A Changing for the Better: Curriculum Revision as Reflective Practice in Teaching and Administration

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> [I have] directed a writing program [. . .] in which all instructors picked their own texts, and [an]other in which common texts were selected by faculty for different groupings of first-year composition courses. [. . .] Conversations among instructors [. . .] about their approaches to the courses are richer and more productive when they're working from a common text [. . . because it] facilitates their exploration of how best to achieve the expressed goals and objectives for the course.
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> –Christina McDonald, James Madison University

> When we moved away from a common text here at Louisville, I noticed that conversations among teachers became richer and more interesting, since people were creating their own curricula. [. . .] I would never advocate that any institution adopt one method or another [. . .] but I'd be wary of assuming that conversations about teaching and collegiality of faculty are tied to using a common text.
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> –Brian Huot, University of Louisville

> Seems to me one result [of having few extensive quantitative studies] is that we have virtually no "proof" that some [writing] classroom activities we swear by do "work" in general. Such as peer group feedback. Or having students revise papers for a new teacher response. Or using no evaluation at all until a final portfolio. The list could go on: in-class pre-

writing? having students write process memos about each paper? Directive vs. less directive feedback? Direct teaching of genres? [. . .]

I used to think I *knew* how to teach college writing. As I near the end of a career I sometimes wonder if all we have is lore.

–Richard Fulkerson, Texas A&M University–Commerce

As I encounter articles or conference presentations about shiny new curricula, I often react with a mixture of enthusiasm and anxiety. I alternate between excitement about the possibilities and skepticism about gift horses or trends; between admiration for the leadership, scholarship, and hard work of the writers or presenters, and worries about my own, or my colleagues', curricular inadequacy. This mixed reaction has intensified in the last four years as I've become a WPA and been involved in a program-wide curriculum change. In the midst of these conflicting reactions, I've begun reframing my questions to reflect on composition's rhetoric of curricular-renovation: What do we talk about when we talk about curriculum change? Do these narratives match others that are prominent in the discipline? Might there be other ways to structure the conversation to acknowledge both the difficulty and the benefit of change itself?

The quotations at the start of this article present two conversationally accepted but often-overlooked aspects of curricular change. One, as the pair of comments by Christina McDonald and Brian Huot implies, is that we have no clear way to judge whether one curriculum generally helps support writing *teachers* better than another. A second, as Richard Fulkerson notes, is that we have very little direct evidence to demonstrate that one writing curriculum accomplishes significantly more for student *writers* than another. Beyond reemphasizing the need in composition studies for more qualitative research, these two ideas also reveal problems with taking a comparative, product-oriented approach to curriculum-reform discussion. My recent experience with curricular change has suggested ways in which seeing curriculum revision as a process-narrative, a story of *the changing itself*, more evocatively illustrates the benefits of curriculum revision than a story that focuses on student-outcomes. Focusing on *changing* instead of, or at least as much as, *change*, may benefit teachers, administrators, and programs as a whole by encouraging the kind of reflective practice that we see as central to scholarship and practice in composition. In this essay, I draw on my experiences as a composition program administrator at Oklahoma State University (OSU)—as well as on my understanding of change-paradigms elsewhere in composition studies—to explore how changing can offer valuable opportunities to strengthen teachers through better sup-

port programs and more opportunities for reflection and leadership. If we define *changing* as an expectation rather than only as an imposition, and we approach it as a multifaceted process, we can provide teachers and administrators with opportunities for productive leadership, for the "richer, more interesting" conversations that McDonald and Huot praise, and for authentic collaboration. As a result, I argue, taking a process-approach to curriculum revision could benefit WPAs and writing programs strongly enough that we should engage in curriculum changing more regularly and comprehensively than our instincts, energy-levels, political-radar, and pedagogical principles generally tell us to.

Local Changes, Multilocal Changings

Since change is situation-specific, curriculum-revision narratives often begin with a review of local conditions. In this essay, as I address ways to alter our rhetorics and goals rather than addressing exact steps and results, I use my home institution's experiences as examples rather than models. I thus hope it will matter rather less than usual that OSU is a land-grant institution of 26,000 students; that our Board of Regents requires all state university students to complete two semesters of college writing; that the OSU Composition Program has a tenured director, a tenure-track associate director, and four graduate-student assistant directors (ADs); that our 100 sections of composition each semester currently share common texts (something that is required by upper administration) and assignment sequences; or that classes are staffed almost entirely by about 45 TAs and adjunct instructors. It may be useful—yet I hope it will not be limiting—to know that OSU TAs take a one-semester, three-credit pedagogy course and participate in monthly composition pedagogy discussion groups throughout their TA tenure, and that all composition instructors attend three days of orientation sessions each year. It may be helpful, also, to understand that between January and July of 1999, our program gained two new faculty WPAs, director and associate director, as well as three new graduate assistant directors.

In addition, since resistance is a primary concern for people who propose change, it may be relevant that three local conditions particularly helped enable this curriculum changing. First, our writing courses are taught almost entirely by TAs, adjuncts, and visiting instructors, whose transience and—frankly—lack of institutional power can make starting a large-scale change easier. Second, the revision was initiated by a tenured faculty member in a college and department that generally support and do not micromanage the composition program. Third, due to the work of an earlier WPA, our program already had several institutional structures that

support change, including a composition curriculum that already met most of the goals of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. In an argument about *change*, all these resources would be crucial to deciding how and whether a curriculum could be adapted from one locality to another. Yet choosing to initiate changing is so fraught with difficulties even in the best of situations—indeed, people in the best of situations may have a particularly low motivation to begin changing—that, in an argument about re-seeing the change-process, I provide these descriptions to add local color rather than to establish necessary preconditions.

Finally, to help focus attention on the more generalizable change-process rather than the local results, in this article I do not examine the details of OSU's curricula, revised over the summer of 1999 by a committee of graduate TAs, instructors, and WPAs.[1] After all, as Huot's example shows, program-wide changing can be instituted (at least once) as an opening rather than an altering of curricular options; WPAs can also initiate changing through a discussion of outcomes without designating one particular means for reaching them. Instead, then, I would ask you to help de-localize my arguments by calling to mind, as you read, one or two generally accepted approaches to teaching writing that you currently choose not to use—portfolios? computer-integrated writing classrooms? teaching multiple or different genres?—and then imagining changing a curriculum in order to use those approaches as a foundation. You should envision a curricular sea-changing as opposed to small adjustments and tinkerings, opting for revision rather than editing. I suggest only three limitations to your imagined program. First, in order to conduct a thought-experiment about the benefits of changing curriculum, we should focus on writing programs that are already providing minimally competent writing instruction. Classes or programs that do not even enter the realm of the WPA Outcomes Statement or the Portland Resolution will still need directed, goal-oriented revision. Second, I am not recommending that anyone change blindly or haphazardly or tyrannically, nor recommending change without informed belief that the new curriculum itself will serve students and teachers well—if not conclusively "better." Third, while I argue that we should undertake change more often than we currently do, I do not recommend continual wholesale changing without adequate time for reflection and assessment. Recommending change for changing's sake is not the same thing as undertaking "curriculum reform [as] a hollow ritual performed every 10 to 15 years for reasons that have more to do with public relations than pedagogy" (Bartlett A-12). Well-considered curriculum changing has *everything* to do with pedagogy, at least as much as the curriculum itself does.[2]

And good pedagogy is one of the largest challenges that WPAs face, particularly given the likelihood that some or all of the people with whom we teach writing are new, overworked, underinformed, and/or even resistant when it comes to teaching writing. Instigating thoughtful, collaborative curriculum-changing at a program level, rather than encouraging and waiting for changes to occur at the level of individual teachers' pedagogies, can support significant pedagogical development—by modeling changing as something that teachers can and should do, by providing collaborative support structures to minimize teachers' risks, and by increasing opportunities for teachers and WPAs to reflect on what they are doing. Changing curriculum might thus be seen as a vital part of teacher education and program development, and perhaps even as a regular expression of thoughtful program leadership.

Changing as "Enabling Condition"

Changing and its benefits are hardly new ideas to writing teachers. We recommend change to our students almost as often as we breathe: "Revision is the key to good writing." Moreover, we frequently ask students to change their writing style or approach for the sake of becoming more flexible writers: by the end of first-year composition, says the WPA Outcomes Statement, students should be able to "write in several genres." We also help new composition teachers and new writing across the curriculum teachers change their teaching styles and adapt to their local environments.

Often in these recommendations for change we imply a *progress* model of change, wherein the purpose of change is to continually improve the product. Elsewhere, our disciplinary rhetoric remains *process*-oriented, emphasizing that we are teaching people the value of the change itself. We explain how much we respect the change-process, how much we enjoy the challenges of complexity and uncertainty, particularly when we talk about teaching. Chris Burnham and Rebecca Jackson, for instance, valorize changing by referring to John Dewey's *Experience and Education*: "While a novice [teacher] may respond to the unexpected with confusion and fear, a professional welcomes the unexpected as an opportunity in Dewey's sense to 'stop and think,' to [. . .] enter the 'heart of reflection' (64)" (159). Indeed, explains Thomas Recchio, uncertainty "is an enabling condition for learning and teaching" (255). Our discussions about curriculum, however, tend to circle back toward the progress model: we celebrate the endpoint of the change. We speak of "a change for the better" in ways that suggest that other programs or teachers could attain those benefits if—perhaps *only* if—they made the specific change(s) that we did, rather than encouraging our colleagues, as we encourage our students, simply to try chang-

ing. Simultaneously, we worry extensively about "forcing" our colleagues to change teaching practices at all. Our official program narratives thus often overlook the benefits that *changing* for the better has brought us. New stories about curriculum revision would better reflect and mesh with our other pedagogical and scholarly goals, allowing us to supportively involve teachers in the practices of change so that they experience changing as a requisite and rewarding part of good teaching.

In his 1999 study of writing teachers, George Hillocks concludes that the kind of changing we say we value in classroom teaching is a rare event: "[E]ach teacher substantially retains [a] teaching identity established on the basis of his or her constructed knowledge of students, goals, curricula, pedagogical content knowledge, rhetoric, and epistemological stance" (124-25). Indeed, writes Hillocks, teachers "are unlikely to change unless they see a *clear need*" (126, emphasis added). Betty Bamberg extends Hillocks's argument that reflective practice is necessary to enable the insight that precedes such a need:

> To move beyond lore, practitioners must engage in the kind of inquiry that characterizes [Donald] Schön's reflective practitioner. However, [Stephen] North claims that "practice qualifies as inquiry less than ten percent of the time" (34) because the overwhelming demands of teaching a full load of composition courses leave the teacher with little time or energy for inquiry. As a result, teachers fall back on "ritual and routine" (34). [. . .]
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>   However, creating conditions that promote reflective practice among TAs is no easy task. [. . .] Unless a program's practices and conditions foster reflection, little is likely to occur. [. . .] For a culture of reflective practice to exist, it must first be built into the TAs' initial preparation and then sustained through programmatic structures and practices that occur after the practicum. (149-50)

In thinking of the causality this way—reflection promotes adaptation—individual WPAs would need to begin by establishing a "culture of reflective practice": for example, by promoting such events as colloquia, peer group discussions, and teaching portfolio workshops. Presumably, the reflectively prepared teachers would then learn (and want) to change on their own. Experience tells us, though, that even well-prepared teachers with a reasonable workload and opportunities to reflect upon their teaching might still not perceive Hillocks's "clear *need*" to change their curricula.

Yet surely there is a cycle at work here: reflective practice leads to change, which in turn should lead to more reflective practice, to Schön's reflection-in-action. We can thus open up the process by seeing the causality loop-

ing back upon itself: significant pedagogical change (even, as in Huot's case, if the new curriculum is an *absence* of a common curriculum) can be one "programmatic structure" that catalyzes reflective practice. Moreover, if curriculum revision is designed from the start to be collaborative rather than top-down, it embodies the kind of "social process" that Kathleen Blake Yancey sees as central to reflection, one that requires "structure, situatedness, *reply*, [and] *engagement*" (*Reflection in the Writing Classroom* 19, emphasis added). Broad-based curriculum changing thus offers unique opportunities to combine what we know about reflective practice with what we know about collaboration. In other words, entering the event-chain by first initiating a collaborative change-process not only provides immediate stimulus for reflection, defamiliarizing the "ritual and routine," but allows teachers opportunities for collaborative responsibility and leadership in both the new curriculum and the changing that accompanies it.

In this model, moreover, the WPA need not be the sole fount of reflective practice; participating teachers join the WPA in reflection and conscious pedagogical decision-making. So instead of seeing program reform as a side-effect of the high-priority curriculum change, WPAs could learn to see that curriculum change doesn't merely require, but also provides unique opportunities: teachers faced with new texts or curricula can be open to and even demanding of stronger support and guidance; making a common effort at changing allows contributions from a wide range of teachers; making visible the work of changing helps leaders negotiate for additional resources for teacher-support. Such significant changing can thus open up new leadership roles for teachers, strengthen the peer-mentoring resources of the program and revitalize professional development sessions. Finally, a WPA willing to invest in curriculum changing can help her teachers acquire habits of mind that they might not acquire on their own—habits that we frequently describe, with more certainty than we have about much that is curricular, as beneficial to writing teachers and students alike.

Flowers along the Road: Illustrations for a Curriculum Changing

Our experiences at OSU reveal several kinds of benefits to teachers, unrelated to the exact curriculum change, that may accompany a significant change-process, opportunities that taken together constitute a kind of planned Hawthorne Effect.[3] I make these observations, of course, through relatively clear hindsight; the original reasons for changing the OSU curriculum were result-oriented and our collaborations were driven at least in part by a wish to *minimize* the effects of and resistances to our changes. Thus the "clear need" that motivated many of these beneficial reactions was externally imposed, and many instructors were unhappy with both the

specific curricular change and the general state of changing it. "It was very hard [for me . . .]," explains one senior instructor; "During that transition period, when all of us were learning, I think many of us were way outside our comfort zone."[4] In a program that had not changed overall curriculum within most instructors' memory, the instigation of a new curriculum, even a collaboratively-generated one, was at best an uncomfortable jolt. Yet this artificially-created "need" also sparked unlooked-for opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and leadership, unexpected flowers alongside a road not originally planned as a scenic route.

Bringing People to the Table

Inviting teacher-participation in planned curriculum redesign is one fruitful way to involve a wide range of teachers, not just those who "try to improve [their] teaching every semester" anyway, as one of our senior TAs notes. One challenge is that teachers may not see their participation as authentic and worthwhile—and thus may not really be "at the table" for a significant change—unless the WPA has first committed to and made public a plan for changing. At OSU, the Director's announcement in Spring 1999 that the composition curriculum *would* change brought a first round of teachers into the process, as six TAs volunteered to join the director in a summer-time curriculum-revision working group. The next opportunity for teachers to join in discussions about the new curriculum came during our fall orientation program. This program had been available as a reflection-fostering experience in previous years but had not benefited as strongly from teachers' actual need to develop new material. Evaluations of more recent orientation sessions have been very strong, with a large majority agreeing that sessions "provided opportunities for me to reflect on my teaching." But since no evaluations were collected before Fall 2000, we have only anecdotal support from instructors to suggest that the 1999 sessions surrounding the new curriculum seemed "more focused [than before], because the [new] curricu[lum] demands more of students, instructors, and administrators" as one TA puts it, or that those sessions did not suffer the problems with attendance at "the ostensibly mandatory orientation sessions" that another instructor recalls from earlier orientations. Yet we do know that the curriculum was different enough in Fall 1999 that teachers at orientation needed both the structural information provided by the WPAs and TA leaders, and the opportunity to brainstorm additional assignments and adaptations during small-group breakout sessions. They were at the table.

Developing Support Structures

Initially, the OSU program administrators saw adjustments to orientation and other teacher support programs as just another requirement of curriculum change, agreeing with Yancey that "major changes in what is being taught *require* [. . .] different ways of preparing TAs" ("The Professionalization of TA Development Program" 71, emphasis added). However, curriculum change also provides opportunities to expand teacher-support structures beyond the obvious compensatory steps. One turning point comes when teachers, too, conclude that "Instructor support is vital [. . .] particularly with changing curriculum" or that a new curriculum "requires more support in order to make instructors comfortable [. . .] in the classroom," because with their high interest in and need for support programs comes the participation and enthusiasm necessary to sustain such efforts.

For instance, as WPAs we could have initiated a new peer-observation program on our own, but without the 18 people (including 10 veteran teachers) who volunteered that first semester to visit and be visited by three other composition instructors, it might have gone nowhere. Teachers' need for support in a new curriculum seemed then to be a significant motivation for overcoming fears about having observers in their classrooms: one TA indicated that the program director could be renamed "Ali Baba" for having created "the forty thieves" of new teaching strategies. Likewise, we could certainly have developed our new Website and filled it with expanded teaching resources, hoping that teachers would use it. Yet websites promoting new pedagogies can gather cyberdust as easily as hardcopy notebooks can; our Website gained its first strong reputation among our instructor population by presenting comprehensive teaching support for the new curriculum. When questioned about what would help them most if faced with another curriculum change, nearly two-thirds of our instructors recently said that they would want (and presumably use) more supporting documents made available on the Website.[5] The catch in such situations, including McDonald's and Huot's, may be that such gains are temporary. In our current stable curriculum, our faculty and graduate student WPAs worry regularly that instructors don't use the Website frequently enough. Likewise, the fact that the number of volunteer participants in the peer-observation program has declined in subsequent years (despite positive evaluations of the experience) suggests that necessity may be the mother of participation—and thus of improved support programs.[6]

Opportunities for Collaboration and Leadership

Paradoxically, the freedom to change one's own curriculum or pedagogy—and to do so in an authentically collaborative atmosphere of reply and

engagement—may for some teachers require a direct program-wide intervention such as a new curriculum. At OSU in 1999, many opportunities for group *discussion* existed, from informal discussions among office-sharers to required professional development group meetings, but the passage of advice and lore tends to be one-directional and normative rather than truly collaborative and reflective. Collaboration and changing, on the other hand, feed one another in another lively cycle that can be entered at either point. Compositionists have argued at least since Kenneth Bruffee's touchstone analysis that fostering collaboration can, if done well, help people become more open to reflection and change.

Conversely, a significant changing also stimulates—indeed, often requires—collaboration. Two senior TAs responding to our surveys note that when groups address issues relating to recent or future curriculum change, the tone of such discussions is "much more serious" or "much more energized" than at other meetings. To be sure, as one TA remarks, many of the participants are energized *negatively* because they would prefer to design their own curricula (if they had to change at all)—and in our survey, sixteen OSU instructors, including most of our newest TAs, indicated that they would prefer to embark on designing a new curriculum "on my own" with full autonomy. Interestingly, however, these numbers were matched equally by instructors who indicated either that they would prefer to change curriculum "working with a small group of teachers collaboratively designing a common syllabus" (thirteen respondents) or, indeed, would prefer to do so within a program "that had already developed a model syllabus" for them to follow (three respondents). Even considering the vaunted autonomy of academia, where independent curriculum control is held out as a strong benefit if not a basic right, curriculum changing may nevertheless provide one of a very few situations where collaboration is an accepted and even desired approach to pedagogy. In the case of resource-limited teachers who may need relief from the steep initial and continuing investments required by a more individualized change-process, it may be fair to say that curricular collaboration is as much a benefit as autonomy is.

A significant changing can also open up leadership roles for teachers, thus strengthening the peer-mentoring resources of the program and the professional development opportunities for teachers. At OSU, TAs and instructors who had been involved in the collaborative curriculum revision and had piloted the new courses had the best information about how to implement the new texts and assignments we were requiring. They could step into leadership positions backed directly by their experience rather than only by the WPAs' stamp of approval. In addition, the TAs who collaborated on what is essentially a Web-based, program-specific teachers' manual did so to meet a real curricular need: the change-process created

both audience and purpose for their leadership. Moreover, our new mentoring program, which pairs new TAs with one of our Assistant Directors for a year, in some ways grew out of an increased sensitivity to teachers' displacement and inexpertise: three of the four ADs who helped develop our new-instructor mentoring program in Summer 2000 had informally mentored other teachers through the curriculum revision. Writes one, "discussions provided on various curricula [. . .] enabled me to articulate my own unease, [. . .] probably making me not only a better teacher but also a more sensitive mentor and colleague." If writing teachers should be writers, then perhaps mentors who support flexibility and change should regularly participate in, and even lead, change.

Opportunities for Reflection and Continuing Adaptation

Most importantly, for those of us who focus on preparing and supporting teachers, curriculum changing promotes pedagogical reflection, perhaps more frequently than reflection promotes change or adaptation. Our survey revealed that a strong majority of responding teachers (eight of twelve) who have participated in curriculum changing can quickly articulate specific ways in which new curricula have provided them with valuable strategies they had not considered before. They also comment that "discussions [of] various curricula have enabled me to think through various approaches" to teaching, or that teaching multiple curricula has "made me stretch how I teach a particular essay/reading," or that the "mental shift" of preparing new coursework "forces one to reevaluate past performance—successes and failures—and improves one's teaching." Moreover, instructors who have changed curricula strongly articulate their sense that the *changing* itself, regardless of the curriculum, has been a significant benefit. Six out of nine veteran instructors responding indicated in nearly identical language that, while switching curricula is stressful and time consuming, having taught with several curricula has allowed them to "broaden [their] teaching activities," to "feel more confident," and to confidently anticipate moving "out of OSU's comp program and into others," where they may be "required" to change by circumstance or student need, even if not by administrative decree.

These respondents might not be typical of the change-resistant teachers Hillocks worries about—but it is also likely that their experiences with curriculum changings have deflected some tendencies toward stasis that might otherwise have dominated their future teaching experiences. Many of these instructors acquired their adaptability by moving from one institution to another, yet a curriculum changing within a single program could produce much the same experience, provided it encompasses a broad enough shift in curriculum. And as their responses showed, experience with

changing makes further changing more palatable. In our recent program-wide survey, half of the responding instructors were willing to allow that a new, unnamed program-wide curricular change in the next year would be "perhaps a good idea, depending on exactly what changes got made"; another third, primarily the more-experienced instructors, agreed that such a change would be "a good idea in principle." And over half indicated that they would want to participate in a curriculum-design committee. I have no doubt that a substantial number of these instructors are hoping for a particular change in the curriculum rather than just an opportunity to change *something*—yet the answers leave me hopeful that our changings are helping to create flexible, reflective teachers whose pedagogical competence is not tied to the exact nature of a single curriculum.

A Culture of Changing: Resentments, Risks and Rewards

Programmatic curriculum changing also offers, of course, opportunities to anger, alienate, repress, and perhaps even harm instructors. These risks are particularly high at the crucial moment when a WPA first decides to initiate coordinated motion in a community that has been stable or even entropic. It is difficult for any leader to convince her colleagues that changing itself is for the better, and unsurprising then that we as WPAs often promote new curricula primarily as constituting better products for students, as OSU's director did in Spring 1999. The six TAs who worked over that summer to redesign the curriculum were, of course, among the most satisfied with the change; many instructors were decidedly less sanguine about either the process or the product. "I [did not] feel I had much input into the program's shape," remembers one former TA: "Going from significant autonomy as a senior instructor [. . .] to what seemed like a kind of lock-step was very difficult." Others have focused their distress on the curriculum itself: "I dislike the [. . .] emphasis this change has instituted," explains one instructor; the program should "drop the trendy nonsense [and] teach writing about *lit[erature]*," argues another; and a third worries that "[t]he current system creates a sense of drudgery for students."

Our experiences make it clear that simply shifting curriculum-revision narratives will not erase either the general or the local difficulties of leading a composition program. Certainly OSU's program of curricular changing has had no exemption from resistance or resentment: our instructors regularly criticize both the curriculum itself and the policy of requiring it in all classrooms; individual instructors decide not to participate in collaborative change or professional development meetings, or choose to disregard aspects of the required curriculum; the directors are seen (and sometimes see ourselves) as having implemented some changes too quickly and others not quickly enough, with too little input or too many cooks in the kitchen.

Our graduate student and faculty WPAs worry a lot in weekly meetings about the ethics and politics of balancing program cohesion with our respect for (and need of) individual instructors and the innovations they can contribute. The illustrations in the previous section can only illuminate opportunities that grew up alongside the uneven road we traveled, not serve as testimony that we have succeeded consistently where others have not. I do argue, though, that WPAs will face many of these challenges whether or not they lead their programs through curricular change: negotiations between writers and readers, expressions and conventions, autonomy and collaboration, individuals and institutions are of central importance in our profession even at our most stable moments.

And ironically, a substantial risk for a WPA establishing a culture of changing comes after an initial changing is "complete" or at least satisfactorily stable. At the crest of our curriculum changing, our instructors' wide-ranging contributions gave us (perhaps undue) confidence that they had entered with us into a process of regular, collaborative, reflective changing. In Fall 2000, for instance, we asked our professional development groups to take on the task of gathering and reviewing texts that could be adopted for Composition 1 in 2001-02.[7] While not all TAs invested the time to peruse booklists and examination copies (though many did), we found most of them contributing to the lively discussions of what we might all want in a new text. As we narrowed the field of anthologies, we also invited groups of adjunct instructors for similarly reflective discussions: the prospect of "having a say" in course design motivated a strong majority of our adjuncts to find time in their busy schedules to review texts and attend at least one meeting. Two texts, both of which were promoted by TAs from among a wide open field of alternatives, emerged as clear leaders in the final recommendations, and the faculty directors chose one of them for the required text; as important as the final outcome was our sense that collaborative changing had become normal and even energizing rather than only burdensome.

However, in our fourth year of changes at OSU, even with the continuing contributions of our teachers, there are programmatic signs that some of the benefits of the initial change are fading: unless we undertake another formal, program-wide, significant pedagogical revision, deliberately reinvigorating our culture of changing, I think we stand to lose much of what we have gained. For instance, teacher interest in and input to our process of choosing or revising textbooks has declined in energy and volume. In contrast to the dozens who wrote up reports on textbooks in 2000, we had to scour the offices in 2002 to find eight instructors willing to help us work on our next custom-published reader (even with the lure of small development-grant salaries). Meanwhile, innovative handouts created three years ago are

now standard program lore, used by dozens of teachers who might otherwise be creating their own pedagogy, and survey responses from teachers who were given the opportunity to revise an essay assignment in Spring 2003 showed that most had modified or borrowed an assignment already in use rather than designing a new one. Finally, although volunteer mentors for our class visitation program for new TAs—that is, teachers willing to be seen as experts by novices—are increasing in number, volunteer participants for our peer-visitation program—teachers interested in seeing and "stealing" new ideas—are decreasing.

Moreover, the influx of new people into OSU's composition program is lessening the effects of the change culture. Of the six instructors who helped redesign the curriculum four years ago, only one is still teaching in the program. Fully a third of our instructors for the Fall 2002 semester did not remember the shift to our second anthology, much less the more significant curriculum changing that preceded it. They, or at least a critical mass of them, need to feel that they have had a stake in discussing and changing curricula, or we risk losing the collaborative and reflective aspects of our change culture and risk having to make our next change as much of a curricular jolt and ethical quagmire as the 1999 change was. This seems almost counterintuitive, since, like Wanda Martin and Charles Paine, WPAs often expect that the energies of new writing program personnel will generate a kind of perpetual motion, bringing change to us: "No matter how much knowledge, enthusiasm, and creativity we have [. . .] we all get stale. We get conservative, protective of our ideas and projects.[. . .] [T]here's nothing like new people with new ideas and experiences to keep the writing program moving forward" (231). An influx of new teachers or administrators can indeed bring energy and even a sense of changing to a writing program. Martin and Paine's scenario raises several questions for me, however: whether WPAs can and should rely on a constant flow of energies from contingent faculty; whether the efforts of a few new individuals are enough to provoke program-wide reflection as well as new routines; and whether sporadic alteration in rhythm or focus is enough to create an ongoing culture of changing and reflective practice. Our experiences at OSU suggest that there is no automatic or perpetual change agent available to relieve a WPA of the responsibility for changing. To be sure, if our only goal were to have a program running smoothly, we might be approaching it; however, if an additional goal is to continue to generate a culture of reflective, adaptive practice, we are losing the battle.

Like teachers, then, program administrators sometimes need incentives and structures in order to deliberately lead programs into additional change, and to do so often enough to make *changing* one of the program's "practices and conditions." True, sometimes change and instability can seem the

norm in our lives, even without the additional disruption of curriculum revision: in an ordinary year, TAs graduate; temporary instructors leave or cannot be funded; faculty rotate through on their composition shift; enrollments surge or wane; administrative and accreditation demands change like the tides. On good days, WPAs facing such pervasive instability can say that we not only acknowledge but enjoy the diversity of personnel or experience: Donna Qualley remarks about her "perpetual cycle of teacher preparation" that "[i]nterestingly, what might have become a Sisyphisian nightmare for the WPA turns out to be the occasion that ensures our program remains dynamic" (279). Yet practicing only reactive change may leave us feeling stuck back in Sisyphus' worn shoes, shifting into the cynical outlook that Richard Miller sees a need to caution WPAs against, in which "all that's left to look forward to in the long walk to retirement is a life spent letting everyone else know that everything in the system works together to prevent innovation. That change isn't possible. That hope is for the young, the naïve, the foolish" (8). Without directed, purposeful changing, change looks more and more difficult and out of our control; leading a culture of changing, reflection and innovation can make "the long walk" seem much more appealing.

Not every WPA will want to or be able to enact curriculum *changing* in the ways we did at OSU, but the changing is more adaptable than is any single curriculum. Earlier in this essay, I asked that readers imagine curricular scenarios to help de-emphasize the locality of OSU's curriculum revision; in closing, I would like to return the favor, imagining a small starter-set of scenarios in which WPAs take the risk of embarking on a pathway of constant, deliberate curriculum changing:

> Pairs of graduate students in a program-administration seminar are assigned to research and present on three or four curricular approaches to composition and how they meet Outcomes Statement goals, as a step toward encouraging curricular generalists who are open to changing.

> A new WPA at a large university, early in her tenure, announces an impending curricular change and convenes a committee dedicated to changing the curriculum significantly—not as a power play or a step to suppress wayward teaching but as a normal leadership and program-development effort.

> A continuing WPA and a plurality of his program's adjunct instructors agree on a regular timeline for collaborative revision—not just review—of program goals, ensuring that nobody is taken by surprise or is left to teach an objectionable curriculum for an unspecified period of time.

> A WPA working with TAs and/or faculty who do not follow a common curriculum decides to facilitate, support, and reward groups of teachers who agree to design and implement a new curriculum collaboratively in their classes together and share their experiences formally with others in the program.

Shirley K Rose and Margaret Finders describe one kind of teacher education as "postmodern": "[an approach] that acknowledges the instability, provisionality, and contingent nature of what constitutes good teaching practices [. . . one] that seeks not closure and definition but a commitment to keep thinking together" (85). Their words apply equally well to the practice of program administration, particularly to the design and implementation of writing curricula. If we can refocus both administrative and scholarly attention onto the processes of changing curricula rather than only on the results, and prepare ourselves better to advocate *changing* as a key feature of writing program curricula, we bring one more element of writing program administration into synch with the rhythms of writing and teaching. We can also help enliven writing programs and support writing teachers, expanding the scope of reflective practice in writing education and thus improving—in addition to whatever benefits come from a specific curriculum or approach—our students' learning experiences in our writing classrooms.

NOTES

[1] If it helps, you may imagine that our textbook shifts were more significant than moving from *The Prentice-Hall Guide* to *The St. Martin's Guide*, but less of a curricular stretch than moving from *The Prentice-Hall Guide* to *Ways of Reading*; you might imagine us replacing 50-75% of common essay assignments in each semester with assignments that had different generic or rhetorical bases.

[2] This is not to discount public relations opportunities altogether. At OSU we certainly informed deans and student advisers that we were adjusting the curriculum to better serve university students' needs—statements that could truthfully be made about many kinds of curriculum changing. Moreover, large-scale program-changing can *look* like more work than daily program maintenance, even if the difference in time-investments is small. Given the daily challenge of representing the intensity of WPA work to program outsiders, perhaps we should do more to emphasize what Roland Barthes calls the "spectacle" of our work, using curriculum changing as one aspect of the "gestures, attitudes and mimicry which make the intention [or the workload] utterly obvious" to anyone watching (18).

[3] The term *Hawthorne Effect* denotes any improved productivity that results not from the specific change but from the increased attention and/or enthusiasm of supervisors; the term is still often used to explain an experiment gone wrong, the sociological equivalent of an uncontrolled placebo effect. To be sure, if the

goal of implementing a new curriculum is to discover whether it, regardless of the quality of instruction, better encourages and supports student writing, then any kind of Hawthorne Effect is a problematic variable to be minimized. However, if we acknowledge that engaged, energetic teaching is crucial to improvement in student writing, then we ought to be designing change-processes that capitalize on any such effect.

[4] Quotations from OSU instructors are taken from questionnaires completed by 28 of 51 current and former composition instructors during February 2003, reflecting on both the original curriculum changing in 1999 and on the idea of curriculum change in general.

[5] "Add more supporting documents to the Website" (for teachers to peruse on their own time) was the most popular response to this question, outdistancing options such as "require fewer outside time commitments" and "add half a day to orientation." This pattern of answers may indicate both a preference for support *and* a resistance to changing *collaboratively*.

[6] In Spring 2002, the cross-visitation program had sixteen participants: all but four were first-year teachers, who are now required to participate. Out of eleven who returned an evaluation sheet, all but one participant listed multiple benefits gained by visiting and being visited. Seven teachers indicated that they would volunteer to participate after completing their required year; however, actual volunteer numbers have generally been much lower.

[7] Professional development groups were asked to discuss four issues: How the book(s) they recommended met extant curriculum expectations, could meet instructors' needs for flexibility, would meet students' needs, and compared to others they had reviewed. The final recommendation sheets asked for a "list of my top 2 or 3 choices" with explanations; the intelligence and thoroughness of the qualitative remarks both indicated the intensity of pedagogical reflection and factored strongly into our final text choice (making a precise designation of "which book won the vote" nearly impossible).

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