

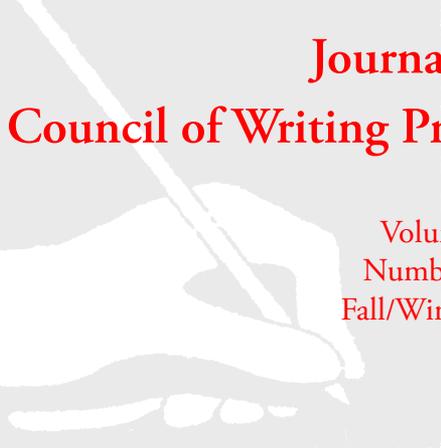


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Writing Program Administration

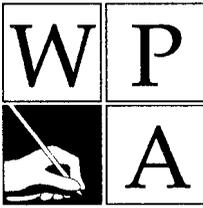


**Journal of the
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Writing Program Administration

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 2,000 to 5,000 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.

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

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

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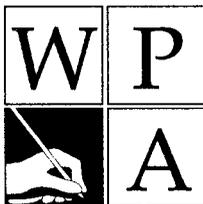
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NEW *WPA* EDITORIAL TEAM FOR 2004

In 2004, a new editorial team from Arizona State University will take over the editing and production of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. The new Managing Editors are Gregory Glau (gglau@asu.edu), Barry Maid (barry.maid@asu.edu), and Duane Roen (duane.roen@asu.edu). Please address all new submission questions to Gregory Glau (gglau@asu.edu). Manuscripts may be submitted for future issues in Word or RTF format as email attachments. Submission questions should now be directed to Gregory Glau, Co-Editor, *WPA*, Dept. of English, PO Box 870302, Tempe, AZ 85287-0302; Email: gglau@asu.edu.





Writing Program Administration

Journal of the
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Letter from the Editors

This is the second to last issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* that David and I will put together for you. As you probably know, we are in the process of handing over the editorship to a highly qualified team of editors, mostly from Arizona State University. (For more information please see the announcement in this issue.) The final two issues obviously feel special to us, but we are not in a position, emotionally or otherwise, to determine just how special they are. We do know we have assembled the work of some fine people in our field. Here is a quick look at what you will find in this issue.

Rebecca Howard returns to the question of how to change outside perceptions of what we do in our writing programs and argues that we now have a new tool, “multimedia rhetoric,” to aid us in our efforts. Stopping short of branding WPAs as logocentric, Howard reminds us that persuasion has an irreducible emotional component—something we tend to forget when preparing arguments in support of our programs. She argues that the visual component of multimedia introduces an emotional edge that can be quite effective when addressing, in her case, boards, deans, associate deans, and she not only makes a compelling case for using multimedia on such occasions but she offers sound advice regarding how to put multimedia presentations together.

Katherine Latterell broaches the vexed question of using graduate students in administrative roles, not in order to answer that question, but to encourage us to think about how our ways of working with graduate student WPAs reflect—or don’t—our administrative philosophies. She first schematizes three ways graduate students operate as WPAs, as “liaison,” “assistant,” and “co-policy maker,” again, not in order to argue for one over the other, but to make these relations more visible and to encourage us to treat these relations in “more dynamic and responsive” ways.

Mary Juzwik examines the ways two different teachers operated within a prescribed curriculum and argues the what happened was less a matter of “implementation” than of “negotiation.” Using de Certeau for guidance, Juzwik shows us that what WPAs tend to see as resistance to their programmatic strategies might be seen more productively as creative, tactical appro-

priations. Her main concern is to reveal the process of appropriation in all its complexity, as a step on the way to rethinking the relationship between instructors and the programs they work in. The details of the two case-studies provide a glimpse into a process we sometimes oversimplify in passing, and WPAs will find the implications she draws for teacher training and program design highly useful.

Jackie Grutsch McKinney and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater used a broad range of material gathered from a teaching seminar for graduate students in order to test again the value of the teaching journal as part of GTA professional development. Theirs as they tell us is a cautionary tale, of sorts, because they learned that the journals by themselves do not tell the whole story and thus can be misleading taken out of context. What they discovered—and what WPAs may find particularly useful—is a schema of “five narrative strands” that illustrate different aspects of composing “a teacherly identity.” It is commonplace to note that new teachers must find their style, but McKinney and Chiseri-Strater delve deeper into the complex stories teachers use to explain themselves to themselves as they develop professionally.

Martha Patton returns to the question of how effective faculty who teach writing intensive courses are with their responses to student writing (and, by implication, how effective the WAC program at the University of Missouri-Columbia is in this regard). Based on her survey of WI faculty, Patton discovered a number of trends—for instance, that senior faculty are more likely to assign fewer but longer papers than are assistant professors—that WPAs can use when planning workshops and offering other kinds of WAC support. She also confirms the general belief that even though there are many different ways of commenting effectively on papers, WPAs need to continue to push WI faculty to use more “context- and audience-specific criteria” in their responses to student work.

We again wish you happy and productive reading.

—Dennis Lynch

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WPAs and/versus Administrators: Using Multimedia Rhetoric to Promote Shared Premises for Writing Instruction

Rebecca Moore Howard

We all know about the difficulty of trying to get students, administrators, parents, and the general public to hear what *our* idea of composition (as a field of study) is, and what *we* mean by “writing.” In terms of the hated but ascendant business model, we have a PR/marketing problem. Until we try to solve it in those terms, we’ll make the same headway for the next few decades that we have for the last few.

—Doug Downs, WPA-L, 18 January 2002

On our own campuses, I believe we need to teach about writing where we can—and particularly teach those in upper administration. In practical terms, this means extending ourselves considerably: asking for meetings with upper administrators, volunteering to talk about our programs at every opportunity, seeking coverage in the campus news sources, and so on. This is a tiring, slow, and ongoing business—but it can eventually pay off with administrators and colleagues who know enough to question or dismiss claims like those Stanley [Fish] makes (or seems to make).

Having worked to teach these lessons to my own colleagues and administrators for almost 30 years, I . . . wonder if others have specific suggestions for how to educate those around us.

—Andrea Lunsford, WPA-L, 28 June 2002

The epigraphs to this essay were written by people very differently positioned in the profession of composition and rhetoric. Andrea Lunsford is a former chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication; Doug Downs is working on his doctoral dissertation in composition and rhetoric. Their posts were made at different times: Downs' in January 2002; Lunsford's in June 2002. Yet the two share a common concern, voiced in the same place (the WPA-L discussion list for writing program administrators). And they both illustrate a concern that is "out there" in composition and rhetoric: WPAs have a compelling need to change beliefs about writing and writing instruction in their institutions, yet the scholarship of writing program administration has not yet articulated effective means for accomplishing the task.

This essay describes multimedia rhetoric as one way of addressing this need. The experience of my own writing program in using digitized video to represent itself to its institution suggests that, unlike most established means of WPA agency (e.g., memoranda, reports, and workshops), multimedia rhetoric has an emotional effect on its audience and thus has a heightened potential for effecting change in the *premises*, the *assumptions*, that people hold about the nature of writing and writing instruction.

THE NEED FOR SHARED PREMISES

Much of a WPA's work is program-internal: training TAs, scheduling classes, choosing textbooks, designing curricula. Other WPA tasks, in contrast, involve program-external negotiations: placement tests, budget requests, WAC workshops. In the program-external negotiations, the WPA often—maybe usually—contends with discrepant underlying premises about the purposes of writing instruction. These underlying premises come in a wide range of shapes, and the lines between them are anything but distinct. They can, nevertheless, be described in terms of their two poles. At one pole is the idea that the primary responsibility of composition instruction is for grammatical and syntactic correctness, a position widely endorsed by those outside the writing program and its scholarship. At the other pole is the idea that "a focus on error can often block the attempts of beginning writers to form their thoughts in prose, and indeed that the explicit teaching of grammatical forms usually has little effect on the abilities of students to write fluently or correctly" (Harris 85). Joseph Harris's statement resonates with most compositionists' beliefs.

In much of the work that takes them outside their program, WPAs must navigate the choppy surf of these discrepant fundamental belief-systems about the nature of writing and writing instruction. To further the work of the writing program, the WPA often finds herself arguing against the

program-external tendencies to define and measure writing instruction on the basis of students' grammatical and syntactic correctness. These arguments are far more than abstract debates about theory.¹ These efforts have grave import for the material circumstances of the writing program. Staffing, budget, and curricula are directly affected by the extent to which program-external powerbrokers² believe that the writing program is doing its work successfully. So the definition of the "work" of the writing program is critical to its material conditions and even to its existence.

For most of us WPAs, the rare successes in these efforts at persuasion are moments to be treasured—as a passage from a Keith Rhodes article illustrates:

I will never forget a time when, the muse being with me, in three minutes flat I got a state higher education official to shift his view of composition from a site of grammar drills and error correction to one of genre analysis and rhetorical strategies. As he said, he had simply never thought about it that way before, but it made sense once he did. (57)

As we all know, though, such serendipitous opportunities will not suffice for the grave, gigantic role of change agent that perforce falls to the WPA. Multimedia rhetoric may provide a less idiosyncratic, more readily controlled way of affecting larger numbers of people.

WPAs AS CHANGE AGENTS: ESTABLISHED METHODS

WPAs take seriously their need to act as agents of change in their universities, and they have offered various sound recommendations for how to accomplish that task. Joyce Kinkead and Jeanne Simpson suggest that change can be effected through a shared language: WPAs should learn the language of higher administration. Edward M. White recommends institutional change by the individual WPA's assertion of power. Louise Wetherbee Phelps alludes to what she calls familiar "transitive" activities such as "faculty development workshops" and "joint course development" and also to "unexpected ways" in which a writing program "enlarges its functions" when it "offers leadership in training of teaching assistants (TAs), pioneers ways of evaluating and supporting teaching, or brings together faculty across disciplines to share and solve common teaching problems" (307). Susan McLeod (in whose recent scholarship change has been an important theme) recommends that WPAs who are acting as directors of writing across the curriculum work to change teachers' practices; their theories, says McLeod, will follow (114). Keith Rhodes offers marketing strategies as a means of change.

In some accounts, changes in an institution's ways of thinking about writing can be effected by connecting the ideological agenda of the writing program to other established institutional discourses. Richard Miller, in Laura Micciche's account, recommends that WPAs turn their "moral outrage" into economic agendas that deans can understand (443). Jeanne Gunner advises WPAs to work for institutional change through "material agency" derived from "understanding the historical moment." Gunner continues, "Analyzing a program's ideological imperatives and its shaping historical forces, a WPA may better be able to develop a materially effective theory of program operations" (9). She suggests not only that WPAs engage in analysis of ideologies but that they then tie the writing program's ideologies to "more culturally privileged and hence more powerful discourses. [. . .] Lessening the gap between master discourses and theoretical discourses is, perhaps, one way to gain the power to enact theory in material ways" (15). Katherine K. Gottschalk takes this theme up in a different manner when she advocates making a writing program "an integral part of the mission of a university, so that it doesn't become a target when unpleasant cuts have to be made." This means moving the writing program off the margins (23)—which, in Gottschalk's account, means not so much changing the institution as changing the writing program. Then, she says, the writing program will be positioned to effect institutional change.

Notwithstanding all these published suggestions for WPA agency, Andrea Lunsford and Doug Downs voice widely held concerns when they ask how WPAs can effect institutional change. Despite WPAs' best work on the important issue of agency, the fundamental set of public assumptions about writing instruction—that it should be focused on sentence-level correctness—endures. WPAs continue to find their programs under constant pressure from the public, from their institutions, and from their students to deliver a first-year writing curriculum that conveys correct, transferable knowledge about sentence-level standards. All the reports, memoranda, ideological analysis, attention to history, moral outrage, WAC workshops, language convergence, marketing strategies, committee meetings, assertions of power, and ideological convergence haven't changed the underlying premise—that composition courses should be teaching grammar. Nor will they. Even the old anti-foundationalist himself, Stanley Fish, teaches what he wants his readers to believe is a grammar-only composition class, and he exhorts all deans to follow his lead and insist that all writing courses do the same.

WPAs are positioned to play influential roles in the university's discussions about the goals of and methods for writing instruction. But we make a mistake, I believe, if we think that our individual or even structural ethos

as WPAs is sufficient to accomplish those influential roles. The rational arguments of our memoranda and our participation on committees just don't suffice. We need more, and that's where multimedia rhetoric comes in: It's another tool, a powerful tool, one that, unlike the other tactics just described, makes ethical appeals to the emotions of its audience.

WPAs AS CHANGE AGENTS: *PATHOS* AND THE VISUAL

Italian rhetorician Ernesto Grassi explains that the great success of rhetoric is its ability to reach the audience's emotions; moreover, he says, it is on emotional bases that we establish the premises of our beliefs. Here Grassi speaks directly to the concerns of today's WPAs in their struggle with discrepant premises for writing instruction. Contrasting rhetoric and dialectic, Grassi says that dialectic manipulates and arranges the premises that have already been provided by rhetoric. Working primarily from *logos*—from logic—dialectic figures out the various combinations and interactions of the premises that have already been established through the *pathos* of rhetoric.

Transporting Grassi's analyses to the tasks of today's WPAs, I would assert that all the print documents of writing program administration—the annual reports, memoranda, and curriculum proposals—are part of the logic of dialectic. These documents are more successful in negotiating the consequences of the community's already-established beliefs about literacy instruction than they are in changing those beliefs. In all their logical splendor, these print documents address—but have little transformative effect upon—the university audience's deeply held premises.

I believe we make a mistake, therefore, when we WPAs try to convey our disciplinary visions of literacy instruction solely by means of reasoned arguments. In well-established disciplinary analyses (see, for example, Clark), that mistake can be categorized as a gesture of masculinist ideology. When we rely solely on *logos*, we participate in a discipline- (and for that matter, academy-) wide prejudice against *pathos*. Micciche invokes Lynn Worsham's charge that even critical pedagogy excludes the emotional from its purview. "By doing so," says Micciche, "critical pedagogies unwittingly end up reinforcing binaries between emotional and rational discourse that serve to feminize emotion, constructing it as an 'irrational' discourse and so an unworthy one for the practice of theory" (438). Given the traditional subordination of *pathos*, we should hardly be surprised that WPAs have replicated the *logos-pathos* binary and have striven to change their institutions' beliefs about the nature of writing and writing instruction exclusively through the agency of *logos*. We want to win our battles; we recognize that deploying *pathos* as evidence will reduce the credibility of our arguments; and so, inescapably, we

must turn to *logos*, notwithstanding whatever ideological qualms we may have about the masculinist privileging of *logos*. Academic business just isn't conducted on the basis of emotionally oriented evidence.

In reaching such conclusions, we fail to differentiate the deployment of evidence for an argument from the development of beliefs on which arguments are based. *Logos*-devotion is not only ideologically questionable, but it is instrumentally unsound. Relying solely on *logos* may make us *sound* like our colleagues in all those other disciplines, but it also keeps us subordinate to them because it prevents us from actually aligning the members of those disciplines with the projects we wish to pursue. *We will never persuade anybody through the exclusive (or perhaps even primary) use of logos.* Hence *logos*-devotion deprives writing programs of opportunities to surmount the public perceptions that depict writing programs and WPAs on a continuum that ranges from “renegade” to “failure”—roles in which we are constructed as having refused or failed to accomplish the literacy agenda set by our colleagues, our administrators, our public, but not ourselves.

With the new technologies, moreover, the hegemony of *logos* is beginning to crack. Reasoned argument is no longer *all* we're teaching in our classes; we're also teaching multimedia rhetoric,³ which does not operate in the reasoned, linear, logical ways that traditional humanism has represented as the only ethical form of argument. Instead, multimedia rhetoric speaks to the emotions. Richard Buchanan explains it this way: “Pathos for the rhetorician is the strand of argument that appeals to the feelings and social circumstances of the audience. It is quite similar for the designer, who seeks to incorporate features that appeal to specific groups of individuals” (195).

I am therefore advocating the persuasive power of multimedia rhetoric as an effective response to the WPA's perennial problem of public demands for “grammar,” “basics,” or whatever term is at the moment marking the current-traditionalism that persists in public notions of rhetoric. The multimedia rhetoric that I describe here is primarily and fundamentally visual, hence emotional, hence able to reach to the most fundamental level of belief, to the premises on which reasoned arguments are based.

MULTIMEDIA RHETORIC: A CONVERSION NARRATIVE

This principle became vivid in my writing program in September 2001, when our dean invited us to do a one-hour presentation to the college's Board of Visitors, an influential alumni group involved in fundraising for the college. As we planned our presentation, we considered the possibility of having a single speaker address the group; or several speakers; maybe using handouts; perhaps mounting some poster presentations—the usual suspects. But we wanted to *reach* these people. We wanted to fire their imaginations. So we

decided that, as program director and department chair (ours is a freestanding writing program that functions as an academic department), I would do a ten-minute introduction, outlining the work of the writing program, and that we would then have three stations in the room, each with a computer running a video presentation of one aspect of the writing program's work. Human beings involved in that work would be at each station, talking, answering questions, schmoozing. Instead of handouts, we would have glossy one-page white papers.

The three areas of the writing program's work that we chose to highlight were technology, the writing center, and writing across the curriculum. We knew that these were aspects that our dean was particularly interested in, and we believed that these were aspects that were readily fundable.

We had only two weeks in which to prepare our presentation. In those two weeks, a team of draftees, volunteers, and mercenaries, led by X, Y, and Z, put together the three videos and whitepapers. Each of the videos consists of a series of clips ranging in length from 15 to 70 seconds. The video occupies only part of the screen. Under it is a caption providing the speaker's name and role ("Director of the Writing Center"; "Instructor"). In one corner of the screen is a caption identifying the topic of the whole video ("The Writing Center"). In another corner of some frames is a caption identifying a major point that the speaker is making ("Mission: To support student writing across and beyond the university"). At a few strategic junctures, slides of statistics (*logos*)—e.g., the demographics of students using the writing center—are inserted (see Figure 1).

The videos were shot in our real setting: our offices and classrooms, the writing center, the campus just outside our building. They are unrehearsed and unscripted: we did, of course, choose people who we believed would say the sorts of things we would want to include on the video, and we did an enormous amount of cutting, so that 20 minutes of raw footage becomes 30 seconds in the presentation. But we did not tell people what to say, and in fact some of the perspectives on the video are not fully in agreement with each other. These are real people speaking their real minds on topics they are involved in and care about.

We also used almost no background music. On one of the CD-ROMs, we used two clips borrowed from another unit in our university. When the presentation reached these clips, some of our audience laughed—because, we believe, these clips were so patently orchestrated for rhetorical effect—in contrast to the much more authentic footage that dominated the presentations. Although we have since invested in some very basic lighting equipment, at that time we had none, so some of our indoor shots are poorly illuminated. Because it was unrehearsed, unscripted, shot in authentic settings

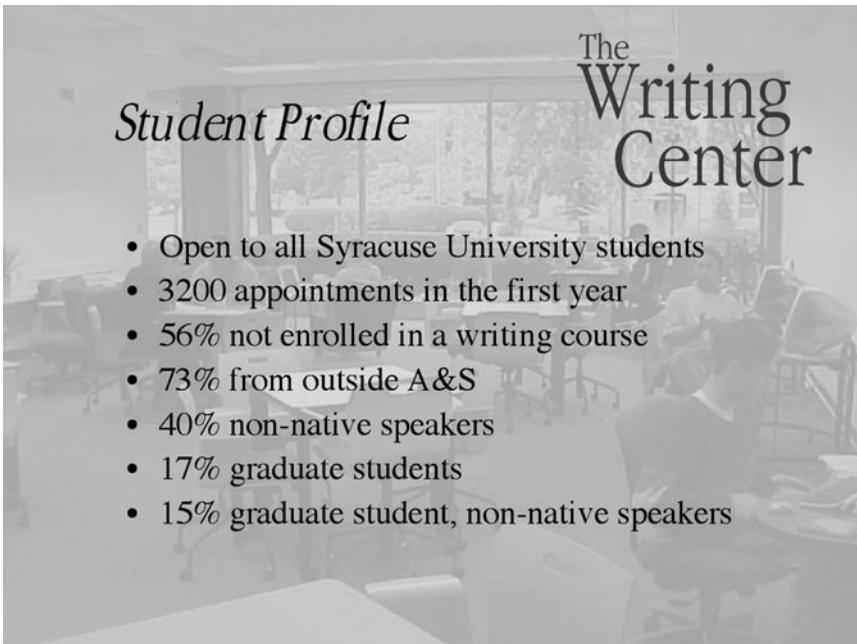


Figure 1. Student Profiles

that are not always well-lit, and free of background music, the video that we produced for the project seemed much more authentic and therefore went beyond merely “selling” our immediate agenda (fund-raising). Our video went much deeper: it affected beliefs.

Most of the clips depict program teachers and administrators talking about their work. In some clips, peer tutors talk about what they do. A few show students in writing classes. By far the most riveting is the sequence featuring Rose Almonte, a native-Spanish-speaking English major who habitually works on her papers with a writing center tutor (see Figure 2). On a variety of occasions, over and over, I have seen this principle in action: people—students, teachers, and administrators—are most interested in and most persuaded by students’ voices.

The reception of our one-hour presentation to the Board of Visitors was overwhelming. After my ten-minute introduction, we invited the alumni to move from station to station, pursuing their own interests. Some went to all three stations; others settled at one and stayed there for the remaining 45 minutes, talking with the writing program representatives, watching the video, and talking with other alumni at that station. We gave each of them a folder with the glossy white papers on the writing center, technology, and writing across the curriculum. And each folder contained a CD-ROM with copies of the PowerPoint videos.

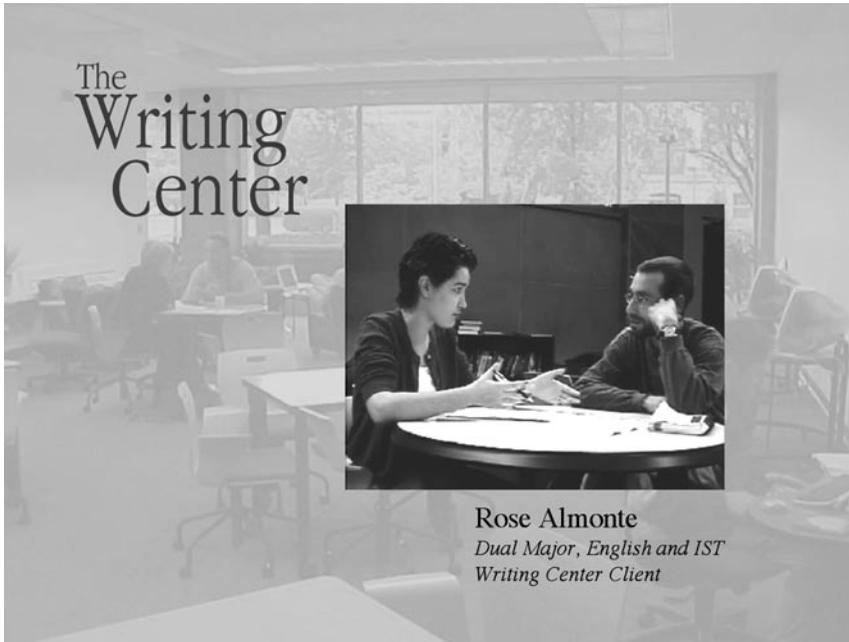


Figure 2. Featuring Student Voices

Significantly, the associate deans of our college were at the presentation, too. They were remarkably enthusiastic. Afterwards they told us that this was one of the best presentations the Board of Visitors had ever had: it had involved them in an active way in the presentation. More important, the deans said things such as, “Now I understand what your program is doing.” These were our *deans!* These were the people who’d been recipients of years of documents—annual reports, proposals, memoranda. They’d been in innumerable meetings with directors of the writing program. But it took three five-minute videos to make them feel that they *understood* the writing program.

As our dean warned us in advance, it will be some time before we will know whether our presentation to the Board of Visitors will result in outside funding for the writing program. But the unanticipated benefits of our presentation were immediate. Not only did we affect our deans’ understanding of our work, but they also asked that we make copies of the white papers and CD-ROMs for others in the university. We were asked to repeat the presentation for a faculty teaching circle. The director of our Center for the Study of Teaching and Learning remarked that he’d like our staff to teach his staff how to prepare such effective videos.

Now, our Center for the Study of Teaching and Learning is a technologically savvy group of people who do lots of video. At first we marveled that we might have anything to teach them. Then we realized that what the writing program folks have that others might not is highly developed rhetorical skills. As we worked on our video we knew, for example, that we should avoid overpackaging our presentation. The people talking were unrehearsed and did not speak from a script. There was no background music. No one was doing a hard sell. Sometimes the camera jumped, the lighting was far from perfect, the peer consultants weren't attired exactly as I might have liked, and sometimes the sound wasn't the greatest, either. The video was, in other words, *genuine*. We had, in Richard Buchanan's words, approached the issue of design from a rhetorical perspective (194), instead of from the *logos* of dialectic or from a sales-and-marketing perspective.

And the result is that we have found a way of affecting people's assumptions about the teaching of writing. To return to the tasks that Andrea Lunsford and Doug Downs articulated: how can WPAs affect others' notions of the writing program? My answer is, "In many ways." We can conduct writing across the curriculum workshops; we can sponsor colloquia; we can join committees and clubs; we can produce newsletters. These are all tried-and-true, valuable methods of spreading the Writing Program Word near and far. Yet we're still rasslin' with a whole cadre of Dean Fishes. Hence my recommendation that we add multimedia rhetoric to the mix. It will not "win" the debate, but it will give us a more persuasive voice in it.

Our Board of Visitors presentation was above all visual. The videos did make some explicit arguments, but their biggest argument—that writing program work far exceeds notions of student obedience to standards of correctness and that it *should* exceed them—was never stated. Instead, the videos inexorably used emotion, metaphor, and association that reached viewers' *assumptions*—their premises—about literacy instruction. This multimedia rhetoric sets aside the Cartesian rationality that Ernesto Grassi rejects, offering in its place a rhetoric of the bodies of the writing program, an embodied, hence emotional, hence effective rhetoric to which our audience could connect and in which it could *believe*. Our intended audience for the presentation was the alumni on the Board of Visitors. Our bonus audience was our associate deans: responsible, experienced administrators who know the writing program well and have paid careful attention to its *logos* over the years, yet whose appreciation of the writing program was substantially improved by the three five-minute videos.

MULTIMEDIA RHETORIC: A PROSPECTUS

This is no easy proposal I'm making. How many WPAs know how to produce digitized video? I certainly don't. When I asked that question of WPAs assembled at the 2002 WPA conference in Park City, Utah, no hands went up, and afterwards, a couple of the most technologically adept WPAs in the audience confided that they could not single-handedly undertake such a task. The three videos produced in our program resulted from a highly collaborative effort led by X, the technology manager in my program; by Y, a faculty member specializing in writing and technology, information architecture, and humanistic informatics; and by Z, an advanced doctoral student writing a dissertation on technology in writing program administration. They were significantly assisted by many others in the program. Producing the three videos consumed well over one hundred work hours. Solving the problems of the circulation of the videos has required additional work: we used PowerPoint for the presentation to the Board of Visitors but have found it quirky when transported via CD-ROM to other machines. For my presentation at the 2002 WPA conference, we tried burning a DVD but found that, inexplicably, the DVD would only play on a machine that itself had a DVD burner. So in Utah I showed it in a QuickTime movie. The resolution in the image was not the greatest, and we also had problems with the sound levels.

In short, multimedia rhetoric is difficult, and it requires collaborative effort. It's not that the WPA must know how to "do it" herself; it's that she must be able to envision the project and lead the effort to accomplish it. She has to hire the people who can and will want to participate. She has to create or recognize the *kairos* for it—or listen to those who do. Most of all, she has to deploy program resources (money, equipment, time, and acclaim) to make it happen.

If we WPAs are going to be in a position to participate fully in the crucial conversations about our own curricula, helping our colleagues understand what it is our programs do and why it is valuable, we need new tools. We need to sell our own vision of our programs, so that those visions become part of the university's discussions about the goals of and possibilities for writing instruction. Hence I am advocating multimedia rhetoric, a rhetoric that works in the realm of *pathos* rather than *logos*, a rhetoric that can reach and affect the very premises that the academic public holds about the true mission of writing programs.

Is our life at Some University radically different because of the Board of Visitors videos? No, it is not. The literacy arguments already underway will probably play themselves out in the already-established terms on which the too-familiar arguments draw. I know of no ways in which multimedia

rhetoric can be deployed as evidence for an already-established argument; its emotional appeals would be rejected as inappropriate to the task. Videos like ours are instead useful in diffuse, nondirective ways: they can change the premises on which members of the academy argue about the work of the writing program, *before a specific argument gets underway*. Once one of those arguments is launched, multimedia rhetoric is an inappropriate way to advance evidence. Argument in academic culture works on *logos*.

So I am not proposing multimedia rhetoric as a solution to the public relations problems of WPAs; rather, I am proposing it as an effective means of grounding a dialectic about writing at one's institution. Those who have seen our videos are now walking around with alternative or expanded ideas about of writing instruction. Visual media reach people at the level of fundamental belief; having done that, the writing program administrator is better positioned to engage in the subsequent dialectic of annual reports, memoranda, committee meetings, curriculum proposals, and all the other well-articulated instruments for exerting agency in our institutions. Then as new arguments arise, they may proceed from premises about literacy instruction that are less dominated by visions of sentence-level drills and assessments.

NOTES

¹ Underlying this statement is my assumption that WPAs actually want to change public perceptions of writing instruction; that they are not the dupes of a crass higher administration. That assumption is not universally shared. Writing in 2001, Sharon Crowley offers an insulting stereotype of WPAs: "These folks have followed the money. They give deans and taxpayers what they want: clarity, brevity, sincerity. They have no truck with invention, allusive styles, and most certainly do not contemplate any such nonsense as a critical relation to grammar" ("Judith" 166). I can only regard Crowley's remark as a deliberate use of unsupported generalization for the purpose of rallying what she must believe is an uncritical audience of compositionists to her abolitionist cause. Beyond invoking James Sledd's "boss compositionist" label for WPAs, Crowley offers no evidence for her generalization. (The following year, though, in "How the Professional Lives of WPAs Would Change If FYC Were Elective," she offers WPAs a means of redemption in their fall from disciplinary grace: they can abolish first-year composition and thereby cleanse their souls.) Nor can I supply any evidence from my own experience. While I am well aware that my work as WPA involves me in coalition-building, dialectic negotiations, and compromises, and while I am experienced in coming to solutions that do not completely cohere with my own convictions about literacy, I am unaware that I have myself ever practiced writing program administration in the way that Crowley describes, nor am I acquainted with any colleagues in the Council of Writing Program Administrators who have. So before I can take her assertions seriously

and place WPAs in the “outside” of belief-systems about writing instruction, I must await some evidence from Crowley.

² *Stakeholders* might seem the more predictable term here. I choose *powerbrokers* to mark the difference between those who do and do not directly participate in the work of the writing program. Students and teachers are stakeholders; purse-string-holding administrators, however much they may care about and support the writing program, are powerbrokers. They control the working conditions of the writing program but do not themselves participate in the work.

³ Douglas Hesse points out that this expanded notion of the work of writing programs has surfaced as one alternative to abolitionist arguments (122).

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Defining Roles for Graduate Students in Writing Program Administration: Balancing Pragmatic Needs with a Postmodern Ethics of Action

Catherine Latterell

In recent years, discussion about the roles and responsibilities being assumed by graduate students within writing programs has increased. Distilling the issues into the most easily defined camps leads to the question: Are we professionalizing or deskilling the field by employing graduate students as WPAs?

One “camp” argues that the field should prepare graduate students for writing program administration through new course offerings, workshops, and assistantships. The need for more organized efforts (widespread and longstanding use of under-the-radar practices notwithstanding) is supported by the widely recognized reality that in today’s job market, people earning PhDs in composition studies can commonly expect to be asked to take on some form of administrative duties once hired. Accordingly, the argument goes, the field has a responsibility to incorporate administrative experience into graduate study. The essay “Present Perfect and Future Imperfect” by Scott Miller, Brenda Brueggemann, Dennis Blue, and Deneen Shepherd is perhaps the strongest representative of this perspective.

A second “camp” questions using graduate students in administrative appointments, suggesting the practice be seen as part of a larger problem with the push to professionalize graduate study. Carrie Leverenz and Amy Goodburn’s thoughtful essay on the subject warns that increased focus on professional development in composition programs could come at a cost to the pedagogical preparation of TAs. Taking on the issue more directly, Sheryl Fontaine has argued that using graduate students as program administrators promotes values which “are in obvious conflict with those most central to those of contemporary pedagogy and theory” (84). Among other

reasons, she and others suggest that asking novices to handle administrative duties reinforces damaging notions about WPAs as glorified staffers with no special disciplinary knowledge.

Defining this issue into two camps provides a quick, if incomplete, view of the stakes involved for the WPA community and for graduate students: Graduate students are interested in getting the best possible preparation in order to be competitive on the job market; and the WPA community is interested, in part, in how what we do promotes (or doesn't) the professional status of our work. That said, the usefulness of putting this issue into an either/or framework ends there. By focusing on broad strokes, such binaries oversimplify the arguments of others, including those I cite above. They mask larger complexities and don't help us see the issue fully and thus deal with it most productively. I prefer instead to see the issue this way: Graduate students are not disappearing from the domain of WPA work, so it makes little sense to ask whether or not they should be here. The hiring of graduate students to assist WPAs with administrative work is a long-accepted practice, connected on one level to the regular university-wide practice of funding graduate students through assistantships. On another level, due to the increasing complexity of our own work, hiring graduate students to help with our workload has become a necessity. And, perhaps most significantly, growth in WPA-related research continues to draw graduate students into WPA work.

What is needed, then, is not so much a debate asking should we or shouldn't we incorporate graduate students into WPA work, because they are here to stay, but a discussion about how and in what ways graduate students' roles and responsibilities in administrative appointments reflect our administrative philosophies as well as our theoretical commitments. What is revealed by this kind of examination not only has potential pedagogical implications for the preparation of future WPAs but also intersects with discussions of power, authority, and administrative philosophies from WPA scholars like Edward M. White, Jeanne Gunner, Eileen Schell, and others. In my interactions with WPAs and a number of assistants, I learned that most of the work currently being done by graduate student assistants can be categorized in one of three job-types—the liaison or go-between, the administrative assistant, and the co-policymaker. This essay argues, however, that we need less limiting approaches to working with graduate student WPAs—ones that will move us away from continued reliance on hierarchical, fixed notions of administration-as-control and toward a view that is more dynamic and responsive. What follows is organized into two sections: the first describes what characterizes current definitions of the roles

and responsibilities graduate student WPAs typically hold, and the second offers an approach to working with graduate student WPAs that interweaves a postmodern ethics of action with administrative practices.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GRADUATE STUDENT WPAs

Before going further, I need to place this discussion in context with the work of Sally Barr Ebest, whose 1999 study provides a comprehensive description of how graduate programs in composition and rhetoric prepare students in the areas of teaching, research, and administration. Her study provides an overview in particular of current curricular requirements as provided by a wide range of graduate programs in composition and rhetoric. In her summary of this study, published in the Spring 1999 issue of *WPA*, Barr Ebest notes that, although “structured training and coursework in the duties and responsibilities of writing program administration were nonexistent” (74) in responses to her survey, her follow-up research confirmed a more recent development of such courses as well as the concomitant increased recognition among faculty to provide graduate students with experience and/or training with administrative issues. Her study’s close examination of graduate curricula from a range of programs presents a picture of the impact of coursework on preparing future WPAs, perhaps most significantly with regard to research methodologies. I hope that my essay contributes to her project by focusing more closely on descriptions of the roles and responsibilities graduate students are currently assuming in program administration.

Although the topic has attracted attention in recent publications and at conferences, as a community we need a more concrete sense of the range of responsibilities of graduate students acting as program assistants. Beyond my own experiences with and observations of the work of graduate student WPAs in three writing programs (Michigan Tech, Texas Tech, and Penn State), much of what follows is based on information I began gathering in 1995 when I conducted a national survey about GTA education curricula (see “Training the Workforce”). Since then, I have continued conversations with numerous WPAs and more than a dozen graduate students who had been hired to work in administrative capacities within writing programs around the country. The descriptions that follow are based, then, on these on-going dialogues (more informal than formal). Their insights and my experience form the basis for my discussion.¹

In my initial queries of WPAs and graduate student WPAs, I sought some basic information:

- What job title is given to graduate students working in administration?

- What was the review process involved in hiring?
- For how many years does a graduate student hold this job?
- How many hours per week do they work?
- What are graduate student WPAs' main responsibilities?

These questions, and the conversations they started, have yielded the following outline of typical definitions of graduate student WPA positions:

- Job titles vary from Assistant Director of the Writing Program, to Assistant to the Director of the Writing Program, to Program Assistant, Teaching Advisor, TA Peer Evaluator, and so on.
- Most graduate student WPAs hold the position for one year, and often part of a summer, and receive one course release per semester (or ten hours per week) for their duties.
- Graduate student WPAs estimate that the actual number of hours per week that they conduct program business floats above the ten-hour-per-week contract. They also report that these hour-totals fluctuate heavily during the semester. There are heavy periods and slower periods each semester.
- In general the hiring process is not formal. The typical story is, after the first year of teaching in the program, the WPA approached them personally about the job. Increasingly, more programs are implementing more formal hiring processes. Still, for the most part, graduate student WPAs felt they were recognized as evincing good will among their peers and for being above-average composition teachers. Other skills such as being very organized or being a computer whiz were also mentioned.
- When holding this appointment, they are typically either in the second (finishing) year of a master's degree or the second year of a doctoral degree—occasionally the first, depending on whether they entered the program as a masters student.
- Many are concentrating study in areas other than composition studies.

Sets of bulleted descriptions, however, don't reveal much about the kinds of work these graduate student WPAs assume, the impact they have on the day-to-day operations of a writing program, or the wider reaching influence they may have on program development. The descriptions and discussions that follow are based on my contacts with graduate student WPAs from a range of programs during the years 1996 and 2000. During that time, I collected the kinds of informal job descriptions that aren't available in most

official job announcements. What marks these unofficial job descriptions is their embeddedness in an individual's specific experiences of working during a given year for one WPA. To be certain, they don't tell the whole story, but they are richer in detail than more generic official descriptions. And, importantly, graduate students who shared them with me, knowing no direct quotations or names would be used, offered no harsher criticism of those they worked for than what they directed at themselves, mostly for wishing that they'd had more time for a particular initiative or knew more before they started. Distilled from these individuals' descriptions, I've defined typical graduate student administrators' roles as falling into one of three categories: graduate students act as liaisons or go-betweens, as administrative assistants, and as co-policymakers. Although they are not mutually exclusive—individual graduate students have responsibilities that overlap all three of these categories—I use these categories to articulate the typical kinds of work WPAs ask of graduate students and the kinds of responsibilities these graduate students typically undertake.

GRADUATE STUDENT WPA AS LIAISON

As the name suggests, the primary function of graduate student WPAs falling into this category is to act as a go-between for the writing program administrator and the program's staff of instructors and teaching assistants. As liaisons, these graduate students typically have two main responsibilities. First, they help TAs understand and follow the program's policies and procedural requirements. Second, they are relied upon to report complaints, problems, and suggestions arising from the teaching staff. Consequently, graduate students acting chiefly as liaisons are chosen for their smart-but-friendly reputations among their peers and for their capacity for showing good will to all. Good will is a crucial requirement for the job, in all cases, because graduate students operating as program administrators negotiate their allegiances to their peers and to those in the WPA office daily.

Again, as its name implies, this position places a premium on maintaining lines of communication among the WPA and the teaching staff. The strength of such a position is that it makes space for a person in the WPA office who is at ground-level within the program. By reporting current issues and concerns among the TAs and by offering insight into how TAs will respond to a given policy or procedure, the graduate student as liaison can play a helpful role in helping shape administrative agendas and planning. However, one potential concern with defining graduate student WPAs' duties chiefly as go-betweens is that it can limit them from experiencing WPA work that is more substantive.

GRADUATE STUDENT WPA AS ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Graduate students whose job responsibilities fall into this category, not surprisingly, explain their role in the writing program very clearly, as it is a very familiar position in offices everywhere. Functioning primarily as administrative assistants, these graduate student WPAs define their roles in terms of the paperwork side of administration. Much more so than the previous category, their energies are used to keep track of the flow of communication going in and out of a program office. For instance, as administrative assistants these graduate students regularly use memos and emails to send out reminders, announcements, and meeting schedules to the TAs and instructors. Other common tasks include being in the office to answer the phone and direct requests for information to the proper authority; ordering textbooks; developing schedules for the fall orientation and other events like brown-bag lunches and teaching colloquia; updating the program's files, resource library, and Web site; and taking notes during staff meetings. Not occasionally these graduate student WPAs also help draft program policies, which are mostly related to procedural matters, such as incident reporting, record-keeping for classroom attendance, policies for finding a substitute teacher, etc.

As the job-type suggests, graduate student WPAs acting as administrative assistants find themselves operating as managers—measuring presences and absences, tracking the activities of the teaching pool, and drafting or filing reports. As such, the duties and responsibilities defined by this category of graduate student work fall between those of the other two categories. Like the liaison position, administrative assistants find themselves using a significant portion of their time communicating with their fellow teaching assistants. The difference, however, is that administrative assistants operate more like mid-level managers from a business model: Their chief task is preparing and sending reports to the pool of writing instructors and conversely preparing and presenting reports to their supervisor, the WPA, on organizational matters. Typical of such work, and a fundamentally crucial organizational need for any writing program, are a range of record-keeping duties, such as tracking attendance for and interest in workshops. Additionally, like the policymaker position described next, administrative assistants play a larger hand in developing program materials and policies. The tendency, however, is that as administrative assistants these graduate students' responsibilities boil down to keeping the office afloat by helping to manage the endless paperwork, which is increasingly generated and stored online.

GRADUATE STUDENT WPA AS POLICYMAKER

Not all graduate student WPAs hold duties as primarily liaisons or staff assistants. An increasing number of WPAs encourage a more collaborative relationship with their assistant directors. These graduate students play more central roles in program development, and in turn, occupy a more equal position in relationship to the WPA. Graduate students who have a voice in policymaking are more involved in decision-making generally speaking within a writing program. They play a thoughtful, even major, role in matters such as textbook selection, syllabus drafting, and curriculum revision. They are more likely to have experience helping to draft program policies regarding more complex writing program activities such as peer evaluation of TAs, developing a system for approving TAs to teach honors sections of writing courses, or for determining topics and speakers for regular writing program colloquia.

These graduate students have authored, or co-authored with the WPA, many key program documents and pedagogical statements, and they are more likely to initiate some projects. These graduate student WPAs have helped design and draft standardized course materials and policy statements shared by all instructors in the program. They may co-teach the pedagogy practica required of new teaching assistants. They may have helped solicit, edit, and produce a program's collection of model student essays as well as a handbook—now typically online—that some programs provide for first-year students. As well, they have increased responsibility enacting policies through, for instance, conducting classroom observations of TAs, writing evaluations, and recommending teaching assignments for up-coming terms. Additionally, these graduate students have described developing team-teaching initiatives and special topics courses—that might, for instance, incorporate visual rhetoric in the composition course. Not surprisingly, these graduate students are more likely than graduate student administrators falling into one of the other categories to claim rhetoric and composition studies as their area of doctoral study.

IMPLICATIONS OF THESE MODELS

By outlining these three characteristic roles or subject positions, I mean to highlight some of the contributions graduate student WPAs make to writing programs. Acting as liaisons, administrative assistants, and co-policymakers, graduate student WPAs can provide crucial support to the writing programs within which they work and to the faculty WPAs who direct them. The material needs of the program office, the faculty WPA, and the gradu-

ate students who take these positions are met—at least in part—by each of these models. After all, maintaining strong communication channels, keeping records, and drafting and enacting policies are three of the most vital responsibilities of any well-managed writing program, and both faculty WPAs and graduate students benefit from these working relationships. It is almost too obvious to acknowledge the well known reality that WPAs are not islands unto themselves, and that by hiring graduate students they are deputizing them to take on some of the never-ending demands of the job. And, it has also become an acknowledged article of faith that WPAs have a duty to help prepare the next generation of program administrators. Accordingly, graduate students gain not only financial support and/or by course-load reductions but also by earning experience operating on the boundary marking faculty subject positions from student subject positions—making an impact on an administrative level in their programs as well as preparing for future working relationships in which they are defined not by their student status but by their status as administrators and teacher/scholars.

Yet, it is not enough to be able to label three general roles and responsibilities that graduate student WPAs hold without further reflecting on what these roles reveal to us about basic assumptions guiding the working operations of writing programs. Faculty WPAs in such large institutions are actively engaged in any number of complex administrative activities (curricula development, placement procedures, graduate teaching and advising, portfolio assessment, outcomes assessment, WAC and WID projects, and so on), each in its own way intersecting local program work with intellectual and scholarly inquiry. Indeed, long have we argued that such activities are not *merely* service but “entail substantive intellectual labor” (MLA Commission 178). Position statements like “Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration,” authored by the WPA Executive Committee, have helped us argue to those outside of rhetoric and composition studies that such work is a site for the production of knowledge in our field. As fundamental, then, not only to the daily operations of individual writing programs but also to developing or refining our ways of knowing and our core intellectual values, the roles we assign graduate student WPAs need further examination. Just as the choices we make about placement or other administrative practices hold a commensurate stake in knowledge (re)production and on continuing concerns about power or the lack of it among WPAs, so too do the roles we assign to graduate students.

While these three categories represent a range of options, my worry is that graduate student WPAs’ most frequently assigned responsibilities suggest they function primarily as surveillance mechanisms. In its most mild form, graduate student WPAs are assigned to keep an eye on things for busy

faculty WPAs by posting new regulations, reminding the teaching staff of policies and events, and keeping office hours in order to be available to answer TAs' questions or to explain procedures. In this way, as several WPAs put it to me, graduate student WPAs act as temperature-takers, checking the health of the program and reporting the general mood of the teaching staff to their faculty supervisors. This seems harmless enough and, as I have noted, even necessary. However, in too many cases, we are overemphasizing a policing or magisterial approach to administration. In these instances, as when a parent leaves their oldest child in charge, graduate student WPAs are used as instruments of control in two ways: (1) as informants—telling the WPA what is “really going on” in the program, and (2) as enforcers—ensuring program mandates as being carried out by all of the teaching staff.

Examples of the use of graduate student WPAs as surveillance mechanisms can be found within all three of the job categories previously outlined. Graduate students working mainly as liaisons described, among other things, being asked to report on the following types of activities of their peers: who is back in the office too early from teaching; who is and isn't holding office hours; who is dressing inappropriately on teaching days; and who is putting down the program to other faculty or staff in the English department. Graduate students whose responsibilities I categorize as administrative assistants related to me their being asked to report, among other things: who is not submitting syllabi or other teaching materials to the program office on time and who is not attending required meetings or the required number of workshops or colloquia. Additionally, graduate students working as administrative assistants described being asked to develop better tracking systems for revealing patterns among the teaching staff and identifying weaknesses among them, such as who is regularly earning low ratings from student evaluations or which TAs have higher than average numbers of plagiarism cases each semester. Even the experiences of graduate students who identified themselves as policymakers revealed instances in which they were operating from a policing imperative. What was perhaps most troubling were some descriptions of their peer evaluation of teaching practices. Although many programs have developed rich peer evaluation programs designed to encourage peer-to-peer professional development, more than one graduate student reported to me ways in which peer evaluation of teaching was less about helping others develop better teaching habits and more about identifying outliers and bringing them back in line with standard practices. In one instance, a graduate student described being asked to re-do her written evaluations so that the WPA could more easily locate specific information about whether or not individual TAs' courses followed curriculum requirements. Other graduate students described being involved in revising contracts and

other policy statements in order to add such language as would allow a WPA to create a paper trail on individual TAs and to institute a process for ridding their programs of recalcitrant instructors.

Certainly maintaining standards and consistency within a large teaching staff is an ongoing challenge to successful program administration. My point here is that, in too many instances, we have been and continue to define graduate student WPAs' chief responsibilities as guardians of consistency and stability. Although individual graduate students have worked or are currently working in more substantial ways within many different writing programs, I am suggesting that the balance of the average graduate student WPAs time is spent functioning as just such a guardian. And, both individual writing programs as well as the field as a whole pays a price for this. The pattern emerging from the use of graduate students as surveilors of their peers suggests a reliance on traditional hierarchical or WPA-centric models of administration. Decisions to do so may be driven by gaps in proper staffing, in needing someone to answer phones, keep communication flowing smoothly between a faculty administrator and the teaching staff, and give us a warning when fires may be building, but the consequences can be troubling. The resulting model that is reproduced is a magistrate's approach to writing program administration: one that teaches our mentees to emphasize keeping the peace and enforcing moving violations over more substantial priorities or wider-reaching agendas. Moreover, it leads to another version of the what-works approach to preparing future colleagues that I and others have questioned in recent years, and, it plays a role in the ethical dilemmas facing WPAs that Mary Ann Cain and George Kalamaras describe in their article "(Re)Presenting the Work of Writing Program Administrators."

Such top-heavy models of administration reinforce the WPA as the site of power/knowledge within a writing program. As Jeanne Gunner notes in "Decentering the WPA," these approaches perpetuate traditional administrative power structures in which communication flows one-way—from the faculty WPA down while graduate student WPAs are treated as a kind of mouth-piece or messenger—and a standardized syllabus and textbook establishes the pedagogical identity of the program. Gunner argues that such an "anti-democratic division of authority" disconnects writing teachers from the curriculum they teach—deskilling them (13). Viewed from a disciplinary perspective, such approaches contradict messages from the Executive Committee and others about the intellectually rich nature of writing administration. By relegating graduate student WPAs—who in many cases treat their experience as professional training for future administrative work—to

performing surveillance and acting as magistrates, we encourage impoverished assumptions about writing program administration as a bureaucratic burden rather than as a site of intellectual inquiry and engagement.

BALANCING PRAGMATIC NEEDS WITH A POSTMODERN ETHICS OF ACTION

How might we conceive of roles for graduate students that offer both them and ourselves more balanced and productive responses to the challenges of administration? More specifically, how might this dilemma help us rethink the ways in which our actions are bound up in assumptions about how power operates within writing programs? Assumptions about power or authority are at the core of working relationships like that between WPAs and graduate student assistants, and, as with all issues of authority, there are no black and white solutions. I am not suggesting, therefore, that we denounce the roles graduate students play as liaisons, administrative assistants, and co-policymakers. Nor that should we value any one of these roles over the others. They exist in useful tension with one another, each highlighting weaknesses of the others, but no one of them provides the solution. Rather, I suggest that we gain more ground by seeing the matter as inextricably linked to how power/knowledge is manifested and circulates within writing programs. I don't think I go too far in saying that WPAs discuss power—strategizing how to gain it, bemoaning our lack of it, questioning the best uses of our authority, and theorizing new models of it—at nearly every turn (cf. Dickson; Micciche; White; H. Miller; Gunner; Brown, Enos, and Chaput; Weiser and Rose). This essay breaks no new ground in establishing a new theory of authority for WPAs. What I suggest is that we can more productively define graduate student WPAs' roles and responsibilities (and rethink our own) through a postmodern ethics of action that casts authority as dynamic yet responsive. Such a perspective would promote more robust possibilities for graduate student WPAs as they balance their overlapping responsibilities to us, to the discipline, and to their writing program.

In a postmodern world driven by economies of speed and expansion, many feel challenged by the pace at which conventional anchors of authority have faded. Postmodern theory is a source of concern for those who associate it with unending fragmentation and nihilism—the loss of any truth and certainty, the loss of any version of an ethical self. Cast in this light, postmodern approaches to authority encourage a relativistic stance in which a WPA might accept “Go with the flow” as a mantra for administrative (non)action. From such a perspective, the WPA becomes defined as a formless shape shifter, operating opportunistically, increasing his or her authority by following the flow of power within a campus setting. Yet, the postmodern

belief in the provisional and positional nature of disciplinary authority can offer great promise. Its enticements lay in its opening of possibilities for making new arrangements and for finding new avenues to answer ongoing practical and epistemological challenges.

What the positive face of postmodern ethics supplies is an approach to power that accounts for multiple possibilities for personal agency that are grounded by our connection (read responsibility) to others. It defines power as existing within complex sets of social relations and as a result of individual interactions that construct a field of possibilities for action. Social theorists like Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, and Emmanuel Levinas among others have argued that power circulates as people interact, and it is articulated on a continual basis through the actions of individuals. These theorists point out that the exercise of power is dependent on people who have a say, not on people being mindlessly led on way or another, floating with the current and grabbing a piece of the action when it comes along. As Foucault writes:

A power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements [. . .] that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. (220)

Within this field, individuals, working together, exert agency—a “permanent provocation” of wills (222)—to identify questions, listen and respond, and negotiate their actions within a frame of possibilities. When we base our interactions on this ethic of responsibility, we accept Levinas’s argument that it’s our capacity to be responsible for others that establishes our subjectivity: “the proximity of the Other is presented as the fact that the Other is not simply close to me in space, or close like a parent, but he [sic] approaches me essentially insofar as I feel myself—insofar as I am—responsible for him” (96). This perspective offers WPAs an alternative to WPA-centric approaches to administration because, while assuming a dynamic understanding of how power circulates, it maintains that individuals’ actions are governed neither by preset rules nor by the capricious whims of an institution. Instead, our actions are motivated by our connection to and sense of responsibility for others.

Such an approach to administration would manifest itself in a number of ways. For example, this view demands that WPAs recognize that power/knowledge is not a fixed possession they can control and hand down to the teaching staff via printed sets of policies or via a magistrate, the graduate stu-

dent WPA. Faculty WPAs cannot be viewed as lone authorities, even though pressures from institutional forces often position them as such. Those guided by a postmodern ethics of action resist urges to act unilaterally; instead they listen to graduate student WPAs and negotiate shared actions in light of the interests and needs of those involved. In describing how this postmodern ethics might reshape teachers' roles in computer classrooms, Marilyn Cooper describes what this stance involves: "Sharing power is not a matter of giving up something you have but rather of deciding what you want to do in any given situation and being conscious of taking responsibility for how what you do affects others" (149). This stance replaces the popular notion, then, that administration is a matter of control with a more productive view that it is a matter of collective action. In the process, it rewrites the script between WPAs and graduate student assistants, reshaping the manner in which they work together and define each others' roles.

Accordingly, by permitting a more responsive, even inventive, relationship to flourish between faculty and graduate student WPAs, our programs become open to benefiting from the wisdom graduate student WPAs can offer. By inhabiting the liminal, interstitial space somewhere between faculty status and student status, graduate student WPAs are capable of providing considerable insight into reaches of the program where WPAs do not/can not tread. This places graduate student WPAs (more than) knee-deep inside writing programs—a position that privileges them with the most up-to-date information on the daily questions and concerns among a department's entire teaching cadre. Instead of using their special positioning to perpetuate a WPA-centric model of administration—one that defines graduate student WPAs as instruments of surveillance—faculty and student administrators can work together more productively by reframing their roles and responsibilities in ways that encourage collective action and dynamic response. In the space remaining, let me provide three brief illustrations of how such an ethic of action can reshape the roles and responsibilities of graduate student WPAs.

One example of how some writing programs have committed to this stance is the growing practice of employing a graduate student as a kind of ombudsperson. In such a position, a graduate student works not as a magistrate so much as a negotiator by investigating undergraduates' and TAs' concerns from as many angles as possible and, in turn, assisting all parties in coming to agreement on an issue through discussion and compromise. Such a complex position is probably most successfully held by graduate students precisely because they inhabit the interstitial space between TA and faculty WPA. This kind of role expands the duties and experiences of graduate students far beyond the more limiting liaison or administrative assistant

job-types, though it combines aspects of both. In fact, the benefit of this kind of role for graduate student WPAs is multi-directional: By using their own insider knowledge and perspectives as they work and socialize with their peers, the graduate student WPA is in a position to listen, advise, and mentor. Simultaneously, they are also in a position to work with composition faculty to shape the program's pedagogy, thus operating as advocates for teaching staff in administrative arenas. Such a role illustrates how some WPAs have or are redefining both their own roles and the roles of graduate student assistants in ways that are sensitive to the shifting dynamics of knowledge and authority within writing programs.

Beyond (or perhaps as a result of) their taking on roles like an ombuds-person, graduate students WPAs need to be re-positioned more centrally regarding a range of decision-making activities within writing programs. In recent years, many programs have made this move, by creating and using a number of committees—made up of graduate students and part-time instructors as well as full-time faculty—to decentralize decision-making authority. Such committees may undertake responsibilities ranging from making textbook decisions to reviewing and/or drafting policies to organizing peer mentoring. When these committees include graduate students as fully integrated members and not nominally and when they do more than make recommendations to the faculty WPA, writing programs not only shift the roles of graduate student WPAs. They also demonstrate that they value collective action over a hierarchy of control.

Here are two examples of how such a rethinking of administrative structures can bring unlooked-for yet substantial productive change to a writing program. First, in response to widespread dissatisfaction among the teaching staff at one institution regarding the system of peer evaluation, the graduate student WPA formed an ad-hoc committee consisting of other TAs and part-time instructors. In one semester that committee interviewed the teaching staff to learn where problems existed and what the teaching community wanted out of its peer evaluation experience. In response to what they learned, they devised a wholly new method of peer evaluation of teaching, turning what had been a fairly cut-and-dried procedure (a class visitation followed by filing a written evaluation) into a process that still included a formal review but that was preceded by a semester of more sustained interaction or mentoring between the teacher and the peer reviewer. The new procedure was presented by the committee to the teachers and the faculty WPA and approved by the staff as a whole before it was implemented. A second example: At a different institution, a small group of graduate students who had had writing program assistantships developed a major curricular initiative regarding one of the general education course requirements for

undergraduates. These graduate students transformed a professional communication course by proposing, creating, and running it as a community-service learning experience. This committee of self-selected graduate students worked with local non-profit and government agencies, and they redesigned the course in order to expose undergraduates to the rhetorical complexities of producing writing for a workplace audience with a range of needs. To make this project happen, they applied for and received both university and external funding, maintained contacts with area agencies, redesigned all the course materials and assignments, and supervised fellow teaching assistants. Perhaps most significantly, years after their inception, both of the programmatic initiatives mentioned here are on-going today.

Although these brief descriptions leave many details unmentioned, these two very different initiatives reveal a common conclusion: When faculty WPAs no longer act as the only source of authority, when graduate students are shifted out of the magistrate mindset characterizing too much of their work, and when we instead work more reflectively with the range of stakeholders within a program, we promote the possibility for longer-reaching and more productive change in our programs. Change can be small or far-reaching, and graduate student assistants, being positioned as they are, typically find themselves involved in a range of activities necessary for the success of most changes, whether these changes are planned by WPAs or, as in the case of the previous examples, whether they transpire in response to unlooked-for concerns or interests among the TAs or others. In either case, graduate students' involvement isn't only necessary but also frequently refines and transforms the changes being sought or executed. Certainly this is true in the previous examples. While the WPAs involved could have reacted to the same stimuli that provoked the graduate students to act, it is highly doubtful that they could have developed such rich changes or initiatives that so well met the interests and needs of the other stakeholders involved, and ultimately of the program as a whole.

CONCLUSION

As I said earlier, where issues of authority and power intersect there are no black and white solutions. Who knows this better than WPAs? We often navigate a realm of compromise where we are asked to accept less-than-ideal circumstances and already blurred authority. In the face of such conditions we have a choice: Continue maintaining hierarchical administrative structures in an effort to hold onto authority—an option that I believe leads to stagnation in both individual programs and broader research efforts—or reconceive administrative structures in order to understand authority as par-

tial, situated, and continually negotiated. Such a view of authority, rather than spreading a bleak postmodern prospect of paralysis, is predicated on an ethics of action whereby people's identity and authority are based in their sense of connection to and responsibility for others. A key step in replacing hierarchical practices with this approach lies in rethinking the roles and responsibilities graduate students undertake in writing program administration, and this essay offers a starting point for such a task. Although, the liaison, administrative assistant, and co-policymaker job-types will persist, a postmodern ethics of action allows us to conceptualize these roles for graduate students in ways that are sensitive to shifting dynamics of power. This will allow us to reap the resulting benefits of collective action.

NOTE

¹ My research for this essay took place over a number of years, beginning in 1995 and continuing until the fall of 2000. As I said, the earliest foundation for this project is a national survey I conducted in 1995 of 36 graduate programs, which sought information regarding TA education programs and curricula (see "Training the Workforce"). In the course of conducting that survey and the series of interviews with WPAs that followed, I developed detailed descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of graduate students acting as WPAs. This was the starting point of this project. I also made contacts with about a dozen graduate students from a range of programs. Between the years 1996 and 2000, I stayed in touch with these graduate students, seeing them at conferences and using email for open-ended conversations near the end of each semester. This informal approach enabled a rich dialogue to develop while protecting the anonymity of the students and the programs for which they worked.

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Handling Curricular Resources: An Examination of Two Teachers' Tactical Appropriation of First-Year Composition Curricula

Mary Juzwick

Often the word “implementation” is used in grant and research reports to describe how written curriculum gets put into practice (e.g., Brickman, Neill). For college and university writing programs, however, “implementation” suggests a focus on administrative mandates, rather than on workaday teacher practices and emerging understandings and struggles that occur in classrooms. This article examines these processes in alternative terms, thus providing a more useful framework for understanding how teachers in large programs interact with official curricula and navigate the task of teaching with materials and conceptual systems that are new to them. Rather than exploring compliance (which many educational policies and curriculum designs seem to promote), this article explores the creative resistance that, in my ten years of teaching in elementary, middle, secondary, and university contexts, has been present at scenes of teaching at all levels.

In what follows, I specifically consider what college writing instructors take from a “standard” curriculum, and what they make of these official, unifying texts and teaching tools as they translate them into the particularities of their own practices of teaching writing. I present a case study of two teachers taking up a new college composition curriculum and the resources it availed. The analysis is guided by the following questions: A) How do these teachers tactically appropriate curriculum? B) What conflicts are involved in such processes of appropriation? and C) What implications for standard curricula and writing program administration are suggested by these processes?

I pursue these questions through a comparative case study that documents how two teachers navigated a curricular model in the first-year composition program at a large university during its first year of implementation.

Analyzing both the curriculum and the reported experiences of individual teachers through the theoretical framework of cultural models (Gee, Holland), I trace the tactical appropriation of this curricular model by these teachers. In the analysis, I unpack the complexity of the conflicts that arose as the teachers interacted with the curriculum. Based on this exploration, I suggest a more dialogic approach to teacher training and curriculum development. Such an approach advocates treating the often conflicting (with the curriculum) cultural models of teachers as an important resource for program growth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand teachers' tactical appropriation of curriculum, I turn to the writing of Michel de Certeau. De Certeau was interested in how workers carve out spaces of agency, freedom, and solidarity—a kind of “harmless” resistance—within bureaucratic systems that they do not have the power to change. In analyzing these processes, de Certeau focuses on the rhetorical practices of everyday life in which workers artfully resist these systems of unequal power relations, rather than becoming unthinking dupes who are “disciplined” by such systems. Specifically, de Certeau theorizes the everyday rhetorical practices of “creative resistance” by workers through his distinction between “tactics” and “strategies.”

For de Certeau, the term tactics describes the ways that individuals, through language, resist the fixation of the linguistic systems in which they find themselves. Tactics are the heterogeneous linguistic traverses by which individuals circulate freely within the language of the system. Embodied in the tactic is the notion of putting to one's own use the language of the strong and the powerful, the language of the mandate. In contrast, “strategies” represent the language of the system, “the calculation or manipulation of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution [and I would add, a university writing program]) can be isolated” and can assume a borderline for conceptualizing relations with exterior totalities that are distinct from it (de Certeau 35-36).

For WPAs and curriculum designers at all levels, this distinction is useful, because it accounts for the institutional demand for standardization that teachers must work within, while also accounting for individual creativity and the change that can flow from individual teachers to the program level. Some teachers may simply “comply” with the “strategies” of a standard syllabus or curriculum, coming to identify and affiliate with the goals, language, and methods of a curricular system in which they must operate. According

to De Certeau, much of Foucault's work examines such "disciplining" processes. However, the vantage point of "tactics" opens up an investigation of the various means by which instructors resist such "strategic" systems. De Certeau provides a vision for considering how program administrators might instead cultivate teachers' ways of using curricular resources: "a *way of using* imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the [. . .] law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic legitimations. A practice of [using] the order constructed by others [. . .] creates at least a certain play in that order, a space for maneuvers of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference" (18). Program administrators may benefit from recognizing how teachers *use* a standard curriculum in de Certeau's sense: they manipulate and intonate it with particular positions and experiences, yet also face restrictions in this play, through the administrative mandates for the program. Like teachers, program administrators are likely to become exasperated by instructors who beg, "Please just tell me the precise and minimum tasks I need to do for a continued appointment offer, and I'll do it!"

Within this de Certeauian framing, I investigate the dimensions of this creative resistance, what I call "tactical appropriation" in response to a new curriculum. In de Certeau's terms, if the writing curriculum on paper and in theory—the documentation of the will of the program for those who must work within it—offers a kind of strategic mandate, then teachers' "ways of using" it can usefully be understood as tactical appropriation.

METHOD

A Case Study Approach to the Study of Tactical Appropriation

This inquiry draws upon a case study conducted in a first-year composition program. From my position within the program, outlined below, I was able to draw on "official" data that I generated, while also being informed by my everyday experiences and interactions. I sought to learn what such an approach makes available: a) a grounding of "observations and concepts" in "natural settings studied at close hand," b) a more holistic picture of "complex social network and of complexes of social action and social meanings," and c) "the dimensions of time and history" that allow for examination of "continuity and change in lifeworld patterns" (Sjoberg et al., 6-7). Furthermore, I conducted this study to serve an intrinsic (for further program reform) as well as an extrinsic function, whereby I sought more general insights about teacher training and learning processes (see Stake 439). Although this study was initially structured as a collective case study of a small group of individuals within the program, I began, over the course of the project, to focus on the experiences of two participants as a comparative case of teachers' tactical

maneuvers in appropriating curricular resources. This inductive approach follows Ragin's suggestion that researchers ought not be too sure about what research subjects are a case of, in the beginning phases of a study, lest rigid preconceptions hamper investigation (6). In what follows, I describe the context in which this case study was conducted, the participants in the study, and finally the methods of data collection and analysis.

Research Context

Midwest University (MU) is reasonably typical in the size and scope of its first-year composition requirement, which made it a compelling site for this research.¹ A research-extensive Doctoral 1 university, according to the Carnegie classification system, MU enrolled 41,219 students campus-wide at the time of this study. Of that population, 11,994 were graduate and professional students, and 28,476 undergraduates. Writing 101 (W101), the first-year composition course in the English department, was designated within the university as a Verbal Communication I (VCI) course, meaning it fulfilled the first of two requirements in the university's general education program in communication. Also met by taking courses in the communication arts, engineering, and agricultural journalism departments, this undergraduate requirement aimed to develop student competencies in writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Approximately 900 students fulfilled the VCI requirement by completing W101 each semester. The program typically offered between 45 and 50 sections of W101, taught by instructors who were graduate students and faculty assistants, many from departments outside English.

While the W101 program had for some time focused on teaching argument, the program underwent an important shift during the time of this study. While previously, teachers were commissioned to design their own syllabi, provided by the program with examples and resources to do so, the new program reforms aimed to unify and regulate the teaching of argument. One impetus in making these changes was a university-wide VCI assessment that loomed ahead, and another was a sense on the program director's part that not all teachers had a firm grasp on teaching argument. It was reasoned that a standardized syllabus for new teachers would allow a more focused method of teacher training, a process which also underwent significant changes. All new instructors were required to adopt this model syllabus during their first semester of teaching, and all participated in a colloquium to support this requirement. Because of the timing of this reform effort, the W101 program provided an ideal case for pursuing the questions of tactical appropriation in curriculum and instruction that are investigated in this essay.

Participants

After teaching W101 for two semesters, I was hired to serve as assistant director of the program during the first year of these new curriculum reforms. My administrative work involved visiting classes and providing feedback about teaching, working with an administrative team in the late spring and early summer to develop the curriculum, compiling instructor resources, co-leading a semester-long colloquium for new instructors, and organizing and leading staff meetings for returning instructors. As a graduate student collaborating with the director to develop the curriculum and collaborating with fellow graduate students in putting it into action, my position provided an “insider” vantage point for investigating how W101 instructors took up this new model.

At the beginning of the semester, volunteers were solicited to participate in the study, and I limit this analysis to two of the three teachers who volunteered and participated in order to carefully consider individual particularities, as well as multiple experiences, in interacting with the curriculum. The two teachers upon whom I focus here provide a generative comparison that illuminate the range of processes and conflicts that were involved in the tactics of curriculum appropriation. Let me provide a brief introductory sketch of these teachers.

Suzanna Roselli, a white woman in her late twenties, was a brand new teacher pursuing a master’s degree in History of Science. Having earned an MA in History at another university, this master’s work was the first step in her plan to complete a PhD in History of Science at MU. Taking courses, preparing conference papers, and working on her master’s thesis were significant themes in conversations with Suzanna. She often reported frustration that she was spending more time than twenty hours each week (the appointment level, according to the teaching contract) preparing and grading for her W101 course, which cut significantly and problematically into time for her own work.

Steve Holland had taken his PhD in Renaissance literature at MU some time ago, and gave one the impression of being an “insider” in the department. For example, he often referred to the broader institutional and historical context in which W101 was located and the university goals he saw his work, and the program, fulfilling. A youthful white man who seemed to enjoy discussions about teaching, he often told illustrative teaching tales, many of them from his four years of work as a tenure-track professor in a Southern community college, a job he left because of a career move by his wife.

Data Generation Methods

The data that were considered come from two different sources: first, curricular materials and secondly, interviews and observations of what instructors made of those materials. Throughout the semester, I collected all curricular materials, including a copy of the instructor handbook (which contained the new model syllabus), supporting handouts supplementing the syllabus, and finally source texts of the syllabus (e.g., Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*). While these were the primary data in examining the curriculum, secondary data included my informal conversations and my involvement with the curriculum development. These materials allowed me to examine the "strategic" mandates with which these instructors interacted.

In order to understand the instructors' perspectives on this new syllabus and to find out what they did and made with these curricular "strategies," I conducted two interviews with each instructor, one during the first month of the semester, and one in the final month of the semester. While I had a set of questions that were asked of both Suzanna and Steve, the discussions developed recursively, and the orders of the questions varied. I tape-recorded and wrote field notes during each interview. I also collected copies of each instructor's particular syllabus and essay assignments, along with a sampling of assignments, lessons, and other written communication. I additionally conducted two classroom observations of each instructor and recorded these through field notes.

Together, these two bodies of data—curricular materials and the instructional responses to these materials—allowed me to contrastively consider how instructors appropriated the curriculum materials, what conflicts arose in these processes, and what implications might follow for curriculum development and teacher training procedures.

Mechanism and Procedures for Analysis

Drawing from sociocultural methods of analyzing discourse in educational and other contexts (Gee, Holland), I examined this case in light of the cultural models that could explain the motivations and practices of curriculum designers as well as individual teachers as they interacted with curriculum. Holland defines cultural models as "shared, conventional ideas about how the world works that individuals learn by talking and acting with their fellows" (86). Gee further elaborates this definition when he explains that, "a cultural model is usually a totally or partially unconscious explanatory theory or 'storyline' connected to a word—bits and pieces of which are distributed across different people in a social group" (44). This storyline, according

to Holland, involves agents who are engaged in a limited range of acts or state changes, which are motivated by a particular set of forces. This schematization parallels Burke's pentad, devised also to describe human motivation in terms of the relationships among agent, act, scene, agency, and purpose. In the analysis, I followed these definitions, assuming that cultural models are schemas for selecting, reflecting, and deflecting reality that develop in the ambiguous mediation between individuals and various cultural worlds in which they participate.

This construct of cultural models allowed me to probe these data in order not merely to identify the processes of tactical appropriation that I sought to understand, but more importantly to explore individual motivation on the part of instructors as they appropriated curricular materials for their own teaching purposes. A cultural model approach further enabled investigation of how these teachers tacitly made sense of what they were doing as they taught writing and how they navigated the conflict between a foreign cultural model for teaching writing (posed by the model syllabus) and their own previous experiences and taken-for-granted assumptions about writing and teaching. In the following section, I have focused my presentation of findings on the concept of "grounding" and the Toulmin model for several reasons. Examining one slice of the curriculum allows for a deeper comparison, and I choose this particular conceptual framework because it was crucial to the first essay assignment, it was a required teaching method, and in my view it was the element of the syllabus with which instructors most struggled. Because it was an object of particularly intense struggle, grounding offered a particularly useful focus for examining the conflicts involved as teachers appropriate a new curriculum into their teaching.

The analysis occurred in two parts. First, I examined the new curriculum, analyzing the strategic cultural model which informed this official document and its design. Second, I analyzed the tactics through which Suzanna and Steve each interacted with this strategic mandate, understanding this interaction in terms of conflicting cultural models. At both levels (both strategic and tactical), I first identified the content, activities, and themes. I next identified key words and metaphors, analytical work that I used to construct a hypothesis of the cultural models that would most persuasively explain the *why* of this tactical appropriation. Therefore, not only were the cultural models of Suzanna and Steve contrasted, but each of these were in turn compared to the cultural model underlying the curriculum for a better understanding of the appropriations that were involved.

FINDINGS

The First Unit of the Model Syllabus: A Rhetorical Curriculum Employing the Toulmin Model

The new W101 curriculum, called the “model syllabus” by teachers and administrators, took Aristotelian rhetoric as its point of departure and laid out a rhetorical system for analyzing and inventing arguments. The curriculum offered a terminology for teaching argument, a process approach to composing (multiple drafts of all papers were required), and genre conventions like summary, outline, bibliography, and essay. The syllabus required instructors to choose the course content (a debate they believed would interest their students and would effectively illustrate the intricacies of argument) and to follow a sequence of assignments designed to help students analyze and write argumentative essays.

In the first unit, students were assigned to argue from formal analysis of popular sources. In the second unit, students moved on to argue using scholarly sources and to begin developing their own research projects. In the third unit, the syllabus mandated argument using scholarly sources that students had discovered, and a critical examination of the consequences of argument. This final unit was designed to engage students in critical reflection that would lead to an understanding of the political and ethical consequences of academic language use, and an increased sense of responsibility for what their language practices in and out of the university might mean (the goal of “ethical responsibility” was a key theme in discussions with the program director). Instructors were required to develop this critical component, and the syllabus grew increasingly less directive as it progressed. Thus teachers had the greatest amount of choice and flexibility in designing and teaching the third unit, and the least in designing and teaching the first, which is the focus of the following presentation.

The Toulmin model of argument was the central terminology to be taught in the first unit of the course. This familiar model isolates the data and claims of arguments and spatially represents the relationship between the two. Supporting this logical move from data to claim are warrants and backing, also spatially represented. Backing, by Toulmin’s definition, exists in relationship to warrants, or the “general, hypothetical [field-independent] statements, which can act as bridges, and authorize the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us” (98). According to Toulmin, the backing of an argument consists of the field-dependent assurances “standing behind our warrants” (103). In this first unit of the curriculum, the term

“grounding,” was given to represent Toulmin’s idea of “backing” (due to the reportedly popular use and abuse of the phrase “*backing up your argument*”). The term was introduced in the second week, as a means for analyzing the texts introduced in that unit. Grounding was a central focus of the first essay assignment, which asked students to write a proposal (including an argumentative rationale) for investigating a piece of grounding that underlay the opposing arguments within the first unit’s debate.

This model insisted that instructors use formal textual analysis, and was less emphatic about their approaches to the developmental processes of individual writers (beyond requiring at least two drafts of papers). This is clear in the nature of the already-mentioned culminating assignment of the first unit, which depended heavily on the concept of “grounding.” In this critical textual analysis, instructors were to select then-current debates, for example that between evolutionists and creationists (Suzanna’s topic). Thus students were presumed to become alternatively readers of the debate, analysts of the debate, and critics proposing a scholarly course of action in order to develop an informed position within the debate.

The cultural model of teaching writing supporting this model syllabus is a neo-Marxist socio-critical approach to texts and writing that continues to be prevalent in composition studies, critical pedagogy, literary studies, and literacy education. As the ultimate ethical goal of the third unit suggests (i.e., investigating the consequences of writing), the model syllabus treated writing as relationally and often problematically situated in sociopolitical contexts. Unlike first-year writing curricula that begin with personal experiences of students or with discipline-specific academic debates, this model began with civic debates—highlighting the political function of reading and writing and de-emphasizing the personal and expressive aspects of writing. As it downplayed the ways that argumentative language use is shaped by individual thoughts and purposes, this curriculum focused more on how language could position and “discipline” its users in power-full and sometimes troubling social systems and practices. The Toulmin method was seen by curriculum designers as a means by which students could begin to engage in such textual deconstruction.

Instructors’ Appropriation of This Model

Suzanna: Writing as Structural. Suzanna’s interaction with Toulmin and with the concept of grounding occurred in the context of her course topic of science and religion: she began the course with readings about a then-current debate in Kansas, about teaching evolution and creation in the schools. It also occurred in the context of her own scientific professional knowledge:

as she explains, “Stephen Toulmin, to me, is someone who writes about time. And things like the *Fabric of Time*. Not about argument.” Her initial reaction to this model was skeptical:

I do think the Toulmin model is, um, a little intimidating at first, . . . I think it’s also a very self-conscious way of reading. I think it’s something we all do, and we all do it intuitively. I think to suddenly have to label the parts of the argument, like to go through and to read and to write CLAIM in the margin and then write DATA afterward, and then to write WARRANT, to me, it’s, to me, it’s exactly why when I entered the university as an English major, I quickly flipped to history. (Interview I)

Although Suzanna did not talk explicitly about “grounding” here, she expresses not only personal distaste, but also skepticism about how helpful these concepts could be for teaching students to read critically. In her view, these conceptual frameworks functioned to produce unproductive labor and complication. Nevertheless, Suzanna acknowledged, “I am grateful to have it, otherwise I would have been completely on my own.” The problems she articulated did not go away, however, and she later became even more frustrated with using the Toulmin model, and the concept of grounding particularly, to focus her teaching of W101.

In the second unit, Suzanna abandoned the timeline and logic of the curriculum (including the Toulmin concept of grounding), deciding instead to use the movie *The Matrix* to talk about issues of contemporary science and society. She explains her reasons for this choice:

This grounding thing isn’t working—my “debatable issue,” which is evolution v. creation, has its roots in 19th-century natural philosophers and theologians . . . I don’t know how best to make long passages of Darwin clear without simply relying on repetition. . . . The syllabus . . . doesn’t allow enough time for the sort of real digging-in we’d have to do for it all to make sense. They’re bored and frustrated and resistant; I’m frustrated because I have to drag them through it, and we’re all miserable. So I’ve ditched the remaining unit two reading and we’re starting over. (Email)

She reorganized her class into a series of student-led discussions about contemporary scientific debates and into individual student research projects. By the end of the course, she reported that opening up the class to a parallel series of debates, led by students, had turned her class into a workable scenario.

Suzanna's frustrations with Toulmin and with grounding make sense if understood in terms of her alignment with a cultural model that positioned writing as a structural vessel to contain and transport ideas. This is evident when Suzanna says of nineteenth-century science writing, "you have to read a lot of it before the point becomes apparent and before the argumentative techniques start to explain themselves" (email correspondence). Such a view of argumentative techniques as self-explanatory structures that function to contain ideas can also be seen in Suzanna's interpretation of the portability the curriculum offers, if students try to use these Toulmin terms in other academic contexts: "it's still the same structure. I mean you have to take the background, you have to take the idea that you think is the right one and support it and convince me" (Interview 1). Suzanna stressed how she believed her task was to equip her students with the structures of writing, for example to "deconstruct introductions and talk about what's effective and what's not." Yet she felt under prepared for this task, and she was dissatisfied with the degree to which the model syllabus helped her to do this for her students. Certainly the rhetorical concept of grounding, with its emphasis on fields where arguments occur, did not fit into her model of writing as structure.

This model suggests a reading of the syllabus that highlighted the structural dimensions of the course (as evidenced above) and an interpretation of the Toulmin model as a labeling of objective, naturally occurring forms, rather than as a generative principle to describe a system of rhetorical relationships and to thereby contextualize language in social and political processes. To put it rather simply, Suzanna treated grounding, and indeed writing, more as *noun* than verb.

Since Suzanna had no prior teaching experience (of writing or any other discipline), what she had to go on were her experiences in W101 teacher training and as a writer in the discipline of history and science. She framed her position as an outsider in relation to the Toulmin model particularly:

The Toulmin model is all fine and dandy, but it would have been infinitely more helpful to have some specific guidance on How To Build A Syllabus. I've been looking at some of the other 100 syllabi; my own is pathetic in comparison, given that it never occurred to me that perhaps it would be a good idea to discuss things like, oh, *writing*. As a historian, I don't spend my class time talking about things like Your Introductions and You, so my syllabus lacks such discussions. (Email)

This cultural model of writing as a transparent vessel conflicted with the official model of the curriculum, and led Suzanna to frustration about her lack of “insider” knowledge when it came to teaching writing. Yet she identified herself as an increasingly competent agent within her structural model of academic writing, as amply demonstrated by her decision to change the course entirely and to focus more in the third unit on the “nuts and bolts” of writing.

Suzanna’s tactical appropriation of the model syllabus led her to abandon it altogether, a high level of resistance that resulted in her not teaching in the W101 program after that semester. Some of the difficulties that she faced, which led to this mutiny, were a) her own expertise (which she perceived to be much different than students’ interests), b) her focus on her need for a “practical” writing pedagogy, rather than obfuscating theories, c) a lack of meta-awareness of her own language use, and d) little confidence in the value of close rhetorical analysis for her students. These last three points in particular represent the conflict between her own cultural model of writing and that of the syllabus.

Steve: Writing as Empowering Process. Contrasting with Suzanna’s second-unit struggle to pull first-year college students through nineteenth-century science writing in a very short period of time, Steve’s choice of a course topic reflected his oft-articulated concern not to waste students’ time by having them write about arcane literature bearing little relevance to their lives. The topic of his section was a then-unfolding nearby scandal, which involved a Midwestern shoe store being exposed by the NCAA for giving college athletes discounts. From this unit-one debate about the roles and responsibilities of college athletes and their relationship to NCAA, his class moved into a second-unit examination of the purpose and role of higher education, reading Paulo Freire, Miles Horton, and more local documents about higher education at MU. Finally in the third unit, his students worked on various projects relating to campus alcohol issues, which Steve described as a welcome shift from the initial debate.

Steve’s engagement with grounding was, in some respects, parallel to Suzanna’s. For example he explained in the first interview that he was noticing a “formulaic problem. Students are filing things into slots, rather than discovering what they have to say” [field notes]. He viewed himself as a newcomer to Toulmin-style analysis: “I don’t feel like I’m in control as much. . . I don’t necessarily feel like I have a handle yet, um, on that. . . this is new to me. Because the teaching of the formal argument analysis thing isn’t something I ever emphasized a lot” (Interview 1). In some respects, then, the Toulmin apparatus marginalized Steve from his past teaching experience.

Unlike Suzanna, however, he acknowledged that this was a logical conceptual framework for teaching the students at MU, while it wouldn't have been for teaching students at the community college where he formerly taught. Because of this experience, Steve appeared willing enough to give this new model a try, and he made sense of it through his understanding of what other professors across the university might expect students to do:

This is going to respond to concerns that our students don't know how to read. A professor from another area says, our students don't know how to read. Well, they've got a pretty good sense now of how to approach a text. Um, how to put a text into conversation with another text. How to read critically. Essentially, that's what I see as this argument analysis. And what that's doing [the Toulmin model] is giving students a vocabulary to read critically and some framework for reading critically. (Interview 2)

Even though new and unfamiliar, Steve placed this approach to teaching argument within what he already knew about the expectations of an undergraduate university education.

Furthermore, he connected the mechanics of the Toulmin model with what he already did and prioritized as a writing teacher. He used the example of paragraphs:

I've used that [the Toulmin model] to get into a discussion about paragraphs. Because that's the one thing I'm just, I've always been, my hobby horse. Write good paragraphs. Because, if you're writing good paragraphs, the other things will come together. And, but using that idea of claim, evidence, warrant, in terms of, Look, this is what your paragraph is doing anyway. You're making a claim, you're giving evidence, you're explaining the relationships between them. Um, which is, that's not what this is supposed to be doing, but I've found it useful, because they have that vocabulary, to use those concepts. (Interview 2)

This way of appropriating the curriculum into what he already knew and did as a writing teacher is a crucial difference between Steve and Suzanna. Suzanna simply did not have the experience teaching writing to develop such subtle strategies of resisting and artfully re-shaping the meaning of the curriculum for her own purposes. When Steve said, "that's not what this [the Toulmin model] is supposed to be doing, but I've found it useful," he displayed a tactical "way of using" that effectively translated the written curricular model into his own teaching values and methods.

According to Steve's pragmatic cultural model, teaching writing was an instrumental process that empowers individuals who do it. Writing, according to Steve's model, was a verb rather than a noun. He was obviously indebted to process theories of composition, and in fact he acknowledged, "whatever theory I have about teaching has been [from] reading Peter Elbow and John Bean." For example, he repeatedly discussed how students need to write a lot—"the more the merrier"—in order to develop the habits of writers. Both times I visited his class, Steve began with ten-minute freewriting sessions. Moreover, he required that students keep a journal with reflective entries about each class period.

An important element of Steve's empowering process model was the economic reward that writing could bring. For example, he shared an explanation (about proposal-writing) that he provided for his students:

If you're trying to take an independent study in . . . biology, you're not just going to have supplies given to you. You're going to have to write to . . . somebody on campus. And say . . . I want \$80 so I can buy dead frogs. And you're going to have to explain what you're going to do and why and why you're going to be successful in order to get that. They'll probably give it to you, but, this is the kind of thing that people in academic settings do. (Interview 1)

Perhaps explained, at least in part, by his background in accounting (his pre-graduate school career), Steve understood writing in instrumentalist economic terms: he frequently referred to students "investing" and "buying in" to what they are learning in the writing class, and more importantly to their own writing. Steve indexed writing according to its use value: students should not be wasting their time writing in his class; rather they should be capitalizing on time for personal gain. Writing often would lead to writing well, according to Steve, and these efforts would "pay off" for students in the near future. Where Suzanna was developing a cultural model of teaching writing "on the fly" as a brand-new teacher of writing, Steve's understanding was well-formulated and tried-in-practice.

DISCUSSION

Clearly enough, the tactics through which Steve appropriated the syllabus and the cultural model of writing to which he aligned himself eased his uptake of the curricular model considerably more than did Suzanna's appropriations and cultural model. He tactically interacted with the newness of the curricular model so as to capitalize on his expertise within the system of

another model, building on prior knowledge-in-action gained from working as an accountant, teaching business writing at a community college, reading Peter Elbow, being an English PhD with an institutional understanding of MU, and so on. As can be seen with the example of paragraphs, he identifies himself as an agent who can tactically manipulate the directives of the syllabus for his own purposes and solve problems accordingly. This hybridity between syllabus and experience created a sort of tactical interactional space between the model syllabus and Steve's prior experience and understandings. This space could develop precisely because Steve did not use Toulmin analysis to do "what the model was supposed to be doing"; instead he positioned grounding, and formal analysis, within his own teaching intentions and practices. Suzanna, on the other hand, grew frustrated and overwhelmed because she did not have a store of prior experience with which to "play."

This comparative analysis illuminates some different levels of conflict that may occur as instructors appropriate curriculum to develop their own courses: at times (as with Steve), this conflict can be fruitful, while at other times (as with Suzanna) less so. While there did not appear to be conflict on the surface for Steve, as was more obvious with Suzanna, the analysis of the cultural model that informed his teaching tactics suggests otherwise. Steve successfully embedded parts of the official curriculum, without fully adopting the socio-critical cultural model of teaching writing. His instrumentalist view of "writing as an individual process to get ahead" did not accord with the more sociopolitical and critical model of writing underlying the curriculum. Thus Steve managed to pull off the *what* and the *how* of the syllabus in his process of appropriation; yet the *why*—firmly grounded in his prior cultural model—remained at odds with the curriculum. This tactical embedding reveals a very subtle—and I would even suggest, desirable—kind of resistance to the curricular model.

Suzanna's resistance was more overt, and she frankly and openly critiqued the model syllabus and all the problems it had created for her as a beginning teacher. As she struggled to grasp the *what* and the *how* of the syllabus, the *why*—her structural understanding of teaching writing—did not empower her to be someone who could maneuver and work with the available means for teaching W101 that were offered in the model syllabus. While Steve also did not passively accept the strategic vision for W101, his resistance was much more subtle and fruitful for his teaching and for program growth. He incorporated the new terminology into his pre-existing teaching framework and awaited persuasion about the underlying cultural model. These two levels of conflict between the strategic curriculum and the tactics of teachers suggest an important direction for the study of writing curriculum and pedagogy.

Russell K. Durst has begun to study the role of conflict in first-year composition programs, though he locates conflicts between students and teachers, rather than between teachers and administrative mandates, as discussed here. Durst notes that, like Steve, most of the students in the program he studied take an instrumental view of writing as economically empowering. Writing, to them, is a technology that will make their lives easier. In holding this model, Durst explains, these students tap into a deep vein of American individualism that is not likely to be excised by a semester of freshman composition—despite the rhetoric of critical pedagogy (such as that presumed in the model syllabus). Yet the composition instructors that Durst studied hold a social view of writing (such as that of the W101 program) and want to stress the complexity of critical literacy, available through such practices as self-reflection, multi-perspectival thinking, explicit consideration of ideology, and social and political equity (2). There is a conflict, then, between the pragmatic motivations of students and the critical and theoretical motivations of composition instructors.

At MU, my findings suggest, such conflicts are also evident between program curriculum (and the administration that designs, revises, and trains instructors to use it) and the instructors who teach in the program.² I have framed this conflict in de Certeauian terms, as the difference between the strategies of bureaucratic power, and the tactics of individuals within such systems. This terminology, as well as the findings of this case study considered in these terms, may prove useful for further study of the struggles that occur between teachers and administrators/official program curriculum in first-year composition programs.

Implications for Teacher Training and Curriculum Development

In closing, I would like to sketch out how this study of two teachers tactically resisting a new curriculum can offer instructive suggestions for training teachers and developing curriculum.

Teacher Training. In light of the analysis, I advocate a teacher training program that carries the critical project described by Durst into teacher training practices. Durst proposes a composition pedagogy built on “reflective instrumentalism,” an approach that “takes advantage of the motivation students bring to their areas of specialization, provides students with useful knowledge, and engages students in critical scrutiny of schooling and society” (179). To account for the inevitable conflict of cultural models when introducing new curricular materials, teacher training needs to try to be as explicit as possible about the “why” behind the curriculum. In training teachers, program administrators might first identify and describe the cul-

tural model on which the curriculum is based. They might further invite teachers to identify their own cultural models of writing, perhaps through writing exercises or small group discussions. Finally, administrators might create forums and mechanisms for instructors to put their own cultural models of writing into conversation with the curricular model. This is to suggest that teacher training become something different than rote “training,” more dialogic and more about the interaction between the cultural models of curriculum and the teachers who bring that curriculum to life in classrooms. While of course teachers will always need to learn the day-to-day “nuts and bolts” of teaching writing, this study suggests the need for deeper conversations as well. Indeed such an approach would involve teachers in the kind of critical scrutiny that this W101 curriculum asked students to do.

Self-critique at any level is difficult, and dialogic methods on the part of administration are needed to bring about an atmosphere where such critique might flourish. The W101 program has since the time of this research built a “reflective” component into staff development, requiring instructors to engage in critical reflection about their practice that occurs in the form of some dialogue with other instructors. Some of these reflective practices in W101 have been team teaching, demonstrating or describing teaching practices for other instructors at staff meetings, creating annotated lesson plans, and reporting on professional articles at staff meetings. All these are intended to create a climate of generative dialogue; however, they will only address the complexities identified in this study insofar as they can begin to address the varying cultural models—the underlying assumptions about literacy—that instructors bring to their teaching and to compare those models with the curricular model.

This study implies that teacher training might alternatively be considered in more rhetorical terms, as the effort to persuade instructors to engage with the curriculum and even to recognize the value of tactical resistance, when instructors remain unconvinced. If we begin to think of teacher training as a set of rhetorical, critical, and dialogic practices that assumes teachers are agents and attempts to persuade them to adapt the strategic cultural model of teaching and writing, then we must also begin to grapple with the question of instructors who resist doing so, for whatever reasons. While program administrators can create a mandate to bully such instructors—“you must teach this, or else...”—that mandate won’t necessarily reach to the underlying cultural models of writing. Perhaps this problem can be at least partially addressed in the practices of recruiting and hiring teachers. But this is a small step, and this problem needs more thorough consideration.

Curriculum Development. Just as instructors can benefit from a more explicit dialogue with the cultural model of curriculum, so the curriculum can be improved through dialogic conversation with teaching tactics.

This analysis suggests the need to consider how to provide a strategic vision for the program while also being sensitive to the ways that tactics of teachers might also inform further curriculum reform efforts. One question raised involves curriculum design. It is not clear that the teachers benefited from a syllabus structure that asked new instructors to design the *telos* (the critical culmination of the course, in the third unit), while having the *techne* (i.e., the Toulmin model) more directly mandated in the beginning of the course. Suzanna abandoned the logic of the syllabus in the third unit, while Steve fell back on what he already knew about teaching research writing. While it only makes sense to insist that instructors think through the critical and reflective “move” of such a syllabus for themselves, it can also be an overwhelming task for instructors who feel like newcomers—rather than experts—within the cultural model proposed in the curriculum. If such a socio-critical cultural model is mandated, then the structure of curriculum needs to offer consistent levels of support throughout the semester. If teachers (such as Suzanna and Steve both) do not grasp the cultural model of the curriculum, the critical vision of the third unit is likely to go unrealized without firmer curricular guidance in the third unit. This is to say that a model syllabus needs to be consistently clear in the “strategies” it is offering to teachers.

On the other hand, the curriculum can be enriched through dialogue with teaching tactics. As this research has been analyzed and discussed with the program director, curricular reform has moved in the direction of including more process-model “nuts and bolts” pedagogical strategies into the syllabus. Thus the curriculum has changed as a result of the tactical resistance of teachers. It may well be the case that Suzanna’s more overt criticism and frustration was more forceful in bringing about such changes, even if it resulted in the termination of her appointment in the W101 program. Though I do not believe that teacher development and training should ever replace the work of administrators in setting out and persuading others of their vision for a program, it does seem plausible that a curriculum that remains sensitive to the conflicting cultural models and the emerging tactics of instructors will be a healthy curriculum.

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NOTES

¹ All names of individuals, institutions, and places are pseudonyms.

² Indeed, if Durst's findings at the University of Cincinnati are any indication, it may well be the case that Steve's cultural model of academic writing will actually be much more persuasive to MU students than will the curricular model.

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Inventing a Teacherly Self: Positioning Journals in the TA Seminar

Jackie Grutsch McKinney and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater

In departments with teaching assistants, WPAs will often face one of the most difficult classes to teach: the teaching seminar for new TAs. The challenge is training one of the most vulnerable and powerless populations in the university—graduate students—to teach another vulnerable and powerless group—first-year students. A teaching journal is commonly assigned in such classes to support the struggle of new TAs and to enable a dialogue between the WPA and the new TAs concerning new practices being tried out in the classroom and new theories being read and considered in the practicum. The TA journal allows the WPA a window into how the new teacher's identity is initially being composed and performed within the TA's classroom. As such, teaching journals provide a discursive space for inventing a teacherly identity. In "Teaching Against the Teaching Against Pedagogy," Lad Tobin discusses the importance of such a space. Tobin writes:

New teachers must compose teacherly identities through invention, performance, integration, revision, trial-and-error. In order to make purposeful decisions about specific, concrete issues (e.g., how to arrange desks in the room, what to wear when they teach, what texts to assign, what grading system to use, and so on), graduate students must first recognize, develop, and invent themselves as teachers (71).

In the TA seminar we recently taught together, we required a weekly journal where TAs reflected both on the required readings and on the activities and questions raised about their own classrooms. At some points we posed specific questions to the entire class for their weekly journal writing (e.g., report on one student whose classroom behavior disturbs or intrigues you), but most often we allowed the weekly assigned readings and their ongoing classroom experiences to shape the journal entries. As co-instructors

(one tenured faculty WPA and one experienced graduate student), we both responded to these journals—writing in the margins, asking questions, and offering resources and advice—and at least once we had the TAs respond to each other’s journals. As the course progressed, we realized that what the TAs decided to write about and how they presented themselves to us was a point of high interest since, in some ways, it reflected what the TAs were getting out of our seminar by showing which theories and practices they were trying out and validating in their own classrooms.

Although our decision to teach the seminar together was planned in advance of the course, (for Elizabeth it was a conscious attempt to equalize the power differential between her and the new TAs by having Jackie, whose position is as a fellow TA, serve as a co-instructor), deciding to research the class came later. The idea slowly developed out of our conversations that preceded and followed the three-hour seminar. After finding many of our conversations returning to the TA journals, we knew we had to collect and reread these journals in their entirety. At the end of the course, every TA in the course granted us permission to reread, photocopy, and use their writing as data. In the semester following the course, we did just that. Working as co-instructors for this course prompted us to carry out a year-long conversation about our teaching practices, something we did not do when teaching solo. As such, we discovered more about one of our prized teaching pedagogies, the journal, than we would have without such conversations.

As we found ourselves drawn to discussing the TA journals and what we felt they were telling us, we noticed patterns in them: stories, self-descriptions, and questions that reappeared. While at first it was the journal narratives that attracted our attention, as we placed all our data within the context of the whole course, we were able to get a fuller sense of our TAs’ strengths and vulnerabilities. It is our intention to share our analysis of the journal narratives and then contextualize them within the whole seminar to argue how valuable the journals are for what Tobin suggests—*inventing, performing, integrating, and revising the emerging teacher identity and for documenting the TAs’ self presentations in their classrooms*. At the same time we see our own reading of the teaching journals as a cautionary tale—for the journal does not always provide the whole story of how well new teachers are negotiating the territory of their writing classrooms and student interactions. In short, WPAs ought to be aware when assigning, reading, and responding to TA journals that there may be certain tropes, narratives, or performed identities in play because of the very rhetorical situation of the journal: the audience, the purpose, and the invented teacherly self.

It is useful to be aware more specifically that while the WPA is the primary audience for the journal and that to some extent the rhetorical purpose for writing the journal is for the TAs to persuade the WPA that they are doing a credible job, the TAs are also dialoging with themselves. In their journals they are trying on different roles and identities to see which one fits best. Through journaling, the new teacher retrofits various idealized masks to match their emerging teaching selves. Primarily, our analysis was shaped by the work of Erving Goffman and Thomas Newkirk. Goffman helped us understand the TA journal as a kind of “performance.” We were reminded by Goffman that “the representation of an activity will vary in some degree from the activity itself and therefore inevitably misrepresent it” (65). This helped us (eventually) to see the TAs’ accounts of their teaching as only representations. Newkirk, who applies Goffman in his work, *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*, shows how students’ personal essays follow certain tropes which do not necessarily reveal *the self*, but often student essays are performances which reveal *a construction of a self* that the student thinks will please the instructor. Additionally, we found useful the wide range of work on reflexivity borrowed from theorists Donald Schon (*The Reflexive Practitioner*), Donna Qualley (*Turns of Thought*), and Kathleen Blake Yancey (*Reflection in the Writing Classroom*). Yancey, in particular, reminded us that teaching, like writing, is “recursive and generative” (24). The value of the journal as a piece of reflective practice for TAs is evident: TAs are able to describe, explain, and even argue with WPAs about their teaching while also explaining themselves to their selves.

JOURNAL NARRATIVES

What follows are five narrative strands that we discovered recurring over and over in the journals of our new TAs, strands which reveal their struggle to compose and present a coherent teacherly identity both for us and for themselves. As we analyzed the thirteen teaching journals, we were interested in how TAs described themselves as writing teachers, what types of classroom interactions they foregrounded as well as what types of pedagogical practices they discussed and how those did or did not link to the theories we had read in our seminar. We considered what “gets said” in this journal discourse and what goes unsaid and why. Our consideration of the teaching journal helped us determine what type of support the writing teachers might need, signaling us to suggest further readings or resources that might be helpful and overall giving us ways of understanding the different self presentations that our TAs were constructing as new teachers.

In categorizing the narrative strands contained within the TA journals, we mainly see the TAs struggle to present a coherent *narrative*. While Nancy Welch in “Resisting the Faith” writes about the narrative of conversion encouraged by one composition program, we noticed a much broader range of narratives. Our seminar was not, in fact, set up for conversions but for each new instructor to create a teaching philosophy consistent with his or her practice and beliefs about teaching and which drew upon the strengths each brought to the program from his or her own previous training and disciplinary interests. Although we do not see this list as all-inclusive or exhaustive of the narratives TAs write, we do think that embedded in these journal entries are the types of appeals which are useful and instructive for those supervising, teaching, and responding to new composition instructors.

Confessions: I Made a Mistake

A common rhetorical stance in the journals was the confession. TAs wrote unabashedly about the mistakes they made in teaching. These narratives are different from the others because the TAs know what they did goes against the theories and practices discussed in our seminar. Telling this type of story is probably part cathartic, yet still part tragic hero tale. It tells the readers, us, “I get what’s going on in our seminar, and I’m getting better as a teacher but I’ve goofed. Please forgive me.” In these both small and larger confessions, the TA was seeking absolution or forgiveness for the error of his or her ways. In our responses to these confessions, we generally granted our absolution as this sort of narrative calls for it.

Throughout the semester, we saw many confessions which seem aimed directly towards Elizabeth in her role as “Director of Composition,” as the Boss. For instance, Laura admits to oversleeping and missing her class. Lisa cuts short her class one day because her personal life is spinning out from underneath her. And, Carl, sick as can be, still holds his class one day, but ends it early in flu-saturated defeat. These cancellations or abbreviation of classes are things a boss would be concerned with. Even though these graduate students had to negotiate their own solutions to these dilemmas, they still seemed to run them past Elizabeth to make sure they were still functioning as—or still were—good employees. Writing about their mistakes in their journals allows them to admit their mistakes without having Elizabeth hear about them from another source and also allows Elizabeth to offer her suggestions, such as the importance of being well and not trying to teach while sick.

Offerings: Am I Right? Or, See, I’m Doing Fine

The next pattern that we both recognized frequently in the journals we have named “offerings.” In this narrative, students would either write success stories or ask for help. The religious connotation is no accident here; we saw

these stories to some degree, as true offerings in the form of thanksgiving for abundance (or success stories) or a plea for help. Our response to these offerings was to accept them, to reaffirm what was going well in someone's classroom and to suggest solutions for TAs who invited us to give advice.

The success stories, like the confessions, reveal what the TA thinks is expected of him or her. Whereas in the confessions, the TAs know they have made a mistake and frequently showed how to amend it, in the success story offerings, TAs instead show how they have done a good job. For instance, David writes about his second week of class: "When I walked into the dark classroom Thursday morning, the sacred semi-circle of desks had already been drawn, just as instructed. This, for me, is a wonderful sign." He's constructed himself as an effective teacher here. His students have already followed his directions about the classroom set-up.

The second type of offerings, pleas for help, we asked for. By the third week we noticed that only one or two TAs were looking at specific students or issues in their classes. So we asked students to explore these things, and they did. This can be seen in an example from Kari's journal. Kari writes about two students who monopolize conversation and her other students who have begun to make fun of the two monopolizers. Kari writes, "I don't know how to approach the other students who make fun of them. . . . Sometimes I think I should speak to them privately and ask them to keep their comments to themselves. What do y'all think? Have y'all ever had that problem?"

What is interesting about these narratives is that the plea for help does not show that the TA knows how to fix the problem or assess the situation. It is not a confession because the TA is not writing that he or she has made a mistake, and at the same time, it is not a success story because the TA is not assessing it as one. Kari, for example, offers a possible solution, but then calls on us to tell her what to do. She does not try to amend the situation first nor does she refer back to the theories or practices we have discussed in class. At the same time, she does not ask, "What should I do?" She asks, specifically, "What do y'all *think*?" The positioning here is complex. She is asking for help in a very indirect way that does not undercut her own authority in the classroom but invites us to help her solve a problem.

Aversions: I Just Want to Know How to Do This

The novice TA's aversion to theory is well known (see Flannery; Tobin; Salvatori and Kameen; Seitz; Wilhoit), so it is no surprise that we found this narrative in the journals, too. This negative response to course readings is probably the most resistant of the patterns we investigated since what we find in these journals is an objection to the entire field of composition stud-

ies, which is new to most of them. Even the most ardent admirer of contemporary literary theories can reject readings about composition and rhetoric wholesale because they do not give them what they feel they need most: practical advice. Aversions are difficult to respond to since they tread heavily on our own professional identities. They reminded us how to see composition through the beginner's eyes.

Most times this objection is voiced because TAs do not know what to *do* with the theory. This can be seen in Rod's journal where he writes, "I'm beginning to feel like all of my journal entries begin the same way: I appreciate what is being said by the author, but I fail to see the practical application. Or Chris, who approaches the seminar reading with dread: "I didn't look forward to these assignments. I'm not eager to read what I perceive to be dull pedagogical texts," although in the same sentence he admits that "I am eager to become a better teacher," and he goes on to discuss two situations where he actually applied collaborative theory read in our seminar to his work as a graduate student.

Other times, this aversion seemed to be annoyance or anger at the genre of composition theory. Matt wrote in response to one reading, "If Mrs. [author's name] would rise from her knees, where she's been blinding worshipping theory, she might be able to see that teaching is not just the potential to be inscribed into a baroque, multi-tiered network of power relations." (Later, in his teaching portfolio, Matt does apologize for his "vitriolic attacks on theory" and thanked us for our "tolerance" toward his ranting.)

Conscientious Objections: Sorry, But It Doesn't Work

The next narrative that we discovered in these journals was objections. TAs writing objections did not reject theory as they did in the aversions. In fact, they leaned on the theories and/or practices we discussed in class. But they write in these objection tales about the theory/practices that do not work for them, so they will not use them any longer. These narratives, in shorthand, go like this: "You told me to try this. I tried it, but it doesn't work. Thus, I'm not going to do it anymore.

Matt, for one, writes about how he is dealing with the issue of lecturing so much in his composition class—a topic we breached in our journal comments to him and in our whole class discussion. Matt tells us that he has discussed it with his class, and they want him to lecture more. He says, "Although we've reached the predictable conclusion that sustained dialogue (give and take) is preferable, we've also decided that I do have information that they want and they want more of it. I, of course, am glad to hear this because I want to give it." Doing so, Matt appeals to a higher authority: the

customer is always right. In becoming a conscientious objector, Matt risks offending us, who have told him otherwise, that to us discussions are more important than lectures.

That none of the methods introduced in our seminar will work for everyone is a disconcerting point for the beginning teacher. Matt shows that he is concerned with his students and with his teaching and that is the aim of the seminar, to make students and learning the focus of the course, and to put those decisions about how to best achieve that into the hands of the new writing teachers. Out of all the narratives, we were most concerned initially with the teachers who wove these tales since our fear was that they were composing a teacherly self that resisted or misinterpreted every theory or practice we had shared with them in our seminar.

Transformations: See How I Have Changed

Transformations or tales of change about what teachers have come to understand over the course of their first semester of teaching are the closest match to the type of conversion narratives Welch discusses. Many of these stories about changed perceptions or insights appear in the final journal reflections where TAs are asked to reread their teaching journal and reflect on what they see as valuable learning from them. As discussions of theory and successful practices begin to leak into the journals over the course of the semester, new teachers share how these ideas begin to serve their goals in the classroom, resulting not so much in conversions but a relieved sense that what they have been studying does really make sense in the long haul, resulting in a kind of transformed teacher.

Here J. T., a creative writer, admits that he has always “hated the word journal because it implies no one will ever read it and that the writing is for me and not other people.” J. T. compares this concern with audience to his inability to watch movies on video because he cannot “believe that anyone else in the world is watching that particular movie at that particular time, and therefore I feel I am not part of anything.” Given this rejection of journaling, J. T.’s changed attitude toward their potential usefulness comes as the result of observing Elan’s class, where he shares that “observing Elan’s class inspired me to build in journals and informal writings” in the following semester. His reasoning is that in journal writing he will “eventually see this informal writing in a revised form, and since I will see it, the audience, small as it may be, does exist.” In spite of the course readings and exhortations about the value of informal writing, J. T. resists the practice until he observes its potential power in a colleague’s classroom. The tales of trans-

formation most often occurred at the end of the semester, as expected. This kind of narrative inspires pride in the heart of seminar leaders. Look, we exclaim, they finally got it!

Categorizing the types of narratives recorded in TA journals helped us see how hard TAs work toward constructing a teaching self that holds together. As Mary Rose O'Reilley reminds us, "We settle on a story we can live with, not only because it's hard to be honest but also because our minds keep trying to create order" (10). Teaching is a chaotic activity because there are so many things to juggle and so much to attend to; no wonder the new TA struggles towards a coherent self-presentation. We found TAs seemed to create a particular persona and maintained that persona in their journals throughout the duration of the course, not just in individual entries. Consequently, if a TA presents, say, a confident teaching self sprinkled with a few confessions, as readers we begin to equate the presentation with the actual teaching. Because of this, by halfway through the course we had created a list of "high-priority TAs"—ones who we were most worried about. Yet, once we started to observe these TAs in action and see other assignments, our "priorities" changed. Our own need as seminar leaders to create an orderly perception of our teaching assistants was disrupted by the larger tales that their work had to tell by placing it in the context of the entire seminar's writing and discussions.

At first then, we misread the TAs' self-presentations or teaching narratives as the *only* or as the *true* narrative of their teaching experiences, but upon rereading the journal in context with the other assignments and the multiple data points of the course, we came to see that the teaching reflections and self-presentations were not the only useful barometers for the TA's classroom. Just as Newkirk notices in his undergraduate essays that students create personas or perform a self in their writing, he also shows the limitation of this self-construction when he asserts, "The key feature of these presentations is their selectivity; every act of self-presentation involves the withholding of information that might undermine the idealized impression the performer wants to convey" (3). All details that may contradict or offer another story are usually hidden or suppressed, but eventually the narrative tears, leaks, or ruptures.

There are always "faultlines" within teacher stories, as Richard Haswell reminds us in *Comp Tales*. There, Haswell discusses the importance of looking closely at the stories we tell as teachers for the leaks: Comp tales will seem lightweight if we do not try to extend their meaning in ways native to their genre. That genre is always narrative, but it is also personal and vernacular and oral and social. Two ways of extending comp tales are by looking for moral directive (always there) and for embedded tales (always there)"

(186). In our second section, then, we look at the embedded tales, the fault-lines, ruptures, or disjunctures as revealed through multiple data sources from our seminar. Whereas the journals usually offered us nearly seamless narratives, other seminar assignments showed teacherly selves which were not so neat. The assigned ethnography, student analysis paper, conference analysis, peer classroom observations, and portfolios allowed us to juxtapose many different types of data against the ongoing narrative of the teaching journal. Now we sharpen our focus and look closely at three of the students in the seminar whose journal narratives led us to believe their teaching was going well, and we show the moments of disjuncture which allowed us a larger understanding of the TAs' struggles. As we locate these moments of tension, we find that there is another story to read that is not captured by the smoother narrative TAs compose for their journals.

THREE STUDENTS, THREE CONTEXTS

David

David was the only TA in our seminar of thirteen TAs who was a rhetoric and composition major. David acknowledged his allegiance to his chosen major by sharing with us in his final course reflection that he sensed a “them and us” feeling to the seminar since so many of his fellow colleagues initially resisted composition theory. In the seminar, David presented himself as very laid back and casual, often waiting to speak last about a topic but commanding a real sense of respect from his peers because he had read some of the material before and already formulated an opinion about it. There was an evenness and thoughtfulness to David's self presentation in our seminar and in his journal entries. He approached the seminar with confidence and dedication: He loved theory. He loved rhetoric. And he loved teaching because of the reflective stance it encouraged for him: “We have to step back and reflect, analyze, and criticize in order to see the sometimes hidden theory that informs our teaching practices,” he wrote.

While in David's seminar journal we read the narrative of “everything's swell,” he actually had more not-so-swell issues in his class (or was at least the most honest about his problems) than any other new teaching assistant. In his first semester of teaching English 101 at our institution, David encountered and wrote about these issues: his problems with leading whole class discussions (he did teach at 8 AM), admitting that only five students out of twenty-two spoke in any given class period; his struggle with group work and student resistance to it; his questions about students falling asleep in his class and how to handle this; and, finally, the “big P” of plagiarism.

David's rupture in this smooth presentation of himself came at the end of the semester when he faced three very different plagiarism cases. When he reported this situation to Elizabeth, he had read all the institutional policies on plagiarism and wanted mainly to talk over his understanding of how to handle working it through. He seemed unflustered by what had happened, although he was clearly more sympathetic to one of the three students. Elizabeth left the ultimate resolution up to David but cautioned that the students needed to understand the seriousness of their infractions, whether intentional or not. David accepts the full blame for the plagiarism problems, which he ultimately attributed to the generic research assignment he had given. As well, he reflected on the way he had organized his response to the first drafts of the research papers suggesting that their wholesale copying came into play because he had relied too heavily on peer review of the initial drafts. Only one of the three students downloaded the entire paper and of this student David is clear about his course of action; "I plan to punish the student to the fullest extent possible according to the university handbook. He will receive an F in the course." The other two students, he writes "worked much harder to make it look like a "real" paper by gluing together texts from various websites. But of the three, only one had a good attendance and participation record. At first David felt that he might give this person "a second chance, asking her to rewrite the paper and reflect on what she's learned in order to pass the class."

David's journal narrative of trying to find a fair approach was read that week by another TA. Chip, his colleague, writes a thoughtful and supportive response:

I know too that that third case was a harder one to fail. Because you sometimes see these as big mistakes, you like to accommodate that other human gift—compassion. Had you done that, I think it would have been okay. Yet, then the gate becomes a flexible unsurity and we lose ourselves in trying to establish the new rules and all the "what if" cases that came our way. . . . Part of our job is to manage that gate. It's best then for you—now and in the future—to be fixed as to what opens and closes it. So, plagiarism closes it—always.

And for David, plagiarism did close it; he failed all three students.

This tension over the plagiarism cases was important for David and for us since we all had to revise his self-presentation. Even though he was confident about his teaching as a rhetoric and composition major, he found his own assignment and response sequencing partly to blame for the plagiarism cases. This moment made us reflect on our work with David. We realized

that because of his allegiances and abilities to write about composition theories and practices in his journals, we had read him as “swell” too. While we might have gone looking for trouble in the journal narratives of our literature and creative writing TAs, we assumed David was doing fine. In our rereading, we realized many other occasions we missed recognizing the other stories in his text because we liked the narrative that David was telling us. We glossed over the fact that he had assigned over fifty-five readings for his students, clearly not appropriate for a writing course. We did not critique his research assignment paper closely enough. Because of his past training and his confident self-presentation, we ignored the ruptures outside of his journal, in his syllabus and writing assignments because he was, after all, telling our story—composition is important and I love it.

Joyce

Joyce came to our seminar with an MA in literature already completed in our department, a year of teaching experience at a local community college, and a previous work history of twenty years at IBM. Joyce was most professional in her self-presentation in our seminar as well as in her journals and papers written for the course. Joyce planned her first-year composition course carefully and entered into the seminar discussions and work just as she might enter the workplace, as a fully engaged learner ready to tackle a new challenge while drawing on a rich well of resources from her previous corporate and ongoing graduate student experiences. In one word, Joyce is responsible; she takes care of things. In our seminar, she was always looking ahead and asking about future readings and assignments. Occasionally, she also followed-up these in class questions with emails, seeking clarification, which demonstrated that in spite of her background and experience, Joyce was not overly confident. This “checking-in” presented us with an interesting persona—one we were both comfortable and uncomfortable with. We saw Joyce as overly eager to “get it right,” yet we didn’t expect any unfortunate surprises from Joyce.

In working with Joyce we found it was important to recognize that she was a literature major, that she embraced specific ideas about the authority of texts as well as theories about reading that might be counter to theories of teaching beginning composition. In her journals Joyce had presented herself as a willing and open reader of every theorist assigned, drawing out the good points in each thinker. Because of this, we read Joyce as a teacher who was trying out the new theories in her class. Instead of having aversion to composition theory, as many of her classmates, Joyce thought through how she might apply them in her journals.

But then she read Robert Schwegler's article, "The Politics of Reading Student Papers," and led the seminar discussion on it. Joyce admitted that Schwegler's ideas about a teacher disclosing her political/personal ideologies in reading student papers "scared her" because she felt that she was so "far to the left politically that I don't even discuss politics with my acquaintances here in the South." Here, in her journal, and in a later class discussion where she asserts that teachers should not bring up race in discussions but deal with it if it surfaces, Joyce writes herself as a teacher who will leave her politics outside of class. She wants to be detached and objective.

Joyce's inner debate over finding political/ideological meanings in student texts in the way she had been trained to locate such meanings in literary texts was explored in one of the assignments for the seminar that required her to analyze how she went about reading and responding to a student paper from her own class. For this assignment Joyce wrote about a paper that clearly displayed conflicted values on the part of the student writer, who adds a sentimental conclusion to her portrait of her deceased grandfather even though he is clearly a heavy drinker and has little regard for the environment. Rather than ignore the conflicting values that Joyce finds in the paper as well as the difference in values between herself and the writer, she addresses them with the student writer both in a conference and in her commentary. In her analysis paper Joyce writes that

I've come to understand that it's not only permissible to voice my own opinions on the cultural, social, and political content of the papers I'm reading [but] a natural and beneficial part of the writing process. I must remind myself, however, this knowledge doesn't give the teacher license to run roughshod over the students' papers or insist that they conform to her ideology.

This moment of disjuncture for Joyce was not fully resolved but mixed around a bit as she began to see that she would need to develop a theory for reading student papers just as she had for reading literary texts. Joyce told us the following semester that she has, in fact, given herself permission to enter into discussions with students on controversial topics and that she feels much more comfortable doing this. While it is not unusual for a doctoral student in literature to view student writing as vastly different from literary texts, it is often a disconcerting experience for them to learn that compositionists read student writing through a political, ideological lens. Once the similarity between reading published and student writing is established (and accepted), the TA with a literature background may become a strong reader

and responder of student texts. Joyce's journal gave us no clues to her conflicted approach to student writing until she had to apply the ideas in our readings to a writing assignment for our seminar.

Jenny

Jenny's past, present, and future is in writing. She had already earned her master's degree in creative writing before coming to our program to work on her MFA in fiction. She was one of the few students in the seminar who had no previous teaching experience. Despite this, or because of this, Jenny immersed herself into her teaching and into the learning of how to teach. She frequently asked questions and shared her missteps in our seminar; she wanted advice from her peers and us. She wrote long journals outlining her teaching and responses to our readings—and even the very early entries show her confidence in her undertaking. She knows what good teachers do, and she knows she wants to be a good teacher.

If there were one word to describe Jenny's developing teaching style, it would be *responsive*. Her journal entries are full of how she's adjusted her course plans to account for new needs or to adapt to new theories. Jenny, for example, scrapped her second essay topic to let students research and reflect on the events of 9/11 instead. In another particular telling example, Jenny confronts a student, asking him why he habitually comes late to class. He tells her that things don't really "get started" until five or ten minutes into class, so he doesn't show up until then. Jenny thinks for a second, and then agrees with the student—she *does* wait to get started until everyone is there. She makes a deal with the student to start on time if he shows up on time. He consents, and by her accounts, he keeps the deal. These kinds of moments are frequent in Jenny's journal. Her self-presentation typically reads: I had a problem, I fixed it, and now everything is fine—showing herself to be aware, successful, and flexible.

Jenny shows herself as a critical reader of her own teaching in her Conference Analysis paper. She tapes a conference with a "shy" student named Tavius. In her paper, she writes about being frustrated that the conference had gotten off track. She tries to bring it back around but does so by saying things that may not actually be "true" in order to bolster his self-esteem and sees that she perhaps has not even answered the one question the student has about "Hills Like White Elephants." She writes, "In the future, I would like my conferences to address the specific concerns of the students more, so I will ask for a written list of questions at the beginning of the session." For Jenny, this conference is not so much about collaborating *with* the student. It is about giving something useful *to* the student. Undoubtedly, as a creative writer, Jenny has worked side-by-side with a number of mentors. They gave

her something. And, Jenny as a writer feels that she can give something to her students. This is evident in how she was disappointed that she was not giving enough and not saying it well enough for her own standards. But, like many of her narratives, the problem is solved and things are fine by the end. Tavius, she tells us, shows change by his next draft, understanding after all what she was talking about with the Hemingway story, and he starts to come out of his shell and take part in class more.

The most interesting part of this assignment for us was the story Jenny did not tell. In the transcripts of the conference, we see that Jenny speaks in long paragraphs, while Tavius replies in words. Jenny does not mention a concern for this in her paper. In fact, she is more concerned with the language she uses; she is disappointed with the number of filler words she sees in her transcripts. This was an important moment for us to read the transcripts and see once again how retellings can simplify something that is much more complex in real life. In our responses to Jenny's analysis, neither one of us paid much attention to what has bothered Jenny in her reading of the conference—the "ums." Instead, Elizabeth gives a different reading of the conference based on the transcript. She notes inconsistencies between what Jenny has narrated and what the transcriptions show about her interactions with Tavius. Jackie also pushes the dominance of Jenny's talk in her comments on the paper by saying, "You have worked hard in this conference." Later, she asks Jenny, "How are you going to deal with [student] silences?" Thus, both of us pick up on different stories that complicate the original narrative that Jenny presents us. Still, at the same time, both of us at the end of our comments confirm the narrative she has written, too. Elizabeth says, "Don't deprecate yourself for building Tavius's self-esteem." And Jackie writes, "It sounds like you've made some progress with Tavius. Good for you—you've got him." This moment of rupture allowed us to step in and ask questions about the way Jenny had narrated her experience with Tavius and to offer some further tools of analysis about speech and silence in conferences to make her future conferences more productive.

CONCLUSIONS

These three teaching assistants provided us with data for placing the body of their work within our TA seminar into a more contextualized reading of the ways they were constructing their teacherly identities. Neither the teaching journal, seminar papers, class discussions, peer or supervisor observations stand alone: they all inform one another. We noticed a broad range of stories emerge in our TA journals, tales in which TAs constructed an array of stances and appeals as they were trying out their new teacherly selves. In

this way our program is not perhaps much different than many others that also struggle with allowing new TAs to find their way in their first-year writing courses. In “Recent Trends in TA Instruction,” Stephen Willhoit writes, “Today, TA in-service programs must balance three related needs: to educate TAs in composition theory and pedagogy, to maintain a theoretically coherent writing program, and to respect TAs’ own theories of writing” (18). In fact, programs like the one Nancy Welch attended may not be as successful as they think in converting teachers to a party line. Margaret Baker Graham and Carol David report in their two year study of TA training that teachers in their program do not all teach under the same philosophy they have trained them in, and in the end it is not necessary that they should. What seems far more important is for TAs to have an opportunity to invent, try out and perform their new identities as writing teachers on the pages of their journals and course work for the seminar. For in spite of the limitations we found in the TA journals, they did provide us with the concerns of new TAs, which were often different from our own agendas. Listening and responding to the journals led us to changes in readings and assignments, as well as provided us with issues to clarify, conferences to be arranged and observation priorities. But the journal, as we hope we have pointed out here, does not tell the whole tale. No single slice of data from the teaching seminar does. In our situation it was the combination of writings, observations, and class dialogue that helped us see and understand the struggle that new TAs face in constructing themselves as teachers.

We have learned from this course and our collaboration in teaching and researching that TA journals are complicated rhetorical situations. When students composed successful teaching selves, we found ourselves persuaded by the presentation. Alternatively, when students composed their teaching as disastrous, we worried. Because the TAs understood the journals differently, they wrote different stories. Some felt they had to show they were doing fine—others confessed that they were having troubles. Some saw the journals as a space to interrogate the readings, and others imagined we wanted to see their teaching selves transform in the course. As we have said, they constructed their teaching selves in the journals, but their narratives also told us they were constructing the assignment and us in particular ways. Therefore, it is particularly important for all WPAs to ask themselves: What stories do my TAs tell or not tell? What selves do they present or hide from me? And, what seams do I unravel and what seams do I leave alone?

The real value of looking at both the ways new teachers represent themselves in their journals—as well as the leakage and faultlines of their teacher narratives within the rest of the course assignments—was not in helping

them toward a more coherent presentation of self as a teacher. Rather, this kind of inquiry shows the extent to which the art of teaching is a reflexive practice that is always fractured and disruptive; it is these disruptions that lead to insight.

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Research or Faculty Development? A Study of WI Faculty Commenting Practices

Martha D. Patton

Research conducted by writing program administrators (WPAs) is little understood. It rarely produces the “hard data” that some policy makers desire in order to justify funding the teaching of writing; it rarely produces the scientifically significant statistics that grant reviewers expect in order to support further study of writing practices. But WPA inquiry, however “soft,” can provide practitioners with valuable pieces of information about the complex puzzle of teaching writing to college students and can inform reflective practice and policy making. Information collected by WPAs, however constrained by the specifics of each teaching situation, can stimulate the healthy self-consciousness at the heart of faculty development.

Policy makers and grant reviewers need to understand that collegiality and professionalism inevitably constrain the kind of information available to WPAs. Policy makers and grant reviewers need to understand why the research methods employed by WPAs are appropriate and why it may be unrealistic to expect “hard data” from controlled studies with independent variables. But WPA practitioners need to embrace the methods available to them to ask and answer such important questions as “Do our teachers actually do what we ask them to do?” and “Do our teachers’ written comments help students make substantive revisions?”

We at the Campus Writing Program at the University of Missouri oversee a well-established writing across the curriculum program that requires each undergraduate to take at least two writing-intensive (WI) courses in order to graduate. These courses are taught by faculty “in the disciplines,” so that a WI course in engineering is taught by the professionals who know best how to write in engineering: tenure-track engineering professors. We justify our program in part on the assumption that writing stimulates thinking, and that revising writing stimulates critical re-thinking. Whether revision

works, though, hangs on the quality of the feedback students get from their busy professors. Do our WI faculty in fact provide the sort of substantive feedback that we recommend in our workshops? Do they actually practice what we preach? And how would we know, since collegiality and professionalism limit the degree to which we can directly observe the written commentary of our WI faculty?

We, like other WPAs, offer workshops about commenting, make recommendations, have informal conversations, and look at papers that come our way. Once in a while, we conduct a semester-long qualitative study of a single course. We have indirect access to a great deal of information, but we have direct access to very little. That is, we have information obtained indirectly through course proposals, course evaluations, anecdotal observations, interviews, conversations, and surveys. We may even have information obtained directly from an occasional study. But we rarely have direct access to even a random sampling of all the writing produced in WI classes in a given semester or to a random sampling of the faculty comments on the student writing. Any WPA inquiry into commenting practices is limited to self-selected participants. It can provide a useful check on our assumptions, can function as part of a larger system of checks and balances, and can suggest patterns and possibilities. It cannot, though, provide positive proof of the efficacy of any single commenting method and cannot support unqualified generalizations.

To explore the general question of the nature of WPA inquiry and the particular question of commenting practices at MU, this article will explore the findings of a two-semester faculty/TA survey of commenting practices. The survey results are not generalizable, given the small sampling of self-selected respondents. Likewise, the survey is only one small piece of a much larger puzzle of faculty development. The survey is, though, representative of WPA inquiry that says *something*, however qualified, about commenting practices, and also serves as a valuable piece of ongoing faculty development.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WPA INQUIRY

In the Galapagos Islands of academic inquiry, isolated research methodologies have evolved in different disciplinary contexts to address different needs, different questions, different purposes. If scientific methodologies provide tentative answers about the material world, humanistic scholarship keeps alive enduring questions that have not yet been settled. WPA inquiry, too, keeps alive enduring questions that teachers of writing need to ask themselves, again and again—and that self-questioning is at the heart of faculty

development. But WPA inquiry has a practical side as well. It must narrate what has already happened in other specific programs so that each WPA can make informed decisions—as informed as possible. WPA inquiry is, as Muriel Harris argues, a kind of applied social research (10). It “begins with questions arising from local practice and local conditions” (2) and proceeds with an array of methodologies, including interviews, ethnographies, surveys, textual analysis, and case studies, that keep alive critical self-consciousness. It cannot yield scientific facts; it can, however, yield a body of observed patterns that can then facilitate practical problem solving in other writing programs.

WPA inquiry about commenting practices leans toward the humanities to the extent it stimulates individual faculty to reflect on their own commenting practices in order to better understand themselves, their students, and their students’ language. WPA inquiry about commenting leans toward the sciences, both social and natural, to the extent it embraces empirical methods to collect data to solve practical problems. As a relatively new form of inquiry, it has antecedents in other multi-methodological social science research in which the inquirer is a participant subject and which is rooted in particular, not universal conditions. WPA inquiry became “species specific” with defining documents, such as Ernest L. Boyer’s 1990 *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, a 1994 Modern Language Association document “Making Faculty Work Visible: Reinterpreting Professional Service, Teaching, and Research in the Fields of Language and Literature,” Janangelo and Hansen’s 1995 book *Resituating Writing: Constructing and Administering Writing Programs*, and a 1996 Council of Writing Program Administrators document defining the intellectual work of WPAs. In their 1999 book, *The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher: Inquiry in Action and Reflection*, Shirley K Rose and Irwin Weiser characterize WPA inquiry by these nine qualities:

1. It is informed by theory and research in composition, rhetoric and related fields.
2. It both acknowledges and questions values widely shared by WPAs.
3. It is worthwhile and ethical.
4. It is rigorous and systematic.
5. It addresses the questions that prompted it.
6. It can withstand peer review.
7. It is documented in program records.
8. It is circulated at the institutional site and may be circulated more widely.
9. Its conclusions enable WPAs to justify decisions. (vii-viii)

A GRIM HISTORY: NEED FOR EFFECTIVE COMMENTING PRACTICES

It is almost an article of faith that writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs promote critical thinking because, it is assumed, faculty provide written feedback, which then prompts students to re-think their written arguments. Is this assumption warranted by current practice? To investigate the degree to which WI faculty do provide effective feedback entails some risks. WI faculty risk initial embarrassment if they expose to WPAs their early attempts to comment on student papers. WPAs risk having to qualify the cherished assumption that WAC programs promote critical thinking. Given a vast literature suggesting that all too often English teachers' comments are ineffective, though, WPAs should not be too surprised if WI teachers' comments are only moderately helpful.

If, as David Schwalm suggests in a November 24, 1999, post to WPA-L, "most instructor time is wasted through response strategies that are both inefficient and ineffective," the problem might trace to several causes. As Winifred Hall Harris and Charles Kline claim in separate studies nearly a quarter-century old, instructors often say one thing and do another; that is, the kind of comments that instructors say are most important address higher order issues (e.g., logic, argument), yet the kind of comments that instructors actually write focus on lower-order issues (e.g., spelling, punctuation). More recently, Bruce Maylath makes a similar claim in "Do We Do What We Say? Contradictions in Composition and Grading." Not only are there gaps between theory and practice, there are gaps between a teacher's meaning for a given comment and a student's interpretation of it (Cohen, 1987; Hillocks, 1982). C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, in a 1981 article, note that "individual teachers can make superficially similar comments bearing vastly different connotations" (2). Several studies in the 1980s, including Ruth Jenkins' 1987 self-study, suggest that, unless comments are specific and focused, students are unlikely to benefit from them (see also Burkland and Grimm; MacAllister; Mallonee and Breihan; and Zellmayer). These studies corroborate Nancy Sommers's claim in "Responding to Student Writing" that, by and large, teachers "do not respond to student writing with the kind of thoughtful commentary which will help students [. . .] think about their purposes and goals in writing a specific text" (154). Even when teachers are inclined to establish priorities and write easily understood, assignment-specific comments, teachers may be little rewarded for doing so. Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford wryly observe in a 1993 article that teaching conditions work against effective commenting and that student revision exists in theory more than in practice.

Most of the literature just cited focuses primarily on the commenting made by English teachers. Fewer studies exist about commenting in WI courses, partly because such inquiry is inherently interdisciplinary and complex. On one hand, WPAs are in a somewhat limited position to evaluate the comments of professors in other disciplines—unless the WPA has special knowledge of the discipline. On the other hand, professors in other disciplines, however sincerely interested in their teaching, reap few professional rewards for reflecting upon and writing about the ways in which they comment on student papers. Moreover, WPAs, who depend upon the good will and mutual trust of colleagues in other disciplines, must be sensitive about not overstepping their authority, which makes difficult the possibility of conducting direct studies of commenting practices. The occasional study of commenting in the disciplines is likely to be informal and anecdotal. However, what scholarship exists complements the scholarship about commenting in composition. For example, Mallonee and Breihan note that, while faculty in different disciplines may agree on certain “errors,” they have widely varying solutions to those “errors.” Willa Wollcott notes that “the issue of evaluation, which can be troublesome under the best of conditions, is especially problematic with content-area writing” (154).

If commenting practices at the University of Missouri (MU) are as weak as this body of literature suggests they might be, then we should expect our undergraduates to be dissatisfied with their writing-intensive courses, at least in hindsight. However, individual course evaluations in addition to a major retrospective survey of our recent graduates suggest that WI courses at MU are well taught.¹ Presumably, commenting practices in WI courses at MU are, if not ideal, far from terrible. How shall we reconcile the likelihood of weak commenting practices with favorable course ratings—and how might commenting intersect with other factors in prompting revision in WI courses? What exactly do MU faculty do?

DESIGN OF THE MU SURVEY ON WI FACULTY/TA COMMENTING PRACTICES

To explore what commenting habits are currently in use by our WI faculty, we designed an open-ended, twenty-question survey and mailed it to all faculty teaching WI courses in Fall 1999 and Winter 2000, approximately one hundred instructors each semester. We also created an electronic form of the survey and e-mailed faculty and their TAs the URL so that it could be completed on-line. Ninety-five individuals responded. Although we cannot boast the sampling procedures that would make this survey statistically sound, we defend research procedures that preserve the dignity and autonomy of

our WI colleagues. That is, we did not impose the survey on anyone who chose not to cooperate with us, just as we generally subordinate our research agenda to our collegial administrative mission. We have, then, less a basis for making a strong, empirically-supported claim than we have a reality check on our basic assumption that our WI courses foster critical thinking, in part through the written dialogue between student and instructor.

A point of clarification might be in order: We entitled our survey “A Survey of WI Faculty and TA Grading and Commenting Practices.” Perhaps we should have omitted the term “grading,” but we felt the term offered writing-intensive faculty a familiar point of reference. The terms grading, commenting, responding, feedback, and assessment each have particular meanings in composition literature, as Speck and Jones indicate in their review of the literature. “Commenting” and “responding” typically are used interchangeably, but “feedback” is used only to refer to comments on drafts in progress, not to comments on final drafts. Speck and Jones further note that “responding” is beginning to eclipse “commenting” in composition literature. We would like to further distinguish between editing, which we defined as corrections of spelling, punctuation, usage, and grammar, from all other kinds of commenting, which most likely focused on content, logic, or organization. All of these terms are to be distinguished from “grading,” which refers to the ranking of a written product, not to the suggestions to help improve the work in progress.

Nonetheless, we used “grading” in the title of our survey. The ninety-five respondents represented more than a third of the MU faculty and TAs associated with our Campus Writing Program in the 1999-2000 academic year. Given our unscientific sample and findings, no tables or graphs will be presented in this article; however, an in-house report with several dozen tables and as many graphs is available upon request (Pattonmd@missouri.edu).² The results suggest, predictably enough, that our writing-intensive faculty spend too much time on lower-order issues (editing) and not enough time on the higher-order comments most likely to bring about substantive revision and critical re-thinking of the content and logic. Nonetheless, some of the findings are unexpected and others affirm the basic vitality of our WAC program.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT OR RESEARCH?

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the commenting survey is that participants took the time to think about their commenting in a systematic way and brought to a level of conscious awareness their own practices. Even if participants merely thought about the survey questions and never reported their own practices, the survey would have served a purpose, a modest form

of faculty development. By answering questions that distinguish between editorial comments and comments that prompt substantive revision, a professor could draw her own conclusions about ways in which she might alter her commenting practices in the future. By answering questions about time spent on commenting and amount of revision witnessed, professors might draw still other conclusions.

The participants, however, did report their practices and enabled us to consider their practices both in terms of our program goals and in terms of a larger body of composition and WPA research. Modest as this study is, it does meet the criteria for WPA research set forth by Rose and Weiser: It is informed by research about commenting; it both acknowledges and questions the assumption that WI courses prompt critical thinking with teacher feedback; it addresses an important question in an ethical manner; it is as rigorous and systematic as conditions within our writing program permit; and it addresses the questions that prompted it. To be considered for publication, this manuscript has been subjected to peer review and any reader is welcome to request our survey data. Irwin Weiser urges local, institutional studies such as this to be valued as *research*—and not, “as is too often the case—as service or administration” since it yields “large amounts of data demanding the same careful analysis and critical interpretation as any other empirical project.” (97) Although the MU survey findings cannot be generalized as fact, they do raise questions, including these:

- Do WI faculty find sensible the commenting practices advocated in our faculty workshops?
- Do WI faculty use the commenting practices advocated in our faculty workshops?
- Can we explain a preoccupation with editing (over comments that prompt substantive revision) in terms of a learning curve, whereby faculty, like their students, need repeated guided opportunities to refine their commenting practices?
- Should we find new ways to provide WI faculty opportunities to discuss and refine their commenting practices?
- Should we revise our assumptions about commenting practices, given differences between composition course goals and WI course goals?

QUESTIONS, PATTERNS, AND SURPRISES

Do WI faculty find Snsible the commenting practices advocated in our faculty workshops?

Certainly, effective commenting is not limited to one single method. Sentence-level feedback from a skillful writer can be immensely helpful in prompting revision of content as well as style. However, most writing-intensive teachers are not rewarded for taking the time it takes to provide this kind of feedback and simply will not take the time. If time is limited, then the conventional wisdom is even more important, and our anecdotal evidence suggests that faculty agree. We join Chris Anson, John Bean, Edward M. White, Richard Straub and Ronald Lunsford, among others, who advise faculty to consider these principles when commenting on drafts in progress:

- Prioritize: Address content and logic (higher order issues) first.
- Be specific: Tie specific questions about content and logic to specific places in the text or to specific places in the assignment (purpose, audience, criteria).
- Respond as a reader: Identify places in the text where the chain of reasoning breaks for you.
- Address lower order issues (sentence structure, formatting, punctuation) selectively, perhaps by noting patterns of error or by closely editing only a small part of the paper.

Judging by oral feedback, end-of-semester conversations, and written evaluations of our faculty workshops, these principles seem to make sense to most MU faculty. Our anecdotal evidence suggests that these principles are comforting to WI faculty who worry that they aren't qualified to "teach writing" or that they don't have time to "correct" their students' papers. Nothing in the survey results suggests that faculty resist any of these principles, at least in theory, and we are not inclined to question the basic wisdom of these principles.

Do WI faculty use the commenting practices advocated in our faculty workshops?

Given what composition literature already suggests about commenting, we should not be surprised that our MU faculty reported spending what we consider a disproportionate amount of time editing. Overall, most instructors reported editing a lot. While senior faculty reported more editing than others did, faculty rank did not seem to be a significant factor. We were disappointed but not surprised that so many faculty reported making only

one to three written comments per paper. We also were not surprised that senior faculty were more likely to assign one or two traditional papers per semester, while junior faculty were more likely to embrace the microtheme model with multiple assignments. There was, incidentally, considerable scatter among nonregular faculty.

Also within our expectations was a correlation between length of papers and time spent commenting. Overall, most faculty reported receiving an average of three to four pages for the first draft of their first assignment. Senior faculty, who were more likely to assign fewer papers, were predictably more likely to receive longer papers. And, predictably, senior faculty who were somewhat more likely to assign fewer but longer papers spent somewhat more time commenting per paper. However, we were somewhat surprised that assistant professors spent nearly as much time per paper as full professors. Given that assistant professors tended to assign more, shorter papers, this suggests that they spend more time commenting over the course of the semester. We may need to find ways to help assistant professors use their time more efficiently. The data also suggest that GTAs spend more time commenting on papers than faculty, but we do not know what portion of the entire paper load in each WI class is handled by the professor. It is possible that some faculty merely look over and add to comments already made by their GTAs and that we should not, therefore, interpret the number of minutes per paper they report as the sole feedback received by their students.

We expected that faculty with smaller classes spent more time commenting per paper. That seemed to be the case. This may be an indirect measure of student class rank: It is likely that lower level students are in large classes for nonmajors and they are getting less feedback, while upper level students are taking WI courses in their major and are getting more discipline-specific feedback. It may be that, regardless of the importance of the course, faculty tend to be more committed to upper level courses for their own majors and that that is reflected in the time spent commenting on papers. Likewise, students may be more committed to writing for courses in their majors and may solicit more teacher feedback.

Even though we found predictable some of our findings, we were somewhat surprised by seven others:

- There may be a point of diminishing returns in time spent commenting.
- Perhaps the number and nature of assignments are better predictors of revision than the number of minutes spent commenting. WI faculty may be doing an admirable job of “teaching writing” if they simply challenge students to think about problems in the dis-

cipline, especially if they “challenge writers to deepen and complicate their thought at a level appropriate to their [the writers’] intellectual development” (Bean 252) by posing a few carefully thought out, content-specific questions.

- Class size, while correlated with time spent commenting, did not correlate with the number of papers assigned. We expected more papers in the smaller classes, but that was not the case.
- While most large WI courses did use scoring guides, almost half of those WI courses with one hundred or more students did not use scoring guides. We do not assume that scoring guides are essential in general, but we suspect that it is difficult for professors of large enrollment WI courses to articulate expectations for writing assignments and to maintain common grading standards without scoring guides.
- Most faculty reported writing four or more comments (beyond editing) per paper. Full and assistant professors reported making more written comments than associate professors did. Perhaps competing responsibilities for associate professors make teaching WI undesirable. It was somewhat disturbing that about 30% of faculty overall (and 50% of associate faculty) reported making only one to three written comments. While it is possible to target the most important conceptual issues in one or two comments, we suspect that most students need more written feedback.
- Some WI faculty are from Lake Wobegon. Amazingly, 100% of faculty who spent ten minutes or less commenting on papers believed that they had above average grading standards.

Again, while these observations are grounded in local, limited conditions at MU, they enable us to work, as Kathleen Blake Yancey and Meg Morgan note, “toward a more generalized construct or prototype of that problem and of ways to address it.” Yancey and Morgan continue, “As WPAs, then, not only do we seek to understand the particulars of our own local contexts, but also we seek in them generalizable issues pertinent to the discipline at large.” (81) Communicating these findings can, as Chris Anson and Robert Brown suggest, “help us to understand the complex relationships between our unique work in the academy and the traditions, ways of working, and kinds of recognition that the academy values.” (151) That is, communicating research findings not only helps other WPAs make informed decisions within their programs, but also helps the profession as a whole establish itself within the academy.

Can we explain a preoccupation with editing (over comments that prompt substantive revision) in terms of a learning curve, whereby faculty, like their students, need repeated guided opportunities to refine their commenting practices?

Our survey leads us to qualify a basic assumption about commenting, that teachers of writing-intensive courses foster critical thinking by commenting on first drafts of students' papers and by asking students to then revise their thinking. Still, the survey provides a basis for seeing the art of commenting as developmental and for viewing the comments from the most experienced or seasoned faculty as rhetorical, or context- and criterion-based. Muffy Siegel suggests that inexperienced teachers of writing focus on form more than on content, which is consistent with our informal observations of first-time teachers of writing-intensive courses, especially when those teachers come from highly quantitative fields. Siegel's finding is consistent with Chris Anson's subsequent 1989 study, in which he analyzed teacher comments according to William Perry's developmental scheme. (Anson reduced Perry's original nine positions of intellectual development to three stages: dualistic, relative and reflective.)³ Dualistic comments tend to be right/wrong and grounded in absolute authority; relative comments, while not grounded in right/wrong thinking are grounded in no standard at all; and reflective commenting is good/better/best commenting grounded not in absolutes but in specified criteria. Anson found that neither dualistic nor relativistic responders provided useful feedback, while reflective responders did. This, too, is consistent with a rhetorical model of responding, in which the most sophisticated responders provide audience- and context-specific feedback based on specific criteria.

If, as our survey suggests, there may be a learning curve for commenting, then faculty need to assign at least two revised papers to refine commenting skills enough to elicit revision. Moreover, faculty may need an opportunity to discuss their commenting strategies with fellow professors and writing professionals so that mere practice does not reinforce ineffective practices. If that is the case, and if we take most of the "bad news" and consider it from a developmental perspective, then we have reason to speculate that commenting will become more effective and more efficient over time if faculty are provided some support.

The challenge for WPAs then becomes understanding the different needs of first-time writing intensive instructors and seasoned instructors in learning how to make meaningful, substantive comments that are specific and focused enough to foster substantive revision. From this more optimistic stance, we might also consider that, while nearly one third of the MU respondents reported seeing little significant revision in their students' writing, roughly two thirds of the respondents did.

Should we find new ways to provide WI faculty opportunities to discuss and refine their commenting practices?

When we view students as novice writers, we don't confuse inexperience with incompetence. A novice will learn, given a chance to develop. Likewise, if we view faculty new to the teaching of WI courses as novice commenters, we shouldn't see them or their commenting as doomed. Perhaps they need not only opportunities to revise their comments, but also time to rethink their philosophical assumptions. They may work through stages parallel to Perry's scheme of intellectual development, in which they first see commenting either in black/white terms, as a matter of correcting errors, or in a completely subjective and whimsical way, with no heed to standards. Eventually, WI faculty may come to understand commenting as a criteria-based means of evaluating student writing within a given context for a given purpose. Just as freshman writers need patient teachers who help them work through developmental stages, full professors may also benefit from dialogue with colleagues and WPAs.

Specifically, we need to understand the limits of a faculty WAC workshop. That is, WAC workshops are necessary but not sufficient: other learning opportunities are needed, too. If the professor is new to the practice of writing comments on students' papers (i.e., if the professor is a novice experimenting with a new genre of writing), he or she will probably need some sort of feedback to better understand the kinds of comments that are most effective. The negative feedback that might come from trial and error or from student evaluations could lead the professor to give up prematurely. Intervention from WPAs could take several forms, including these:

- One-on-one private conversations.
- Brown bag lunch seminars focused on commenting.
- Surveys soliciting good, better, and best comments (indirectly asking the faculty member to evaluate his or her own commenting).
- Focused workshops on refining those factors that may set the context for the written comments: evaluating course expectations, designing problem-based assignments that match course expectations, articulating assignment criteria, and developing primary trait scoring guides.

WPAs need to consider not only the students' writing processes and need for reflective practice, but also professors' writing processes (for assignments, for scoring guides, for comments) and need for reflective practice. In "Reflective Reading: Developing Thoughtful Ways to Respond to Students' Writing," Anson argues that "more useful for developing response strategies

are workshops that invite participants to bring in actual samples of students' writing from their own classes, on which they have made either formative or summative evaluative comments" (317). In such workshops, participants might discuss the context for writing (the student, the curriculum, what had happened previously, what prompted this particular assignment); the written commentary (the style, focus, length, effectiveness); and their own justifications for privileging one style of commenting over another for a particular purpose. Activities such as these might help faculty move from dualistic response to more reflective practice.

Should we revise our assumptions about commenting practices, given differences between composition course goals and WI course goals?

Perhaps the most surprising finding of our survey was the possibility that there is a point of diminishing returns in time spent commenting. Half of the respondents reported spending well over fifteen minutes per paper, and one fourth of the respondents reported spending over twenty minutes per paper. That is, over three-quarters of the respondents reported spending at least fifteen minutes and maybe many more minutes commenting per paper. However, respondents who reported spending more than twenty minutes per paper did not see more substantive revision than those who reported spending only ten to twenty minutes per paper. The data suggest that there may be a point of diminishing returns in time spent commenting, although we fully recognize that the survey sample is small, that standards for judging "substantive revision" vary, and that the research instrument is measuring only a perception of substantive revision.

If in fact there is a point of diminishing returns in time spent commenting, this might be a unique feature of writing-intensive courses (relative to composition courses). It is possible that revision in writing-intensive courses is less closely tied to the feedback loop than is the case in composition courses because the teacher's authority rests on more nonwriting issues. Students' motives for revision in writing-intensive courses might be affected by non-writing-related factors, such as how interesting the subject matter is to the student, how relevant the course is to the student's major and career choice, what the teacher's reputation is, and how motivated the student is to do well in the course—independently of the writing. In courses where writing is a means rather than an end in itself, it is possible that the most important factors affecting revision are the most important factors for teaching the course well in the first place, again, independently of the writing.

We also need to help faculty understand that the "conversation" about writing begins with the assignment, may include other class discussion besides that which the student commits to paper in writing, and continues

with the professors' feedback, which in turn should encourage, not discourage, further response from students in revised drafts. If teachers of writing-intensive courses lack confidence in their ability to write comments efficiently and effectively, they might capitalize on other parts of the "conversation." Writing-intensive faculty might actually save time commenting by investing a little more time designing good problem-based assignments with a clearly-identified audience, purpose and task. Writing-intensive faculty might save time by addressing some issues with the whole class or by providing a short exercise in something most students are struggling with, perhaps appropriate documentation for the discipline. But even learning to save time takes time.

CONCLUSION

Nick Carbone and Margaret Daisley argue that there's a rhetorical paradox in responding to writing: On one hand, we teach students to think carefully about audience, purpose, and contexts; on the other hand, we often respond to student writing as if student texts were detached from any audience and context. As Yancey and Brian Huot plea in "Construction, Deconstruction and (Over)Determination: A Foucaultian Analysis of Grades," we need to admit how variable evaluation is, to acknowledge our doubts, and to continue to study our practices—to approach responding rhetorically and thoughtfully. From our perspective, there is no danger in admitting that commenting and evaluating depend not on absolute, universal standards, but rather on a set of context- and audience-specific criteria and that there will be variability whenever the criteria are not made explicit. The challenge, then, becomes making the grading criteria as explicit as possible. Given a set of criteria, grading is not that arbitrary at all and local judgment probably is superior to national norms.

Put another way, our challenge is not so much to do anything new, but to keep on guiding new writing-intensive faculty from a dualistic perspective of responding to a more reflective, rhetorical method. Edward White, in *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide*, offers a heuristic for the writer of writing assignments, including task definition (6). We need to help guide faculty from a generic, universal sense of standards (which might be right but are hopelessly general) to a context-specific set of standards and to let those standards guide the commenting and responding on student drafts. This is especially important in writing-intensive courses, partly because faculty may overestimate what their students know about the unique features of writing in that discipline. Scoring guides can help communicate the unique features of the discipline and of the assignment.

But, even if WPAs patiently practice what they preach and adopt a process-based, rhetorically sensitive model for teacher commenting, WPAs won't fix all the old commenting problems, once and for all. A certain tension is inherent in the teaching/learning relationship and isn't likely to be diminished, even in the most supportive environment. Still, WPAs can create an environment in which committed teachers who seek feedback are encouraged to experiment with and are reinforced for developing more rhetorically-sound comments. With patience and perseverance, WI faculty may develop more effective commenting practices and may foster critical thinking. With patience and ingenuity, WPAs may perpetuate the action-reflection cycle central to faculty development. This action-reflection cycle—not controlled experimentation in artificial settings—needs to be embraced as the key to WPA inquiry.

NOTES

¹ See "The Campus Writing Program Alumni Survey," a telephone survey designed by Marty Patton and conducted by Kenneth Fleming, Center for Advanced Social Research, Fall 2000. The Center for Advanced Social Research (School of Journalism, 135 Neff Annex, Columbia MO 65211) includes among its clients The Ford Foundation, The Center for Disease Control, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trust, and numerous state agencies. The survey results are available upon request: PattonMD@missouri.edu.

² See "A Survey of WI Faculty and TA Grading and Commenting Practices," conducted by Marty Patton, Campus Writing Program, Fall 1999 and Winter 2000, available upon request. PattonMD@missouri.edu

³ See Perry, W. G. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. (Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988).

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“School Is Short and Life Is Long”: Advice for TAs

Wilhoit, Stephen W. *The Allyn and Bacon Teaching Assistant’s Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Longman, 2003. 234 pages. \$42.00 (paper).

Michael Hennessy

I’ve been teaching a TA practicum nearly every fall for the past fifteen years, using a wide range of course materials—textbooks, essay collections, coursepacks—but never quite finding a perfect match between the needs of the TAs I work with and the readings we discuss. To be sure, there are plenty of first-rate books available for introducing newcomers to the art and craft of teaching composition, books like Erika Lindemann’s *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* and Cheryl Glenn Melissa A. Goldthwaite, and Robert Connors’s *The St. Martin Guide to Teaching Writing*. But neither of these books, nor any other book I know of, does what Stephen Wilhoit does in *The Allyn and Bacon Teaching Assistant’s Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*.

Wilhoit covers all the expected bases—the “how-to” information that every new writing teacher, TA or otherwise, needs to know in order to navigate the choppy waters of a composition course—everything from planning a syllabus to assigning final grades. But besides providing an abundance of practical “how-to” advice, Wilhoit also speaks directly and personally to TAs, addressing concerns that are, in many ways, unique to them. Writing from his own substantial experience as a TA supervisor, Wilhoit gives advice not only about conducting class but about conducting life: striking a healthy balance between work and family; integrating the multiple, often conflicting, roles TAs must fill; taking the job seriously without forgetting to enjoy it. Early on, in a section called “Balancing Demands: Life as a TA,” Wilhoit offers this sage advice: “Sometimes resolving problems in your personal life is more important than anything happening at school. When personal or family conflicts occur, take care of yourself and your family without guilt. School is short and life is long” (19). While this sort of “life advice” makes up a relatively small part of Wilhoit’s book, the humane tone he strikes here informs the book as a whole, giving credibility and heft to the practical, nuts-and-bolts advice about teaching that makes up the bulk of *The Teaching Assistant’s Handbook*.

In his Preface, Wilhoit anticipates the most likely objection to his book: that it overemphasizes practice at the expense of theory. He acknowledges that the thrust of the text is “clearly pedagogical” (xx) and suggests that faculty might want to pair his book with an anthology of theoretical essays. Indeed, Wilhoit’s *Handbook* would work beautifully in conjunction with a collection like Victor Villanueva’s *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, recently out in a second edition from NCTE. For me, though, the shortage of theoretical discussion in Wilhoit’s book is not a significant problem. For one thing, he does address theoretical issues at several key junctures, including a section early in the book that briefly outlines widely discussed taxonomies of composition developed by Richard Fulkerson and James Berlin (28-31). Wilhoit uses this discussion to introduce the notion that all classroom practice ought to be grounded in a coherent theoretical position. Toward the end of the book, in an impressive section on professional development, he argues that effective writing teachers must become “conversant in the theories underlying [their] pedagogy and discipline.” “No one,” he reminds us, “teaches theory-free” (201). Wilhoit’s own discussions of teaching practice are theoretically well informed; he demonstrates for TAs the kind of theoretical sophistication he urges them to develop.

The nuts-and-bolts pedagogical discussions that form the bulk of Wilhoit’s *Handbook* are among the best I’ve seen. They show, throughout, an acute awareness of audience. Wilhoit never forgets that he is addressing *beginning* teachers, and if his advice at times seems obvious to classroom veterans (e.g., the importance of building bathroom and lunch breaks into a long stretch of student conferences), such advice is often precisely what TAs need if they are to avoid the sometimes painful process of learning by trial-and-error.

One of the book’s best pedagogical discussions is in Chapter 5, about responding to student writing, which includes an extended heuristic for teacher response, a taxonomy of responses, and a perceptive discussion of the various attitudes a teacher can assume in reading a draft: editor, average reader, academic reader, coach. There is also a superb and substantial chapter on presenting material in class, a topic given short-shrift in many how-to books about teaching writing. Here Wilhoit discusses the techniques and relative merits of lecture, discussion, oral reports, collaboration, and in-class writing. Chapter 8, on using technology in teaching composition, is another exceptional part of the book, offering TAs useful lists of Web resources, including OWLs, listservs, reference sites, and sites for plagiarism detection and professional development.

The wealth of detailed, audience-specific pedagogical advice, in itself, makes Wilhoit’s text valuable for new and experienced TAs—and for other faculty as well. But what truly distinguishes this book is not its teaching

advice but its coverage of concerns that TAs are *not* likely to share with more experienced teachers. The opening chapter is a case in point; here Wilhoit covers the full range of employment issues and English department conventions that most of us take for granted but that are, in fact, quite mysterious to the uninitiated—matters ranging from the TA's general role in the English department hierarchy to practical concerns about tuition remission, health insurance coverage, and campus parking. The chapter ends with a section, mentioned earlier, that discusses the challenges TAs face in balancing graduate study and teaching with their personal lives.

Other pleasant surprises in Wilhoit's book include a chapter about teaching literature, which many TAs, even those in rhet/comp programs, may find useful; one about the academic job search; and one about growing as a teacher, which offers advice on taking risks in the classroom and on the benefits of becoming a reflective teacher.

Perhaps the only unpleasant surprise about this fine and useful book is its price. I was taken aback when a textbook representative quoted me a figure of \$42 for a 234-page paperback. That's a good deal of money for underpaid TAs who have a tall stack of other books to buy every semester. At least for our TAs, however, the publisher agreed to provide copies free of charge because we happened to be using a Longman title in our first-year composition classes. WPAs who want to require Wilhoit's book in a practicum or other course, or as summer reading for incoming TAs, might want to check with the publisher about possible complimentary or discounted copies.

In any event, WPAs should do whatever it takes to get this book into the hands of TAs. Wilhoit's pedagogical advice is solid, detailed, and practical—the kind of advice many of us wish we'd had starting out. As Wilhoit points out, his book is not a substitute for the ongoing instruction and support that TAs need from supervisors, from faculty, and from one another. But *The Allyn and Bacon Teaching Assistant's Handbook* is, nevertheless, an invaluable introduction to teaching composition. It is also a resource that harried TAs can turn to for encouragement and moral support.

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Announcements

The **Consultant-Evaluator Service of the Council of Writing Program Administrators** provides two-person teams to evaluate campus writing programs and their related organizations, initiatives, and institutional components: first-year writing, writing across the disciplines, writing centers, assessment, the role of the WPA, and the like. C-E visits can assess programs and related areas, contributing to institutional program reviews, regional and national accreditation bodies, and the efficiency of campus writing and English programs. Consultant-Evaluators are nationally-recognized scholar-teachers in composition-rhetoric and English studies. For further information, contact Deborah H. Holdstein, co-director of the Service, at d-holdstein@govst.edu. Please title your post "C-E Service."

2004 Summer WPA Conference: Workshop July 11-15, Assessment Institute July 15, Conference July 15-18. Hosted by the University of Delaware. The annual conference, held in mid-summer and hosted in rotation by the home institutions of members, is actually three separate activities:

1. a small, intensive, four-day workshop (attendance about 25) for newer WPAs.
2. a one-day institute (attendance about 25) on assessment of writing and writing programs.
3. a three-day conference (attendance about 200) with concurrent sessions, plenary speakers, and time to network on issues of writing program administration.

The conference comprises two-and-a-half days of panel presentations, poster sessions, plenary addresses, and networking among 200 WPAs from many different types of colleges and universities. Social events include a Thursday night reception, a Friday pub crawl on Main Street in Newark, and a Saturday night banquet and dance. Entertainment includes the Libby McDowell Quartet (jazz), Jerry and the Juveniles (oldies), and our own Composition Blues Band. Please visit the Conference website for additional information, proposal forms, and more: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wpa2004/>.

The Writing Instructor, a freely available networked journal and digital community indexed in the MLA International Bibliography, announces the release of Beta 3.0. This new release feature articles and hypertexts from Margaret Batschelet, Christy Berzsenyi, Jeff Jeske, W. Keith Duffy, Ron Christiansen, Teresa Bruckner, Martha D. Patton, and David Rieder. 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: <http://www.writinginstructor.com>.

Adult Basic Education: Impact of Policy on Practice, Summer Institute 2004. International Perspectives. June 28-30, 2004, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. One year into the International Decade of Literacy, governments are being pressured

to develop and implement policies on adult literacy. The complexity of the issue and lack of consensus about the boundaries of literacy are challenging politicians everywhere to create policies that support responsive practice. This institute asks what we know and what we don't from experiences at home and abroad. Confirmed participants include: John Benseman, University of New Zealand; Joseph Lo Bianco, Language Australia; Jay Derrick, National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) UK; and Sondra Stein, NIFL. For more information, please contact The Centre for Literacy: Website: <<http://www.nald.ca/litcent.htm>>. Email: <literacycntr@dawsoncollege.qc.ca>. Telephone: (514) 931-8731, ext. 1415; Fax: (514) 931-5181

Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition. Series Editor, Charles Bazerman. Parlor Press and the WAC Clearinghouse. The Series provides compact, comprehensive and convenient surveys of what has been learned through research and practice as composition has emerged as an academic discipline over the last half century. Each volume is devoted to a single topic that has been of interest in rhetoric and composition in recent years, to synthesize and make available the sum and parts of what has been learned on that topic. These reference guides are designed to help deepen classroom practice by making available the collective wisdom of the field and will provide the basis for new research. The Series is intended to be of use to teachers at all levels of education, researchers and scholars of writing, graduate students learning about the field, and all who have interest in or responsibility for writing programs and the teaching of writing. The first volume in the series, Janice M. Lauer's *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition*, was published in January, 2004.

Parlor Press and The WAC Clearinghouse are collaborating so that these books will be widely available through low-cost print editions and free digital distribution. The publishers and the Series editor are teachers and researchers of writing, committed to the principle that knowledge should freely circulate. We see the opportunities that new technologies have for further democratizing knowledge. And we see that to share the power of writing is to share the means for all to articulate their needs, interest, and learning into the great experiment of literacy. For information about the Series visit Parlor Press (<http://www.parlorpress.com>) or the WAC Clearinghouse (<http://wac.colostate.edu>).

New WPA Editorial Team Welcomed! In 2004, a new editorial team from Arizona State University and Arizona State University-East will take over the editing and production of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. The new Managing Editors are Gregory Glau (gglau@asu.edu), Barry Maid (barry.maid@asu.edu), and Duane Roen (duane.roen@asu.edu). Please address all new submission questions to Gregory Glau (gglau@asu.edu). Manuscripts may be submitted for future issues in Word or RTF format as email attachments. Submission questions should now be directed to Gregory Glau, Co-Editor, WPA, Dept. of English, PO Box 870302, Tempe, AZ 85287-0302; Email: gglau@asu.edu.

Contributors to WPA 27.1/2

Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater is an associate professor of English in the Rhetoric and Composition Program at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. At the time of writing this article she was the Director of Composition and has also held the positions of Director of English Education and Graduate Director of Women's and Gender Studies at UNCG. Her research interests are in literacy, ethnography, composition theory, teacher-research, and gender studies. Her publications include *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* (2002), *Academic Literacies* (1991), and numerous articles.

Michael Hennessy is professor of English at Texas State University-San Marcos, where, for seventeen years, he directed the first-year composition program. During his tenure, he mentored several hundred TAs, many of whom are now college writing faculty. In fall 2003, he was appointed associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas State. He is author or co-author of three composition textbooks—*The Borzoi Handbook for Writers*, *The Borzoi Practice Book*, and *The Random House Practice Book*. He has twice received Texas State University's Faculty Senate award for excellence in teaching.

Rebecca Moore Howard (rehoward@syr.edu) is associate professor of Writing and Rhetoric at Syracuse University and the former writing program administrator at Syracuse, Texas Christian, and Colgate Universities. Her teaching and scholarly work focus on issues of plagiarism and authorship; composition pedagogy; and writing across the curriculum. She is author of *Standing in the Shadow of Giants: Plagiarists, Authors, Collaborators* (1999) and coauthor of *The Bedford Guide to Teaching Writing in the Disciplines* (1995). Her coedited book, *Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum* (2000), won the 2000-2001 WPA Book Award.

Mary Juzwik is an assistant professor of English at Northern Arizona University, where she teaches courses in language and literacy to pre-service English teachers. Her current research, which theorizes and empirically examines "teaching as performance," explores how rhetorical theory and the everyday practices of literacy teaching can mutually illuminate one another. This narrative study aims to develop a better understanding of the verbal artfulness of teaching.

Catherine Latterell is an Assistant Professor of English at Penn State University, Altoona. The range of her work, at its core, focuses on examining systems of higher education at public universities. She is currently developing a first-year composition reader for Bedford/St. Martin's Press called, *Intersections: Reading and Writing about Identity and Culture*.

Jackie Grutsch McKinney is a newly appointed assistant professor of Rhetoric and Composition at Ball State University where her duties include teaching undergraduate and graduate courses and directing the Writing Center. She has an article forthcoming in *The Journal of Teaching Writing* on the difficulties of teaching research writing and is working on her first book, an analysis of how Americans compose stories of self-defense. In her new life in Indiana, she finds herself longing for good Thai food, well-organized files, big fat novels, and lazy weekends. Luckily, on occasion at least, she finds all of these things.

Martha D. Patton, adjunct professor of English, helps direct the Campus Writing Program, the writing-in-the-disciplines program at the University of Missouri. She teaches writing, women's literature and humanities classes, but her research focuses on writing-in-the-disciplines, especially writing in biology and in engineering. Her essay, "Situated Writing Lessons: Putting Writing Advice in Disciplinary Context," appears in the most recent issue of *The Writing Instructor*: <<http://www.writinginstructor.com>>.

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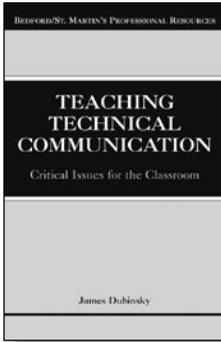
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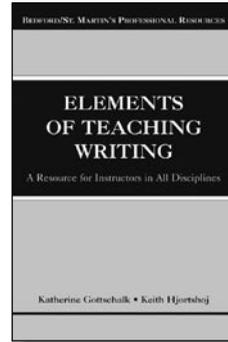
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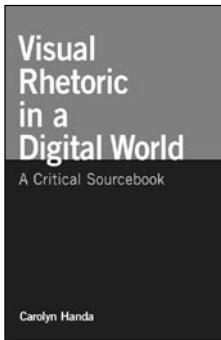
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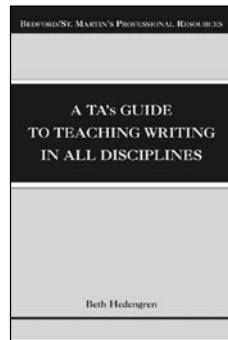
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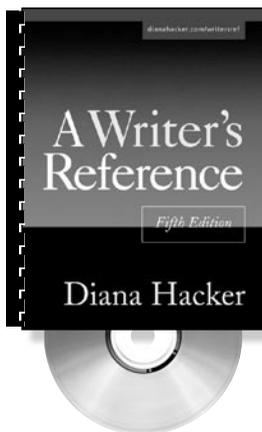
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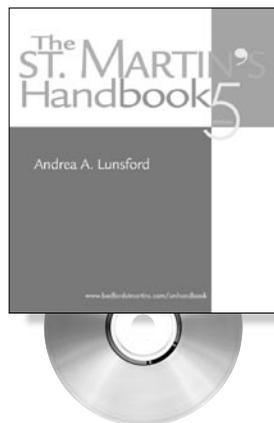
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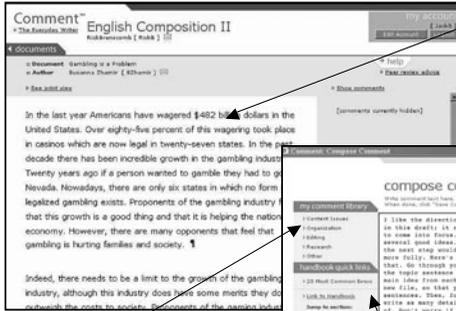
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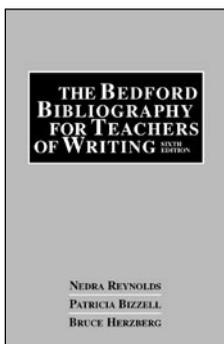


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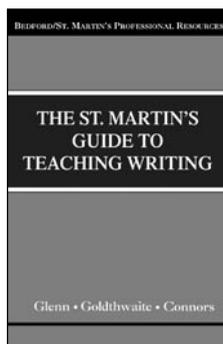
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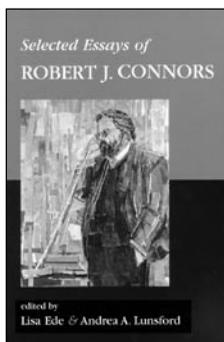


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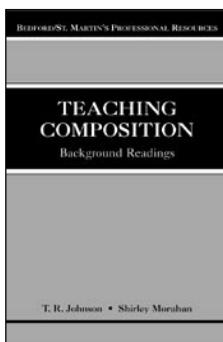


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