at least some of its power to name and place.

Notes

¹ An early draft of this essay was presented as a paper at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Minneapolis, MN, on April 16, 2000.

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² I should note here that whether directed self-placement precipitated any sort of revolution at my university remains to be seen.

³ The role of placement coordinators was played by graduate teaching assistants in English. The result of negotiations with the English department's chair and the dean, these new, part-time positions were created to help the WPA implement these changes in the writing program and oversee their development.

⁴ Those interested in reading the full report, "Directed Self-Placement and the English 100/101 Stretch Program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale: A Report on Student Performance, Retention, and Satisfaction" can request a copy from the author by writing to him at blakesle@purdue.edu or c/o the Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907.

⁵ Because directed self-placement is an indirect measure of writing apprehension, and because people tend to associate apprehension with lack of confidence, some believe that women will be more likely to place themselves in a basic writing course than men, on the premise that cultural biases predispose women to be less confident about their abilities than men. In her MA thesis, "The Role of Self-Efficacy in Directed Self-Placement: An Analysis of Confidence, Apprehension, and Gender Components," (SIUC, July 1999), Erica Reynolds cites a wealth of research on this issue. For instance, in their study of writing apprehension, John Daly and Michael Miller found that "males were significantly higher in writing apprehension than females" (255; "Further Studies on Writing Apprehension: SAT Scores, Success Expectations, Willingness to Take Advanced Courses, and Sex Differences," *Research in the Teaching of English* 9 (1975): 250-56). Our enrollment results from Fall 1998 support Daly and Miller's finding, and add validity to the premise that directed self-

placement is at least an indirect measurement of writing apprehension, which correlates with actual writing ability.

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Appendix 1—Contents of the Directed Self-Placement Brochure

Directed Self- Placement and English Composition at SIUC

To succeed at SIUC, you will have to make many informed and mature decisions about which major to pursue, which courses to take, and how to manage and prioritize responsibilities. At SIUC, we believe that you can and should begin exercising your judgment early. Directed Self-Placement (DS-P, for short) allows you to decide whether to begin the English Composition sequence in the English 100/101 Stretch Program or in English 101. We want you to reflect upon your preparation for college-level writing, to consult with teachers, advisors, and family members, and then to choose the right course. (You will also write a diagnostic essay the first week of class and be asked to reconsider your original placement if the results warrant that recommendation.) Finally, all students are required to participate in Directed Self-Placement and should take responsibility for making this important decision. Before you meet with your advisor to register for courses, carefully review this guide. Past results show that students who are well informed also earn higher grades in whichever option they choose. So please consider this information carefully!

Option 1— English 100/101 *Stretch*

The Stretch Program is carefully designed to ensure that students develop the writing skills they will need to successfully complete the English Composition requirement and excel at the University. In the Stretch Program, students take English 100 and 101 in consecutive semesters with the same instructor. Both instructors and students thus have time to address specific writing needs at a pace and in a sequence that helps students excel. Students who choose English 100/101 *Stretch* improve their chances for success in English 101 and 102. English 100, 101, and 102 are each offered for three credit-hours. Depending upon your major, English 100 may count for elective credit for degree requirements. English 101 and 102 satisfy the Core Curriculum requirement in the Foundation Skills area.

In English 100, you will practice the forms of writing that will be expected of you in English 101, such as argumentation and analysis. You also will learn the writing and reading skills that help you gain confidence in your ability to communicate your ideas clearly. You will usually write about subjects familiar to you. If one or more of these characteristics describe you, consider enrolling in English 100:

- Generally, I don't read when I don't have to.

- In high school, I did not do much writing.
- My high school GPA was about average.
- I'm unsure about the rules of writing.
- I've used computers, but not often for writing and revising.
- My ACT score was below 20.
- I don't think of myself as a strong writer.
- I have been advised to take English 100 following a diagnostic writing.

Option 2— English 101

Generally speaking, you are well prepared for English 101 if you have done quite a bit of reading and writing in high school. English 101 instructors will assume that you can summarize and analyze published material from magazines, newspapers, books, and scholarly journals. They will also assume that you have written a variety of essays in a variety of forms, including persuasive and analytical writing. If most of the following statements describe you, you should take English 101 first:

- I enjoy reading newspapers, magazines, and books.
- In high school, I wrote several essays per year.
- My high school GPA placed me in the top third of my class.
- I have used computers for drafting and revising essays.
- My ACT score was above 20.
- I consider myself a good reader and writer.

Further Course Information

You can find out more about these courses on the World Wide Web at our Directed Self-Placement Home Page:

<http://www.siu.edu/departments/english/writing/wstudies.html>

See the reverse side for some Frequently Asked Questions . . .

[Page 2 of brochure starts here]

Frequently Asked Questions: Directed Self-Placement and English 100/ 101 Stretch

Q. Why would a student choose to begin with English 100?

A. When a student chooses English 100, he or she automatically becomes a part of the *Stretch Program*, which allows students to work with the same experienced instructor in both English 100 and 101. Having the same instructor and peers for two semesters ensures a sense of continuity in writing development, increases confidence, and improves chances for success in English 101 and 102. Students in Stretch Programs generally earn higher grades in more advanced writing courses.

Q. Does English 100 count as a credit toward graduation?

A. In nearly all cases, yes. Students receive 3 hours of course credit for English 100. English 100 does not substitute for Core requirements, but these 3 hours may be applied toward the degree if the student's major allows for elective credit. Students should check with their advisors to determine whether English 100 will fulfill degree requirements in their major.

Q. How do students in English 100 ensure that they have the same instructor for English 101?

A. Students will be told which section of English 101 to register for and a spot will be reserved for them in that section until the 13th week of the semester. (The English 101 course will be offered at the same time on the same days as their English 100 course.) Students who would like a different instructor for English 101 will just register for a different section.

Q. What if the Diagnostic Essay shows that the student should move from English 100 to 101 or from 101 to 100?

A. The Director will advise these students that they should consider moving but will not require them to move. Students will be told which sections will be open to them if they would like to move, and they will be asked to see Donna Vance in Faner 2390 to get a closed-class card for the appropriate section if they do. Students who do not move from English 101 to 100 after advised that doing so would be in their best interest will be given instructions for setting up appointments with Writing Center tutors.

Q. If a student fails English 101, can he or she re-start with English 100?

A. Yes. The student will just select English 100 when registering for the next semester's courses.

Q. If a student receives a PR in English 101, can he or she re-start with English 100?

A. Yes. The student would enroll in English 100 the next semester and then take English 101 the semester after that. The student has one academic year to make up a PR grade before it turns to an F, so if the student completes the English 100-101 sequence satisfactorily within the year immediately following, the PR grade would not turn into an F automatically.

Q. How can students and advisors learn more about the Stretch Program, the English Composition courses, and Directed Self-Placement?

A. The English Department site on the World Wide Web includes useful information on these topics:

<http://www.siu.edu.departments/english/writing/wstudies.html>

If you would like to meet with a Placement Coordinator to discuss your placement in English 100 or 101, please contact Dr. David Blakesley or Ms. Donna Vance by phone at (618) 453-6811 or by email at dblake@siu.edu. The Writing Studies office is open Monday - Friday from 8:00 a. m. until 4:00 p.m.

Appendix 2—What Do We Know Now?

Since its inception, we fine-tuned the directed self-placement process, doing everything possible to keep students informed and to make sure that those who weren't initially could still exercise their choice at the start of each semester. We were diligent in preparing statistical reports, some quite lengthy, detailing precisely what the results show, some of which I summarize here. These reports were distributed widely to all constituencies so that everyone would know the results of their efforts.

Moving to directed self-placement and the *Stretch* model has led to positive and measurable results. Even as the quality and rigor of the courses has improved, so too have student performance and retention. Instructor morale in the basic writing course, English 100, is substantially higher than it was among teachers of English 101R prior to Fall 1998.

We have to-date collected performance, placement, enrollment, or survey data on over 7,000 students, including baseline data with which to compare new data as it emerges.⁴ The results of such change were as imagined: students who self-selected the *Stretch* program ultimately outperformed their peers in the next two courses in the sequence. They highly valued our asking them for their input. Retention from semester-to-semester in writing courses improved immediately.

Here are the most important conclusions we can draw now that the data on these changes has been collected and analyzed. (See Table 1.):

1. Under the old sequence of courses, regularly admitted students tended to do better as they progressed, while Special Admission students tended to do worse. For the sizeable population of Special Admission students in English 101 Restricted sections in Fall 1996 and 1997, we saw the mean GPA drop markedly in English 102, nearly three-quarters of a grade-point lower than regularly admitted students.
2. On the premise that it is important for students to do well in their first writing course, it is encouraging to find that students who take English 100 have a substantially higher pass rate (9% higher) in their first course than do their peers in English 101.

3. The promise that students who begin with English 100 will catch-up to their peers by the end of the composition sequence has been realized.
 - a. The pass rate in English 102 (91.4%) for regularly admitted students who begin with English 100 is 3.5% higher than it is for students who began the sequence with English 101 (87.9%).
 - b. Special Admission students who began with English 100 have a 6% higher pass rate in English 101 than do those who began with English 101. They have a 1% higher pass rate in English 102.
 - c. The Fall 1998 group of Special Admission students, whether they began with English 100 or 101, had a higher pass rate than the same population in previous years. The Fall 1998 group had an overall pass rate of 83.6% in English 102, a 3.2% increase over the Fall 1996 group (80.4%) and 4.6% increase over the Fall 1997 group (79.0%).
4. The Fall 1998 Special Admission students (both the English 100 and 101 groups) had a mean GPA of 2.44 as a group in English 102, which is .12 higher than it was for the 1996 English 101 Restricted group of students (2.32) and .32 higher than it was for the 1997 group of English 101R students (2.12). Special Admission students are no longer falling further behind regularly admitted students as they complete the sequence of courses (see #1 above).
5. Evidence that directed self-placement and the Stretch program have had a positive effect on student retention is already starting to show, with the pass rates of at-risk students (both regularly admitted and Special Admission students) improving over previous years, even though the courses themselves now have more challenging student learning objectives.
6. 582 students took English 100 in the course's first two years, representing approximately 11% of the students who chose between English 100 or 101.
7. Initially, only about half of the students in English 100 and 101 say they heard about directed self-placement prior to enrolling for the course. Those who did chose English 100 at about a 21% rate. We expect that students will become better informed as directed self-placement becomes the norm.
8. 93% of the students who knew about directed self-placement

- highly or moderately valued their right to choose which course to take.
9. At the end of the semester in English 100, 84% of the students believed they chose the correct course. In English 101, 97% of the students felt they chose the correct course. (See Charts 1 and 2.)
 10. Males choose English 100 at a 3.6% higher rate than do females.⁵
 11. Students in English 101 who do not accept the recommendation of the Director to consider moving to English 100 following the diagnostic essay have a failure rate in English 101 higher than 50%.
 12. By multiple measures of performance, the diagnostic essay verifies the validity of directed self-placement as a writing placement method.

Chart 1 shows how the students felt by the end of English 100. At that time, 84% of the students in English 100 reported that they had chosen their course correctly. That is a high percentage given the likelihood that students who do exceptionally well in the course might feel that they would have done equally well in English 101. Even so, an overwhelming majority believes the right choice was made.

Chart 1. Did Students Make the Right Choice in English 100?

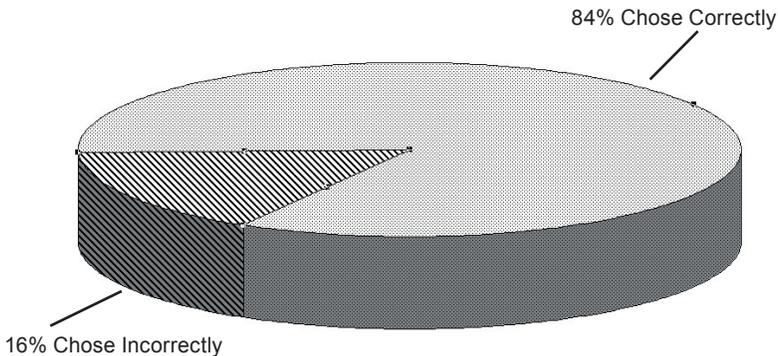


Chart 2 shows the results for students in English 101. By the end of the course, 97% of the students felt they made the right choice. Whether that high a percentage actually did choose correctly is a matter for debate. About 20% of the students do not pass the course, so one wonders

whether those students did indeed make the correct choice. It would be useful to study this response more thoroughly with some follow-up questions because one consequence of directed self-placement should be a feeling of greater responsibility on the student's part for the outcomes of his or her education. It would be ideal if students came to believe that grades in courses were "earned" and not simply "received."

Chart 2. Did Students Make the Right Choice in English 101?

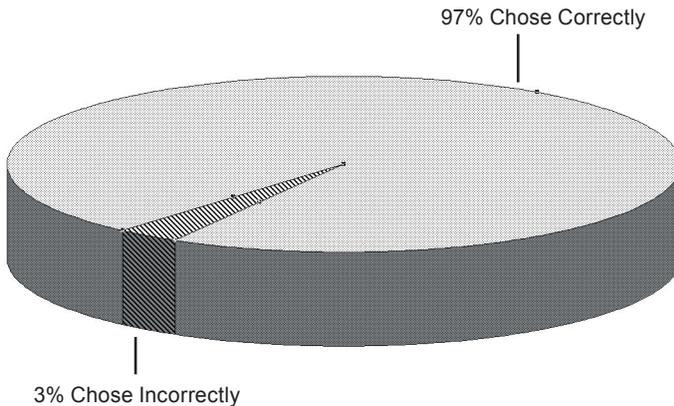


Table 1 summarizes GPA data for students across the composition sequence in the two years immediately preceding the change and the results collected as of Spring 2000. A detailed analysis of this data would be beyond the scope of this essay, so it is provided here simply to suggest the basis for the more detailed internal reports we generated.

Table 1. Tracking Student Performance in ENGL 100, 101, and 102 (Students admitted Fall 1996 through Fall 1998+)

Course/Semester/Year/ Group	# of Students	Mean GPA ENGL 100	Pass Rate ENGL 100	Mean GPA ENGL 101	Pass Rate ENGL 101	Mean GPA ENGL 102	Pass Rate ENGL 102
ENGL 101—Fall 1996 (Regularly Admitted)	1828			2.69	78.0%	2.92	85.9%
ENGL 101—Fall 1996 (Special Admission)	258			2.33	75.2%	2.27	77.5%
ENGL 101R—Fall 1996 (Special Admission)	213			2.58	80.8%	2.32	83.9%
All Special Admission Students in ENGL 101—Fall 1996 (Regular or Restricted)	471				77.7%		80.4%
ENGL 101—Fall 1997 (Regularly Admitted)	1734			2.73	79.8%	2.86	87.5%
ENGL 101R—Fall 1997 (Regularly Admitted)	63			2.47	77.8%	2.53	88.1%
ENGL 101—Fall 1997 (Special Admission)	104			2.5	77.9%	2.66	86.4%
ENGL 101R—Fall 1997 (Special Admission)	341			2.48	77.7%	2.12	76.7%
All Special Admission Students in ENGL 101 and ENGL 101R—Fall 1997	445				77.8%		79.0%
ENGL 100—Fall 1998 (Regularly Admitted)	71	3.1	88.7%	2.64	76.9%	2.94	91.4%
ENGL 100—Fall 1998 (Pre-Major)	124	2.9	88.7%	2.38	71.6%	2.82	88.9%
ENGL 100—Fall 1998 (Special Admission)	77	2.85	79.2%	2.46	76.7%	2.44	84.4%
ENGL 101—Fall 1998 (Regularly Admitted)	1360			2.72	78.9%	2.95	87.9%
ENGL 101—Fall 1998 (Pre-Major)	367			2.70	76.3%	2.91	87.7%
ENGL 101—Fall 1998 (Special Admission)	390			2.29	70.8%	2.44	83.6%
All Special Admission Students in 1998 Group	450			2.35	71.6%	2.44	83.6%

Placement and Instruction in Context: Situating Writing Within a First-Year Program

Theresa Freda Nicolay

In “Toward a New Theory of Writing Placement,” Brian Huot takes up a “conversation on writing placement procedures” (49) which he began in his earlier work, “A Survey of College and University Placement Practices.” Huot calls upon those of us who design and implement placement procedures to contextualize all of our writing assessment practices, whether they meet students as they enter our institutions or act as barriers to graduation. “It is a truism in current ideas about literacy,” Huot argues

that context is a critical component in the ability of people to transact meaning with written language. In composition pedagogy we have been concerned with creating meaningful contexts for students to write in. A theory of assessment that recognizes the importance of context should also be concerned with creating assessment procedures that establish meaningful contexts within which teachers read and assess. Building a context in which writing can be drafted, read, and evaluated is a step toward the creation of assessment procedures based on recognizable characteristics of language use. (1996, 559)

Huot attempts to move us away from “artificial” forms of writing assessment, such as the timed impromptu (which continues to be widely used), towards alternative emergent practices, practices that reflect our values and pedagogies as writing instructors. And while Huot has cataloged both new and old assessment procedures, other composition specialists have put forth innovative models for the remediation of first-year students, which should also occur within meaningful contexts. In the following pages, I will demonstrate how, at St. John Fisher College, we

have contextualized not only writing placement but the instruction of basic writers as well by embedding both within the layers of our first-year program.

The program itself is set within the larger context of the college core, which requires all entering first-year students to participate in Learning Communities (clusters of two, three, or four courses, all of which contain at least one section of composition). If we think of these elements as concentric circles, with writing placement at the center, surrounded first by Learning Communities and next by the college core, then we may envision basic writing instruction as the shuttle which moves among them all: students work in the writing center with peer tutors on papers for their English classes as well as their linked core cluster courses, and the thinking and writing skills they refine there are fundamental to the core curriculum as well as their majors.

Variations on a Theme: Some Current Models for Placement and Basic Writing Instruction

At the same time that we at Fisher were piloting our new placement and basic writing program, Alice Robertson and her colleagues at SUNY at Stony Brook were taking stock of their four-year-old placement procedure. In “Teach, Not Test: A Look at a New Writing Placement Procedure,” Robertson describes the shift from a two-hour essay exam to a “placement class” which, like their writing program, emphasizes process: “students in each class freewrote, shared and responded to the writings, and then talked in small groups about topics generated within the class before putting pen to blue book and actually composing individual essays” (57). Robertson and her colleagues created a context for the placement essay, thereby making the writing task more meaningful for the students. While Fisher uses this same process approach, ours takes place over a period of three weeks rather than one afternoon. The extended time allows us to employ a placement model that precisely correlates with our teaching model, and is, in fact, the first step in our first-year writing program pedagogy.

Changes in placement techniques don’t always bring about changes in basic writing instruction. For example, Royer and Gilles, who describe their placement process as “directed self-placement,” “agree that students should not be marginalized, but [we] think the most practical reconception of remediation does not involve eliminating basic writing courses, but rather thinking very differently about placement” (63). For them, different means allowing students to choose their own placement, with the help of a brochure containing course descriptions and student profiles

“In high school, I wrote several essays per year” in contrast to “In high school, I did not do much writing”). The authors argue that this process empowers students and circumvents the damage of remediation:

The power relations that are violated by taking away choices are not repaired by mainstreaming, which simply eliminates options, or by updating methods of administering and scoring placement essays, which continues to tell students that they are not ready to make their own decisions. (69)

I would argue, however, that the process actually disempowers students by asking them to make a judgment without the benefit of the expertise that their instructors possess. They are in college, after all, to gain some of that very expertise, yet when students fail to place themselves properly, they have only themselves to blame: “If they fail, they will, we hope, learn that a college education is a serious endeavor and that success often begins with a proper estimation of one’s abilities” (70).

In contrast, Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson, at the University of South Carolina, have developed a “Writing Studio Program,” in which all students are mainstreamed (like Fisher, they eliminated both the timed exam and the remedial course). Those students who need basic writing instruction—as well as those who volunteer for the studio program—take part in weekly meetings outside of the classroom. Placement is based on two writing assignments completed during the first week of class along with a portfolio of previous work. Once again, context plays a role:

Our approaches to assessment and instructional design must give student writers the attention required for their knowledge and assumptions to emerge in the company of those who are willing to listen and to critically and collaboratively explore connections to the politics and practices of writing assessment and instruction at a particular site. (65)

The SJFC Writing Program In Context: Historical Narrative

St. John Fisher College is a liberal arts college of approximately 2,000 students, primarily undergraduates. Changing student needs and developing faculty pedagogical interests led the English department to make modifications in the structure of our first-year writing program. In the past, we offered both a remedial (English 100) and an introductory (English 101) writing course. For years, instructors of both courses used

the current-traditional model in which students study rhetorical modes and emulate the work of professional essayists. By 1990, however, many instructors had moved to a constructivist paradigm, and both courses became more process-oriented, with a portfolio system of evaluation and peer review groups for in-class work on writing. In spite of this positive change in teaching method, our first-year writing assessment measure, the TCW (Test of Competence in Writing), was a traditional one-hour essay exam taken by most students during orientation and not “functionally related” to our writing program, as Edward M. White recommends in his book, *Developing Successful College Writing Programs* (119). As is typical of this kind of placement procedure, students were not given an opportunity to discuss the topic, and revision was precluded by time constraints. Not surprisingly, lack of student investment in the topic, coupled with the artificial (decontextualized) nature of the assignment, produced mediocre writing with many surface-level errors. How could we, we wondered, make the writing assignment “real” for our students? Could a writing placement essay connect the discourse of their past lives with that of their future in academia? Would such an assignment lead to a truer picture of students’ writing abilities?

While arguing the virtues of the “timed impromptu,” which is a direct measure, in contrast to such indirect measures as the multiple choice writing exam, White admits that, especially when poorly developed, essay exams often give rise to “mechanical response patterns,” the five-paragraph theme and the like: “The standardized test conditions strip natural context from the writing, allow no collaboration or preparation, and disallow more than token revision. [. . .] Clearly, essay testing is a compromise and its limits must be seen clearly” (White 1995, 36). One such limit for us, apart from the writing context, was the assessment context. During the year before we changed our process, essays were not assessed by Huot’s “experts”—those who actually taught the courses into which students were placed. Rather, the newly appointed writing center director wrote the topics, administered the exam, and, with the help of two adjuncts, assessed the essays and made the placements. At that time she taught neither 100 nor 101. Our process could not have been more decontextualized, except in those odd cases where a student learned from her senior audit that she needed the TCW in order to graduate. In such cases our placement exam became the most perfunctory of exit exams.

In the face of this writing-as-product assessment practice, we found ourselves asking, like the Writing Program staff at SUNY at Stony Brook, “Why weren’t we practicing in placement what we so ardently advocated in our classrooms and courses?” (Robertson 57). How did our placement procedure relate to the freshmen writing course itself?

Although we were using a direct method of assessment, we did not have carefully developed scoring criteria, nor were full-time faculty involved in either the placement process or the basic writing program. Despite the fact that essay exams were widely accepted by our colleagues across the country (Huot 1994, 54), we felt that a radical change was in order.

Program Overhaul

Then, as now, first-year composition at Fisher cohered across all sections in terms of pedagogy and goals. While instructors were and still are free to choose course content, the pedagogical approach and goals remain constant: we teach writing as a recursive process, engage in close reading of professional and student texts, focus on invention and discovery, provide ample opportunity for the workshopping and revision of essays, and use portfolios to assess end-of-semester skills. Our new placement procedure would need to incorporate and reflect those values.

To support these evolving pedagogical goals, the department made two interrelated changes: first, we eliminated the TCW and devised a new method for placing students; second, we eliminated English 100 and converted English 101 into a variable-credit course (to be taken for 3 or 4 credits). We eliminated the remedial course because English department faculty felt that the course's disadvantages were outweighing its advantages. Beverly L. Clark and Roger D. Clark suggest that even when placement methods are, as in their case at Wheaton College, "decent [. . .] predictors of exemptibility," departments must consider possible negative effects of placement procedures on some students (21). Such effects were evident among our students: we found that those first-year students placed into English 100 felt stigmatized, "held back," and this was especially clear to those of us who found them, bitter and demoralized, in our English 101 classes the following semester. Unfortunately, by placing students in a remedial course which also took them out of curricular synch with their peers, we were inadvertently reinforcing the students' misconception that people are "born" writers, when in fact what we wanted our students to learn is that all writers, even professionals, can improve their skills through instruction, practice, feedback, and revision.

In both the three- and four-credit components of English 101, students are deeply immersed in just such a recursive process of writing. The difference between the two components of the course is one of degree: fourth credit students receive additional feedback and instruction during a minimum of weekly half-hour tutorials in the writing center. Students meet with peer tutors, all of whom have taken a credit-bearing course taught by the WPA. In addition, fourth credit students meet with their

composition instructors for a minimum of two conferences over the course of the semester in order to discuss their progress in the course as well as any individual areas of concern. While the fourth credit is attached to the composition course, a student may bring in writing tasks from any of his or her linked Learning Community courses. It is the English instructor, however, who conferences with the student, receives copies of tutorial records, and assigns a grade for the fourth credit.

The Writing Assessment Project

Creating the Assignment. The current placement process, which we instituted in Spring 1994, begins in the classroom, since all students are enrolled in English 101. All entering first-year students are required to participate in a Learning Community, all of which have an English 101 component. Despite the different topics of the Learning Communities, all first-year students are given a common reading and writing assignment. During the summer, a reading is chosen by an ad hoc committee of English department faculty under the leadership of the WPA. Since we have institutional goals for the Learning Communities, a reading is chosen that is in keeping with those goals and, to the best of our ability, the theme for that year's matriculation ceremony. Once faculty have agreed on a reading, the WPA drafts a common writing assignment, complete with writing prompts to help build prewriting into the students' processes. Then, the other members of the committee make revisions to the placement assignment, and this process continues until consensus about the final form is reached. During the first week of the three-week placement process, the students will receive the collaboratively-written assignment as well as criteria for assessment of their essays.

Our placement assignments call for a blend of personal narrative set within a larger framework of cultural analysis of a particular professional essay, thereby combining the conceptual fluency and creativity of expressivism with the critical acuity basic to constructivist college work. The essay that students finally submit is primarily personal narrative and secondarily argument: students argue that their experience demonstrates or conflicts with a particular aspect of American culture. The essays are typically three pages long and often follow the basic five-paragraph formula with which most high school students are familiar (one of the goals of English 101 is to move students beyond the five-paragraph model).

We ask our students to synthesize an argument that looks inward at the self while also looking beyond it to those external forces which impinge on the self and its evolution within society. We ask students to engage in these two kinds of reflection for several reasons. First, writing about themselves, a topic about which they are experts, allows students

(in most cases) to easily generate a lot of raw material, thereby making invention relatively easy. Because most college writing is not expressivist, we next ask them to think about the culture in which they've been immersed throughout their lives; this helps move students away from solipsistic narratives while at the same time requiring them to analyze ways in which they are shaped by and in turn shape culture. Experience has taught us that most of our students are downright Emersonian in their sense of their own individuality: they insist that, like Jay Gatsby, they've sprung from their own Platonic conceptions. Thus we come to our final reason for the style of our placement assignment, and it is, admittedly, an ideological one. We believe that a liberal arts education should make students more self-aware, especially about the hegemonic forces of our culture; however, such an awareness comes via an arduous process for many students because their sense of self-creation is so deeply felt. Our placement essay aims to jump-start the process.

Implementation. Placement begins in the classroom as the students use in-class brainstorming techniques. They then engage in peer review work on drafts which they then revise and submit for assessment. Throughout the process, instructors direct students toward more self-conscious writing through several in- and out-of-class writing exercises related to the paper. Thus, by the time the paper is turned in for evaluation in the third week of class, the student has engaged in a variety of activities—discussion, drafting, revising—that increase his or her investment in the paper, and the paper is likely to represent the student's best effort.

A Sample Assignment. One of our most richly contextualized projects took place when we used the essay, "So How Did I Get Here?" by Rosemary Bray, a Harvard-educated African-American whose story debunks myths of the welfare family. We chose this particular essay not only for its rhetorical effectiveness, accessibility, and synthesis of personal narrative and cultural analysis, but largely for the force and clarity of its argument. The essay's emphasis tied in well with our college's mission. The majority of our students are from suburban and rural, primarily white, communities; students of color represent only about twelve percent of our undergraduate population. In the face of this disparity, an ad hoc committee of students and faculty developed "The Fisher Creed" which emphasizes the value of diversity and respect for others of all backgrounds, not merely one's own. During our matriculation ceremony, all first-year students are invited to sign their names to a copy of this secular creed.

Each year's ceremony also highlights a local personality, and during this particular year, our speaker was a former anchorwoman for a local television news program. She spoke compellingly to our students about her journey from college to network television, and, finally, to the business world, as the owner of a consulting agency. A few days later, when they'd started English 101, the students were asked to write about their own journeys to Fisher, their own "So How Did I Get Here?" narratives. And while we received a number of lackluster chronological accounts, we also received many reflective essays that looked simultaneously inward at the self and outward at the culture.

Because we allow three weeks for the placement process, there was plenty of time to discuss the speaker's address, the Bray reading, and the students' own experiences and ideas. By bringing together the substance of the matriculation ceremony, the professional reading, and the students' own experiences, we managed to create a complex context in which students could begin to develop their voices, increase their level of discourse, and submit a placement essay that reflected their ability to write under "real" circumstances, rather than the artificial circumstances of the timed impromptu, on which we had for so many years relied.

The Placement Process

Developing An Anchor Set. The WPA, along with one or two colleagues, reads the first sets of papers that come in, since sets are submitted to instructors on different days, depending on course schedules. The anchor set committee reads through these and agrees on two of each: a "3"; a "4" (meaning 3- and 4-credit placements); and a "borderline." We try to choose essays that are not the most obvious examples of their kind, since our readers are quite seasoned at this point. We think it is more important to locate areas of non-consensus so that we can engage in discussion about what "good" writing is for this particular cohort of students writing on this particular topic. These essays comprise our anchor set, which we copy without the students' names for all of our readers. From this set we develop the criteria for the current year's placement.

Although the basic criteria stay the same from year to year (the essay should demonstrate the writer's comprehension of the topic, ability to focus and develop ideas as well as to balance narrative and analysis, and mastery of standard written English), we adjust the criteria to fit each year's topic. An actual essay prompt and criteria sheet based on that year's anchor set will provide clarification. Our 1999 placement was based on the Kai Erikson essay, "Trauma at Buffalo Creek," and our prompt read as follows:

Some Background

In his analysis of the Buffalo Creek disaster, Kai Erikson makes the distinction between community and communality. While a community is based on a shared physical territory, communality refers to the emotional and interpersonal ties that people share. In other words, communality is something MORE than a place; it is the character of that place, its personality, so to speak. Erikson describes communality as “the network of relationships that make up [one’s] general human surround.”

Sometimes that network of relationships is totally bounded by community, by a shared physical territory, as it was for the people of Buffalo Creek. If we move one step further in our thinking, we can ask ourselves where we find communality. We can ask ourselves what our most powerful network might be.

The Assignment: Where Do You Find Communality?

Choose a network of relationships that you’re enmeshed in. Ask yourself first: is it tied to a physical territory such as your neighborhood or even a “cyber” location? If it is not, then what makes that network more powerful than just geography or place?

If your most powerful network is tied to a place, then what can you say about it that gives it communality? What makes that network more than just a group of people who find themselves in the same location?

If your most significant network does not depend on a location, then why is it more important to you than networks that are formed around locations?

What follows are some writing prompts that will help you generate ideas for your essay. After your instructor has taken you through these, he or she as well as your peers will help you come to a central focus, or idea, around which to build your essay.

- A. List the five most important networks of which you are a part.
- B. Choose one of the following as your subject and then complete the following thoughts:
 1. I can describe the network of relationships that is most important to me as _____.
 2. When I hear the people in that network talk, I hear _____.
 3. I find communality in this network of relationships because _____.

- _____.
4. If everybody I know in this group disappeared, _____ would happen.
 5. Who I am has been shaped by this network of relationships in these ways: _____.
 6. I can be a part of this network no matter where I may move because _____.
 7. I cannot carry this network with me wherever I go because _____.

During the anchor session, instructor/readers were given these guidelines:

A “3” essay:

- Is well organized: focuses appropriately, stays on focus, and has a main point. (With this year’s topic, “focus” specifically means the “network” is clearly defined as something unique to this individual.)
- Contains more than minimal details/examples of what makes this network “tick.”
- Contains some analysis explaining what makes this network “tick.”
- Is relatively free of mechanical errors, or has a concentration of one or two types of errors.

A “4” essay:

- Is not well organized: doesn’t focus appropriately, stay on focus, or have a point. (With this year’s topic, failure to focus specifically means the “network” is not clearly defined as something unique to this individual.)
- Has minimal or no details/examples demonstrating what makes this network “tick.”
- Has no analysis explaining what makes this network “tick.”
- There are many instances of several different types of errors.

The Anchor Session

Our session begins with the distribution and reading of the anchor set; each English 101 instructor (other Learning Community faculty typically are not involved in the placement process) determines a placement for each essay. Using a double-entry matrix on a flip chart, we record each reader’s placement of each paper. In this way, we can readily and

graphically see the distribution of the threes and fours (“borderline” is not allowed at this stage). Again, we are not trying to achieve consensus; however, most placements are in synch. Rather than work toward consensus, we look for placements that diverge and ask the reader why she placed in such a manner. The process is somewhat messy and can be difficult when colleagues disagree and find themselves having to defend their assessments. After all, college professors are accustomed to dispensing grades in the privacy of their classrooms and are not often (even by their own students) called upon to explain the rationale for those assessments. However, the process, as Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow argue in the case of portfolios,

puts “objective” examiners in the same room with the student’s own teacher and gets them tangled up in discussion of specific papers where the teacher may be personally involved. The system thus makes trouble. [. . .] But this is nothing but the trouble that results from putting on the table what has always been in the closet in programs that evaluate with proficiency exams or leave evaluation wholly in the hands of the individual teacher. (“State University of New York at Stony Brook Portfolio-based Evaluation Program” 12)

So what is at first uncomfortable becomes a boon as instructors find their assessment practices affirmed by their colleagues or come away with new perspectives about those practices. In addition, the anchor session is invaluable for helping new hires—both full- and part-time—to get a sense of our standards as a department. Because Fisher is a small liberal arts college that does not offer a graduate program in English, our adjuncts are often ABDs from a local university whose first-year students typically have higher SAT scores and more cultural capital in general than our students, many of whom are first-generation college students and have different strengths. We’ve found that, almost to a person, these new adjuncts tend to have inappropriate expectations for our students, so the anchor session helps new instructors early on to reflect on and refine their assessment skills. In addition, students benefit from more consistent assessment across sections. As Belanoff and Elbow note, “When the disparity of standards is locked inside solitary heads, it’s only visible to students who compare notes and to administrators looking at different teachers’ grade sheets” (“Using Portfolios to Increase Collaboration and Community in a Writing Program” 21). Though no amount of discussion among faculty can do away with this disparity, the calibration session has the potential to decrease it significantly.

The Readers

After the calibration session, each paper is read by two instructors. Each instructor takes her or his own set and assesses it, putting no marks on the papers other than a “3” or a “4” on the back of the paper (comments and grades must be made later, after the assessment). Along with their revised formal drafts, students submit workshop drafts of their essays and, in some cases, process reports as well as any informal prewriting material, all of which the instructor can consult when assessing the essay. Using the essay as well as the ancillary materials mentioned above, the instructor is able to make a highly contextualized assessment. As Huot points out, such a scenario is “context-rich and rel[ies] upon raters knowing as much as possible about the papers, the students, the purpose of the evaluation, the consequences of their decisions and the decisions of fellow raters” (Huot 1996, 563). During the placement session, the second reader assesses the essay without looking at the instructor’s placement. The second reader likewise puts a “3” or “4” along with her initials. If her placement is different from that of the instructor, then adjudication by the WPA or another third reader is necessary. When instructors disagree about placement, they may discuss the placement decisions with the one or two other readers, and the placement may be changed as a result.

The WPA coordinates calibration and placement sessions, first by putting together groups so that no group contains only new hires (usually adjuncts). Before even getting to the Saturday session, faculty have explained to their students what the fourth-credit is and have told them about placement and the volunteer option. Ideally, they come with a list of volunteers. By the end of the session, the WPA has a list of those who will need additional instruction, and she knows how many slots are available for volunteers.

The 4th Credit: Instruction In Context

In place of a remedial course, we offer supplemental credit-bearing instruction in the writing center for basic writing students. As noted, when we place, we are placing students into either a three- or four-credit version of the same course (English 101).

The fourth credit is earned through a combination of one-on-one meetings with the professor and writing work done in the writing center. In our case, the latter means work with undergraduate peer tutors, since our writing center does not employ faculty tutors (except for those who work with ESL and graduate students). We require ten half-hour visits to the writing center: the way we run the course, this amounts to two visits per paper. We also require two conferences with the instructor as

well as extra written assignments, most of which focus on increasing the student's self-awareness of his or her own writing process (writer's memos, for example). Importantly, students who are not placed in the fourth credit may volunteer to sign up for it, and we have had volunteers during every semester since we piloted this program in 1994.

Once students begin the program, they are required to complete at least one writing center session per week throughout the semester. Staggered appointments are crucial, since ten visits during the last week of the semester will not benefit students. The imposed schedule builds in time for revision and reflection of the student's own writing and writing process and avoids what Nancy Sommers identifies as a common problem among inexperienced writers, that is, the conflation of revision and editing, which is only exacerbated with the use of linear models of the composing process. Sommers writes, "The students do not have strategies for handling the whole essay. They lack procedures or heuristics to help them reorder lines of reasoning or ask questions about their purposes and readers. The students view their compositions in a linear way as a series of parts" (383). This is exactly what peer tutors can help writers overcome, by asking questions which help students articulate and develop their ideas; in short, the peer tutor is a real reader. Over time, students learn to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and they often bring their own assessment criteria to later conferences.

Peer Tutors and Pedagogy

Our writing center is driven by theories of active, collaborative learning, such as those put forward by Kenneth Bruffee in "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'":

[I]f we accept the premise that knowledge is an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers and that learning is a social process not an individual one, then learning is not assimilating information and improving our mental eyesight. Learning is an activity in which people work collaboratively to create knowledge or justify belief collaboratively by canceling each other's biases and presuppositions; by negotiating collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers through assenting to those communities' interests, values, language, and paradigms of perception and thought. (12)

Writing center peer tutors comprise one group of knowledgeable peers, a group that occupies the middle ground between everyday language and

academic discourse. Eleanor Kutz argues that teachers must “combine beginning with and validating the students’ current language, pushing the development of language and thought in meaningful contexts, and initiating students into academic discourse conventions” (390). Student tutors are just such teachers.

Peer tutors serve as mediators between students and teachers within the writing center. English 101 students bring their papers into the writing center during all stages of the writing process. For example, a peer tutor might teach a tutee brainstorming techniques, such as listing and freewriting, or the two might work on such final activities as editing or proofreading. Having already been through English 101, peer tutors can discuss with tutees their own relatively recent experience, including successes as well as setbacks. Peer tutors are particularly adept in moving between the academic literacy of college professors and the more colloquial language, both written and oral, of students. Undergraduate tutors, familiar with the conventions and lexicon of writing as a discipline, also help students to understand what their professors mean by phrases such as, “substantiate the assertions you put forth in paragraph three.” Such translation is necessary because often the very terminology that facilitates the discourse of professors is hopelessly vexing to undergraduates just entering the academic community.

Although tutorials are collaborative, we encourage writer ownership of papers in several ways. Peer tutors ask their tutees to read their papers aloud, avoid taking papers out of writers’ hands, do not write on tutees’ papers (tutors may take notes on separate sheets of paper), and teach tutees to recognize their own errors rather than making corrections for writers. In addition, peer tutors use a variety of techniques that encourage writers to think for themselves, including using handbooks to correct errors in grammar, asking questions in order to promote conceptual fluency, and teaching writers to generate and develop topics through the use of heuristics, such as tree and map diagrams as well as double entry matrices.

Peer tutors teach writing as a recursive process rather than a linear one. Sondra Perl argues that recursive writers shuttle back and forth among such writing activities as planning, generating, organizing, and editing. Perl writes:

Writers construct their discourse inasmuch as they begin with a sense of what they want to write. [. . .] Rereading or backwards movements become a way of assessing whether or not the words on the page adequately capture the original sense intended. Constructing simultaneously affords discovery. (26)

Many students do not look upon writing as a process of discovery, one that is inextricably linked to thinking and learning. Peer tutors are crucial in modeling for writers how to use what they've already written to further develop their ideas; one cannot overstate the difference it makes to students to have their peers walk them through this shuttling process.

Advantages and Disadvantages

There are many advantages to this method of assisting students who need extra help in a basic writing course. Not only do students not feel "held back" in an extra course, but the fourth credit does not necessarily signify remediation since a variety of students take it voluntarily. Students are also placed in the fourth credit as a result of a process that takes into account all the ways writing is done in the course; group work and revision are included. Of course, disadvantages are that faculty may treat the fourth credit as something only the writing center is responsible for and not involve themselves with the students beyond assigning the hours in the writing center; this can be resolved, for the most part, with communal goal-setting sessions with all faculty at the beginning of the term.

The most important advantage to the intensive work on writing which characterizes the fourth credit is what occurs between the English 101 student and the peer tutor in the writing center. Why are sessions in a writing center more effective than a remedial course? By working with writing tutors, students are receiving one-on-one attention that no instructor, even with the best of intentions, can reasonably provide, especially in this era of increasing class sizes and administrative responsibilities. (In our English 100 classes, the typical student-teacher ratio was 15:1; however, our current 101 classes are capped at yet often exceed 20.) Writing center tutors engage students in effective conversation about writing throughout the course of an entire semester. Thus far, the fourth credit program has succeeded in helping basic writers remain in synch with their peers. Table 1 indicates both 101 grade distribution and promotion to English 102.

Table 1. Full-Time Freshman Taking the 4th Hour in ENGL 101. ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 Grades.

Fall 1995 Entering Class

	English 101 grade		English 102 grade	
	Count	%	Count	%
A	1	1.8%	2	4.0%
A-	5	9.1%	2	4.0%
B+	8	14.5%	5	10.0%
B	3	5.5%	7	14.0%
B-	8	14.5%	11	22.0%
C+	14	25.5%	10	20.0%
C	5	9.1%	5	10.0%
C-	3	5.5%	6	12.0%
D+				
D	2	3.6%		
D-	3	5.5%		
F	2	3.6%	1	2.0%
FA	1	1.8%		
W			1	2.0%

Fall 1996 Entering Class

	English 101 grade		English 102 grade	
	Count	%	Count	%
A	1	1.9%		
A-	6	11.5%	4	9.3%
B+	6	11.5%	7	16.3%
B	10	19.2%	8	18.6%
B-	5	9.6%	10	23.3%
C+	5	9.6%	2	4.7%
C	7	13.5%	6	14.0%
C-	6	11.5%	4	9.3%
D+	2	3.8%		
D	1	1.9%		
D-				
F	2	3.8%		
FA	1	1.9%		
W			2	4.7%

Fall 1997 Entering Class

	English 101 grade		English 102 grade	
	Count	%	Count	%
A			2	3.8%
A-	11	17.2%	2	3.8%
B+	10	15.6%	6	11.5%
B	10	15.6%	6	11.5%
B-	9	14.1%	8	15.4%
C+	10	15.6%	9	17.3%
C	4	6.3%	9	17.3%
C-	4	6.3%	2	3.8%
D+	1	1.6%	2	3.8%
D	3	4.7%	1	1.9%
D-				
F			2	3.8%
FA	2	3.1%	2	3.8%
W			1	1.9%

Fall 1998 Entering Class

	English 101 grade		English 102 grade	
	Count	%	Count	%
A	3	3.8%		
A-	5	6.3%	6	9.7%
B+	9	11.4%	5	8.1%
B	17	21.5%	12	19.4%
B-	13	16.5%	15	24.2%
C+	13	16.5%	8	12.9%
C	8	10.1%	9	14.5%
C-	3	3.8%	2	3.2%
D+	2	2.5%	1	1.6%
D				
D-				
F	4	5.1%	1	1.6%
FA	1	1.3%	2	3.2%
W	1	1.3%	1	1.6%

Conclusion

As teachers of composition, our goal is not to remediate students in separate courses or punish them with weekly consignment to the writing center. Rather, we offer them a shared intellectual and cultural experience and exposure to peers who represent a diversity of writing strengths. For those students who need additional practice and feedback, we offer the support—in terms of both time and attention—necessary for them to succeed in their first-year writing course. We emphasize process over product, a recursive rather than linear style of thinking and

writing. We attempt to treat students as individuals who learn in a variety of ways. The fourth credit, the time spent each week in the writing center and in conferences with the instructor, allows us to teach students according to their own learning styles and to help them create their own repertoire of writing practices that will allow them to succeed as writers both during and beyond their college years.

The fourth-credit option is probably not feasible for schools with high enrollment in which the ratio of students taking writing courses to students working in the writing center is high. In a school like ours, however, a low ratio allows us to play to the strengths of a small institution. In addition, this system recognizes the fact that at a small school, a basic writing course must fulfill several functions: in addition to teaching writing, we've found ourselves acclimating students to academic life, fostering new friendships among students, and providing a forum for faculty development. In Brian Huot's words, we find our placement and subsequent instructional methods now have "institutional validity": they fit our department's and our college's mission (1994, 59). For us, process-oriented placement and follow-up instruction have worked to increase students' investment and awareness of their own writing processes, the best way we've found so far to help students become better writers.

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Writing Program Design in the Metropolitan University: Toward Constructing Community Partnerships

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Based on our work as WPAs at Georgia State University, a large urban campus located in downtown Atlanta, this article represents an attempt to understand the contexts within which we work as urban writing program administrators, teachers, researchers, and colleagues. We share this attempt because we believe that our university and the way in which we are trying to construct writing programs may be similar to others and may, therefore, serve as a way to start a conversation about writing program work in metropolitan universities.

Certainly readers of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* recognize that the work of WPAs is often strangely defined and dual in nature. As Rita Malenczyk explains in a recent issue, we are not administrators “in the same sense that deans and college presidents are administrators” (18). She argues “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” (18). We agree and argue that the priorities of the “metropolitan university philosophy” (defined below) and the potentials of community-based work allow for a significantly greater role for writing programs within the university.¹ The writing program that we envision moves away from a primary identity as a coordinator of service courses and toward a new type of institutional system with multiple purposes, functions, and activities tied to research. As research-based institutional systems that can coordinate meaningful and related work across and outside the univer-

sity, writing programs are potentially powerful institutional systems that foreground the work of writing teachers, researchers, administrators, and students within the university in potentially transformative ways.

The “Metropolitan University”

Tom Miller tells us that “to make sense of our (WPA) work, we need locally-situated, politically-engaged accounts of what English departments do” (“Why Don’t Our Graduate Programs Do a Better Job of Preparing Students for the Work That We Do?” 53). We agree and wish to ground our discussion of WPA work within recent scholarship concerning the broader mission of metropolitan universities. Blaine Brownell explains that “the term ‘urban university’ no longer describes, as it once did, an open admission institution with mostly undergraduate and applied academic programs staffed by mostly part-time faculty” (21). He prefers the term “metropolitan” over “urban,” emphasizing a larger, rather than smaller, area of concern (21). A growing number of administrators and teachers at urban universities who now view their institutions in these broader terms have united to develop the philosophical concept of the “metropolitan university,” a construction often quite distinctive from the traditional urban university in terms of mission, community leadership and partnerships, and (critical for WPAs) evaluation of traditional faculty responsibilities.

Charles Hathaway, Paige Mulhollan, and Karen White define the metropolitan university as an institution which embraces an “interactive philosophy” leading to the establishment of a “symbiotic relationship” with its metropolitan area (9). Universities adopting this “interactive philosophy” have joined to form the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (see the Appendix for the Declaration of Metropolitan Universities), which provides a network of annual conferences, publications, and grants for its members in an effort to unite “universities that share the mission of striving for national excellence while contributing to the economic development, social health, and cultural vitality” of urban and metropolitan areas (*Information on the Coalition*). The Coalition publishes a quarterly journal, *Metropolitan Universities Journal: An International Forum*, targeted primarily to departments of sociology, higher education, and policy development. However, as WPAs in an urban university—one which is a member of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities—we find these articles invaluable in helping us understand both the university’s broader commitment to and symbiotic relationship with the metropolitan Atlanta area, and the role the first-year composition program might play in this interactive philosophy.

Critical in the move to redefine WPA work in terms of research and scholarship rather than managerial tasks, the mission of the metropolitan university leads to a broader conception of the traditional “responsibilities” of university faculty: teaching, research, and professional service. In the metropolitan university model, faculty (while meeting the highest scholarly standards of the academic community) are encouraged to reconsider and more fully merge these duties, which are never mutually exclusive. For example, metropolitan university faculty must seek research opportunities linking basic investigation with practical applications appropriate for the classroom. Faculty must adopt responsibility for educating students to be informed and effective citizens, as well as preparing them for their chosen professions and occupations. Additionally, faculty must contribute to the metropolitan area’s “quality of life” while developing close partnerships with area enterprises in mutually beneficial ways (not only serving as experts disseminating information). This reconfiguration of research, teaching, and service is similar to that proposed by the MLA Commission on Professional Service, which recasts research, teaching, and service into “intellectual work” and “academic and professional citizenship,” with research, teaching, and service arranged as sites of activity that can be found in both categories. For WPAs, either new configuration of responsibilities would mandate that we train our graduate students to carry on our mission, in Tom Miller’s words to “transform public higher education” by developing “the critical awareness and practical skills needed to make productive use of converging institutional, disciplinary, and public trends” (“Why Don’t” 44). Just as importantly, these necessary reconfigurations more accurately reflect the ways in which research, teaching, and service already blend in our own work.

We think that the concept of the metropolitan university invites us to rethink the place of the writing program in the larger university mission just as it supports our work on terms that are likely familiar and comfortable. The implications of this institutional theory, however, run deep. They first demand that we think of writing programs as much more than spaces that support good teaching and university service. In fact, the implications of this institutional theory demand that we think of the writing program’s community interface and (therefore) research functions as just as important as more traditional roles and functions. This audience already knows that WPA work is intellectually rich and demanding, and many in this audience engage in inquiry activities that are called, variously, scholarship of teaching or teacher research. Fewer of us see the administrative and institutional work that we do as inquiry that can be framed as such and written about (see Porter et al.). There is already an internal impulse, then, to more fully embrace the research

possibilities of the writing program. However, the move to rethink writing programs as signature places for university-community collaborations increases the *need* for research as well as the type of research and institutional work required of WPAs. A community interface for writing programs, by which we mean the point of contact between the writing program and various communities, must first be imagined, designed, and constructed by WPAs.

The Writing Program as Community Interface: Research and Civic Rhetoric

Regardless of whether one's university fits the definition of a metropolitan university, the *idea* of a metropolitan university is a useful heuristic for thinking about writing programs because it is an institutional theory (and not, say, a cultural theory). Furthermore, because writing programs are pragmatic spaces that act in partnership with others in the university, the outreach and problem-solving *ethos* of the metropolitan university serves as a concrete model for outward-looking WPA work. There are problems, however, with designing good community-based work.

Linda Flower discusses university-community interface concerns when she writes that "town and gown" relationships have always been strained and marked by asymmetries of power. She also notes that the current enthusiasm for community-based work is at least to some degree a function of cyclical interests, and that this enthusiasm will wane unless community-based work is "rooted in the intellectual agenda of the university" (96). Flower calls for community-based work that is animated by a spirit of inquiry, which means that community-based work must be connected to research.

We welcome a research focus because we believe that writing programs need to be structures that support and generate research. More directly, however, we believe that that community-based work *requires* research. Any serious interrogation of "community" requires inquiries into the nature and meaning of communities themselves. And any serious, sustained community-based work that avoids the cyclical attentions of academic fashion requires the sustained activities that community-based research can provide. Our way, then, of working through the problems of cyclical interests in community-based work and relatively thin views of community is to focus on the research functions of writing programs and to pick up on much older rhetorical traditions in the form of a renewed focus on civic rhetoric in our writing programs.

What we take from readings of recent attempts in political and social theory to define community is that it is relatively easy to name small, homogenous communities, like tight cultural or family groups, particu-

larly when they are situated within a shared space. The task becomes more difficult when confronted with contemporary society, which is generally more diverse and dispersed. In such a context, sociologists like Anthony Cohen argue that community is constructed symbolically as a system of values, norms, and moral codes that provide boundaries and identity (9). For Cohen, the term “community” is relational. One locates community by recognizing boundary construction. Citizens, activists, and others help construct communities in any number of ways. One of us has worked with organizations, both large and small, that have helped construct community around issues such as crime and safety (see Grabill, *Community Literacy*, Chapter 5). We have also seen community constructed around housing issues, political issues, health issues (think of the history of HIV/AIDS activism), and institution building (e.g., civic associations and advocacy groups). While some boundaries may certainly be material or biological, most are symbolic—constructed through the communication of shared symbols and meanings—and any metropolitan area is a configuration of multiple and overlapping communities.

The complicated dynamics of communities should give us all pause as we consider community-based work. If a community is a highly variable and situated construct, then making the determination of exactly which community writing teachers and researchers are working with is an open inquiry question. Writing program interactions with communities, therefore, need to be framed as research activity for reasons connected to all that we don’t know and understand about the relationships between writing programs and community-based work. “Research,” in this sense, means at least two things. Community involvement of any kind—service learning, outreach, and explicit research—should begin with the assumption that communities are not found places but moving targets. A fundamental inquiry question attached to all such projects, then, should be “who is the community with whom we are working?” Answers to that question lead to an equally fundamental ethical inquiry, which asks “in whose interests are we teaching/serving/researching?”

There is another, more engaged sense of community-based research that is recognizable as such. This type of community-based work involves researchers working with communities to solve problems in ways articulated by community members (e.g., Sclove, Scammell, and Holland; Greenwood and Levin). Community-based research is not without conceptual and practical problems. Practitioners spend considerable energy defining what “counts” as community-based research, usually on the basis of the nature of community participation: Is research done on community members or with them? Are community members supplying questions and initiating research projects or not? Are com-

munity members primary participants or merely consultants? And so on. To do “true” community-based research is extremely difficult: communities must be well organized; researchers must be open and flexible to working in new ways (ways that funding cycles aren’t sensitive to); and meaningful participation is difficult (see Kretzmann and McKnight for much more on community building and change). In addition to the inquiry needed to design effective service learning experiences, for example, community-based research provides a framework for other types of research activity (e.g., Grabill “Shaping Local HIV/AIDS Services Policy Through Activist Research”). For community-based research to be most useful, however, it must have an institutional home. There is considerable writing-related problem solving to be done with community-based organizations. The writing program—as a visible and active research and outreach center within the metropolitan university—provides a necessary institutional home.

In order for a writing program to organize sustained community-based work, its partnership with “the community” must be under constant scrutiny. Framing community involvement as research is the best way we know to be both self-conscious about the community-based work of a writing program and useful to communities themselves. But community-based research is not the only way that writing programs can construct meaningful community interfaces. Another, much older tradition, is that of civic rhetoric. Tom Miller tells us that

a civic philosophy of rhetoric can enable us to bring our work with service learning, new technologies, and political controversies into a unified project that challenges the hierarchy of research, teaching, and service that limits the social implications of academic work and devalues the work of the humanities. (“Rhetoric Within and Without Composition” 34)

If we adopt Miller’s stance, then civic rhetoric becomes the catalyst not only for what we do in the English department and university but also a powerful catalyst for refiguring our work outside the university. These ideas are not novel but rather call for a return to the ideal of the eighteenth-century public intellectual. During the late eighteenth century, professors of moral philosophy in the British cultural provinces included the study of English literature, composition, and rhetoric in their course curriculum. Working in the margins of the British realm, moral philosophy professors, such as Adam Smith and John Witherspoon, were training their students to compete with Oxford- and Cambridge-educated students for jobs and social position. These first professors to teach English Studies could be defined as “civic rhetoricians,” professors “concerned with the political art of negotiating received beliefs against

changing situations to advance shared purposes” (Miller, *The Formation of College English* 34). In many cases, these professors delivered public lectures in English to citizens interested in social, political, and economic advancement. The curriculum of the public lectures found its way into the university courses. Viewing the aims of communication in terms of civic rhetoric has the potential for changing the face of contemporary urban English departments as well. Indeed, there are a number of compositionists who have already refigured writing programs—at least in part—along these same lines (see David Cooper and Laura Julier and any number of service learning advocates).² We believe deeper curricular changes, however, begin with changes in writing program design. Like moral philosophy classes of the eighteenth century, composition courses are our core requirement for all students and provide unique teaching moments for blending students’ self interests with civic participation. Civic rhetoric and a focus on inquiry in community contexts provide frameworks for education—and “good” writing and writing instruction—in terms of preparing our students to enter local communities in hopes of advancing the common good in the face of changing political needs. We see a renewed focus on civic rhetoric within the writing curriculum not only consistent with an intellectually and ethically sound community interface but consistent as well with the role of the metropolitan writing program.

Toward Program Designs

All that we have written to this point is necessary institutional theory that frames and drives any pragmatic program design issue. At this point, we want to focus more concretely on issues of program design. We divide this discussion into issues of administration, curriculum design and teacher training, and relationship building with community-based groups.

Administrative Issues. To succeed, our vision of writing program (re)design must receive university, college, and departmental support. At our institution, changing administrative attitudes and practices concerning larger educational theories, financial support, and curriculum issues usher in the necessary environment for change to occur. At a broader institutional level, Georgia State’s adoption of a metropolitan philosophy of education, along with the restructuring of the Carnegie system for ranking colleges and universities, encourages faculty to refigure the traditional triumvirate roles of service, research, and teaching.³ Faculty members interested in expanding existing programs to reflect a metropolitan philosophy of education that emphasizes the university/community symbiotic relationship are encouraged to do so. Grant money

and designated budgetary funds are now available to support faculty who are interested in researching and initiating these changes (and for disseminating findings to audiences outside the academy), to create new degrees that foster this interaction, and to establish administrative faculty tenure lines that foster the metropolitan university principles. Additionally, Georgia State is actively participating in national discussions concerning institutional aims and assessment of the “work” of higher education. This interest in a broader, integrated analysis of the role of the urban university leads us to believe that the time for revising existing programs is at hand.

At the Arts and Sciences College level, our dean (with backing from the faculty senate and the provost) has appropriated funds for creating new initiatives, new degree granting programs, and new faculty lines to expand/redefine the “work” of the department, in correlation with broader university philosophies. For example, the move away from adjunct faculty to visiting instructor/lecturer positions changes not only the “face” of writing instructors but the level/quality of composition instruction in first-year writing classes. As members of the department, visiting faculty take an active role in not only curriculum design and the mentoring of teaching assistants, but also in program administration. The dean has fully supported this move and appropriates funds (as needed) to increase the number of visiting positions we may staff.

Within the department, our chair has expanded the duties/parameters of the WPA, even changing the name of the position to Director of Lower Division Studies. Although the WPA now has increased responsibilities, we see the restructuring of this office as a positive move. Lynée, as Director of Lower Division Studies, has hired an Associate Director of Lower Division Studies (who is appointed from the pool of available visiting lecturers) and an Assistant Director of Lower Division Studies (graduate student) to help administer the program. The department financially supports these positions. Perhaps more importantly in terms of program redesign, however, is the freedom now afforded to the Directors in terms of curriculum design and teacher preparation. With changes at the university, college, and department level, writing program administration has a degree of autonomy and acknowledged expertise that allows room for new program designs. We detail these larger administrative shifts because of their importance; those in position to effect change must have (some degree of) administrative support at all three levels of institutional government. In terms of institutional change, two issues have been fundamental for our design initiative:

- Efforts focused on institutional changes that create value for community-based work (see Porter et al.).

- Efforts focused on institutional changes that create value for Positions devoted to help organize community-based work. This is a task we have started but have yet to complete. We are focusing on developing relationships with community organizations, supervising ongoing projects, and looking for new teaching and research opportunities (including funding for those activities).

There is no question that the program changes we are implementing and suggesting are resource-intensive and institutionally visible—we require resources and are shaking up a formerly literature-based writing program. There is no other way, in our mind, to do community-based work effectively.

Curriculum Design and Teacher Training. Tom Miller, in a recent issue of *WPA*, explains that in order to prepare graduate 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” (44). We agree wholeheartedly and believe WPAs must design teacher training models that address local institutional and community exigencies. Miller’s program at the University of Arizona and Linda Flower’s community-inspired program at Carnegie Mellon offer two examples of locally situated, civic-minded approaches to teacher preparation (see Miller “Why Don’t Our Graduate Programs Do a Better Job of Preparing Students for the Work That We Do?” for detailed program descriptions). Writing Programs at our institution are in their infancy. Institutional conditions are rapidly changing, and “moments” for change are just now present. As we are taking advantage of these developments to formulate our theories/directions for advocating that students “go public,” our personal experiences in the arena of community-centered pedagogy obviously inform our thoughts concerning teacher training. What follows is a reflective example of Lynée’s attempts to develop curricular models and teacher training along the lines we have suggested in this article.

As director of that program, Lynée recently piloted a first-year ethnographic writing course (along with seven other instructors) in civic rhetoric/writing, based on principles of service learning and public literacy instruction.⁴ The ethnographic approach takes advantage of the urban locale and encourages students to take advantage of the unique research opportunities available in Atlanta and surrounding bedroom communities. Higher education task forces advocating a metropolitan university philosophy of education indicate that the quality of student learning is directly related to the quality of students’ involvement in their

education. It is not enough, in other words, to say that a writing curriculum will involve public issues or demand that students venture out into their communities. Charles Ruch and Eugene Trani tell us

boundaries between the classroom and the community can be made permeable, and the extent to which the flow of ideas and people is accelerated is the mutual benefit of both. However, the full impact on the curriculum will not be met by including only community activities. Inductive pedagogy, case methodology, and cooperative learning strategies will need to be introduced into the classroom. Only by restructuring the instructional process so classroom content is tied with community experience will the full potential of these boundary-spanning strategies be achieved. (233-34)

Based on a rhetorical philosophy of composition instruction and founded on the pedagogical approach advocated by Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater and Bonnie Stone Sunstein, authors of the class text *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*, the ethnographic-based writing class answers the call for incorporating community experience in the academic classroom. Those involved in this project are “inventing” a new curriculum and pedagogy—adopting an interdisciplinary approach to writing instruction that is new and exciting for teachers and engaging for students; moreover, we are creating real-world research scenarios and writing assignments tied to community experiences.

Specifically, our 1102 students pick a site to investigate. Most of the course assignments concern or occur at the students’ sites. Projects include: mapping exercises, observations in the field, interviews, oral histories, artifact gathering and analysis, and videotaping, along with “traditional” research and documentation exercises. The students submit a well-organized portfolio the final week of the course including all of the course assignments, a complete narrative (research paper with traditional bibliography), and reflection essay. Each component of the final portfolio has been peer-edited or presented to the class, in some cases graded, and revised over the course of the term. To date, seven instructors have participated in this approach to first-year writing instruction with overwhelmingly positive results. Students’ projects cover a range of topics and communities, some personal interest groups—others public institutions and organizations. The students choose their research sites based on their own interests and experiences in a particular local community.

After a successful first attempt, Lynée is now moving the course and the larger curriculum more clearly in the direction of studying and practicing “civic rhetoric,” eliminating sites that don’t lead students from the

role of observer to participant in community affairs while still allowing students to pick their own sites—one of the course’s greatest strengths. *Fieldworking*, which offers a comprehensive course of study including excellent assignments and sample portfolios, was the ideal text for our first attempt at ethnography in the first-year writing course. However, we are now departing a bit from the *Fieldworking* approach in the reconfigured course, directing students to both historical and contemporary readings that address civic rhetoric. We want students to fully grasp the concept of “a good man speaking well” and the term’s historical implications (and mutations).

Likewise, we’ve expanded the focus of our teacher mentoring sessions to include concerns of civic rhetoric and community. Those of us engaged in the ethnographic pedagogy lead training colloquia advocating a civic approach to teaching first-year writing. We are gradually “infusing” most of our mentoring meetings with discussions of civic rhetoric and community involvement. We are making grass roots progress. Those TAs who have taught the course encourage other TAs to adopt this methodology; these TAs also present their experiences at area conferences and colloquia. The second edition of *Fieldworking* has just recently been published, and we are scheduling the authors to lead a seminar for TAs. In the required teacher preparation course, graduate students planning to teach at GSU are encouraged to adopt a civic-minded philosophy in their courses.

This reconfiguration of the curriculum adopts tenets of the metropolitan university that forward Georgia State’s urban outreach mission and addresses what Elizabeth Ervin has labeled composition teachers’ “increasing dissatisfaction with teaching writing in ways that objectify ‘society’ rather than foster students’ direct interaction with it” (“Course Design, English 496” 43). By training TAs to encourage students to enter the public sphere and engage in public writing, we are helping to restore in both graduate and undergraduate students “a sense of *civitas*, of belonging to one polity and community” (Brownell 23). We also want to underscore the fact that curriculum development efforts such as this—long-term, ongoing, and collaborative—are essential for creating necessary broad-based program change. Without both collaboratively revising curriculum and developing related teacher training, program changes run the risk of being top-down or unsupported (or both) and therefore doomed to fail.

Building Relationships. Another key component of the writing program we envision is building relationships with community-based partners. These relationships will vary with the context, but they are an important part of any community interface. As we discussed earlier in the article, research—or more generally inquiry activities—is the start-

ing place for developing these relationships. Here we want to discuss how long-term relationships can be created and how these relationships affect program design. Toward that end, we will use our service learning program in professional and technical writing as our example.

Like Thomas Huckin's goals for service learning in technical communication—(1) helping students develop writing skills, (2) helping students develop civic awareness, and (3) helping the larger community by helping area non-profits—our goals for service learning are to take part in long-term community change by meeting the needs of community partners and to provide rich and compelling contexts for student learning.

Setting up service learning projects takes some time and involves the informal inquiries into the nature and function of local communities we presented earlier in this article. Service learning program development begins, then, with a kind of community-based research. The process of developing actual projects runs throughout the year. Georgia State's office of community service learning occasionally funnels projects our way. Sometimes faculty will speak at information sessions with members of community-based non-profits. These opportunities often result in new projects and relationships. Over time, we have established a network of contacts in Atlanta with whom the program has been working for a number of years. These efforts are essential because this is how we are trying build long-term relationships with organizations in the community that make a difference in people's lives; likewise, we are trying to position our professional and technical writing program to make a difference in people's lives.

In either business or technical writing, we try to come up with seven to fourteen projects each semester, depending on the course schedule. These projects meet the following criteria:

- The projects meet a real need as articulated by our community partner.
- The projects are sophisticated and writing related.
- The projects fit into the time frame given to the project (5-10 weeks, depending on the course and project).

The heart of the criteria is that these projects must be of service to the people with whom we are working. Once that criteria is met, we begin to address the other constraints. Once potential projects are identified, we visit contacts at their locations to learn about the organization, learn about the neighborhood (if necessary), and make sure the site (and neighborhood) is safe and accessible to students. We also further discuss the contours of the project and the needs of the organization and community. Once the contact person expresses the desire to proceed, we do so with

letters of understanding and, eventually, with visits to class and contact with students.

This approach to service learning is somewhat different from the model typically presented in composition and some technical and professional writing forums. The difference is not really in the pragmatics of setting up or teaching a service learning project. It is in our focus on program design and relationship building. The relationship that is of primary importance is not the student-community agency relationship. In composition studies in particular, the common service learning model is to have students find projects to work on or to choose from a wide array of projects—usually more projects than can be addressed in a given semester. Student choice, student agency, and student voice are valued and for good reason (see Bacon). Our concern with such an approach is that it too often sounds like a low-level colonization of the communities around a university, particularly if the burdens for community-engagement are placed on the shoulders of students. In other words, we have serious doubts about the ability of service learning to accomplish either its service or its learning goals without a solid institutional home. A writing program's community interface is meant to be such a home.

Service learning in technical and professional writing—and any sustained community engagement on the part of writing programs—needs to be connected to the day-to-day institutional work and ethos of the writing program and its faculty. This is how relationships with community groups are initiated and maintained. For our part, we have found the following “to do” list useful in our efforts to build relationships with community groups and design our community interface for the professional writing program:

- Spend the time necessary to get to know the community (again, activity that should be thought of and framed as research);
- Make sure that community-based organizations are well served, both initially by a service learning or research project and on an ongoing basis through consistent follow-up;
- Ask community-based organizations for help, ideas, and advice regarding how to extend and strengthen new and existing initiatives;
- Commit the resources necessary to show that the program's commitment to community-based work is long-term.

Conclusion

Students view the occasional encounter with classroom pedagogy that extends beyond classroom walls for what it is: an anomaly—an experimental blip on the educational radar screen, not viewed as authentic or

even sanctioned by university practice. Perhaps as their teachers, we do too. There are few examples of writing program design that match the numerous course designs and individual faculty initiatives. There is little sustained thinking that might suggest that the recent turn to community-based writing is much more than current fashion. There is even less community-based research in composition.

Certainly, our related experiences with ethnographic writing and service-learning projects and our attempts to build them into a coherent program design reflect our attempts to bridge perceived gaps between university education and the “real” world; however, do these singular experiences really heighten students’ awareness of community or motivate students to actively engage in civic activities long term? Just as importantly, we must ask how limited “term projects” benefit local communities. The scholarship of our field repeatedly raises these questions, but for us the answer lies in writing program (re)design.

Writing programs are far more useful to communities than to individual students and faculty because they provide a context for meaningful student and faculty work. They can do so, however, only if they are designed with a community interface. Writing programs are well positioned to take the institutional theory of the metropolitan university and run with it. Without administrative design, however, the community interface necessary to support community-based research and meaningful, sequenced curricular experiences will never materialize, and writing programs, we fear, will fail to become the centers of research, teaching, and service that they can be.

Notes

¹ We think of writing programs as encompassing “first-year” writing as well as each writing program for which associated faculty are responsible—professional writing, writing across the curriculum, and so on. We think of them also as broad intellectual and administrative structures. As intellectual structures, writing programs can “house” research by clustering faculty with similar interests (much like graduate programs) and by making certain activities (e.g., the teaching of writing) a valued activity. Similarly, writing programs, as administrative structures, manage and align significant resources (books, phones, desks, people) and could, if designed in such a way, manage other structures and processes, such as community-based work. As administrative systems that leverage significant resources, writing programs can act as levers for institutional change.

² Recent composition scholarship concerning theory and pedagogy encourages WPAs to adopt principles of civic rhetoric in course design and program development. In particular, the following works provide rationale and practical advice for restructuring the aims of higher-education writing instruc-

tion: Bruce McComiskey's *Teaching Composition as a Social Process* (2000), Elizabeth Ervin's *Public Literacy* (2000), John Paul Tassoni and William H. Thelin's collection *Blundering for a Change* (2000), Emily J. Isaacs and Phoebe Jackson's edited collection *Public Works* (2001), and the groundbreaking collection, *Coming of Age* (2000), edited by Linda K. Shamon, Rebecca Moore Howard, Sandra Jamieson, and Robert A. Schwegler. These composition scholars and teachers offer theoretically unique and pedagogically sound options for instigating immediate programmatic change. What form that instruction actually takes is predicated upon local communities, student needs, and institutional identities. Students must not only master the skills of argumentation and persuasion but also understand the moral and philosophical implications of the arguments they make and the persuasive actions they take. These works all suggest—in a variety of ways—that students must study rhetoric and writing to move beyond analysis of texts towards public engagement.

³ Interestingly, the revised Carnegie Classification 2000 ranking recently “moved up” GSU’s classification from the category of Doctoral I to Doctoral Extensive, the highest-ranking category, including only 3.8% of classified institutions. A senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation who supervised the new classification system, Alexander C. McCormick, explains that the categories were revised because foundation leaders were concerned that “the categories had come to weigh institutions’ research activities too heavily, at the expense of other aspects of their missions, such as teaching and service” (Basinger A31).

⁴ For a fuller discussion of ethnographic course design at Georgia State University, see Gaillet’s “Bridging Two Worlds: Writing Program Administration in the ‘Metropolitan University’” forthcoming in *City Comp: Teaching Writing in Urban Spaces*. Ed. Cynthia Ryan and Bruce McComiskey. SUNY P (2002).

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Appendix

Declaration of Metropolitan Universities

A number of presidents of metropolitan universities have signed the following declaration.

We, the leaders of metropolitan universities and colleges, embracing the historical values and principles which define all universities and colleges, and which make our institutions major intellectual resources for their metropolitan regions,

- reaffirm that the creation, interpretation, dissemination, and application of knowledge are the fundamental functions of our universities;
- assert and accept a broadened responsibility to bring these functions to bear on the needs of our metropolitan regions;
- commit our institutions to be responsive to the needs of our metropolitan areas by seeking new ways of using our human and physical resources to provide leadership in addressing metropolitan problems through teaching, research, and professional service.

Our teaching must:

- educate individuals to be informed and effective citizens, as well as capable practitioners of professions and occupations;

- be adapted to the particular needs of metropolitan students, including minorities and other underserved groups, adults of all ages, and the place-bound;
- combine research-based knowledge with practical application and experience, using the best current technology and pedagogical techniques.

Our research must:

- seek and exploit opportunities for linking basic investigation with practical application, and for creating synergistic interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scholarly partnerships for attacking complex metropolitan problems while meeting the highest scholarly standards of the academic community.

Our professional service must include:

- development of creative partnerships with public and private enterprises that ensure that the intellectual resources of our institutions are fully engaged with such enterprises in mutually beneficial ways;
- close working relationships with the elementary and secondary schools of our metropolitan regions, aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of the entire metropolitan education system, from preschool through post-doctoral levels;
- the fullest possible contributions to the cultural life and general quality of life of our metropolitan regions.



The Power of “De-positioning”: Narrative Strategies in Stories of Stopping

*Ruth Mirtz, Keith Rhodes, Susan Taylor,
and Kim van Alkemade*

When compositionists narrate the history of the field, it is hard to resist the power of casting the evolution of our discipline “as a story about how, against considerable odds, dedicated individuals managed to work together to battle faceless bureaucrats, an indifferent institution, smug, lethargic colleagues” (Miller 26). Of course, what’s missing from this heroic story of dedicated composition teachers, as Richard Miller argues, is the perspective of the writing program administrator. In “How to Tell a Story of Stopping: The Complexities of Narrating a WPA’s Experience,” Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley note that “victim narratives [have] become a characteristic way of telling our professional stories” (75). While compositionists bask in their affirming pedagogical interactions with students, writing program administrators operate in the larger context of “misunderstanding, or lack of understanding, in English departments and central administration about our evolving field, our interest, our priorities, and the changes in writing instruction and program administration as a result of the last thirty years of evolution” (78). However, “heroic encouragement does no more good than the victimization narrative” (78).

While Bishop and Crossley investigated what prompted so many naive victim stories, in this article we are especially intrigued by stories of stopping because each of us has recently stopped our work as WPAs—but we have stopped in so many ways and for so many reasons that we find Bishop and Crossley’s hero and victim narratives less than compelling as an explanation for how and why WPAs stop. While we do feel like victims at times, and while each of us found some or all of our work as WPAs fruitless and demoralizing, we are interested here in

examining a greater variety of stories of stopping because we narrate our stories in vastly different ways from Bishop and Crossley. We see ourselves as neither victims nor heroes; in the stories we tell, victims do not become martyrs and heroes do not ride off into the sunset. Our stories of stopping are narratives of passage and choice, of development and change; but they are also narratives of limits, lines drawn in the sand, and the necessity, at times, to separate ourselves from work that we mostly love and respect. By telling and interrogating our stories of stopping, we reveal the multiple ways in which WPAs position ourselves in our own narratives.

This article was inspired by email conversations in which we were arguing about the ultimate value of describing our stories in a specialized journal such as *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. Each of us wrote our own story of stopping, which we shared with one another.¹ As we worked through and commented on each other's stories, we found that they were interesting for the interpretive strategies employed in their telling—the essence of scholarly, thoughtful writing about academic experience. However, we were also struck by how, in our narratives, we positioned ourselves as active agents, casting the various circumstances of our “stoppings” as power-moves in our careers as well as our personal lives. The way we told our stories revealed that we wanted our refusals to be positive moves toward something, not steps backwards. We have all felt—at least for a moment—that we could do more for our students and our discipline as ex-WPAs than as WPAs. Instead of seeing ourselves as denied, resigned, or demoted, we represented our transitions as a “de-positioning.” We not only described how we changed our work as administrators, but how we carried the concerns and goals of our field with us to new positions.

Although each of us has stopped being a WPA to one extent or another, we still see ourselves as WPAs in different forms. Our experiences in writing program administration do not cease to count for us, or for the profession, even when they are in the past. Stories of stopping like ours may be the reason why many new graduates in composition studies refuse to accept WPA positions, thus shaping the future of our profession. But beyond the cautionary tales of tenure denied or writing programs that resisted change, the way we tell our stories of stopping challenges the rhetoric of victimhood through the narrative strategy of investing the act of stopping with the power to change a career, or a writing program, or a discipline, for the better.

Haunted by Boxes

Ruth Mirtz's story of stopping begins with a crisis familiar to many of us who have taken WPA positions as untenured, junior faculty: she was denied tenure, an injustice that still angers her. Ultimately, however, her narrative casts this as "a terribly freeing, empowering event, because it made choices possible again, after a long period where choices didn't seem possible." Mirtz constructs her narrative around the image of boxes that come to stand, both figuratively and concretely, for the accumulated experience of having served as a WPA.

I remember staring at the boxes for hours one afternoon, trying to make a logical decision which, in the end, couldn't be made logically. I was packing to move to a new job, from an intense WPA position to an intense teaching position. The boxes held reams and reams of material from teaching assistants, five years' worth of teaching philosophies, responses to Elbow and Bizzell, interviews with students, micro-ethnographies of classrooms, teaching demonstrations, self-evaluations. What would I do with them, since I was not a WPA any longer? Those boxes were the only evidence that I was ever a WPA, the only physical evidence that I had helped many new teachers through their first years, that I had advised many students, that I had kept the program together despite the efforts of colleagues in the department to dismantle it. My name wasn't even on the latest edition of the student and teacher's guides I had insisted on and helped develop.

For Mirtz, facing those boxes was more of a crisis than being denied tenure, selling her house, or saying goodbye to friends. "Until the box crisis, I had operated with a sense of the future as a WPA, always easily envisioning a writing program that worked better for TAs and students. Now I was facing the reality that nothing had changed, there was nothing to show for six years of work as a WPA." Although she recognizes that little of her work as WPA was solely her own, since she worked hard to draw TAs and composition colleagues into the leadership of the program, she decided in the end to take the boxes with her to her new position. She realizes that taking the program materials will not make a statement, because she left a capable, composition-trained non-tenure track colleague in her position. "Certainly the university made a statement by denying me tenure," she writes, "but my message had to be what I did next, what meaning I made of my WPA experience."

What she makes of the experience—the outcome of her stopping—is at first cast in very positive terms as she narrates her story:

Taking the boxes with me taught me that I carry with me a lot of other WPA baggage. I see no reason to throw it away, even if I don't exactly use it the way it was first intended. In my job interviews, I often presented myself as someone who enjoyed WPA work and wanted to continue it. I wasn't lying; about 75% of what I did as a WPA provoked my thinking, made me a better teacher, and gave me tangible rewards as an administrator, and I came very close to taking a WPA position I was offered. But I am completely satisfied as a "regular" faculty and an elected one-year chair of the composition committee within the English department. My new colleagues have no idea how easy I find all this—sending a couple of emails to arrange a meeting, writing a draft proposal for a program assessment, talking out a teaching problem in the hallway, while teaching 4-4 and choosing my research projects. I'm delighted not to be dealing with the stress of planning five or six meetings, finding last-minute adjuncts, battling arbitrary and ambiguous demands from upper administration, and planning counter-offensive measures after unforeseen attacks on the writing program in the latest faculty meeting. Now I have the time to do other, equally worthwhile things for my new writing program. I've learned that to admit failure and find something just as good to do (depositioning, as we've been calling it) is a hugely important step both for me and for the writing programs I care about. The boxes I brought with me from my WPA position are now stacked in a closet.

However, the story is not quite as simple as that. The boxes come back to haunt her when Mirtz finds herself acting like her former colleagues did when she was a WPA:

The second crisis occurred as I talked to my new chair who, as both chair and WPA, was doing most of what I used to do, for example hiring in late August inexperienced and over-committed adjuncts to handle extra sections of first-year composition. All I did was smile sympathetically and murmur nothings—the same maddening thing that my colleagues used to do to me. And I'm angry again, at myself for being as useless on this issue as a not-WPA as I was as a WPA. My chair and I both know, without discussing it, what the answer to this problem is: funds for tenure-track composition instructors, which in turn

require commitment to the writing courses from outside the department, which in turn requires knowledge of what the course is and isn't and a willingness of upper administration to let the people who teach the course decide the conditions under which it will be taught.

Mirtz's story of stopping becomes more problematic than a narrative of liberation from burdensome administration to personal freedom. She recognizes that, as a former WPA, she will always carry with her the wider perspective that her experience has given her. She can never forget that labor and administrative issues intersect with a commitment to student writing. Her problem becomes how to use her accumulated experience and knowledge—what is in those boxes—while still insisting "I am not the WPA." She recognizes that, when she stopped being a WPA, she removed herself from the advantages of that position at the same time that she lost its disadvantages.

The resolution Mirtz comes to is not simple, but a delicate negotiation of power and responsibility. "Now I can do what I wish I had been able to do as a WPA: work outside the administrative role with an eye toward what's best for the composition program, unite my teaching and research interests with that of the composition program, and get as much deserved attention to the program as possible by leading committees and publishing articles." The larger implication of Ruth Mirtz's story of stopping is that, as more of us transition through writing program administration, our field needs to draw on this broader base of knowledge and experience. The practice of writing program administration can gain valuable support by including those whose administrative experience may be hidden in a closet, but who still carry—and value—the boxes.

Saturday Mornings Spent in Tears

While Ruth Mirtz negotiated an unbidden change in her career from WPA to faculty member, Susan Taylor actively rejected not only writing program administration but also the university as an institution. She stepped out of administration and off the tenure-track to become an adjunct teacher at a community college. Looking back, she rejects not only the pressures and politics of directing a writing program, she rejects the value of the experience itself: "Being a WPA was not worth anything to me. Being part of the university academic community meant nothing to me." She casts the outcome of her rejection in entirely positive terms:

Like Ruth, I have boxes. Mine are not kept for the sake of another university job; rather, they are kept for future possible reference. I do not want to be a WPA or a university

professor ever again, but I know the key to any type of job in academe is information. So, I have kept the information from my time as a WPA to save myself time in case I need time to do other tasks. However, I am finding that I have more than enough time nowadays, even though I teach four or five classes a semester. I do not need time like I used to; I can manage time quite well and still have time left over for myself. In other words, I now have a life that I can embrace instead of visit. I am quite happy now. I did not think I could be since I had been trained to get a tenure-track job. I am an adjunct for a community college and a branch campus of a small four-year liberal arts college. I get to do what I do best, teach. No committee work and minimal contact with “colleagues.” Quite often, I get asked when I will go back on the job market and get a university job. My standard reply is “never.” While my positions do not afford me financial security by any means, they do offer me a blessed sense of peace and no more Saturday mornings—or other days—spent in tears.

While Taylor presents her rejection of writing program administration as a power-move, in the painful narrative of her experience as an administrator, there are echoes of the rhetoric of victimhood. Because Taylor’s doctoral work was in women’s literature, not composition, she entered into our field with the same step that took her into administration:

I was not “trained” to be a WPA. I took no classes in Rhetoric and Composition. Instead, I chose to attend the proverbial school of hard knocks, reading Rhet/Comp theory on my own because I was appointed Assistant Director of Composition in my first year out of graduate school. As a result, I thought I needed to pay attention to the extraordinary discipline that I was now a part of, by caveat, not qualifications, and threw myself into the scholarship that I admired as Rhetoric and Composition. I attended WPA conferences, participated on the WPA-L, gave papers at CCCC, and so forth. And hard knocks I got because I was falling in love with a discipline that I had not “done my time” in. One of my favorite sayings once I had made the switch was how much more fulfilling it was to go to a Rhet/Comp conference than a literature conference. The founders of the discipline were alive and not French and, therefore, would talk to me. I was enamored by such witty

and intelligent folks as Peter Elbow, Ann Berthoff, Lynn Bloom, and Anne Ruggles Gere. I felt I had found my intellectual home and thought it could sustain me because my physical home, or the place I was employed, was nightmarish. I needed to be Matt Damon in "The Talented Mr. Ripley" because I needed to be a charming killer who did not get caught except in a mirror at the end of the film. Instead, I was horrified by what I saw. I was not prepared for the back-stabbing and pettiness I encountered as a member of the academic and administrative branch of my former institution. I was not prepared for the general nastiness and disdain my literature colleagues bestowed upon me. I was not prepared for the lack of care for students. I was not prepared.

Although Taylor developed an appreciation for our field, her personal and emotional experience of the institutional realities she faced led to her "de-positioning." Interestingly, it was a research project on the working conditions of WPAs that inspired her decision:

After spending the morning of February 20th, 1999, giving a phone interview to a person in Chico, California, about being a WPA, I realized I could easily become everything I found so distasteful about academe and that the job was taking over my life. I cried as I recounted the events of my time to the interviewer. No job was worth the pain and humiliation I felt as I answered the interview questions. No university position was worth fighting for to secure being a part of academe—university, that is—that is seen as "important." I wanted to end my association with the entire construct. So I did.

While Taylor rejected her position as a WPA, her new colleagues value her experience:

When my department chairs, at either the community college or the branch of the small four-year college, are working out scheduling each semester and discuss their problems with me, I smile and repeat the cliché to myself, "there but for the grace of god, go I." I have even said it out loud to each of the chairs because they know I understand their problems. I do not offer to help, I offer to listen.

Her listening ear is valued by her colleagues not for its sympathy, but for its knowledge and experience. It is because they know that she understands their problems that her offer to listen is so gratefully accepted.

Personally, the experience of being a WPA taught Taylor that she “can close the door to the opportunity to ever hurt myself like that again.” Professionally, she decided to value what she does best, which is to teach.

Taylor’s story of becoming a WPA and of de-positioning herself addresses important issues of training and professionalization. While a background in composition won’t completely prepare anyone—especially an untenured faculty member fresh out of graduate school—to meet the challenges of writing program administration, there is no doubt that Taylor’s lack of preparation contributed to her de-positioning. In fact, during her time as WPA, she secured a WPA evaluation of the writing program, one outcome of which was the recognition of the evaluators (and later from the department) of the need to replace her with a tenured, rhet/comp specialist. Yet the recentness of her experience also points out how much education our field still has to do on the institutional level, to make colleges and universities understand that WPA positions need to be filled with appropriately trained, and preferably tenured, faculty.

Losing Faith

Keith Rhodes’s story also presents his decision to stop serving as Coordinator of Composition at a teaching university as a positive move, but the issues that led to his de-positioning are located less in the program he served than in our field’s disciplinary and professional construction of what it means to be a WPA. Rhodes’s narrative reads very differently from Ruth Mirtz’s or Susan Taylor’s in that he never presents himself as a victim of institutional or administrative circumstances. On the contrary, the problem with the position he held was its lack of an intellectually interesting challenge:

Would you take this job? Assume that your main role as Coordinator of Composition is to improve the quality of composition instruction by helping experienced, full-time teachers develop better approaches to the teaching of writing. Assume further that most of these teachers are either tenured or in positions with no “up-or-out” pressure, and that the handful who are under “up-or-out” pressure were all recently participants in excellent composition T.A. programs. Assume further that, as a newly minted Ph.D. who made a rather quick run through grad school, you have in fact taught fewer composition courses than anyone on your new faculty. Oh, and toss in that the school’s graduate program has no composition component, and G.T.A.’s work exclusively in the Writing Center, run by a full-

time instructor who, while well-informed about composition theory, is not on the tenure track. Yet another non-tenurable instructor, who in this case has little background in composition theory (though much expertise in assessment theory), runs composition placement and assessment. Meanwhile, there is no option of just declaring victory and moving over to another position; the line itself is defined by its vague administrative aspect, even if three fourths of the load is simply teaching composition and, once a year, an upper-level writing course. Finally, let us imagine that several previous highly qualified candidates had either fled or been run out in the fifteen-year history of this position. I took the job. I knew it would be dangerous, but I also knew how much I could learn from it. I set out with two goals, in this order: 1) make the job safer for those who would hold it in the future, and 2) try to be the one who held it when it became safe. As things turned out, that whole scenario shifted by the end. The job was safer, and I could have held it had I wanted to; but I didn't want to anymore.

Unlike Taylor, Rhodes wasn't mistreated, at least not overtly, and his relations with colleagues were good. Unlike Mirtz, his performance reviews indicated that he would have been offered promotion and tenure. The problem was that he could simply make no sense of the position of Coordinator of Composition with his department, and the department could make little more sense of anything he had to offer. His knowledge alone had no capital among his colleagues, and they had no interest in changing their traditional English program in ways that would have given him other outlets. He was happy being a writing teacher, but he had no psychic resources for dealing with using released time for a job that had no feasible goals and apparently as few expectations—other than that he had to do something, anything, to justify it.

To find his justification, Rhodes turned to his counterparts in writing program administration. He became a house gadfly on WPA-L, the listserv for writing administrators. Needing actually to administer by persuasion rather than fiat, he began probing to find how much persuasive wisdom about writing teaching might lurk under all our professional knowledge of placement methods, management of contingent labor, and professional legitimization. In the collective wisdom of our field, however, he did not find what he was looking for:

While I found useful nuggets of information, the whole tenor of the conversation ran to matters that rarely suited my needs. I found myself particularly disturbed by the ease and frequency with which list members swapped recipes for running essentially composition sweatshops—”adjunct wrangling,” to use Cynthia Jeney’s priceless private phrase, a job not greatly improved in my eyes when it gravitates more toward TA mentoring/wrangling. Most of our discipline’s best administration seemed to require a strong top-down power grid, even if we took pains to use that power humanely. At best, we founded departments of our own—or found more composition-friendly departments, like my current one—and then collaborated as equals. If there are stable models for true “bottom up” program development, I have yet to find them.

In the end, Rhodes decided to stop what he was doing as “Coordinator of Composition,” even though it involved leaving a job in which he was advancing his career. At his school, Rhodes was able to get a graduate class in composition theory approved, but its subject matter was not included in the comprehensive examinations, the engine of all curricular decisions by the students. He was able to draft more readable syllabi and put in place theoretically informed descriptions of the outcomes for each stage of the composition sequence, but he could not enact any conceivable method by which anyone had to use them. He was able to inform colleagues about the relative value of different composition teaching practices, even winning their assent to his credibility, without much affecting what was done in their classes. As he puts it, “I simply lost faith in the prospect of having meaningful work to do.” More significant was his loss of faith in the profession as a whole:

I left rather ashamed of my associations with composition professionals. Our pretensions to being the disciples of a better way seemed entirely hollow. James Sledd’s accusation that our best and brightest were merely “boss compositionists,” most effective at and most interested in running first-year composition “plantations,” hit much too close to the mark. When it came to persuading empowered English professors and liberal arts administrators to value a strong commitment to writing teaching, our professional apparatus seemed not exactly ineffectual, but certainly unfocused. The great hopes and promise with which so many of us had been sent out to do our “missionary” work for a better approach to composition seemed founded on a mere

trick of labor conditions. The good word seemed effective only with those whom we had over a barrel. While I could understand the difficulty of intervening in complex institutional changes like those at the University of Minnesota, I felt betrayed when Ruth Mirtz and Susan Taylor made such varied and direct pleas for rhetorical backing and met with such pathetically inadequate response. If perhaps beginning or lower level administrators were not the slaves of boss compositionists, at best we seemed to be the hapless recruits of a pyramid marketing scheme, deluded by narratives of glory into taking roles that served largely the careers of a limited and self-obsessed elite.

In contrast to his critique of composition, Rhodes's attitude toward his former department remains tolerant, even appreciative. As a whole, they were running what seemed to him a more ethical program than those run by most of his "betters" on WPA-L. In their program, nearly every first-year composition student had an experienced, full-time, committed teacher of writing in every class, even if most of those teachers had little theoretical acumen and made classic and obvious mistakes along the way to doing, also, much good. Had he been able to leave only that part of his job that involved coordinating composition, he might have stayed. Perhaps most disappointing to him is that, despite his suggestions of other models, that department has simply hired another newly minted PhD to fill the same position—"another Sisyphus to push the same old rock," as he puts it. "But frankly," Rhodes says, "they are trying to do what they think is right in light of what our own apparatus of professional composition communicates to them. By the time I left, I was leaving composition coordination rather more than I was leaving my literature-centered colleagues." At his new place, Rhodes has limited, sensible charges within an administrative apparatus that he can potentially improve. The work is harder even though the goals are much more limited, but it makes more sense to him. It would be easy for Rhodes to blame the former school for inept planning; but disturbingly, "that school is simply enacting the logic that we pretend to have when we make the claims we do about the state of our field."

Rhodes's de-positioning narrative resists the rhetoric of victimhood and casts his decision to stop being a particular kind of WPA as a positive one. The most compelling thread in his narrative is the story of his relationship to our own field:

I have stopped, but I haven't given up; and in the main I've gained a further appreciation for how difficult a thing I was seeking to do. I still maintain it could and should

have been otherwise, though; and painful as it is, I hold many of those for whom I have enormous professional respect nevertheless partly accountable for the losses being suffered in departments like my former one, where a tenure-track line has now existed for over twenty years without producing a promotion or tenure. The professional status of writing program administration has survived and grown mostly by taking advantage of adjunct and TA status to create a ready pool for artificially easy administrative implementation. It's not clear that we can grow out of that, and it is unfair to indicate to departments and job candidates alike that we have.

Feels Like Starting Over

Kim van Alkemade's story has many elements of the naive victim-narrative, but for her also the act of stopping is cast as a positive move that allowed her to renegotiate her position within the department. The WPA position she accepted right out of graduate school (and still ABD) was like Keith Rhodes's job in Susan Taylor's department. "At my interview," van Alkemade recalls, "one of the senior faculty, previously the WPA himself, asked me, 'Some of us have been teaching writing longer than you've been alive. What makes you think you can come here and tell us what to do?' I responded that as Director of Composition, I would not tell anyone what to do, but work collaboratively to develop consensus. I recognize now how unprepared I was to fulfill this promise." Although she had what Taylor did not—recent graduate training in composition and some experience with program administration—she, too, was "not well-prepared politically and vulnerable to departmental power elites" (Hult 50). Like Rhodes and Mirtz, van Alkemade expected her department would value what her degree in composition represented. "Because I was hired to be the Director of Composition on the basis of my qualifications, I assumed the department wanted me to reshape the program to reflect my recent professional training."

Reflecting on her WPA experience, van Alkemade casts her story in the terms offered by Christine Hult to categorize writing program governance:

From the beginning, mine was a weak monarchy with limited authority, kept subservient to the department chair who appointed the members of the composition committee. The committee, in turn, envisioned administration by oligarchy with a ceremonial head of state to administer the program. At the time, my own vision of my role was

as a benign dictator, bringing current practices and contemporary theory to the well-meaning but misinformed traditionalists. I soon learned, however, that young, untenured women who are still writing their dissertations do make very effective dictators. My accomplishments as WPA—winning educational technology grants, writing a computer-based curriculum, revising composition course descriptions, integrating library instruction, developing a more efficient and ethical placement process—impressed few faculty within my department, and inspired active resistance in others. The only way for me to avoid the language of victimization is to spare you the familiar litany of confrontations and humiliations that characterized my first five years as a WPA.

Despite an emotional response to the pressures of her position similar to Taylor's, the circumstances of van Alkemade's stopping did not imitate either Mirtz's denial of tenure or Rhodes's decision to change jobs. She finally completed her dissertation, earned her PhD, and was awarded tenure. The real crisis came after these hurdles had been overcome, when her department decided to fill a tenure-track slot with another compositionist.

Of course I supported this decision, and volunteered to serve on the search committee, expecting to be its chair. After all, I was the Director of Composition and the only faculty member with a PhD in composition. Despite these qualifications, however, the department chair excluded me from the search committee entirely. I protested at our department meeting, determined to get the chair on record, but he simply asserted that enough faculty had volunteered for the search committee before I did. In the hallway after the meeting, however, he took me aside and confided, "I didn't want to say this in front of everyone, but there are people in the department who just don't want to be on a committee with you, Kim." The next day in the copy room, a colleague confided that she heard a member of the search committee remark that he didn't want to hire a clone of me. It was impossible not to take all this personally, although I know my situation wasn't unique. As Sally Barr-Ebest discovered, "women who speak up and fight for their program are doubly damned" for being aggressive rather than "agreeable and easy to work with" (66). Soon after this incident, I decided to hell with it, and told

my department chair I wanted to stop being the Director of Composition. The chair said that would be fine, that the search committee would go ahead and advertise for a new WPA, and after he or she was hired, I could exchange my administrative release for another teaching assignment and stay on the faculty. After all, I had tenure, a mortgage, and a child in school—I didn't want to start over somewhere else.

Like Keith Rhodes, van Alkemade's narrative doesn't blame her discontent with writing program administration solely on her department. Her experience led her to critique the field in which she had been educated and trained:

Not only did I resent the way I had been treated by my department, I also resented the field of composition studies. I had finally realized that by hiring me—a young, untenured woman—to be the Director of Composition, the English department assured the position would “remain relatively powerless” (Barr-Ebest 65). I could have made my life easier by simply managing the existing writing program, which is apparently what most departments really want, but that's not what my degree in composition studies had taught me to desire. Like Wendy Bishop, I believed that the WPA should be the expert responsible for the program (Bishop and Crossley 77). I was offended when I was asked to enact practices I thought were intellectually indefensible and not in the best interests of the students. I concluded the only reason the English department had hired a PhD in composition was because flourishing graduate programs in composition produce composition specialists, and university administrators encourage departments to hire people with the right specialization for the job. Thus our own graduate programs qualify us for jobs as WPAs, knowing we are likely to be hired into situations where we will “not operate in a political and economic system that can affirm our values” (Bishop and Crossley 78). Despite the WPA guidelines, writing program administrators rarely occupy respected positions of authority where the scholarly value of curriculum and program development is recognized. Proclaiming that it ought to be this way hasn't yet made it so, and as Christine Hult acknowledges, probably won't “in our lifetime” (51).

Continuing to function as the Director of Composition while a search was conducted for a new WPA, van Alkemade nursed her resentments even as she began to disengage emotionally from the politics of her position. But the search committee from which she had been excluded failed to make a hire; a small pool of applicants resulted in only one offer, which was turned down. For a second year, van Alkemade was asked to conduct the business of the writing program, this time only for one semester followed by a sabbatical. The search was conducted a second time, but again it failed. Beginning to feel vindicated, van Alkemade reconsidered her angry critique of composition studies:

At CCCC in Minneapolis, a professor on the faculty at a doctoral program in composition read my name tag and remarked, "Oh, I saw the ad from your school for a Director of Composition. We told our graduate students not to apply for that job." I began to understand that the field of composition studies was responding to the exploitation and unfairness inherent in untenured WPA positions by advising new graduates not to take those jobs. Unable to replace me, my department realized the problems I had as WPA were not unique to me, but were inherent in the position. The field of composition itself made this point to my department, but only after my de-positioning got me out of the way.

Another year passed, during which van Alkemade let go of her resentment, the department chair was replaced, and colleagues began to value her willingness to do a job they could hire no one else to do. As the search geared up again, van Alkemade was asked to join the committee for its third attempt to hire a WPA. However, she knew first-hand how unethical it would be to hire a new untenured professor to direct the composition program. If the new chair and her colleagues would agree to work with her, van Alkemade offered to stay in the position—an offer her department accepted. She suggested that they search for a compositionist without administrative responsibilities, and they finally made a successful hire. "Although I never really stopped directing the composition program," van Alkemade concludes, "my declaration of stopping made it possible for me to start over. At least now I am what a WPA ought to be: a tenured member of the department who is accepted and, hopefully, respected by her colleagues."

A story like van Alkemade's may seem at first like a victim-narrative, but here too the act of stopping—whatever the circumstances that led up to it—is cast as a power-move that resulted in the department's new appreciation of her work, as well as her renewed appreciation for her

own field. By not throwing new, young bodies into the breach, graduate programs in composition had supported her de-positioning and made it possible for her to start over again. Her story also demonstrates that the naive victim-narratives we have so often told in journals and at conferences have had a powerful effect on working conditions in our field, even as her critique of graduate programs in composition continues to ring true, and as these four stories of stopping attest.

Including the Outside Game

The four narratives we shared with each other told very different stories of stopping. While each of us addressed the circumstances that made us feel, at times, like victims, each author employed narrative strategies to recast our experience of stopping as a purposeful de-positioning. In our stories, we downplayed or questioned our victimization, emphasizing instead the positive outcome, the lesson learned, the happy ending, and the new opportunity our stopping initiated. These narratives challenge the prevailing view of the stories we tell as WPAs. Instead, we offer the narrative of the limits of WPA work: story after story of WPAs reaching their limit and inducing change through de-positioning. One of the problems with the positions described in our stories here was that there was no end in sight, no prospect of relief coming, of substantial change happening, of solving problems once and for all. Because WPA work is intellectual, stimulating, and demanding, our narratives suggest that a career as a WPA has to be a road that branches or diverges away and back again.

Before his untimely death, Robert Connors posted his own story of stopping in an email to WPA-L. In his narrative, too, Connors casts his stopping as a power-move:

There are times when we must finally say, like Thrain, “This cannot be borne.” This year, after six years as Director of the UNH Writing Center (which I founded in 1994), I was forced to resign in protest of budget cuts that threatened to eviscerate the WAC Program with which the UWC is associated. After many long memos detailing the damage we were taking, the betrayal of the Faculty Senate’s WI legislation it represented, the relatively small amount of resources we needed to do the work reasonably, I had gotten nowhere. The inside game had failed. And when the inside game fails for a WPA, there are two options: either keep playing it, because you’re afraid that without you things would be even worse, meanwhile

eating your liver with anger and frustration; or: move to an outside game. The problem with the outside game is that you have to cut yourself loose to play it.

Careers in writing program administration are more likely than not to start and stop more than once. Our field—in its discourse, training, and professional standards—needs to broaden its scope to include former as well as present WPAs: both the inside and the outside game. As Connors put it, “if we as WPAs bring our disciplinary expertise to bear on local conditions and find them wanting, our first task must be to work to improve them, and then, if we cannot improve them (for whatever reason), to withdraw the sanction of that disciplinary expertise from the situation.”

If every stopping is also a starting, then we hope our experiences will help others to begin well, whether they are just starting out, starting over, or deciding to stop. “Being outside of administration,” writes Ruth Mirtz, “has allowed me the perspective to see what I did learn from being a WPA.” For Keith Rhodes, “life makes sense now. I feel as if I am being paid to succeed, expected to succeed, and to use my most well-honed, well-prepared abilities to do it. I don’t always succeed, of course; but that’s because the work is difficult, not because the work is distrusted.” Connors warns that stopping “takes a strong stomach,” but as the narratives we share here attest, de-positioning can be a powerful strategy for writing program administrators.

Notes

¹ For the sake of narrative coherence, we decided to frame our first-person singular stories with an amalgamated voice, blended from an initial introduction and conclusion by Ruth Mirtz, which was revised by Kim van Alkemade in response to our reviewers’ comments.

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Starting Over with Basic Writing

Scott Stevens

McNenny, Gerri, and Sallyanne Fitzgerald, eds. *Mainstreaming Basic Writers: Politics and Pedagogies of Access*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. 2001. 256 pages. \$24.50 (paper), \$59.95 (cloth).

Fox, Tom. *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Boynton/Cook, 1999. 128 pages. \$21.00 (paper).

Over the years, many basic writing teachers have expressed discomfort with the “at-risk” designation applied to our students, but now the efforts of legislators and university officials have truly put students and the programs serving them in jeopardy. I am referring, of course, to the much-publicized assault on remediation occurring across the nation. Working as the coordinator of a basic writing program in the California State University system, I am reminded daily of the need to respond to the rhetorical and ideological battles raging in conference rooms and presidential suites up and down the state. Whatever contribution I might make to my campus by designing a basic writing program that is coherent, ethical, and pedagogically sound is routinely thrown into turmoil by mandated reductions in remediation time, new assessment procedures, revamped high school standards—all decisions made by others very far from the classroom.

The movement to “mainstream” did not begin with political efforts to eliminate basic writing, but it has attracted renewed attention because of them. Gerri McNenny and Sallyanne Fitzgerald’s *Mainstreaming Basic Writers* enters into this highly contested arena to provide “fair representation” of the differing perspectives and strategies that have emerged

from the remediation debate. Though there is ample evidence to make the case for mainstreaming, this is not the overall emphasis of the volume. The collection covers the spectrum of informed opinion among teacher-researchers in basic writing programs, as well as presenting several possible program models from the campus-specific responses that have emerged. The combination of endorsement and warning makes the book feel especially honest about the difficulties mainstreaming presents. In this way, *Mainstreaming Basic Writers* is an important guide to many of the issues we face in setting writing program curricula and policy.

Three central themes within the mainstreaming debate emerge in *Mainstreaming*: the political and social costs of remediation, the empirical data for and against mainstreaming, and the curricular innovations we might offer in response to external pressures. The range of concerns the contributors address will make this volume an important scholarly and practical resource, one that should be required reading for any graduate composition studies program. What's more, though the central subject is mainstreaming, teachers who direct and study writing programs at any level will find much of this volume very helpful for the questions it poses about teaching writing in general.

McNenny and Fitzgerald's collection shares the goal of rethinking issues of opportunity and writing instruction with Tom Fox's *Defending Access*. Fox's book seeks to change the terms of the debate over basic skills instruction by highlighting the rhetorical and ideological contradictions of higher education's commitment to both academic standards and open access. Placing historical standards movements alongside everyday administrative maneuvers that regulate students' movement in the university, Fox helps us see how administrative practices are political actions (76). Taken together, these two books guide us in reconsidering the motives and means of teaching developmental writing. Nothing will quiet the current political storm, but the work of these writers can help us influence the outcomes as we are forced to start over with basic writing.

The visibility of basic writers has always been a source of ambivalence. David Bartholomae initially remarked that the influential curriculum in *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* was designed to make sure the students didn't disappear (9), only to overturn that proposition in his 1993 essay, "The Tidy House," in which he argued that basic writing programs have come to depend on identifying students *as* basic writers in order to justify our work. Students understandably often prefer to blend in without the stigmatizing mark of "remedial." Yet given so many endorsements of the value of diversity on campus, the students who overwhelmingly fill basic writing classrooms should be seen and be

welcomed for the perspectives they bring. Paradoxically, by their consignment to no-credit writing courses, they are hidden in the curriculum at the same time their presence makes them targets. Since Bartholomae's Tidy House argument, we have debated if basic writing programs might not harm students as much as they help them.

This ambivalence characterizing basic writing lies at the heart of the essays in *Mainstreaming Basic Writers*. The essays by Ira Shor and Mary Soliday speak most directly to the political causes for the damage. Shor presents remediation in its most common forms as a ceaselessly crippling mechanism of social struggle (the "no-credit, curricular reservation"). Shor's essay rebuts the now familiar "tradition of complaint" about writing instruction with the consistent asymmetry between economic power and writing instruction. Shor also cites recent studies that call into question the empirical value of placement to assert that "Writing instruction's social function is to help reproduce inequality...to preserve the hierarchies now in place" (30). A more concrete analysis of the economics of basic writing appears in Mary Soliday's report on higher education funding. Soliday shows how the ideological effort to equate remediation with people of color leads to a view of basic writing as a welfare program. I appreciate Soliday's effort to break us out of the mindset that our programs are *the* key to student success, especially when legislative defunding of public education has had a greater effect on students' access than the much-debated success of remedial programs. In a passage that is the central theme of this book, Soliday explains, "The real danger is not that we experiment with new programs, but that we contain our commitment to working-class, culturally diverse students within a single course or program" (70).

The dreary portrait of social meanness and institutional hegemony provided by Soliday and Shor is counterbalanced by accounts of success in basic writing against these odds. Acknowledging the trend toward elitism, Ed White presents empirical data to resist the "new abolitionists" who would eliminate basic writing in favor of entirely elective writing programs. The actual achievements of basic writing programs, White argues, can be seen in retention data from both California and New Jersey. White offers strong correlations between testing, remedial coursework, and student persistence as a clear indication that basic writing works: those who take placement exams and pass required preparatory classes are less likely to transfer or drop out. What White cannot show is that students remain enrolled *because* they took a remedial course. White's analyses may suggest that writing abilities strengthened by developmental classes translate into success in subse-

quent coursework, but it is equally possible to argue that persistence, in an academy that makes poor use of writing, is less dependent on literacy than our rhetoric of needs asserts.

Sharing White's positive view, Terrance Collins and Kim Lynch "argue caution" because they feel we are misled by the "homogenizing" tendency many discussions of mainstreaming draw upon (73). Worried that the ideological warrants of mainstreaming may unintentionally make successful basic writing programs and the students they serve disappear, Collins and Lynch resist the idea that mainstreaming is always good. Citing the *unusual* circumstances of the University of Minnesota-General College—credit-bearing, two-term coursework; small class size bolstered by current technology; humane placement—Collins and Lynch question the very idea of a "mainstream." Instead they propose that local circumstances should dictate whether or not mainstreaming is appropriate. This respect for context also guides Trudy Smoke's essay on the implications of mainstreaming for ESL students. Smoke cautions that our lack of clarity about how best to help ESL writers could hurt students if we treat mainstreaming as a cure-all for writing pedagogy.

These are important warnings. But Collins and Lynch never seem to question if success itself can be failure. This is, for me, the great insight of Bartholomae's Tidy House argument (an argument Collins and Lynch strongly denounce): namely, that basic writing programs over time actively "maintain the distinction (basic/normal) we have learned to think through and by" instead of questioning it (Bartholomae qtd. in Collins and Lynch 8).

The curricular innovations in the second half of *Mainstreaming* inherently question the basic/normal distinction. There is a compelling array of curricular experiments presented here, and anyone seeking mainstreaming options would be wise to examine these different approaches. I would like to mention a few specifically. Barbara Gleason's chapter outlines a curriculum for returning students that uses ethnographic assignments to connect students' oral communication skills with practice in "academic ways of knowing, persuading, and communicating" (124). Rosemary Winslow and Monica Mische describe a course that examines cultural representations of the "hero quest" to help students see themselves as making choices about learning. Studying heroes isn't mere content: the authors designed the course to be sensitive to "the ways matters of the heart affected learning" (151). The rich intellectual experience of the course is designed to create a sense of "higher purpose" for learning and since it draws on all students' experiences, "distinctions in writing skill are not central to students' contributions to the class" (151). Mark Wiley reports on a similar experiment using cohort-based learning communities to create a coherent intellectual and social experience

for students. Though he helpfully identifies what specific institutional structures and relationships made this program succeed, Wiley does not offer this arrangement as an ideal. Instead he portrays the bumpy road he and his colleagues traveled as a model for “curricular inquiry” that should guide whatever alterations we might make (187).

The gains reported in these disparate studies are inspiring and consistent enough to warrant more of these efforts. But a nagging problem remains: among the experiments reported here, researchers decided which students were good candidates for the programs and which were not. Obviously Wiley and Gleason were being ethical by not exposing extremely unprepared students to undue risk in the absence of adequate support systems. Still, selective admission into these studies could imply that it is policy these writers oppose (placement as the consequence of testing) rather than the diagnostic impulse and its apparatus that too often isolates students under the guise of helping them succeed. Is this merely a relocation of the basic/normal line?

Mainstreaming Basic Writers is marked by a deliberate modesty that I appreciate, taking as one of its foundational assumptions that each situation varies enough from others to justify caution in generalizing about all students and all programs. Some of the writers in this collection (Wiley, Soliday, Winslow and Mische most notably) take care to remind us that our programs, as important as they might be, are only one part of students’ college experience. Despite what we believe about the importance of literacy, our classes may not be the primary reason students succeed. This is the sort of modesty that I find helpful because it forces us back to the larger issues of what higher education is for and how our programs, mainstreamed or not, support those larger purposes. One rule for starting over is to make sure we do not exaggerate the effects of our programs, mainstreamed or not. If we are to begin again, it cannot be with the same uncritical faith that we alone make a difference in students’ lives.

This recognition that teaching literacy is never done in isolation (no matter how much our programs actually are isolated) requires that we connect classroom contexts with cultural pressures. The ambivalences of *Mainstreaming Basic Writers* need to be situated in broader analyses of the function of basic writing programs in higher education. Tom Fox’s *Defending Access* (1999) provides exactly this wider social and institutional context and complements McNenny and Fitzgerald’s book. Fox’s analysis of the juxtaposition of standards and access raises the level of the debate, clarifying the consequences that follow from our immediate programmatic decisions. Fox requires us to understand our commitments to the entire enterprise of which our programs are only a small but contested part. Fox not only addresses the argument about

standards within the ideological arena where it gathers its force, but he also shows its manifestations and consequences in the lives of students most at risk.

Defending Access is as much a case study of institutional change as it is an analysis of historical standards rhetoric. Fox and his colleagues set out to eliminate the non-credit, prebaccalaureate writing track well before the conservative campaign to reduce remediation got started. It is easy to see the assault on remediation as a new form of elitism. Fox indicates it is more important to understand why conservative arguments are effective now and what social forces lend them power. Those who choose to elevate the status of basic writers on their campuses will appreciate Fox's insight about negotiating the structural and rhetorical "strategies of containment" that impede these efforts (45). As much as local contexts may dictate different strategies, Fox's analysis identifies some near-universal features of institutional life, such as "when access threatens change, standards are always one of the tools to resist that change" (8).

Fox studies the political valences of the term "standards" as it appears in a constellation of conservative texts by William Bennett, Dinesh D'Souza, and Allan Bloom. What Fox finds in these educational jeremiads is a dialectical pattern in which standards, invoked by these writers as universal, are consistently linked to the presence of multiculturalism in the academy, arriving with Open Admissions in the 1970s. By this logic, standards were compromised when access was granted to unprepared people of color. This is reasoning with which we are familiar. Where Fox catches us by surprise is by implicating those of us who think of writing as a means of gaining entry by meeting standards (empowerment), asserting that "we fall into the trap of imagining that language standards and social boundaries are one and the same" (6).

Focusing on the writing experiences of students of color, Fox insists we have to "abandon the notion that skills alone provide access" (17). To illustrate this point, Fox examines the historical tradition of African American literacy outside of formal schooling and joins it to writing by African American students from his own classes. In contrast to the story most of us know by heart about the rise of composition at Harvard to enforce linguistic manners, the communal use of literacy among ex-slaves is an example of how writing has been used as a genuine means of access to dominant society. Of course, the Harvard narrative won. For African American students today, this typically means being denied full access out of an erroneous "belief that large gaps exist between what students know and what students need to know" (69). Fox argues that

as long as writing is seen first for its ability to reveal whether a student meets our standards for belonging, we will continue to “underestimate” the literacy that students outside dominant society bring to college (69).

The mainstreaming issue cannot be framed as primarily a matter of student preparedness and only secondarily about our institutional response. Fox makes it clear that our assessments of what students need are never separate from the decisions we make about the solution. Local actions at any level always provoke historical and institutional prejudices. Fox proposes we need to extend institutional action in support of access well beyond basic writing. Access is also threatened above and below the first year of college, so Fox describes how multi-level intra-institutional efforts like WAC and the National Writing Project can resist the exclusionary effects of language standards and social politics wherever they occur.

Fox goes to great lengths to insure that readers understand he is unambiguously in favor of high expectations; he says early on that “teaching without challenging standards is usually bad teaching” (10). The disingenuous battle over standards is always framed in terms of what we lose in our institutions by admitting students with differences in preparation. As an alternative, Fox proposes contingent standards that take advantage of the various literacies that come with access, rather than standards that predetermine who will have the chance to meet our expectations (91). The fact is there is no reason we cannot be equally committed to wide access *and* high standards. Whether we mainstream or retain basic writing programs, Fox’s book makes it obvious that the forced new beginning of basic writing must assert the value instead of the costs of creating and preserving opportunity.

The significance of the approaches to basic writing in *Defending Access* and *Mainstreaming Basic Writers* will be felt differently by literacy scholars and WPAs. As a student of literacy, I find these arguments illuminate the unrealistic social burden writing ability is expected to carry in our culture. As Fox observes, “To shout with urgency that students don’t know science is to argue for science education, to claim that students are illiterate is to argue that they are unfit for college” (43). WPAs may well see these texts differently. Every WPA will have to address these issues, publicly, before provosts and trustees who sometimes expect easy answers to complex problems, and more privately, in matters of program design and administrative research. I know the discussions in these two books will lead me as a program coordinator to make different choices.

Bartholomae's skepticism about basic writing programs tried to raise in us a restlessness that might have made us more prepared to respond to the problems we now face. It is arguable that more of us should have been following the lead of Gleason and Soliday or Fox and Rodby and should have been studying new ways to address the educational needs of students in basic writing instead of spending all our time refining one response to the presence of beginning writers on campus. What I find most encouraging in the debate over basic writing presented in *Mainstreaming Basic Writers* and *Defending Access* is that discussions of what students need to succeed in college—the ways to estimate their readiness, the strategies for teaching and aiding them—apply to all students in all programs, not just basic writers. The mainstreaming discussion forces us back to clarifying what we want to accomplish with all student writers irrespective of the distinctions we have felt compelled to make between them.

Work Cited

Bartholomae, David. "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum." *Journal of Basic Writing* 12.1 (Spring 1993): 4-21.



Announcements

Discovering Digital Dimensions: Computers and Writing 2003 (3-D at Purdue in 2003) will be hosted by Purdue's Department of English, the Professional Writing Program, the Rhetoric and Composition Program, and the Writing Lab from May 22–25, 2003, in West Lafayette, Indiana.

As in years past, the conference will provide diverse opportunities for engagement on issues of central concern to teachers, scholars, and writers in the emergent culture of the digital age. The theme—3-D at Purdue in 2003—stresses the importance of discovery in the many dimensions of learning, teaching, and writing as digital networks proliferate and make possible new forms of expression, suggest alternative rhetorics, and invite (re)presentation of our disciplinary histories. Conference participants will have opportunities to hear keynote addresses from well-known intellectuals, attend poster and panel sessions, interact with vendors specializing in communication technologies, and be entertained at special multimedia (3-D) events. The conference will again partner with the Graduate Research Network and the CW 2003 Online Conference. Some participants may have opportunities for earning course credit.

The conference theme, *Discovering Digital Dimensions*, encourages participants to look at the digital world from multiple perspectives and to consider new applications and directions for emerging technologies. Possible areas of inquiry will include but not be limited to the following topics:

- *The Wired Academy*: electronic communication across the curriculum; transcending disciplinary boundaries; interdisciplinarity; electronic publication; intellectual property; queer issues; technology in the writing lab; computers in professional writing, technical writing, and scientific communication;
- *Digital Pedagogies*: teaching technology; implications and pedagogies of commercial and open source technologies; technology and writing program administration; assessment;
- *ESL and Technology*: international and immigrant populations; global discourses and communities; electronic borders and borderlands;
- *Race, Gender, Access to Technology*: digital and feminist politics; technological literacies; vaporware; support and training; workplace prejudice; technological histories;
- *A/Synchronous Learning Environments*: MUDs and MOOs, OWLs, IM, courseware, etc.;

- *Spatiality and Electronic Architectures*: archival issues; real/virtual classroom design; web design; digital libraries; eBooks; virtuality;
- *Hybrid Rhetorics*: visual, oral, textual, multimedia, hypertext;
- *Emergent Network Cultures*: film; media representations; virtual communities; digital copyright; distance learning; writing in the digital workplace.

Proposals will be due Monday, October 28, 2002. They may be submitted beginning September 16, 2002. We encourage those interested to visit the website, <http://www.cw2003.org>, to take advantage of online discussion venues designed to assist proposal planning and development, foster ongoing discussion of conference themes and events, and find answers for your questions.

For more information about the on-site conference, contact David Blakesley, Program Chair, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, 765.494.3772, info@cw2003.org. The conference web site is <http://www.cw2003.org>.

The Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) will hold its 29th annual meeting 3-5 October 2002 in Logan, Utah. The conference theme is “Complicating Binaries: Exploring Tensions in Technical and Scientific Communication.” Discussions will explore issues in opposing viewpoints such as: academy vs. industry, theory vs. practice, internal funding vs. external funding, professional education vs. service courses, humanities vs. science and technology, and inside English vs. outside English. For information about the program, please contact Nancy Allen <nallen@online.emich.edu>. For information on the conference site, contact Kelli Cargile Cook <kcargilecook@english.usu.edu> or check the CPTSC website at <http://www.cptsc.org>. We hope to see you there.

The Writing Instructor, a freely available networked journal and digital community, announces the release of Betas 2.1 (Open Topic) and 2.5 (“Electronic Publication”). Beta 2.5 is a multi-journal, collaborative issue involving *TWI*, *Academic.Writing*, *Enculturation*, *Kairos*, and *CCC Online*. These *TWI* releases feature new work from Paul Cesarini, Joseph Eng, Paul Heilker, Janice McIntire-Strasburg, Peggy O’Neill, Patricia Webb Peterson, and Karen Wink. *TWI* accepts open submissions for blind, peer review year round. Contact editors David Blakesley (blakesle@purdue.edu) or Dawn Formo (dformo@csusm.edu) for more information, or visit the Website at <http://www.writinginstructor.com>.

Contributors to WPA 25.3

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Keith Rhodes is Assistant Professor at Missouri Western State College, where he also directs basic writing and writing placement and serves as liaison for dual credit composition courses. His scholarship focuses on the practical situation of composition theory. He has been highly active in the WPA Outcomes Statement process, and he currently serves as

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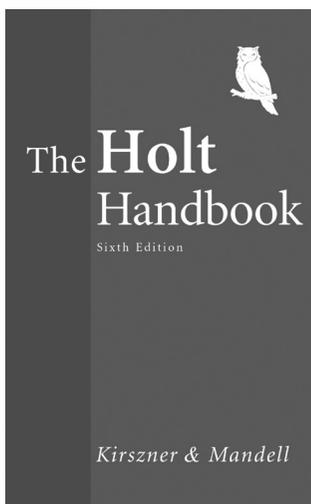
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Susan Taylor has retired from teaching. Currently, she is recovering from brain surgery and deciding between two employment opportunities for her future.

Kim van Alkemade earned her PhD in Composition and Rhetoric from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with a dissertation on computers and writing. She has served as the Director of Composition at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania since 1992, where she teaches composition, developmental writing, technical writing, and creative non-fiction. She is currently working on a nonfiction book project about the Hebrew Orphan Asylum in New York City.





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