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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_. Manuscripts may be submitted for future issues in MS Word (preferred) or RTF format as email attachments to wpa-journal@gmail.com. Submissions are anonymously reviewed by the Editorial Board. The editors will respond within three months after the receipt of the submission.

Authors whose work is accepted for publication will be asked to submit final versions in both print and electronic form. Please double-check all citations. Tables should be saved in the program in which they were produced; authors should indicate program type in their correspondence with the editors. Images and line-art should be submitted as image files in uncompressed TIF or JPG format and as separate files, at 300 dpi or higher. Authors are responsible for seeking and securing permissions to use images that they did not create themselves. 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
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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CALLS

Relevant announcements and calls for papers will be published as space permits. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and calls for proposals/participation should not exceed 1,000 words. Please include contact information and/or links for further information. Submission deadlines in calls should be no sooner than January 1 for the fall/winter issue and June 1 for the spring issue. Please e-mail your calls and announcements to wpa-journal@gmail.com and include the text in both the body of the message and as an MS Word or RTF attachment.

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Letter from the Managing Editors

Once again, we find ourselves privileged to present an excellent collection of WPA work in this “special issue” focusing on new programs and challenges edited by Mary Braun, Catherine Chaput, and Danika Brown. Tim and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with these three terrific colleagues; their efforts have been tireless and professional and have resulted in a great issue.

We look forward to our upcoming fall/winter 2008 issue on research-driven WPA work, the CFP of which reads in part

... we are soliciting articles that not only justify our areas of study but which also directly identify how much writing contributes to tuition dollars not just initially (first-year programming) but also over the typical four- or five-year enrollment of the average undergraduate student. In other words, success in writing correlates—if not directly relates—to increased retention. In this sense, most successful retention efforts focus on writing skills as both abilities that demonstrate learning while also serving as methods for understanding—i.e., writing as cognition. Ultimately, writing also is the most demanded skill in the workplace, and because of this, we wish to discuss the ways in which contemporary writing programming is lending itself towards successful job placement and other workforce-related objectives . . .

And which will include Chris Anson’s and Edward White’s WPA plenary addresses from the 2006 and 2007 WPA conferences, Edmund Jones’ article on online DSP, Carrie Leverenz’s article on new media and writing program administration, and a collaborative article on the value of first-year writing programs by Anis Bawarshi, Rachel Goldberg, and Angela Rounsaville.

On a final note, copies of the corrected, reprinted 31.1/2 issue are available on the WPA website at http://wpacouncil.org/31n1-2. Our goal is to present as near error-free an issue as possible, but sometimes mistakes do
happen. We regret any inconvenience these errors caused and will redouble our efforts to ensure that the journal represents the highest standards of scholarly work.

—Deirdre Pettipiece, University of the Sciences in Philadelphia
—Timothy Ray, West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Letter from the Editors of the Special Issue

NEW PROGRAM DESIGN IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

In our day-to-day development, reform, and administration of first-year and undergraduate writing programs, we often focus on the immediate and local idiosyncrasies of what we do. Our program administration therefore is often responsive to institutional imperatives such as assessment mandates and constraints, particularly the allocation of resources determined at upper administrative levels. Because of a myriad of pressures, writing instruction and program administration have become, in large part, technocratically defined and managed. In response to these conditions, calls for rethinking and diversifying our approaches with more attention to a broadened scope of the rhetorical tradition, interdisciplinary methodologies, and an understanding of the implications of teaching rhetoric and composition beyond the classroom have increasingly shaped our thinking about new and innovative approaches to our writing programs. Heeding the insightful analyses and critiques offered by people in the field such as Sharon Crowley, Thomas P. Miller, and Michael A. Halloran, the articles in this special issue offer new and innovative approaches to writing program development and curricular design.

Each of the articles in this issue seek to question and disrupt dominant technocratic tendencies in program administration by actively asking: What is the potential to create or revise programs based within the liberal arts ideals of critical engagement, within the rhetorical tradition of public engagement, or within a philosophical inquiry about writers and writing? What are the socio-political and economic factors that thwart such alternative program development and how can those factors be addressed? In asking these questions, these articles not only offer an analysis of pressures defining and delimiting work within writing programs, but also offer well thought out program ideas, offering potential alternatives and strategies for redefining that work.

Catherine Chaput’s article, “Lest We Go the Way of Vocational Training: Developing Undergraduate Writing Programs in the Humanist Tra-
dition,” provides a model of a visionary undergraduate writing program that places writing within the intersections of rhetoric and cultural studies. Drawing on a diverse group of theorists and critiques of the divisions in composition, rhetoric, and cultural studies, Chaput engages the apparent dichotomy between interpretation of texts – largely delegated to literary studies – and the production of texts – understood to be the domain of composition – and rearticulates that distinction as the role of rhetoric as reproductive or disruptive. She advocates for a “humanist rhetoric” that understands both interpretive and productive aspects of language as culturally tied, dialogically and dialectically privileging engagement with others that might lead to disruptive and transformative cultural practices. The model curriculum she offers demonstrates ways an undergraduate writing program might prepare students to question how the production of texts occurs within political and economic contexts, and are embedded in questions of power and identity.

Dylan Dryer’s article, “The Persistence of Institutional Memory: Genre Uptake and Program Reform,” examines first-year placement processes as a genre that demonstrates the institutional tendency to construct hierarchical student “needs” in ways that may have little to do with student abilities, potential, or perception of their own needs. Dryer extends Jeanne Gunner’s ideas of “social genre” and Royer and Gilles’ analysis of the material implications of texts used in placement to develop a critique of the placement process. Dryer’s analysis of the way the genre of placement – including placement tests, scores, and alternative processes – function to define writing instruction itself as well as students’ experience of that instruction reminds us that our program administration must constantly struggle with technocratic institutional assumptions. Understanding writing program administration as itself engaging with institutionalized genres enables the WPA to rhetorically analyze the contexts and texts that delimit what we do, providing potential ways to intervene in those processes, and to understand why some of those interventions are not always successful.

Kimberly Costino’s article, in “Service vs Subject Matter: Merging First-Year Composition and First-Year Experience,” describes how a WPA’s astute rhetorical analysis of institutional imperatives can lead to opportunities to constitute and define composition’s subject matter. Costino provides an innovative approach to developing a new set of merged courses that create interdisciplinary, content-focused approaches to composition in ways that mitigate what Sharon Crowley has called the “ethic of service” surrounding composition courses. The author’s experience with merging First-Year Composition with a university First-Year Experience initiative allowed her to articulate to faculty and administration outside of the writing pro-
gram an understanding of composition not merely as a set of skills for producing texts, but as a discipline that examines language and argument as socially embedded and context-bound. The author offers a model of a program initiative that, by making composition part of a sequence of content-driven seminars, makes visible and legitimates the content and practices of writing instruction as rhetorical activity. Costino outlines the impact of this merging not only on the composition sequence, but on the other disciplines’ approaches to discourse in the content area seminars.

Utilizing discourse analysis and activity theory, John Oddo and Jamie Parmelee’s article, “Competing Interpretations of ‘Textual Objects’ in an Activity System: A Study of the Requirements Document in the ___ Writing Program,” demonstrates the significant role institutional texts play in program development and administration. The authors examine the ways two faculty who play key roles in the administration of a writing program interpret a document that outlines the requirements for the first-year writing courses. The authors find that because the document does not necessarily capture some of the agreed upon goals for the courses, specifically in the area of digital literacies, the way the document is interpreted and applied by individuals functioning under differing assumptions may work against achieving programmatic course goals. As Dryer’s article points out, Oddo and Parmelee further emphasize that writing instruction is not defined in a vacuum, but is rather constantly shaped and delimited by the discursive practices that often become reified in institutional settings. The authors provide a framework for investigating the implications of our textual objects as we attempt to create new programs and curriculum design.

In the final article of the issue, we return to the question of radically transforming our writing programs to reflect the depth of our rhetorical theories. M. J. Braun’s “The Prospects for Rhetoric in a First-Year Composition Program: Deliberative Discourse as a Vehicle for Change?” reflects on her own analysis of the textual objects that constructed a writing program defined by formalistic, a-rhetorical pedagogical practices, despite the shared goal of a program that was more richly rhetorical. Like Chaput, Braun points out the divergence of traditional composition’s formalist focus on the production of written text from the more rhetorical understanding of texts as having deep contexts that respond in complicated ways to other texts and discourses. Braun recounts literally abandoning the discursive textual objects (to borrow Oddo and Parmelee’s term), such as decontextualized syllabi and student guides that outlined modes of discourse, and embarking on a collective, rhetorical project with instructors in the program to completely re-envision alternative approaches to writing instruction. The process Braun and her colleagues undertook embraced the very principles
of rhetoric—deliberation and democratic debate—that the revised program adopted as goals for the writing courses, an approach informed by the work of Sharon Crowley, Patricia Roberts-Miller, and Chantal Mouffe. The author describes the exciting results and positive reception of the program by the students and instructors, as well as the engaged participation the program enabled. However, Braun goes on to point out the institutional obstacles such as dependence on contingent labor and the lack of recognition of administrative efforts as equivalent to other forms of scholarship that eventually hobbled and reversed the transformation of the writing program.

Braun’s article, like all the articles in this issue, invites us to consider the dynamic potential to develop new writing programs that enable our students to navigate, question, and perhaps transform social and institutional structures. Simultaneously, however, these articles remind us that visionary program administration requires that we navigate, question, and transform those very structures ourselves. I and my co-editors hope that the dialogue opened here inspires and instructs all of us to rigorously and critically engage our programs as themselves rhetorical—interacting with and potentially transformational of larger cultural practices.

On behalf of the special issue editorial team . . .

—Danika M. Brown, The University of Texas Pan American
Lest We Go the Way of Vocational Training: Developing Undergraduate Writing Programs in the Humanist Tradition

Catherine Chaput

Marshall McLuhan once declared that “it’s misleading to suppose there’s any basic difference between education and entertainment” (3). Such a distinction, he says, “merely relieves people of the responsibility of looking into the matter” (3). The entertainment industry helps produce meaning, shape desire, and direct social practices; it educates, wields power, and serves political ends. No doubt, politics entertains too: presidential candidates make appearances on late night television talk shows and answer questions like “do you wear boxers or briefs” just as much, sometimes more, than they answer questions like “what is our exit strategy from Iraq?” While politicians engage in dialogue with citizen/viewers, such exchanges are choreographed to niche markets and packaged as entertainment rather than political deliberation, teaching us that the line between rhetoric and poetics, between production and interpretation, between dialogue and diatribe, is more blurred than either the literary or rhetorical canons would suggest. Yet the recent anxieties among rhetoricians, in communication and in composition both, over rhetorical and cultural theories that stray from the central mission of textual (re)production tend to miss McLuhan’s rather basic point—the world of globalization has indeed imploded upon itself and the disciplinary boundaries that thrived in the industrial era of education simply cannot sustain themselves under the critique of an increasingly interdisciplinary world.

Opposed to such disciplinary gatekeeping, I contend that writing programs, particularly the growing number of undergraduate majors and concentrations, take this sociocultural and historical context into consideration rather than working to train students exclusively in the discrete tasks of
workplace writing. In an interdisciplinary world, writing programs need to interact with the rhetorical functions of politics and entertainment as they emerge in both public and private spaces. For me and the curriculum I will discuss later, this means continually working at the intersections of rhetorical humanism and cultural studies in order to arrive at a writing program that matches the diversity of persuasive symbolism comprising the social and historical world we inhabit. Taking up this subject, this essay outlines the theoretical linkages I see between rhetoric and cultural studies as humanist pursuits that converge at the site of textual interpretation and production, and conjectures that critics of this practice might be more troubled by the thought of using rhetoric to transform the world than they are over disciplinary purity. I use Georgia Southern University’s Writing and Culture Area concentration as a model to illustrate how this confluence between rhetoric and cultural studies can be translated into a fully developed undergraduate writing program with its foundation in the liberal, rather than mechanical, arts. Arguing against hitching writing to the practical needs of the university and the workplace, I end with a call to develop more writing programs based on such humanist foundations.

Writing, Cultural Studies, and Rhetorical Humanism: Debates and Traditions

I believe a fundamental congruence between rhetoric and cultural studies stems from the fact that both fields are wedded to political action rather than mere philosophical inquiry. If we move rhetoric beyond its primary definition as civic action—exploring epideictic discourse as Jeffrey Walker advocates or defining rhetoric as an art according to Janet Atwill’s revisionist history—we open up rhetoric to inquiry and action within the diverse spaces of our contemporary world. Indeed, the long history of rhetoric and the shorter history of cultural studies understand discourse as an evolving tool necessary for the practical engagement of a world in flux. Perhaps because of this commitment to public engagement, rhetoric and cultural studies have merged in several ways. A decade ago Thomas Rosteck published, “Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies” in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, fueling a conversation about the relationship between these two fields. Since then rhetorical studies has expanded to include diverse projects illustrating the interrelatedness of these two academic and political fields. Rhetorical scholarship of myriad texts has been enhanced by attention to cultural analyses and courses in cultural studies have become a standard component of many rhetoric and composition graduate programs. Even debates about academic disciplines have been deepened through this dual
analytics, pointing toward a need to rethink university structures, curricular design, and classroom pedagogy. Steven Mailloux, for instance, encourages using rhetorical hermeneutics in concert with transnational cultural studies in order “to enter into the ‘philosophical quarrels’ within general debates over the future of higher education” (22). In order to facilitate further inquiry about the role of rhetorical hermeneutics, Mailloux calls for increased dialogue between rhetoricians in communication programs and English studies.

Scholars from both English and communication departments responded with disciplinary histories that explore the institutional role of rhetoric and led up to the inaugural conference of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies. David Zarefsky, who represented the conference’s working group on “Institutional and Social Goals for Rhetoric,” gave the following summary of rhetoric’s institutional history: 1) rhetoric exists as a subfield in both English and speech communication departments; 2) in English departments, rhetoric focuses on writing and emphasizes pedagogy while its speech communication version focuses on speech and emphasizes civic discourse; and, 3) the speech communication version believes itself more progressive than the conservative field of English from which it broke nearly a century ago (28). What appears to me to be a major omission from Zarefsky’s history is the material and intellectual ghettoization of rhetoric in English departments that results, in part, from rhetoric’s dual subordination as a subfield of composition, which is itself a subfield of English. To clarify Zarefsky’s institutional sketch, I would add that composition programs frequently have a service-orientation, tackling first-year writing, writing across the disciplines, technical writing, and business writing so that other fields can focus on purportedly separate and more important content issues. These various strands of composition primarily rely on Aristotelian methods of rhetoric as understanding the available means of persuasion prior to the production of credible, genre-specific texts. However, new directions in rhetorical studies, both those that revisit ancient rhetorical traditions and those that join the rhetorical tradition to contemporary critical/cultural theories, offer ways of getting beyond the peculiar institutional constrains of writing programs, curriculum design, and administration, all of which are delimited by composition’s institutional ethos as a service to other units and knowledges.

The absence of this writing program history likely contributes to what Zarefsky identifies as a major institutional paradox: while rhetoric could be a powerful interdisciplinary project, it “remains fragmented into subfields of two parent disciplines with limited interaction between them” (28). Writing programs often do not identify with the English departments in
which they are housed for some of the same reasons rhetoricians do not—they see the teaching of literature as secondary to training students in various discourses outside the university. From this perspective, rhetoricians remain fragmented not because we have divergent interests but because communication studies mistakenly assumes rhetoric and composition privileges literature over civic discourse and both groups mistakenly occlude culture from political deliberation, further dividing the field from within. Interestingly, several of the position papers at the conference “argued for the need to transcend the division between English and Communication studies” (30). James Arnt Aune, for instance, called for the establishment of rhetorical centers that embrace pedagogy, placing the teaching of basic speaking and writing courses at the heart of these centers—a proposal eerily reminiscent of writing centers that emerged across the country in the 1980s. Other recommendations from the conference working group centered on increased communication between the two institutional homes of rhetoric, among our like-minded colleagues across the university, with administrators, and with the public—precisely the kind of work in which WPAs have cultivated much expertise. Contrary to those who oppose rhetorical hermeneutics as disciplinary suicide, this working group clearly advocates opening up rhetorical boundaries, rejecting binaries like theory versus practice, transgressing disciplinary divisions, and embracing the complementary notions of dissoi logoi and contingency. I believe this gesture provides an opportunity for writing programs to align themselves with rhetoricians in and outside of the English department, placing writing within the thick of both cultural and political interpretation and production, and severing its allegedly exclusive loyalties to literature.

Surely such realignment would be welcomed by the many writing specialists who call for increased attention to rhetoric. Thomas P. Miller, from whom the title of this essay borrows, repeatedly argues that without more attention to rhetoric, English departments will become hopelessly irrelevant (“How Rhetorical are Composition and Communications?”; “Lest We Go the Way of the Classics”). Others argue that besides making our curriculum more rhetorical, we need to become better rhetoricians ourselves. Carmen Werder suggests that the WPA learn to use rhetoric, rather than raw power, to negotiate institutional change (“Rhetorical Agency”). James Porter, et. al., have gone so far as to develop what they call an activist methodology that encourages students and faculty to see possibilities for rhetorical change at the indices of global and local exigencies (“Institutional Critique”). In sum, there exists, within the field broadly construed, a pervasive belief that rhetoric holds the answer to both our curricular relevance and our institutional authority as writing programs. Yet the hope many place
in rhetoric frequently delimits the rhetorical to a political sphere artificially quarantined from the cultural world, and focuses on the reproduction of the status quo rather than the questioning of normalized discourse. These scholars are not alone in their desire to define rhetoric within clearly articulated practices. Composition specialists also advocate a particular form of rhetoric—one that negotiates the political and symbolic terrains but does not redesign the contours of these spaces, one that argues within the boundaries of an imposed civility but does not speak outside those normalized borders, and one that begins with what is while forgetting to imagine what could be.

Just as some communication scholars police disciplinary boundaries against rhetorical hermeneutics some composition theorists also find themselves wary of diverse approaches. For instance, Richard Fulkerson’s “Composition at the Turn of the Century” argues, with regret, that composition has become a less unified and more contentious field than it was fifteen years ago. He blames our disciplinary ambiguity on the splintering of a previously more unified field and holds critical/cultural studies, in particular, to task for catalyzing this centrifugal process. Our pedagogies, he says, are divided among critical/cultural studies, expressivism, and rhetorical approaches, arguing that critical/cultural studies methods alone fall short because they are reading-based, hermeneutics; on the other hand, rhetorical approaches, of which he names three, and expressivism, are productive and, therefore, appropriate to the teaching of writing. The three rhetorical approaches to composition, according to Fulkerson, are the teaching of argumentative writing, academic writing, and generic writing. Each of the rhetorical approaches takes an audience and the public sphere as given and teaches students to write persuasively within particular spaces while expressivist approaches use writing to know, reflect, and heal, coaxing a clear and authentic voice from each student without contamination from outside sources and influences. Critical/cultural studies, however, uses heuristics to help students understand, question, and transform such realities through writing—a task he believes falls outside composition’s disciplinary expertise. Fulkerson emphasizes that the misplaced critical/cultural studies classroom seeks “not ‘improved writing’ but ‘liberation’ from dominant discourse,” indicting it with a potential for political indoctrination absent from the other supposed politically neutral approaches (660). That Fulkerson fails to acknowledge the rhetorical base of many critical/cultural studies pedagogies, that he sees division and deliberation as threatening, and that he understands reading/interpreting as separate from writing/producing position his argument squarely within the problematic binaries that those attending the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies are trying to overcome.
Indeed, Fulkerson’s attack on critical/cultural studies could just as easily be an argument against Mailloux and others’ use of rhetoric to understand cultural production. Both critiques seemingly desire a definition of rhetoric confined to negotiating already agreed upon possibilities without further interrogation—emphasizing the enthymematic and downplaying the dialectic in ways that privilege vocational over humanistic inquiry. But culture and politics are not mutually exclusive spheres and rhetoricians who eschew cultural spaces miss key opportunities for dialogue and deliberation over contemporary politics. What is most clear to me from the backlash against hermeneutics and cultural studies from both sides of the rhetorical divide is that these disputes are not about rhetoric as productive versus rhetoric as interpretive—an impossible binary; rather, they seem to stem from disagreements about rhetoric as reproductive versus rhetoric as disruptive. Hence, this debate forces us to ask whether the role of rhetoric in writing programs is to teach students to be agents of change or simply citizens of empire, to borrow from Robert Jensen’s title phrase.

Janet Atwill’s work on technê and the liberal arts tradition offers an excellent stepping stone into this important question. In condensed form, her *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition* argues that there are two distinct traditions in the art of rhetoric—technê, which allows for invention and intervention, and a liberal arts tradition that eclipses the political and social functions of this earlier tradition while solidifying disciplinary knowledge and naturalizing the position of its privileged subject. Atwill encourages us to go back to the lost tradition of technê in order to harness rhetoric’s disruptive and transformative potential. As she states, the goal is to “extricate rhetoric and technê from ‘normalizing’ traditions that work against intervention of any kind” (207). This means moving beyond the theory/practice binary, but it also means moving beyond the culture/politics binary. As I said earlier, there is no clear distinction between the political and cultural effects of the entertainment industries and the political and cultural effects of the democratic sphere—both are forms of public pedagogies. Such a principle underlies, in fact, Jeffrey Walker’s groundbreaking exploration of the “rhetorical poetics” embodied in Greek lyricism that predates the systematic theories of rhetoric to which most rhetoricians cling (*Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*). Given this and many other studies, the suasive quality of all discourse has become almost universally accepted, yet we are slower (as Fulkerson’s assessment of composition illustrates) to endorse programs informed by a notion of rhetoric as disruptive to the imagined line between politics and culture as well as to the world more generally.
Examining the twin anxieties in communication and composition through Atwill’s argument reminds us of the rhetorician as dangerous, as one who can compel others to see and act in the world differently, as one who invents new possibilities rather than acquiesces to old regimes. In this sense, the best work currently emerging within rhetorical studies, regardless of its disciplinary home, seeks to open up academic and political conversations, unhinging the dichotomous relationship between rhetoric and poetics in a way that seems much more aligned with the contemporary geopolitical moment. Such work is certainly performed by rhetorical theorists and often taught within graduate programs, but there remains a dearth of this rhetoric at the undergraduate level in both English and communication departments. Communication departments tend to emphasize professional skills—journalism, broadcasting, acting, and public relations—while English departments tend to position rhetoric as a rather straightforward component of writing courses—rhetoric in first-year composition, business writing, or technical writing—or, less often, as a form of literary interpretation. Few undergraduate programs offer a four-year sequence of courses informed by rhetoric within creative and political texts, with an additional emphasis on these texts as pedagogical, as teaching us how to act in the world.

Entrenched disciplinary boundaries and theoretical stakes professionalize us to guard our theoretical and disciplinary divisions rather than break them down. One place where such clear disciplinarity might not emerge, however, are the growing numbers of freestanding writing programs and the undergraduate degrees developing nationwide. According to Jeffrey Grabill, et al., one way to engage in “dramatic institutional initiatives to improve writing instruction” is to create departments of writing (231). The writing departments that he and his colleagues have created (the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University and the Department of Writing & Rhetoric at the University of Rhode Island) engage writing rhetorically in the ways I advocate and are, as they say, “humanities-based departments of writing, focused on teaching writing in socially, culturally, and critically aware ways” (231). These programs are not alone. A Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies offers an impressive collection of possibilities and roadblocks for independent writing programs. Sandra Jamieson in conjunction with Drew University Composition Program has compiled and continues to update a growing list of Writing Majors, Minors, Tracks, and Concentrations. While most of the programs listed focus on technical and professional writing, some do specialize in rhetorical humanist or cultural studies approaches. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for instance, has a program in Writing and Humanist Studies that includes courses focused
on the intersections of writing and the self as it exists in society, emphasizing issues of race, gender, and identity. Housed in a university known for its technological studies, it shouldn’t be surprising that this Writing and Humanist Studies program offers courses in technical communication and science writing. But many other programs retain strong connections to professional work even in liberal arts or humanities colleges.

In fact, among the programs that identify themselves as offering humanities-based writing degrees, few provide a comprehensive curriculum that studies both political and cultural aspects of persuasion. Take, for instance, Michigan State University’s innovative Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures. This department appears to see writing, rhetoric, and culture as equally important and connected aspects of humanistic study, but its undergraduate major in writing, titled Professional Writing, exists separately from its undergraduate major in American Cultures even though both are housed in the same department. While I support the work being done in this department, I want to underscore how much writing, even in a humanities-based curriculum, remains tied to business skills such as developing technological literacies, writing grants, editing, and publishing, with proportionally fewer courses connected to cultural aspects of textual production. Nevertheless, Michigan’s program does diverge in important ways from its peers which mostly provide vocationalizing majors in writing and rhetoric. Given the institutional and geopolitical context of such programs, it is no wonder we cling to the market logic that equates a university education with job training. And yet this technocratic sensibility in our program development is, as McLuhan points out, both misleading and a renunciation of responsibility for teaching students about the rhetorical possibilities of a world co-constructed by politics and culture.

A more integrated approach, I suggest, would be based exclusively on rhetorical humanism and cultural studies. Such a curriculum would move beyond the professionalizing, reproductive mechanism of traditional rhetorical practices, at least within the domain of composition, and embrace rhetoric as a dynamic that produces the material and textual world through cultural, political, and economic valuations. I rely on Atwill’s distinction between reproductive and disruptive rhetorics, when I call for curriculum development in a humanist tradition. My tentative use of humanism, deeply conscious of its many critiques, is likewise indebted to Paulo Freire’s conception of humanism as a process of becoming such that history moves forward through the dialectic between the word and the world, textuality and materiality. His seminal work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, defines humanism as a dialogical engagement with others in order to understand and transform the contradictions that strip individuals of their subjectiv-
ity, making them only objects of others’ power. Humanism, in this sense, demands that students learn to take responsibility for their agentive power in a world that is both political and cultural. I am fortunate to have participated in developing what I believe to be one such curriculum in the Writing and Culture Area Concentration at Georgia Southern University’s Department of Writing and Linguistics. I turn now to a discussion of this undergraduate concentration as a rhetorically and culturally informed writing program with a humanist, rather than a practical, orientation.

**Program Development: Georgia Southern’s Writing and Culture Area Concentration**

“Until the inherent structure of American academic institutions changes significantly,” Barry Maid argues, “the ideal Independent Writing Unit will be a full-fledged department offering programs which lead to degrees” (454). He contends that such an institutional context would allow faculty to imagine and deliver a wide variety of writing and rhetoric courses beyond the first-year sequence and a handful of well trodden upper-division courses blandly titled Advanced Compositions, Business Writing, and Technical Writing. Sharon Crowley, in the same Writing Program Administrator’s Resource, reaffirms her belief that severing the traditional albatross of required first-year composition would free the WPA to do other, more productive, work in writing program development. While I am politically sympathetic to Crowley’s position on the elimination of FYC, I see Maid’s promotion of an independent writing structure with multiple undergraduate threads as another way to enable faculty the creative space to develop new programs. I certainly doubt that the rhetorical humanist and cultural studies approach I advocate could be achieved through one or two first-year or a upper-level courses, but there is no reason FYC (required or not) couldn’t participate within a fully developed undergraduate program.

In the independent writing department at Georgia Southern, for instance, students receive a bachelor’s degree in Writing and Linguistics with a concentration in one of four areas. The department chair represents the unit within the college and university while each area is coordinated by one faculty member in collaboration with the faculty teaching in that area. The first-year program is administered by a separate director of composition, also in collaboration with faculty who teach in the first-year sequence. This departmental structure leaves little clearly defined space for what is traditionally called the WPA, perhaps answering Marc Bousquet’s call for “working toward a university without a WPA” (518). And, yet, I don’t want to idealize this structure as it required faculty to provide unpaid service
toward program development that would in most departments be compensated with reduced teaching loads. After breaking from the English Department, renamed the Literature Department, the independent Department of Writing and Linguistics was initially responsible for first-year composition and for a minor in writing while it worked without remuneration on developing a structure for its undergraduate major. This unpaid labor did not end with the Regents 2003 approval of the major. Although the different Area Concentrations existed in theory when the major was approved, there remained significant work to refine the focus and curricula of each of these Areas.

The department’s four different major tracks were in relatively inchoate forms that needed development to achieve national parity with peer programs as well as to better meet the goals and objectives outlined in our accepted proposal for the major. Two of these concentrations (Linguistics and Creative Writing) have long institutional histories with clearly defined and standardized undergraduate coursework, making the development of their areas considerably easier in that they had to align with national standards but did not have to invent those standards. A third Area (Professional and Technical Writing) has less institutional history, but certainly had national counterparts upon which to draw. In fact, few would argue that the most clearly entrenched writing courses, besides first-year composition, are those in technical, professional, and business writing. The fourth Area (Writing and Culture) had a more difficult terrain to negotiate. Like many new programs, an institutional space was carved out for this area, originally titled the Theory and Practice of Writing, before its curriculum was fully developed. This occurred because of an institutional Catch-22—you must have students to fill courses before you can offer them, but you need to have a major before students enroll in courses. What this meant was that I arrived on campus as a member of this Area Concentration with few courses on the books and even fewer courses that genuinely reflected the Area’s goals—goals which were as yet unclear to our diverse faculty. But because my department chair assured me that this Area was open to being shaped as I and my colleagues thought prudent, I jumped into curriculum development with both feet. Given my interest in cultural studies as well as the extreme breadth of research interests among the faculty, it made sense that our common ground was an investment in the intersections of writing, rhetoric, and culture. Because “rhetoric,” we were accurately told, was a hot-button term for the Communication Arts faculty, we compromised by titling the area Writing and Culture, even though our collective commitment was to delivering a rhetorical curriculum that taught students how to theorize and use writing as a means of negotiating diverse discursive
spaces. In this way, we wanted the curriculum to be decidedly humanist and not simply applied, technical, or simply intellectual.

The Writing and Culture Area, which I coordinated during its development, met every other week as it collaboratively constructed a focused mission, a four-year curriculum, activities for student groups, potential speakers, and future public programming. Although this service required a substantial amount of time, faculty members were dedicated to the work because, as workers in the trenches, they understood this as a unique opportunity to productively shape their working environment. Two of the more important discussions we had as an Area focused on what we wanted to achieve within rhetoric and composition that did not encroach on the other areas—linguistics, creative writing, and professional and technical writing—but offered its own unique focus or slice of the field. For us, that became culture and its relationship to both rhetoric and writing. Our second hurdle was how to offer this curriculum at an undergraduate level when most of our models of rhetoric and composition curriculum came either from graduate-level courses or from first-year sequences. Again, this meant abandoning professionalizing courses intended primarily for future academicians and focusing on the humanist foundations of writing. These two ongoing discussions allowed us to expand our definitions of rhetoric, writing, and culture in order to create something none of us individually could have imagined before these regular deliberations. In other words, we used the rhetorical process we wanted to teach our students to invent the shape and scope of this Area Concentration. After a summer and two semesters, we had what we believed to be a tenable four-year curriculum. At this point, we received department approval and began adding courses to our official program by petitioning the college and university curriculum committees. Not all of the courses I will be discussing have been approved at the university-level, as the curriculum is moving forward in stages; however, the fully drafted curriculum has been approved by both the Area and the department and we anticipate its full university approval in the near future.

Existing in a freestanding writing department, the Writing and Culture Area is not constrained by multiple disciplinary concerns. Its mission is informed by the belief that rhetoric and writing constitute a fundamental power to shape the world and centered on the desire to provide an in-depth exploration of writing practices geared toward rhetoric as both interpretive and productive. Students concentrate on the ways writing systems have shaped and been shaped by the needs of social, cultural, political, economic, and professional communities. Its courses ask students to grapple with the important considerations of identity, power, and persuasion at the same time that they ask them to produce and revise multiple kinds of
texts. Ultimately, the Writing and Culture curriculum hopes to offer students the theoretical and practical tools necessary to engage, negotiate, and transform a world in which textuality dominates our personal and public lives, encouraging a politics and culture of engagement for students on and off campus. This, we believe, is the foundation of a humanist-based, undergraduate education; consequently, we do not have an explicit commitment to clearly “transferable” job-related skills like web design or grant writing. No doubt, these are important aspects of real-world writing, but in our departmental structure they are more appropriately housed in the Professional and Technical Area Concentration, giving our Area the freedom to explore humanistic aspects of writing. Simply, our Area provides students with a space to theorize, analyze, and produce writing in concrete cultural and political locations. These critical thinking and writing activities will certainly help students in their future employment, but our primary goal is to explore how writing affects individuals in society and how those individuals can write back to society.

The undergraduate major who declares him or herself in Writing and Culture has taken a two-semester sequence of first-year composition and has likely taken one or two content-specific courses in writing at the 2000-level. Two of these 2000-level courses are required of all majors in the department and include courses like the Locations of Writing, Everyday Creative Writing, and Writers on Writing, among others. Regardless of their declared concentration, all Writing and Linguistics students are required to take the gateway course from each Area. These common body of knowledge courses are Creative Writing, Foundations in Professional and Technical Writing, Frameworks in Writing Studies, and Language and Linguistic Theory. Frameworks in Writing and Culture, our gateway course, introduces the area-specific content: composition studies, literacy studies, rhetorical studies, and cultural studies. After taking this course, students in our concentration take a course in each of the content areas initially explored. Together, these five courses help students frame the theoretical, methodological, and practical relationship between discursive production of various sorts and the world simultaneous described and called into being vis-à-vis that production. It is this basic assumption about the embeddedness of discourse studies within each of these courses that ultimately compelled us to omit an additional course on discourse analysis that existed in earlier drafts of the curriculum.

From these foundational courses, students take what have been divided among service, applied, and outreach courses. These labels exist primarily for faculty to understand how the courses we inherited and the courses we created fit together into a coherent curriculum. They are, at best, arbitrary,
and, at worst, fictive categories that reproduce the precise binaries that the newly established Rhetorical Alliance suggests we consistently and publicly reject. Nevertheless, they help provide a framework and justification for the courses we can legitimately offer in our particular Area Concentration. Even applied and service courses for other units must fit into our conception of writing as a humanist pursuit. Our service courses are aimed primarily at potential teachers—those who might pursue the middle grades and high school as well as those who might teach in various post-secondary programs—as well as at future journalists, editors, and other professional writers. We inherited these courses from both the education and communications departments, but were able to change the courses in dialogue with these departments according to our Area goals, making them appropriate both to our majors and these other students. Courses designed for education majors, for instance, now focus on how to teach writing, linguists, and grammar as politically and culturally inflected practices as well as how to teach writing for social change more specifically. Other courses teach revision and editing within the political and cultural frames of rhetoric. While professionalization has become the normalizing discourse of the university, these courses add a rhetorical lens to such work in order to better understand the complex political and cultural intersections that take place within the often taken-for-granted professional landscape. These changes were viewed positively by the outside faculty and students who came to understand such courses as intellectually engaging with their professional activities rather than as a meaningless hurdles that must be jumped. In my experience teaching one such course, students struggled with the unfamiliar theories they were asked to read and apply, but most found that the rhetorical and cultural perspectives enhanced what they were learning in their home departments.

The applied courses, ranging from Comic Book Writing in American Culture and Writing to Heal to Argumentative Writing and Writing for Public Forums, focus on producing texts, but only within specifically defined historical and political contexts. These courses ask students to inquire into unique historical problems, to see themselves situated within the various matrices of these issues, and to produce texts that address, engage, and potentially intervene into social, cultural, and political realities. They especially emphasize the public nature of rhetoric and writing, often requiring students to produce texts in conjunction with local community groups. Writing for Public Forums, for instance, allows students to investigate a variety of forums for publication and presentation. Students choose forums that are appropriate to their interests and goals and then produce work tailored to that discursive space. In workshops, student develop, cri-
tique, and revise individualized projects that will ultimately be presented in public settings, which include the university-sponsored television channel and radio station, the local art studio and theater, local print publications, as well as various political meetings. These applied courses provide students both guidance and opportunities to use writing to entertain and persuade the public. Because we want students to understand writing as both politically and personally meaningful, we do not separate the imaginative aspects of rhetoric from its civic nature. We want students to see the value of using creative venues to make important political arguments, as these are some of the most persuasive sites available to us.

Our theoretical courses, all cross-listed as graduate courses, are designed to deepen the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural foundations on which our curriculum is founded. These courses include Non-Traditional Rhetorics; Memory, Writing, and Identity; Writing the Body; and Globalization and the Rhetoric of International Relations. These courses connect the rhetorical work of local sites with larger sociocultural and political exigencies of our contemporary world. They explore how individuals are positioned within multiple and conflicting institutional discourses and work to invent writing that moves beyond these containments. Such theoretical goals connect to the humanist project of understanding and constructing ourselves as well as our place in society. For this reason, students do not simply read and write about theory, but use theory to act in the world. For instance, the Writing the Body course asks students to create experimental writing projects that engage a critical social issue, involve dialogue with the community, and are presented to others with a theoretical explanation of how the text intervenes into that issue. In this sense, the program views theory as a means toward achieving more meaningful engagement with the world and others in it rather than distancing oneself through the purportedly separate work of the mind.

The curriculum also allows for Special Topics courses, which recently have included Studies in Rhetoric and Reality TV; The Language of Imprisonment; and Presidential Rhetoric. As Special Topics, these courses will shift and evolve with changes in students, faculty, and the sociopolitical climate. For example, the Presidential Rhetoric course was offered in the fall semester of 2004 in order to coincide with the much publicized Bush-Kerry race. This course was so popular we opened a second section to accommodate student interest. Such courses serve as an ideal occasion to connect with other faculty by cross listing and advertising to students in other disciplines. Our courses have intersected with communication arts, political science, criminal justice, literature, and art, among other disciplines. Not only does this give us an opportunity to recruit students who
might want to minor in our Area, it also opens up dialogue about writing, rhetoric, and culture with other faculty members, laying the groundwork for possible future collaborations.

Finally, courses from other Area Concentrations in the department are encouraged—Visual Design Studies in the Professional and Technical Writing Area or Language, Power, and Politics in the Linguistics Area, might, for instance, serve students in our track. Currently, courses are more or less housed within the discrete Areas of the department. These Areas are responsible for developing course rotations and for staffing courses. There are a small number of courses that circulate among the faculty in different Areas, but this is rare. However, each Area can encourage and/or require students to take courses from the other Areas. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the work in the Writing and Culture Area, we actively promote student exploration in other Areas. Such connections are fundamental to our understanding of rhetoric, writing, and culture as dynamic processes that seep across arbitrary boundaries. Collectively, the foundational, service, applied, theoretical, and special topics courses, as well as key courses in other Areas form a writing curriculum that we believe unites disparate aspects of our cultural and political worlds, tying them together through an investigation of how writing shapes and is shaped by our struggle to define the human project.

Undergraduate Writing and a Future of Rhetorical Humanism

At the intersection of rhetoric and cultural studies, wedded to a tradition of change and a commitment to political action, this curriculum hopes to promote action—in classrooms, in departments, on campuses, in private spaces and in public venues. It is the belief of the Writing and Culture Area Concentration that the role of rhetoric, in its broadest sense, enhances the teaching and practice of writing by asking students to make connections among different spheres of public discourse—pushing them to see and participate in the interrelatedness of cultural, political, and economic practices as they converge within textual spaces. We further believe that this focus on writing offers one way to bridge the mythical relationship between rhetoric and democracy because the curriculum constantly returns to the question of how individual and collective identities are rhetorically forged within different institutional parameters at the same time it requires them to produce writing that engages this question with potentially new results.

In many ways, the debates about rhetoric’s relationship to culture along with the rich interdisciplinary tradition outlined, for instance, in Rhetorical Education in America, edited by Cheryl Glenn, Margaret M. Lyday, and
Wendy B. Sharer, serve as a guide to our curriculum design. *Rhetorical Education in America* offers an array of essays detailing how rhetorical knowledge helps people engage in and change society, a key goal of our program. If this is the direction in which our research is moving, it only makes sense that we attempt to develop programs with similar motivations. Rethinking both our theoretical tradition and our disciplinary boundaries opens rhetoric up to a diverse tradition of engaging political discourse, social change, and classroom practices; it includes traditional and marginal histories; it explores performative, visual, and material rhetorics; and it uses rhetoric to invent future, as yet undiscovered, paths. As an undergraduate writing curriculum that takes the individual and his/her role in society, and not professional work, as its foundation, the Writing and Culture Area Concentration is moving in a direction that uses rhetoric to rethink (rather than reproduce) the world, and I hope other programs will join in this exploration, paving new directions of their own.

Notes

1 This list, which began at the University of Utah under the direction of Doug Downs, currently contains links to individual programs and instructions for adding other programs to the list. It can be found online at <http://www.depts.drew.edu/composition/Cccc2002/majors.html>.

2 Although the Department of Writing and Linguistics broke from the English department, the Writing and Culture Area’s biggest institutional struggle has not been with literature but with the Communication Arts department over the definition and uses of rhetoric, reaffirming the pervasive anxiety we all have over controlling rhetorical production.

3 I worked in this department from 2003 to 2006 and acted as Coordinator from 2004 to 2006. While I am no longer at Georgia Southern, the program continues to grow in much the same ways as I am outlining here. In part, I believe this consistency results from the rhetorical and collaborative design process.

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The Persistence of Institutional Memory:
Genre Uptake and Program Reform

Dylan B. Dryer

If we fail to recognize how much the use of a technique, however simple, has displaced, translated, modified, or inflected the original intention, it is simply because we have changed the end in changing the means.

—Bruno Latour
“Morality and Technology: The Ends of the Means” (252)

Contemporary theories of genre, like those guiding the research in Coe et al.’s anthology, *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre*, can offer much to writing program administrators. For these theories teach us that institutionally entrenched genres have a way of surreptitiously reconstituting social relations that the readers and writers who take them up might otherwise reject (see especially Freadman “Uptake” and Paré “Ideology”). Jeanne Gunner’s request that WPAs think of their writing programs as a “social genre” operates with similar assumptions. For Gunner, genres’ “recognizability” can be extended to recurrent social formations of people and activities; that is, WPAs and students and teachers and administrators know a first-year writing program when they see one (11). But Gunner’s aim is to problematize that “knowing” as the usually unconscious exercise of “culturally sanctioned assumptions,” and to ask WPAs to be reflective about “the social institution that writing programs materially constitute” (7-9).

One important subject for such reflection is the fact that writing programs are, like most large social organizations, materially (re)constituted in the everyday uptakes of recurrent textual forms. It is by and through quite literal systems of genres, after all, that the “usual administrative tasks” of “testing, placement, grade dispute adjudication, TA preparation, faculty
development, evaluation, curricular development, assessment, and so on.” As we know, these genre systems “automatic, ritual unfolding makes them appear normal, even inevitable” (Paré 59); through such ritualized uptakes, Anis Bawarshi notes, readers and writers mobilize the “ideological interstices that configure, normalize, and activate relations and meanings within and between systems of genres” (653). Given that so much of the work of WPAs is necessarily done with institutional genres, it is worth considering whether the tacit social relations that genres reflect and produce have something to do with the “climate of disappointment” Laura Micciche describes as pervading WPA scholarship, particularly where it addresses the work of program reform (432). For in reading about this work, we need not look long nor particularly hard to find stories of frustration, thwarted plans, and unanticipated consequences: missions unaccomplished, data co-opted, initiatives thwarted, reforms foundered, and such successes as we can claim are often deeply qualified, if not pyrrhic.

As Anthony Giddens has written, “the escape of human history from human intentions, and the return of the consequences of that escape as causal influences on human action, is a chronic feature of social life” (7). The story that follows shortly (although still in the “qualified success” sub-genre, to be sure) will move some administrative genres into center stage to try to explain why “qualified” habitually marks WPA successes, and to show how the unanticipated consequences of genre uptake help ensure that such successes continue to be “qualified” ones. A theory of genre that could, as Giddens might say, “de-routinise” the textual forms in which our work is constituted and enacted might also make us more aware of the other forces we take up when we take up genres and might even make some consequences more anticipatable.

I’ll very briefly offer an example, one that also serves to introduce a term I’ll be referring to later. “Directed Self-Placement” (or DSP) is a composition course enrollment alternative to placement testing in which first-year students, usually equipped with materials that invite them to consider their prior reading and writing habits and experiences and outlines of the kinds of writing coursework available at their institution, place themselves. In Directed Self-Placement: Principles and Practices, Daniel Royer and Roger Gilles anthologize a compelling series of arguments for DSP, which they see as creating “a more direct relationship between students and writing curricula” (51). As they put it, such a move “peels away an entire complex of concerns and activities—an entire industry, really—that discourages us from attending to the only really important variables: our students and our curriculum” (51).
Royer and Gilles’s own contribution to this anthology is particularly interesting for its concern with a genre local to Grand Valley State University—specifically, the “slips of paper” that WPAs used to place in students’ admissions portfolios to announce their placement into this or that first-year writing course (slips of paper that, in the hands of students angry about their placement, positioned administrators to defend the student’s placement with a certainty they didn’t feel (65-6)). DSP obviated these “slips” by assuming that students can be “thoughtful about their own experiences and abilities and act responsibly in their own best interests” (64). That “slip of paper,” for Royer and Gilles, was a material embodiment of their institution’s presumptions about its students and the reliability of its assessment mechanism. In their telling, the disappearance of this local genre signified a larger shift in the work of that particular writing program—and a telling one at that, since a “slip” could scarcely accommodate the ways in which GVSU students are now asked to work out their own assessment of need for writing instruction. The point I take from Royer’s and Gilles’s experience is that, inasmuch as their daily uptakes and institutional imbrications permit time and space to be reflective about them, WPAs should think carefully about the genres through which their administration is enacted and by which it is conditioned. For if genre conventions organize social relations among students, administrators, and faculty, changes in such conventions can be signals of, and possibly provocations for, changes in social relations.

WPAs know very well that course names and numbers matter; job titles and signature blocks matter; program and job descriptions matter; and that, as Susan Wyche warns, “once constructed…these labels exert a social grip that makes transformation difficult” (93-4). Experience has also taught them to be wary about the ways in which cultural nostalgia “creat[es] and rationaliz[es] institutional inertia” (Rodby 108). Since the conventions of genre systems are both the operational context in which names (and misnomers) circulate, as well as the material embodiments of institutional ideologies, they are thus important sites for our critical attention. As a case in point, the cautionary tale that follows describes one writing program’s rationale for and attempt at mainstreaming basic writers, and the consequences of its decidedly unwary uptake of the very genre system the reform was targeting.

**Taking Up Basic Writing Reform at UWM**

Each fall, about 5500 students entering the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee take the English Placement Test (EPT), the invisible hand of
the University of Wisconsin System’s academic literacy training. UWM’s First-Year Writing Program (FYWP) has—along with the rest of the UW System—relied on this test to sort cohorts of first-year students since 1977, ample time for it to become a fixture complete with people who depend on it for their livelihoods, spaces devoted to its distribution, proctoring, and assessment, and institutional dependence on anticipated revenue streams generated by testing fees and the hundreds of students it tracks into non-credit remedial courses. All this activity is marked, typically, by a rhetoric of inevitability. Here, the UW System’s “Office of Testing and Evaluation Services” website describes the work of a committee known as the “College Writing Association,” which helped develop the EPT in “the early 1970’s”:

The Association decided…that one of its immediate tasks was the construction of a placement test whose content and standards would suit the particular needs of the University of Wisconsin System and would be completely determined by practicing classroom teachers of composition. This test would have as its major purpose the identification of those students who need immediate remedial help and, at the other end of the scale, those students who could justifiably be placed into advanced courses. (“Background of the Test”)

Student “need” for remediation (like the justification for “advanced” placement) precedes and is identified by the test—rather than being constructed by it—much like the scale on which their “need” gradates into the abilities of those designated “advanced,” whose placement is the justice they are due.

And how does the EPT go about assessing this need? Among the “Sample Items” offered on this webpage are “English Usage Items,” in which students are asked to identify which underlined section in a sentence contains the “deviation from standard written American English,” e.g.:

While inspecting the ranks, the officer seen that the new recruit *had laid his rifle*.

_A_.    B.  

in the mud *and gotten it dirty*. No error.

D.    E.  

The test also features “Sentence Correction Items,” which ask “students to select the most effective expression from among five choices,” for example:

In the smaller towns of Wisconsin, *where one can quickly walk* to the greening hills of Spring.

_A_.  , where one can quickly walk

B.  where one can quickly walk
To take the second example on its face, if we assume that this author has completed his or her sentence, then the answer is “D.” (Of course, making that decision is also to change the intention of the sentence, which some test-takers might be reluctant to do.) More to the point, answering the question means theorizing its author’s intentions, which opens up rather than closes down the range of possibilities of which “expression” is most “effective.” For example, does the author intend to continue the sentence, and is the error that there is information to be supplied? If so, then the answer is obviously “A.” Conceivably, this statement might even be a response to a question, e.g., “Where’s a good place to take walks?”—in which case there is no error at all. Like other versions of this ubiquitous genre, the standardized EPT is capable only of assessing its subjects’ ability to make decisions about sentences divorced from any context (other than the answering of test questions and perhaps imagining the intentions of test-designers).

This is by no means a novel critique of standardized tests (see, e.g., White 34). My point in critiquing this particular one is to contextualize a phenomenon to which I will return below: the depth to which this genre’s construction of student “need” permeates the ways in which this program conceived of administering students’ writing. For while it is certainly questionable what the EPT tests, there is no question that its “findings” have serious consequences for those it places. Table 1 shows how the EPT placed 5603 first-year students entering UWM in the Fall of 2005, with the attrition and failure rates awaiting them there.

Not only do failure and attrition rates increase the lower in the sequence students are “placed,” the two rates actually *diverge* as placement drops; that is, it becomes less and less likely that a student who remains enrolled and completes the course will pass. The disparate impact on the bottom two-fifths of these first-year classes (and those “fifths” and that “bottom” are EPT-constructed, of course) was the more poignant and pointless because of several years’ worth of innovations on the “095” side of the divide, innovations that had steadily brought the curriculum of English 095 more and more closely in line with the recursive, assignment-sequence-driven portfolio required of students placed in English 101. Mirroring the national trends Peter Dow Adams notes in “Reconsidering Basic Writing,” these innovations’ steady erasure of the pedagogical and curricular differences between
these two “levels,” meant that by 2002, credit (and a slightly smaller class-size) was really the only difference\(^2\) between the two courses (23-24).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition Sequence</th>
<th>Percentage of Class “Placed”</th>
<th>Mean Rate of Attrition Fall 02 to Spring 04</th>
<th>Mean Rate of Failure Fall 02 to Spring 04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 102 “College Writing and Research” 3 Graduation Credits</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 101 “Introduction to College Writing” 3 Graduation Credits</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>14.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 095 “Fundamentals of Composition” 0 Graduation Credits</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 090 “Basic Writing” 0 Graduation Credits</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>22.45%</td>
<td>39.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Comparative Failure and Attrition Rates in FYC Courses by EPT Placement Score

Although students placed into English 095 performed very differently from peers directed to English 101, mounting anecdotal evidence from teachers familiar with the curriculum of both courses indicated that they saw little difference in the preparedness and skills of students placed into either course.\(^3\) As the learning outcomes and pedagogies of these courses converged, an unanticipated consequence emerged, as then-WPA Bruce Horner explained at a May 5\(^{th}\), 2006 meeting of the L&S Chairs and Directors. As he explained, the rationale for some years had been:

That if we can’t give these students graduation credit, the least we can do is give them the experience of a college-level course. Further, we’ve made a concerted effort to assign our most highly dedicated and informed instructors to teach these courses. One result has been that while students placed into
these 90-level courses appreciate the respect the demanding curriculum pays them, they resent not earning graduation credit for what they rightly perceive to be college-level work. (“Re-Placing” 1)

The curricular renovation of sub-100 level classes and unofficial re-placement of students tracked there by the EPT together produced evidence that verified what program administrators had long suspected: the consequences of placing students in English 095 were unwarranted by the EPT’s inability to make such a distinction in the first place.

A Mainstreaming Pilot and its Assessment

Since 1993, Rodby & Fox, Soliday & Gleason, and others have confirmed the unsettling conclusions Adams drew from nearly ten years’ worth of pass and articulation rates in the first-year writing program at Essex Community College. After closely reviewing the rates in which students placed in lower-level basic writing courses went on to take—let alone pass—“college level writing courses” (29-33), it appeared that “students’ chances of succeeding in the writing program [were] actually reduced by taking basic writing courses” (33). To test whether these findings could be replicated at UWM, program administrators asked the College of Letters & Science for permission to pilot a study to:

Determine whether students ordinarily placed in English 095 would be better served by enrolling in English 101 and a one-credit supplementary course, English 105 (“Editing College Writing”) to provide necessary assistance to ensure their academic success in English 101. English 105 is a one-credit course that focuses on revising, editing, and proofreading academic writing. (Horner and Bott 1)

The proposed small-group workshop supplements a mainstream composition course is modeled on Grego and Thompson’s “Writing Studio” course at the University of South Carolina (66-73). Much excellent work has already been done on studios (see also Tassoni & Lewiecki and the Grego & Thompson volume Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces), and so I need not deal thoroughly with them here. Rather, I wish to note that even while challenging the EPT’s ability to distinguish between these two groups of students, this proposal also presumes that students designed “remedial” by the EPT would need something “supplementary to” English 101 in order to pass it. This surreptitious persistence of the designation “095” shows the extent to which the genre of the placement exam continued to shape our operating assumptions about our students’ “needs.”
This conceptual baggage did not, however, prevent us from reconfirming the findings of other mainstreaming studies. During the four semesters of the pilot study, 4347 students designated “ready” for English 101 by the EPT passed English 101 at a rate of 81%, and were retained at a rate of 93%. Meanwhile, 213 students whose EPT scores designated them as “need[ing] immediate remedial help” in the form of English 095 volunteered for the English 101/English 105 alternative. 75% passed and 96% were retained. Another 48 students whose EPT scores tracked them into English 090 volunteered for 101/105 after completing English 095; they passed at a rate of 58% and were retained at a rate of 93%.4

It was therefore clear that the EPT could not identify with any accuracy which students “needed immediate remedial help,” since students who “could justifiably be placed in advanced courses” were only slightly more likely to pass English 101 (“Contents of the English Placement Test”). Students constructed as especially “at-risk”—that is, as needing two semesters of remediation prior to credit-bearing composition courses—passed English 101 portfolio review at 58.3%, almost precisely the same rate (-1.5%) as this “group” of students (as constructed by the EPT, anyway) passed English 101 after taking English 095, confirming our suspicions that the net effect of English 095, whatever its intention, was to “slow…progress toward earning a degree” (Horner and Bott 3).5

As we began to translate our data into language suitable for presentation at the 2005 CCCC and the 2006 CWPA, my colleagues and I were at pains to argue that the volunteers for this pilot study were not unrepresentative—on grounds of being somehow more “motivated” or in some sense “better students” than those who elected to remain in English 095. We argued against essentializing what it means to “volunteer”: there could be no accounting for parental involvement, discrepancies in advisors’ knowledge about or enthusiasm for this option, the likelihood that this or that student lives in a home in which official mail is routinely opened or the validity of standardized testing is questioned. It was, thus, not at all clear that only the best and brightest of the students designated “095” participated in this course, nor was it fair to say that they were being compared to four cohorts of 095 students from whom the cream had already been skimmed.

Ironically, the obligation we felt to rationalize a valid sample blinded us to the fact that this student population was unrepresentative; in fact, for two reasons, they were even more “at-risk” than the general L&S population (at least as conventionally constructed by UWM). First, about a third of the total participants were part of the “Academic Opportunity Center,” a provisional-admitance program that provides “access to UWM for students who have academic potential but whose prior education may not
have adequately prepared them for college.” A third of our cohort, thus, consisted of students designated both “in need of” 095 and more generally under-prepared for work at UWM. Second, as UWM’s Black & Gold Commission found, “UWM continues to lose over 25% of its entering freshmen by the second year. The percentage of new freshmen not returning rises to over 35% for new Latino freshmen and 45% for new African-American…students” (2). Table 2 shows the distribution of L&S’s population by ethnic heritage during the four semesters the pilot was underway, with the corresponding percentages among the pilot cohorts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asian</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Comparative Distribution of Ethnic Heritage: Pilot Cohorts/L&S Population. *Numbers do not add to 100% because of the ~2.2% who decline to self-identify.

That this population of students piloting our alternative to basic writing contained, respectively, 2 and 4 times the percentages of populations the Black & Gold Commission designates as “at-risk” suggests that this designation is somewhat less essential to them, and rather more essential to the places they are tracked.

**Taking Up Institutional Genres**

We thus had ample evidence to challenge the EPT’s construction of student “need.” But as the four semesters of the pilot ran out, institutional preparation for Fall 2006 proceeded apace. All over campus—and in blameless ignorance of our pilot students’ demonstration that they did not need the course—English 095 began to be reconstituted in a vast network of administrative genres: course catalogues, teaching schedules, administrative hires and job descriptions, the *Student Guide to the First-Year Writing Program*, advising bulletins, and EPT cut scores. For English 095 was, of course, still *there*: as lines of text the publisher of the UWM Course Catalogue
was busy formatting, as something that was designated to happen in certain hours in certain classrooms, as a course certain teachers had requested to teach, as a “place” into which the first cohorts of EPT-test-takers were already being sorted, and as a source of anticipated revenue already being earmarked and spent. While no one of these genres was the specific site of institutional memory, their collective effect was to dilute the reform of the program and to perpetuate the EPT’s construction of our students, a construction that had penetrated institutional culture to an extent we neither anticipated nor were able to fully resist.

This started to happen as early as March 2005. In my capacity as then—Coordinator of English 105, I met with the Director of Enrollment Services and the administrator of the Testing Center, who were—to say the least—nonplussed at our list of objections to the EPT. As they explained, they didn’t set the cutoff scores for composition placement; we did. They had been taking the FYWP’s annual silence on the issue to signify our contentment with the status quo. As I wrote to update Horner and Bott afterward:

We have a great deal more latitude with the EPT than we thought. That is, individual colleges in the UW system can (and do) set their *own* cut-off scores for different sections. We could, for example, pull several years’ of raw EPT scores for 095; if a performance-pattern does emerge, we could use that data to lower the eligibility score for 101. A more dramatic version of this might involve lowering the eligibility score for 095 sufficiently to essentially erase 090. (“Meeting Minutes”)

Armed with this information, we decided at our next meeting to “investigate the feasibility of adjusting EPT cut scores so that students who would normally place into 095 will place into 101” (Bott, “Minutes”), and this turned out to be relatively easy to do. As I gloated at the WPA conference in Chattanooga a few months later, “we didn’t get rid of English 090; we just made it impossible to test into it, effectively moving about 1000 students from 095 into English 101/105. That is, we changed not the sequence of the courses, or the institution of standardized testing itself, but merely the official interpretation of what these scores meant” (Dryer, “Alternative”).

You have no doubt spotted the contradiction: while reclaiming the power to tweak how the EPT placed students, we lost sight of the larger problem with using the EPT to place students at all. Nowhere in either of these meeting minutes nor in that breathless conference paper is there any attempt to preserve the variable of student choice. Which is a very curious thing, since our data was based on four cohorts of students who did choose
for themselves whether they “needed” 095 or not. Or, rather than being curious, it is in retrospect an entirely predictable consequence of genre uptake: we “took up” the genre of the standardized test as our means of institutional reform, but in doing so, we also took up ways of talking and writing about ends that effaced the whole question of students’ choice—foregrounding the “studio” aspect of our reform at the cost of effacing its “DSP” aspect.

This is not to say that what became known as the “require vs. recommend” issue was never contested, as indicated in Horner’s email to the two Associate Deans for L&S, the Director of the Writing Center, and the incoming Director of Composition indicates:

These changes are a result of findings from teh [sic] pilot study to date indicating that there is no significant difference in performance between students who place into English 095 and those who place into English 101. Briefly, we’re imagining shifting almost all 095 students into 101, with provisions for them and their fellow 101 students to enroll in sections of the one-credit 105 course, and reassigning students now in English 90 into English 095 (effectively making 095 into 090). This would be done by adjusting the EPT cutoff scores to redirect students from the courses in which the current cutoffs place them. (“Changes”)

This sense that students might self-select 105 ("provisions for them and their fellow 101 students to enroll" as opposed to "being enrolled") is also evident in the handout the WPA team drafted to guide this meeting. Figure 1 shows the “conclusions” section of this handout, which appeared before analysis of the data described above.

The WPA team argued that the evidence sufficiently demonstrated that: a) students designated “095” by the EPT could pass 101, and b) to enforce such placement, given the stakes, would be not only arbitrary but unjust. We faced the counterargument that the evidence did not sufficiently demonstrate that students designated “095” could pass 101 without 105, an argument tacitly supported by what was couched as the “prohibitively difficult” tasks of administering a class that was “recommended.” It would be, so the arguments went, too difficult to staff, to find rooms for, to train teachers for who might not know whether they were needed until the last moment prior to the semester, to reserve rooms for that might have been used for different classes that were required, and so on. Besieged by these arguments—arguments that demonstrated in sum that the institution was not prepared to accommodate anything approaching DSP—we emerged from the meeting with edits to our proposal, as shown in Figure 2.
Accordingly, we recommend that the EPT cut scores be reconfigured for the following placement of students in the First-Year Composition Sequence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGL Standard Score</th>
<th>Placement Code</th>
<th>Course Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150-290</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>291-380</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>101 (105 recommended)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>381-460</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>461-520</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>521-850</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>GER Satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consequences of New Cut Scores**

- Students who previously placed into English 090 will now place into English 095.
- Students who previously placed into English 095 will now place into English 101.
- The Testing Center will send the names of students who score between 291 and 380 to the FYC Director, who will send those students letters recommending that they also enroll in English 105.

Fig. 1. Detail from Handout for EPT Adjustment Meeting, 03/09/06

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that this tactic accomplished two important things—it relocated several hundred students out of difficult, non-credit-bearing courses where previous populations faced double the fail rates and triple the attrition rates of those rewarded with credit-bearing placement and halved the time spent being “remediated” of several dozen others. However, it could not avoid coding these students as “different” in some way, locked into taking another course that someone else has decided that they “need”—despite the fact that the our findings were based on cohorts of students who had determined a measure of their own “need” for writing instruction.

It is clear that the genre system of the standardized placement test had long since accreted around itself a whole web of rationalizing discourses; those “logistical” objections raised at that meeting were surface manifestations of its construction of certain writers as “basic.” (We arrived, that is, at
Accordingly, we recommend that the EPT cut scores be reconfigured for the following placement of students in the First-Year Composition Sequence:

<table>
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<th>ENGL Standard Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150-290</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>291-380</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>101 (105 <strong>recommended</strong> required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>381-460</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>461-520</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>521-850</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>GER Satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consequences of New Cut Scores**

- Students who previously placed into English 090 will now place into English 095.
- Students who previously placed into English 095 will now place into English 101 *and* 105.
- The Testing Center will send the names of students who score between 291 and 380 to the FYC Director, who will send those students letters recommending informing them that they must also enroll in English 105.

Fig. 2. Detail from Revised Handout for EPT Adjustment Meeting, 03/09/06

the same realization as Judith Rodby did a decade ago—only now with the terms reversed: “[placement testing] was, more than anything else, a function of the institution, a category that worked primarily to promote other institutional functions, such as [basic writing]” (108). Our uptake of the EPT as a mechanism of reform meant taking up the same nexus of institutional relationships in which it existed—one predicated on the assumption that students are unable to assess their own needs for writing instruction.

Even the welcome announcement in which we learned that the Provost had authorized our reform relied on this assumption. The Provost, wrote the Associate Vice-Chancellor, was persuaded that the effects of adjusting the EPT for the next term would “meet exactly the goals of ‘Access to Success’ [an initiative to increase matriculation and retention of historically
underserved populations], namely, enabling students to complete remedial work and get into college level courses as soon as feasible” (Williams “Change”). Our data, Williams reported, persuaded university administration that “090 is unnecessary”; “that current 095 placements are also unnecessary”; and that “this change is clearly one that is advantageous for students” (“Change”).

Upper administration made the right decision; moreover, they pressed for immediate action despite significant revenue loss from discontinued sections of English 095. Yet as the goals of “Access to Success” are here defined (for “students to complete remedial work and get into college level courses as soon as feasible”) the invocation of “remedial” effaces much of what the pilot demonstrated: that these students did not require “remediation”—not as defined by the work they produced.

The local genre of the Course Action Request (the official document through which courses at UWM are renamed, become prerequisites, enter or leave general-education requirements, and so on), cemented this construction for posterity. The “Reason for Action” it provides the Faculty Senate reads:

In an effort to streamline completion of the English Competency Requirement, the Department has eliminated English 090. Students who need remedial work will being [sic] in 095 and then move into 101/105. A pilot study has shown this sequencing to be as or more successful than the old 090, 095, 101, 102 requirements. (Jo)

To be sure, the CAR is almost as tightly constrained as a haiku (it limits course descriptions, for example, to “25 or fewer words”). As such, a more detailed Reason for Action—one that did justice to the complexity and significance of our findings—was unlikely. Yet this convention reflects notions about the brevity with which objectives for a postsecondary class ought to be described, notions that remain widespread in part because they are maintained by the persistence of such conventions. And it was this convention that enabled startling (to us) assumptions to enter, as it were, “naturally”: a) that the purpose of our pilot was to “streamline” students’ passage through the writing program; b) that eliminating 090 was our motive and not an unanticipated consequence; and c) that remediation is a need independent of the EPT’s construction of it. That is, nowhere in any of these constructions is there a suggestion that there was something counterproductive about the older practices of placing students. 101/105 is not an alternative to 095, it is the place where students go after 095, and so on.
Among the lessons we might have taken from Rodby and Fox’s work at CSU-Chico was that “standard, monologic institutional methods for communicating with students about writing assessment and placement...[tend] to reinforce both students’ estrangement from the academic institution and the institution’s assumption that it knows all it needs to know about student writers’ needs” (68). As it turned out, taking up institutional assumptions about placement meant more than reenacting tired narratives of student “need”; it also meant effacing the intellectual work represented in the hundreds of entry, mid-term, and exit qualitative surveys easily available in my office files during this entire process.

Our inability to take up that genre as evidence was unfortunate since any of the survey data might have taken this decision in a different direction. For example, one question on the exit survey read, “Now that you are nearly done with 101/105, how do you feel about your decision to take it, rather than 095?” Of the 197 responses on file, representing nearly 80% of the students participating, not one expresses any regrets or even ambivalence about taking the course. And while many responses were perfunctory (e.g., “fine” or “happy”), many took the opportunity to explain why they felt the way they did. 51 mentioned “credit” as one of, and most often, the only reason for feeling that they had made the right decision—a number that dwarfs the 8 who said they were glad they took English 105 because it helped them pass English 101.

But it was no coincidence that we stopped talking about students’ self-placement at precisely the time we started talking about using the means of the EPT to achieve the ends of program reform. As Gerri McNenny argues in her introduction to Mainstreaming Basic Writers: Politics and Pedagogies of Access, “any decision to mainstream basic writers will always be contingent on site-specific configurations, including the political and economic circumstances that define the mission of the institution and the cultural, social, and intellectual situatedness of the student populations” (2). McNenny rightly directs attention to local conditions. To the configurations she notes, we must add our uptakes of institutional genre systems—for it is the assumptions they reflect and the practices of reading and writing into which they draw their users that these “sites” are produced.

Coda: Toward Creating Uptakes for Students’ Writing

We were not alone in reconsidering the placement of “basic writers” at UWM. Concurrent with our pilot study, an “Enrollment Management Steering Committee” was posing itself a similar question. In the first draft of their report, “Undergraduate Student Retention at UWM – a work in progress!”, they asked: “Given our vision to improve retention/graduation
rates, what do we know about the linkage between student retention and ‘preparation’ indicators that we review for admission status?” (1). They, too, presented tentative findings about the dismal retention rates of students with ACT scores below 16. Despite the encouraging way in which the Committee scare-quotes “preparation,” they do not go on to question the ACT’s construction of a certain kind of “preparedness,” advising instead that “consideration must be given as to whether UWM can and should be the entry point for this group of students” (“Progress” 3). Two months later, UWM’s Chancellor took up the Committee’s data in his Plenary Speech in order to draw his own “preliminary conclusion”: UWM’s attrition problem is a problem of (and for) students who were “severely under-prepared to do college-level work when they were admitted to the university” (Santiago). And when the Steering Committee finalized its report three months later, it suggested that such students are “prime candidates for…transition programs with MATC [a local technical college] and perhaps a revised first-year curriculum appropriate to student preparation” (“Installment” 3).

That such plans would recreate the unworkable and exploitative practices that “basic writing” classes first emerged to redress is disheartening evidence of the power of the discourses of student “lack” (of ability, of contribution, of potential for or right to postsecondary education) to nearly effortlessly reproduce themselves (see Shor, 39-42). So it went: in January of 2007, a “UWM News Release” unveiled a new “guaranteed admission and transfer agreement” whereby undergraduates “can begin at MATC and be guaranteed admission at UWM, close to halfway done with their bachelor’s degree.” And in a story soon to be told by Katie Malcolm in her dissertation Resurfacing: New Guides for Basic Writing, English 105 was itself dismantled in the spring of 2008 for some of the same logistical and financial objections that greeted its short-lived institutionalization. Dispiriting, certainly—

On the other hand, and to deliberately invoke Mina Shaughnessy’s “tide” metaphor at the conclusion to “Diving In,” we are justified in hoping that moving these students into 100-level courses moved them, as it were, to higher ground—providing them with some measure of protection from the forces that might sweep them away to more marginalized sites (295).

As a field, we are still grappling with the question of whether or not, as Rodby and Fox surmise, “basic writing [is] produced and reproduced by the context of basic writing courses,” whether onsite or outsourced (87). To point out that what these contexts are assumed to mean—a beneficial safe house or oppressive bilking scheme, an opportunity for acclimation into university discourses or an exercise in ritual humiliation—is rarely represented in the words of “basic writers” themselves, is to make the obvious but necessary point that debates about these spaces should enlist the work
and representations of those who have the most stake in them. In ongoing efforts to problematize the pictures of our students that standardized tests create, we might learn from our experience by turning to the intellectual work of students: close, comparative work on student writing generated by students whom such tests persist in constructing as “basic,” and careful reading of their representations of their experiences in being thus constructed.

One way to change the culture of postsecondary remediation is to create conditions in which students admitted to the university are more able to remain and thereby change the culture of the university by and through their writing. That the culture of the university is reflected and perpetuated mostly by and through systems of genres in which these students do not compose is one way to understand how long institutional memories of “basic writer” will be and an urgent call to focus the work of institutional reform on those genres themselves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Bruce Horner, Alice Gillam, and Charles Schuster for their feedback on an early version of this paper and Drexel University for their support while the paper was being revised.

Notes

1 Thanks to Bruce Horner for imagining this third “misreading.”

2 For example, by 2004 the “Critical Reading/Critical Writing Connections” portfolio outcomes for 095 were: “Make connections between the writer’s ideas and the ideas of others and distinguish between the two; demonstrate an ability to use key ideas, terms, or concepts from reading one text as a critical lens to interpret other texts; demonstrate the ability to approach subjects from multiple perspectives; offer vivid, well-developed examples and details drawn from course readings, outside texts, or experience; and acknowledge and fairly represent differing interpretations or points of view.” The same category of outcomes for English 101 portfolios were: “Demonstrate the ability to produce a critical interpretation of a text; provide analyses with reasoning and evidence appropriate to the context; approach subjects from multiple perspectives; use key ideas, terms, or concepts from reading one or more texts as a critical lens to interpret other texts; and offer thoughtful, convincing interpretations, analyses, or arguments that go beyond the obvious.”

3 In the Fall of 2003 alone, 14 students were—based on the strength of their first-day-of-class essays in English 095—were moved into English 101, and all 14 passed (Horner and Bott 3).
During these four semesters, 1251 students took English 095. The mean retention rate for those four semesters was only 82%, and only 82% of those retained passed— with zero graduation credits for their labor.

Additional factors increase the warrant for this claim: 24% of those who completed the term but failed English 101 had below a 1.0 average for the term, which suggests problems larger than English 101; 27% of students who did not get credit for English 105 still passed English 101; and most significantly, 92.6% of the students who participated in the pilot who have taken English 102 (the final course in the first-year composition sequence) have passed. Their 4692 peers who followed standard placement into 102 (placing there directly with an EPT score of “3” or articulating into it after prior composition courses) passed English 102 at a rate of 87.2%. This last point further undermines the theory that their success in English 101 was due to the support of English 105, rather than their placement in a credit-bearing course.

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Service vs. Subject Matter: Merging First-Year Composition and First-Year Experience

Kimberly A. Costino

As first-year experience (FYE) programs designed to address increasing attrition rates become more prevalent on college and university campuses throughout the U.S., many writing program administrators are facing increased pressure to align their writing programs with their campuses’ first-year experience programs. In some cases, the pressure on WPA’s is not only to align these programs, but to merge, or even replace, first-year composition (FYC) with writing intensive, academic content FYE seminars. As Doug Brent points out in “Reinventing WAC (Again): The First-Year Seminar and Academic Literacy,” “at a number of institutions, the[] affinities [between writing programs and FYE programs] are already being translated into programmatic convergence” (254). To many provosts, deans, and other upper-institutional administrators, such “programmatic convergence” between these academic content seminars and FYC likely makes such good and obvious sense because of what Sharon Crowley has referred to as composition’s “ethic of service” (1) and its subsequent lack of both disciplinary status and the protections of academic freedom that such status affords. For, if, as Crowley suggests, the purpose of composition instruction is perceived to be to “serve the needs of the academic community, as well as those of students and the community at large, by teaching students to write error-free prose” and the purpose of first-year academic content seminars is, as Doug Brent puts it, to “foster intellectual engagement” (256) and “academic discourse” (261) as well as “bodily retention,” (256) then why not do what schools like Linfield College have done, “replace first-year composition with a series of seminars ‘taught by any teacher on any topic that lends itself to inquiry, provided the course adopts certain pedagogical practices and encourages in students a self-conscious awareness of the intellectual habits of mind associated with those practices’” (Brent 262)?
Given composition’s historical concern with its place in the university, it seems fair to assume that despite administrative support for this kind of programmatic merging, many WPA’s and other compositionists will be inclined to resist such replacements and/or convergences on territorial, theoretical, and political grounds. Some are likely to argue that those without training in composition are unqualified to teach writing; others are likely to argue that writing instruction will inevitably end up taking a back seat to the content area of the seminar; while still others will be inclined to resist such merging because they do not see composition instruction as a service and do not want to perpetuate the ideologies that undergird this ethic or the exclusionary practices that it supports. While I agree to an extent with all of these arguments, particularly the last one, I would also suggest that it is possible to employ such programmatic convergence to “reframe” (Hesse 345) the work and subject matter of composition studies on our campuses in ways that might begin to disrupt composition’s “ethic of service” and its concomitant lack of disciplinary status. More specifically, I would argue that it is possible to implement a merger between FYC and FYE in ways that can work toward a more comprehensive and clearly defined subject matter for composition that might ultimately be granted disciplinary status and the protection of academic freedom that it deserves.

In what follows, then, I provide a brief history of first-year experience programs in general and discuss the specifics of my campus’ newly developed first-year experience program—known locally as “Gateway”—and the institutional context out of which it emerged. From there, I explain how the composition faculty at CSUSB has employed the implementation of the Gateway pilot program in ways that have carved out spaces to discuss and reconstruct the subject of composition. I close by considering this programmatic merger in the context of Tom Fox’s discussion of de Certeau’s tactics, strategies, and its relationship to substantive composition reform.

A Brief History of First-Year Experience Programs

According to Brent, first-year experience programs first emerged in the 1970s as a means of addressing the increasing attrition rates at colleges and universities across the U.S. Although the first-year seminar has always been the “flagship vehicle” (254) for these programs, they consist of a variety of strategies—including learning communities, tutoring and residential programs, specialized academic advising—intended to help students transition successfully from high school to college. For the most part, these strategies have been housed and conducted outside of the academic disciplines. Even the first-year seminar, according to Brent, “originally appeared in the form
of ‘University 101’ or ‘extended orientation’ courses” (254) and “covered topics ranging from library and study skills to adjusting to university life, dealing with sex, drugs and alcohol, personal values, and career advising” (254). As Brent suggests, they were intended to foster the “social” rather than the “intellectual” transition from high school to college.

More recently, however, seminars with more “intellectual” or academic content, taught by faculty across the university, have become more common than they were in the early years of these programs. In contrast to “University 101” courses, academic content seminars are inquiry-based; they are designed around the instructor’s disciplinary research interest, and, as such, they invite students to become, in Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger words, “legitimate peripheral participants” (qtd. in Brent 254-255) of their instructors’ discourse community. In so doing, according to Brent, they bring FYE programs “closer to the orbit of composition studies” (257). While Brent may be correct in suggesting that the inquiry-based nature of the first-year seminars bridges FYC programs and FYE programs, that was not the impetus for the union of these programs on our campus; mere practicality was. A bit of background about our institutional context is necessary to explain.

The Backdrop for the Current FYE and FYC at CSUSB

In the fall of 2004, the provost, in conjunction with the faculty senate, established a task force to research and design an academically-oriented transition program for all incoming students. The creation of this taskforce was publicly represented as part of the faculty’s desire to share responsibility for “student success” with the student affairs units on campus. The CSU chancellor’s office had recently issued an executive order demanding that all CSU campuses develop a plan to decrease the time to graduation and address the issue of unacceptably high attrition rates on campuses. Our campus was already offering a “Freshman Seminar” course akin to the “University 101” courses Brent describes, but retention at CSUSB that year was 42% compared to the national average of 63%. The creation of the task force, now known as the Gateway Taskforce, was the faculty’s way of addressing this issue.

Driving this public interest in sharing responsibility for student success was the wide-spread perception that our campus was in the midst of a bona fide literacy crisis being fed by two separate, but related issues. The first issue feeding this “literacy crisis” was the ever-increasing pressure from the administration to increase FTES. The senate felt that because pressure to increase FTES was so high, the campus was accepting more and more under-prepared students in larger and larger classes. As a result, the quality
of instruction was going down, while attrition rates and time to graduation (not to mention faculty work-load) was going up.

The second issue driving the supposed “literacy crisis” on our campus was another directive from the CSU Chancellor’s Office: to reduce the need for remediation on all CSU campuses to 10% by 2007. (When the executive order was issued in 1996, our remediation rate was 53%; it is now 2008 and our remediation rate hovers around 70%.) Looming in the background of this executive order was the threat of outsourcing basic writing from CSU campuses to the local community colleges—an approach other CSU campuses had already taken—if the target remediation rate was not met. One strategy the composition faculty employed to meet the administration’s demand was to develop a “stretch” program, along the lines of the programs at Arizona State University and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. This program merged the preexisting two quarter basic writing courses into one, unified twenty-week course: the same cohort of twenty students would have the same instructor for all twenty weeks, would complete an elongated version of the first-year composition curriculum, and would, we hoped, ultimately receive college credit for completing this college-level curriculum. At the time I was approached about Gateway, the FYE program that the taskforce had developed, we were in the process of strategizing about how to be able to offer baccalaureate credit for completing the stretch courses.

The suggestion to incorporate sections of our basic writing program into the pilot of the Gateway program came about for two reasons. The first was that the logistics of Gateway would be easier to manage because the program’s design involved cohort-scheduling and students in the stretch program would already be cohorted for the first two quarters of their first year. The second was that the students who tested into the stretch program were assumed to be members of the target population for Gateway, as they were perceived to have the greatest “needs” and would therefore be the most likely to leave school and/or take too long to graduate.\(^2\) My initial reaction to the suggestion to merge Gateway into our first-year composition program was to say “no,” largely because I was concerned that agreeing to allow the programs to converge in this way would perpetuate composition’s ethic of service, which, as noted above, many composition scholars have identified as problematic in at least two ways. First, as Crowley has pointed out, this service ethic has worked to create and maintain the exclusionary practices of U.S. universities. As Crowley explains:

The instrumental service ethic of the required composition course [is] to make student writing available for surveillance until it can be certified to conform to whatever standards are
deemed to mark it, and its authors, as suitable for admission to the discourses of the academy. [. . .] Exclusive practices need someone to exclude. The marginalization of the entire freshman class (except, of course, for those few elect—usually English majors—who are exempted) serves to underscore and reinforce the exclusivity of academic discourse, both with regard to the academy’s newest members (students and teachers alike) and with regard to the culture at large. (4)

In other words, perpetuating the notion that the purpose of composition courses is to “fix” students simultaneously perpetuates the hierarchy between academic discourse and anything Other, and leads to the exclusion and/or erasure of difference. The second reason that composition’s ethic of service is problematic concerns the issue of disciplinarity, or composition’s lack of it, and the subsequent lack of the protections of academic freedom. Indeed, drawing on the work of Crowley, as well as that of James Berlin, Robert J. Connors, Wallace Douglass, and Susan Miller, Mary Boland has more recently argued in “The Stakes of Not Staking a Claim,” that composition’s history of service has made it appear to be “wholly nondisciplinary” (33) and, as a result, the “‘property’ of everyone else” (33). More specifically, she writes:

At the exact moment that disciplined knowledge making was introduced as a primary function of higher education, composition was created as a wholly non-disciplinary course. Born of a test, college composition was always imagined as preparatory to disciplinary work, but not itself amenable to disciplined inquiry. [. . .] This historical construction has left the composition professional largely unprotected by academic freedom. (33-34)

So, allowing the perception of composition as a service to the university compromises the field’s status as a discipline and leaves its practitioners vulnerable to curricular and programmatic takeovers.

At first, it seemed to me that merging our basic writing program, already dogged by the discourse of remediation, with a program whose purpose is to uncritically assimilate students more fully (and efficiently) into the academy would only enable such practices of exclusivity and reinforce the notion that composition has no purpose, no subject matter, other than finding more and better ways to “fix” our woefully broken and under-prepared students. However, as I examined the structure of our specific program and realized that I would have the opportunity to implement the Gateway program myself, I began to see ways that incorporating our basic writing courses
into the pilot of the Gateway program could offer practical benefits. On the most practical level, merging the two programs would provide money for professional development for adjunct composition instructors teaching in our writing program. It also offered the possibility for arguing against the outsourcing of “remedial” writing classes and for considering these courses “remedial” in the first place. After all, if the courses are included in the students’ first-year college experience, then they are, by definition, college courses. However, even more important than pointing out this hypocritical irony (or garnering money for faculty development), I also saw the merger, because of the specific structure of the Gateway Program, as offering opportunities for campus conversations about literacy and writing courses that might work to reconstruct the subject of composition studies. For, as Boland hopefully points out, “we can, by the language we use in even our most local and casual representations of the field, begin to circulate a more comprehensive sense of writing” (45) and, therefore, a more comprehensive and complex understanding of the subject matter of our field.

The Gateway Program

The Gateway Taskforce Report describes the components of the program as follows:

1. *A two-day Summer Immersion Program*

2. *Gateway-enhanced sections of 1st-year courses (designated in catalog)*;

3. *Block-scheduling of student cohorts.* As stated by the National Learning Communities Project, students in learning communities tend to (a) form their own self-supporting groups beyond the classroom; (b) become more actively involved in learning; (c) experience a higher quality of learning because of increased participation; and (4) persist at a substantially higher rate.

4. *Ongoing contact between cohorts and teaching teams throughout the academic year.* Each week, teaching teams comprised of faculty members, study specialists or advisors from Undergraduate Studies (USTD), and student mentors would meet 25-student cohorts for an hour to address common concerns and questions. Each cohort would be assigned a 3- to 4-member team; this part of the Gateway program works to promote community, to create a shared investment in student and program success, and to increase collegiality, and to emphasize an “improvement-oriented” campus culture.
5. **Resources online for the campus community.** These resources should include (at least): templates of “pathways to success” for students; teaching resources for faculty planning Gateway-enhanced courses; graduation rate and retention rate information; information about CSUSB accreditations; information on Gateway program assessment; and contact information.

Most relevant to merging Gateway and our basic writing program are components #2, “Gateway-enhanced sections of 1st-year courses” and #3, “Block-scheduling of student cohorts.” “Gateway-enhanced courses” are enhanced versions of courses already offered in the General Education (GE) curriculum. In other words, students in the Gateway Program take courses as part of their first-year experience that they are already required to take in order to fulfill their GE requirements. Their first-year experience is therefore incorporated into the existing curriculum; it does not involve taking additional seminars. The “enhanced” nature of the Gateway courses implies that each course is explicitly inquiry-based, which means it puts discipline-specific problems at the center of the course, is assignment-centered, and pays explicit attention to literacy practices within disciplinary-specific contexts. Incorporating our basic writing program into this structure would mean students would take their “stretched” basic writing course, as Gateway-enhanced, in fall and winter quarters and then move together as a cohort to a third GE class such as Introduction to Psychology or World Civilizations. The disciplinary integrity would be maintained in all courses: the composition classes would have at their center questions concerning the relationship between language use and its conditions of production and consumption and the history or psychology courses would have at their center questions concerning the subject matter of those disciplines and students will use and discuss discipline-specific literacy practices throughout each quarter in order to examine those questions.

Clearly, then, these Gateway-enhanced courses are more like the academic content first-year seminars Brent describes than the “University 101” courses he mentions. However, they are also different. In the “writing intensive” academic content seminars that Brent discusses, students write intensively about other disciplinary research questions, but composition itself is not represented as having a subject matter about which to write; in Brent’s representation, composition has no discipline-specific questions of its own. We see this, for example, in his discussion of the affinities between academic content seminars and the WAC movement:
Typically, the search for meaningful contexts for research-based reading and writing has found expression in the WAC movement, most notably in the Writing in the Disciplines variant, in which writing-intensive courses provide disciplinary context. In its most strongly argued form, this movement represents a sharp turn away from general-purpose first-year composition courses—dubbed general writing skills instruction or GWSI courses by Joseph Petraglia (“Introduction”) and others—toward courses located firmly in established academic disciplines. (259).

In this conception, composition is constructed as the binary opposite of “established academic disciplines,” characterized as “a general purpose” course focused on “writing skills instruction.” This is precisely the understanding of composition that supports its ethic of service and precisely the kind of construction I hoped would be undermined by merging with Gateway. Indeed, because the structure of our program as a whole requires that students take three consecutive Gateway-enhanced courses, where Gateway-enhanced means that students’ reading, writing, and research is driven by discipline-specific questions, if the first two Gateway-enhanced courses are composition courses, then composition must, by definition, have a subject matter of its own; it must have discipline specific questions that students can investigate in small research/learning communities. Merging with Gateway, and the conversations and professional development that such a move would inevitably enable, I hoped, would make this subject matter of composition visible.

The Subject of Composition

What, then, is the subject of composition? This is a question that those involved with Gateway—faculty in and out of composition, faculty senators, academic deans, and even the provost—have engaged in vigorously and critically, particularly in meetings and workshops geared toward defining and developing the various “Gateway-enhanced” courses. Indeed, the first Gateway faculty meeting—which also included members of the faculty senate not teaching in the program, but who would later be voting on whether or not to pass the English Department’s baccalaureate credit-bearing Stretch Program—was intended to discuss the “inquiry-based” nature of the Gateway-enhanced courses, which meant discussing the boundaries of each of our academic disciplines. More specifically, the faculty members at the meeting were asked to identify the subject matter of their disciplines, some questions concerning what drove their field and which could
be put at the center of their Gateway-enhanced course. As we were sharing our responses, someone in a discipline other than English suggested that one way to create continuity between the courses over the year would be to design the fall/winter composition course as writing about the third course’s discipline. I responded that while such a structure might create thematic coherence across the three courses, it would not be consistent with the disciplinary-specific nature of the program. I then asserted that the field of composition has its own questions that students would be exploring and then used the opportunity for the group to discuss our notions of writing and our various perceptions of the purpose of first-year composition.

Not surprisingly, several faculty members in the room, none of whom were trained in composition studies, suggested that the purpose of composition courses was to teach students better writing skills so that they would be able to write well in the rest of their courses. (Composition’s ethic of service was raising its ugly head.) Those of us in the room who had been trained in composition responded by trying to articulate a richer, more complex view of writing and the subject of composition studies by emphasizing the social nature and uses of writing and arguing that the subject of composition involves the study of language use, of how text production is context-bound and implicated in relations of power, of how it is tied to the conditions of production and consumption, of what can (and cannot) be said when, where, why, and of what the sociocultural implications of this are.

This was the first of many conversations with the Gateway faculty that provided opportunities for those of us trained in composition to, in Boland’s words, “clearly nam[e] our subject for ourselves and others” (44). Articulating the subject of composition in situations like this is important because this works to challenge composition’s ethic of service and its problematic implications. Finding such opportunities to articulate and redefine composition’s subject in these ways and for such a broad and important audience, however, would have been more difficult were it not for the composition faculty’s willingness to include our FYC courses in an FYE program that insists that attention to disciplinary-specific literacy practices be included in all of the courses that make up the FYE. In other words, because the structure of the Gateway Program includes composition courses and insists on disciplinarity, it creates a space for composition to exist as a discipline. As a result, as we have moved forward and the Gateway faculty have talked about individual course curricula and how to create continuity and coherence for the Gateway cohorts as they move through their Gateway-enhanced courses, a rhetorical approach to genre has become one of the primary means by which we create continuity and coherence for the
Gateway cohorts. For example, all Gateway-enhanced courses, regardless of discipline, talk about genres and the relationship between form, content, and context. Instructors in each Gateway-enhanced course talk about the different genres common in the discipline, their organizational structures, the various organizations such genres can take, each genre’s purpose and intended audience, the identity the various structures create for the writer, the values each genre embeds, and the connections between these issues. So, rather than composition courses functioning as a generalized “how to write course” or a more specific course on how to write in another discipline, the composition courses in the Gateway Program function as one of three WID courses that make up the FYE at CSUSB in which students explore through reading, writing, and researching, the subject of composition.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The increasing prevalence of first-year experience programs coupled with composition’s “ethic of service” means that WPA’s will probably continue to be asked to align FYC with FYE in one way or another. Such convergences can no doubt be problematic in many ways. When we, as a composition faculty, were faced with this decision, it raised the question for us of whether it is possible to blend these kinds of programs without bolstering the perception of composition as a non-disciplinary service. We have found that it may, in fact, be possible, as long as the combined program is structured in a way that allows composition to be treated as a discipline and allows its subject matter to remain visible and intact. I realize that everyone on campus will not buy into our revised conception of the discipline, but as Boland notes, “the shaping power of discourse suggests that as others overtake our richer ways of talking about writing and language use, they will be overtaking richer ways of knowing what writing and language use [i.e. the field of composition studies] mean[s] and entail[s]” (32).

I realize that, at best, allowing our programs to merge in this way has been a mere tactic in the effort to gain disciplinary and professional status for composition, that as Tom Fox has argued of the Temple composition faculty, we have “disguise[d] [our] own liberatory agenda as the work of the institution” (258). And, as Fox, drawing on de Certeau, asserts, tactical practice is:

Ultimately the work of stalling and forestalling. The success of radical teaching depends ultimately not on tactics, but on strategies, which de Certeau defines as long-term actions that work from one’s own place. If the composition program can-
not represent its goals in reasonable complexity, and if it cannot persuade those outside of our discipline to adopt them, then substantive change is not going to happen.” (259)

I believe, however, that in using the particular structure and implementation process of our first-year experience program to “circulate a more comprehensive sense of writing” (Boland 22) and, therefore, the work of the field of composition, such tactical maneuvering has laid the groundwork for the kind of strategic practice and substantive reform that Fox calls for and that many compositionists seek.

Notes

1 For resources and trends in First-Year Experience Programs, see the “National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition” (http://www.sc.edu/fye/index.html).

2 Important to note here is that although the pilot of the Gateway Program would rely exclusively on basic writing courses that are in number, if not in content, pre-baccalaureate course, the Gateway Program, once piloted and proven effective, is intended to be a campus-wide program. In other words, the plan for Gateway is that eventually, all incoming first-year students will start their FYE in the fall FYC course sequence that they place in to (all of which will soon be baccalaureate credit-bearing) and then they will move on to their other Gateway-enhanced courses as a cohort in each subsequent quarter. So, although the initial merger on our campus between FYE and FYC involved only “basic writing” courses, this was never the long-term goal. The composition faculty realized the irony/hypocrisy of situating a first-year college experience in courses that are not considered by the university to be “college material,” but hoped to use this irony as part of their arguments for a baccalaureate credit-bearing stretch program.

Works Cited


Competing Interpretations of ‘Textual Objects’ in an Activity System: A Study of the Requirements Document in the ___ Writing Program

John Oddo and Jamie Parmelee

In April of 2000, the Council of Writing Program Administrators adopted an “Outcomes Statement,” which describes what writing students across the nation should accomplish in the First-Year Composition (FYC) course. Kathleen Blake Yancey, who helped compose the statement, noted in 2001 that “the role of digital technology in composition programs” was “notably absent” (322). In July 2007, a fifth section (dubbed the “technology plank”) of the Outcomes Statement was proposed. This section is meant to address the use of digital technologies in FYC (“Technology Statement”).

In a similar effort to account for the role of digital technologies in composition, ___ recently revised its own Writing Program. This proved to be a massive change, since, at the time, many instructors still taught a literature-based curriculum with an emphasis on grammar instruction. The task was to move the curriculum away from a current-traditional model to one that emphasized digital composing, multimodal projects and a rhetoric-process approach to teaching writing. With these goals in mind, several committees worked to design and implement a new writing curriculum with new goals, objectives, and requirements. Perhaps the most crucial new objective was to more fully account for reading and composing in web and digital environments. This new emphasis on digital design is made clear in the Writing Program’s 2006-2007 guidebook which states that “college graduates in the twenty-first century must be able to use computer and other digital technologies to produce acceptable documents relevant to their academic majors and professional careers” (3). In light of this reality, the Program increasingly emphasized multimodality and composing with new media in faculty workshops and meetings. More importantly, to cre-
ate a material environment commensurate with the new goals, the Writing Program received funding to introduce six rooms furnished with new wireless computers to be used in every writing class. Once again, this was a major change.

The specific aims of the new Tier I writing course—including the type and number of assignments to be given—were listed in a singular document which was distributed to all writing faculty in April 2006: the “Goals and Objectives for Tier I” document (Appendix A). The document consists of a list of six “Goals and Objectives,” followed by four “Requirements.” One goal/objective specifically calls on students to “learn Web and digital environments valued by the university.” However, this goal/objective refers to rather basic digital literacies (e-mail, word processing, backing up files, etc.)—and does not specifically stipulate that first-year students create multimodal texts with new media technology. Situated at the end of the goals and objectives document are the four distinct requirements that students must meet (Figure 1). These requirements are the focus of our study. It is important to note that no requirement specifically calls for a digital assignment in the Tier I course. In fact, the requirements may not reflect the realities of composing in a digital environment since they refer to “papers” and “pages”—terms which may not be compatible with digital composition.

In this paper, we study the role of the Requirements document, a “textual object,” as it functions in the activity system in which ___’s Writing Program coordinators work. By exploring how this document has been interpreted and employed by Writing Program coordinators in the context of a newly-created, digital environment, we hope to gain some insights that could be helpful for other Writing Programs transitioning into the digital age, advancing an understanding of what it means to undertake such widespread change for a writing program, including the introduction of digital technology.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Tier I Requirements document (Figure 1) is perhaps a perfect example of what Cheryl Geisler terms a “Textual Object.” According to Geisler, texts act as objects when they “appear to become part of the public arena, hard facts of organizational life through which authors can control action—or initiate consequences over which they have no control” (301-2). Geisler distinguishes between private texts (such as drafts, notes, and emails), which are often used to produce the final product and then discarded, and public texts (such as memos, purpose statements, published articles), which become part of a social context and have influence on the people in it. Pub-
lic texts, not private texts, function as textual objects capable of influencing people’s behaviors.

Geisler derives her concept of textual objects, in part, from David R. Russell’s application of activity theory to writing studies. According to Russell, poststructuralist theories, based on Bakhtin’s understanding of discourse as a dynamic process, have begun emphasizing the dialectical nature of both the context and activity of writing. Using this understanding of writing as his foundation, Russell borrows from activity theory to develop a broader definition of context that recognizes the dialectical relationships within and between the socio-historical context in which writing takes place, the collective or individual agents of writing, and the texts produced. Thus, according to Russell, the unit of analysis in writing research ought to be the activity system, an “ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction” (510).

An activity system is represented by a triangle and is comprised of three principal parts. At Point A of the triangle are subject(s), defined as socially and historically mediated human agent(s), whether individual or collective. Russell recognizes that subjects can be part of multiple and even conflicting activity systems. The mediational tools, at Point B, are materials put to

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1. To write approximately 20 pages (double spaced 12 pt. font) of graded writing. In addition to these formal graded pieces of writing, students will also produce informal writing that may consist of, but is not limited to journals, process or research logs, responses to reading assignments, free-write activities, peer responses, and multiple drafts for each graded, formal writing assignment.

2. To develop a minimum of 4 papers on selected topics and 1 reflective essay in a single-semester course; or in the two-semester extended “stretch” course 6 papers: 2 papers on selected topics and 1 reflective paper per semester.

3. To develop papers that have a point; that is, personal experience, narratives, or other modes should not be assigned for their own sake but to further a continuing argument or thesis. To focus on a variety of textual lengths and difficulties.

4. To document at least one paper with research that uses a recognizable documentation format and style.

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Figure 1. “Requirements for Tier I”
use by subjects in order to accomplish some purpose. Finally, at Point C are object/motives, defined as the “raw material or problem space on which the subject(s) brings to bear various tools in ongoing interaction with another person(s)” (511). An object at Point C potentially leads to particular outcomes desired by the subject. But, this problem space is a contested territory, since different subjects bring different motives to the collective work space. As Russell argues, activity systems are not static, but rather dynamic systems that are constantly changing as their internal components interact with each other and with other activity systems.

In the activity system of the Writing Program coordinators (shown in Figure 2), the coordinators are located at Point A, as subjects. The mediatational tools (Point B) related to their textual object would include notes from meetings of the committees that composed the Requirements document, previous drafts and versions of the requirements, correspondence related to the composition of the document, and any other resources and documents that came to bear on the Requirements document. At Point C, then, is the textual object, the final draft of the Requirements document, which was disseminated to faculty in the department. The motives and desires of the Program have now been objectified in the document itself, and the document stands as the Program’s representative to the writing teachers.6

In her study, Geisler sought to explore how texts “jump” from Point B to Point C. That is, she studied how some texts transform from mediatational means, tools in the production process, to objects capable of influencing how people conduct themselves. When texts operate in this way, Geisler argues, they “can be understood as part of the shifting consciousness sustaining everyday life in complex organizations” (298). As part of this shifting consciousness, textual objects can produce outcomes that are

Figure 2: Coordinators’ Activity System

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in line with the subject's intent and desire, in contradiction to it, or some combination thereof.

Less apparent in Geisler's work, however, is a study of the variables, such as other textual objects, conflicting motives, or divergent interpretations of a given textual object, that lead to desired outcomes being realized or resisted. Several scholars have noted that meaning is not “fixed” or inherent in a given textual object. Instead, meaning is always dependent on the social context in which texts are embedded. As Russell explains, on the one hand, objects (textual or otherwise) have the potential to “stabilize-for-now structures of action and identity” (514, emphasis added). On the other hand, Russell notes, a person is likely functioning in multiple contexts simultaneously, and, inevitably, contradictions arise: “... people experience double binds, seemingly irreconcilable demands placed on them by the pull of two competing motives. Eventually, individuals’ agency or identity may be transformed” (532).

The present study considers how unanticipated variables that lie between a textual object and the desired outcomes of an activity system might prevent those outcomes from being realized (see diagram in Appendix B). Specifically, we examine the Tier I Requirements document and explore how this textual object has shaped (and been shaped by) the behaviors of subjects in the activity system of ___'s Writing Program coordinators. Of particular interest is the possibility that major desired outcomes for this textual object (programmatic coherence, introduction of multimodality) are destabilized when coordinators (subjects) with potentially differing motives unanticipatedly interpret the document in different ways.

**THE PRESENT STUDY**

The present study examines the ways the ___ Writing Program coordinators have responded to the requirements portion of the Tier I “Goals and Objectives” document. In conducting this study, we sought to answer the following research questions:

- What do the Writing Program coordinators see as the desired outcome(s) of the Tier I requirements? That is, how do the coordinators interpret the requirements?
- Do their interpretations of the requirements conflict with the coordinators' other motives for the Writing Program?
- To what extent has this textual object become a “hard fact of organizational life” which coordinators rely on to understand the desired outcomes for the program? That is, to what extent does the Require-
ments document influence the coordinators’ professional identities and practices?
• How might the coordinators shape the meaning of the document within the program? That is, how do they attempt to shape the ways instructors take meaning from the text?

Methods

Participants and Site

The two ___ Writing Program coordinators agreed to participate in our project. One participant was Dale, the Writing Program Coordinator. Dale was a Professor in rank with a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition. He began directing ___’s Writing Program in 2004, three semesters after the provost had charged the English Department with revising the writing program and two years before the new program was initiated. As the head of the Writing Program, Dale was mainly responsible for attaining the new computer classrooms by gaining the support of the Provost. Dale met with upper administrators to secure resources for the new writing program. He had informed the provost’s office that the new curriculum could not be delivered without computer classrooms. Dale’s work focuses on policy development and implementation. He does not schedule instructors or monitor their progress with the new curriculum. At the time of our interview, he was not teaching a writing course, though his teaching schedule does include one writing course every other year.

Maggie, the Assistant Writing Program Coordinator, has a M.A. in Composition and is a non-tenure track Assistant Professor with many years of experience in administrating and teaching composition courses at ___ University. She was, at the time of our study, teaching a Tier I course; she teaches two writing course each semester. Maggie had an active role in creating the new program and, as the Assistant Coordinator, she was responsible for ensuring that all Tier I instructors made the transition from the old literature-based curriculum to the new digital curriculum. Thus, Maggie had a hands-on role throughout the process of changing the Writing Program and was most responsible for interacting with instructors on a day-to-day basis.

Depending on the participant’s preference, interviews were conducted in the participant’s office or in our office (across the hall). The interview with Maggie was conducted in her office; the interview with Dale was conducted in our office.
**Procedures**

After gaining IRB approval for our research, we contacted Dale and Maggie via an e-mail message. Upon receiving their informed consent, we scheduled interviews which comprised the entirety of our data. We conducted semi-structured interviews which were not strictly formal; we attempted to ask questions as uniformly as possible, but also asked the participants to feel free to interject or extemporize. We sought to keep a conversational tone within the constraints of our interview format. For the sake of simplicity, one of us asked the questions and the other took field notes and interjected when necessary. Interviews were conducted over the span of one week in November 2006. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, was audio-taped and was later transcribed.

Questions for the interview were developed in advance and were incorporated into a script (see Appendix C). Our questions were divided into three categories which were designed to elicit responses related to our research interests: namely, coordinators’ interpretations of, and activities related to, the Requirements document. Our three categories were: (a) coordinators’ interpretations of the textual object, (b) the degree to which the textual object has become “public knowledge” shaping coordinators’ daily activities, and (c) ways the coordinators have influenced the instructors’ understanding and application of the textual object. The same questions were included in both interviews so we could identify similarities and differences in the coordinators’ responses.

**Data Analysis**

Our approach to data analysis emphasized a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss). One of the tenets of grounded theory is that analysis is done *inductively*. That is, categories and theories are built from the ground up, as they “emerge” from the data—not from previous scholarship or assumptions. After a close reading of our interview transcripts, we identified trends that seemed to be emerging from the data. We then developed (and redeveloped) a coding scheme which reflected these trends and systematically coded the transcripts as categories emerged. To ensure the validity of our coding categories, each of us coded the transcripts separately and compared our findings to determine the level of agreement. Based on a random sample of 20% of the data, we calculated a simple inter-rater reliability of .78. Satisfied with this reliability, we reconciled any disagreements and stabilized our coding scheme (Geisler 79-91). Our primary unit of analysis was the t-unit, “the smallest group of words that can make a move in language” (Geisler 31). More specifically, Kellogg W. Hunt defines...
a t-unit as one primary clause, with or without any subordinate clauses.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, we considered a given response to a question as a secondary unit of analysis. This made it easier to compare one coordinator’s answers to the other coordinator’s answers.

We identified three main categories of the coordinators’ interpretations of the textual object: \textit{consent}, which is stated agreement with the “literal”\textsuperscript{13} meaning of a textual object; \textit{objection}, which refers to stated disagreement with the literal meaning of a textual object; and \textit{revision}, which is the intentional or unintentional reinterpretation or non-literal interpretation of a textual object. We identified one category which described how the textual object had become “public knowledge” that influenced coordinators’ administrative work: \textit{deferral}, which describes any time a coordinator mentioned deferring to the wisdom of the document. That is, the coordinator might refer to what the document, seemingly on its own, directed her (or an instructor) to do. Finally, we identified two categories related to the way coordinators, guided by their interpretations of the document, influenced (or tried to influence) instructors’ practices: \textit{enforcement}, which refers to moves in which coordinators explicitly discuss telling instructors what they should be doing by referring to the document; and \textit{additional digital recommendations} in which coordinators explicitly articulate expectations for digital work to be done in addition to the “papers” called for in the Requirements document.

\section*{Results}

Dale and Maggie each indicated that achieving programmatic coherence was a desired outcome of the Requirements document. However, one unanticipated variable that may have prevented this outcome from being realized was that the coordinators varied widely in their interpretation of (and subsequent enforcement of) the requirements. In order to effectively summarize and categorize our data, we have chosen to present some general results in Table 1. The table indicates the number of times each coordinator’s response 1) revealed his/her interpretation of the document, 2) indicated that the document was a kind of “public knowledge” influencing his/her day-to-day activities, or 3) indicated attempts to influence instructors’ practices in ways that supported or contradicted his/her interpretation of the document.
As the results indicate, when it came to interpretation of the document, both coordinators generally consented. Maggie overwhelmingly consented. In fact, nearly 95% (52 out of 55 responses related to interpretation) of her interpretations of the document indicated her consent. She never objected to the document and very rarely (5% of her interpretations) offered a non-literal revision of it. Dale also consented to the document most of the time (54% of his interpretations). However, nearly half of his interpretations were divided between objection and revision. Both Dale and Maggie indicated that they deferred to the document, suggesting that it was indeed a “hard fact of organizational life” capable of influencing the work in their administrative activity system (Geisler 301-2). That is, Dale and Maggie both treated the document as an authority that could guide their own interpretations of program goals as well as their interactions with instructors. Finally, Dale and Maggie both inevitably shaped instructors’ interpretations of the document. Maggie, and Dale to a far lesser extent, acted as enforcers of the document, encouraging instructors to comply with its demands. Each coordinator relied upon his/her interpretation of the document when interacting with instructors. Since each coordinator had interpreted the same document differently (Maggie was overwhelmingly a consenter, while Dale felt free to revise), each coordinator was likely to enforce the same document according to different standards in their interactions with teachers. Maggie referenced her role as enforcer 53 times, while Dale suggested that he very rarely acted in this role. Interestingly, Maggie frequently recommended that instructors incorporate digital work into their teaching practices—despite the fact that this was not a stated requirement. Thus, Maggie suggested that instructors create digital assignments in addition to the more traditional writing assignments that the document required. Taken together, the coordinators’ differing interpretations of the textual object constitute
unanticipated variables that potentially destabilize the desired outcomes of their activity system. That is, the coordinators’ differing interpretations of the document may have led instructors to get mixed messages (especially regarding the role of multimodality as a requirement) which may have compromised the desired outcome of programmatic coherence.

Analysis

Dale as Rare and Reluctant Enforcer

To Dale, a desired outcome of the program was that teachers have a certain degree of freedom in designing their classes, and this prevented him from legislating curricula to a great extent. As he put it:

If I really believe that teachers need to create their own curriculum, that teachers need to be autonomous agents, that they need to be able to design their own classes…then that means that I don’t get to tell them what to do.

Consequently, Dale observed that teachers had a relatively great deal of flexibility in determining the degree to which they satisfy Tier I goals and objectives:

You could satisfy these in robust ways or you could satisfy these very minimally and I’m not sure that every course could satisfy every one of them in a robust way—again, I guess it comes back to the philosophy of trying to give teachers as much autonomy as possible and still have some kind of core.

Dale was adamant about having a program that is as open as possible—with the goals and objectives document serving as “the only guidelines that people have.” He praised the requirements because they allowed for a coherent program without inducing “lock-step uniformity” among instructors.

Dale’s job did not demand that he be an enforcer of the requirements. When asked if he found himself having to refer back to the document, he was quick to answer, “No.”

Because… if I were doing that, that would basically be if I were trying to see if people are doing what they’re supposed to be doing, and I don’t do that…I do very little of that.

By and large, Dale’s job entailed being a spokesperson for the program, securing resources, shepherding the new curriculum through various committees and making program–level decisions. More recently, in addition to helping to secure an improved physical space for the writing center, he is currently working with departments across campus to offer dedicated ver-
sions of the second required writing course and with faculty across campus to develop a more coherent approach to upper-division level writing courses.

Dale’s Deferral: Using the Document as an Authority

Nevertheless, we counted eleven t-units in which Dale acknowledged that in some instances his job as a coordinator compelled him to enforce the document. According to Dale, if someone confronted him and said that an instructor was having students write only one paper for the entire semester, as opposed to the four required papers, he would defer to the document as a way to insist compliance with program requirements. Dale also mentioned the occasional need to defend the requirements when faced with resistant instructors or administrators. In such cases of having to defend the program, Dale indicated that the Requirements document, as a textual object, served as a sort of final word that all could agree on. Dale’s readiness to defer to and enforce the document when necessary indicates that this textual object was central to achieving his major desired outcome for programmatic coherence.

Dale’s Interpretation of the Document

But how did Dale interpret or understand the requirements? This question proved to be very important because Dale’s interpretations of the textual object could potentially influence instructors’ interpretations. When asked if he thought the requirements accurately reflect what he wants the Writing Program to be, Dale initially sought to distance himself from the document, but nevertheless endorsed it: “they don’t necessarily reflect what I want because I didn’t write them […] I think they’re okay. I think they’re fine.” In spite of his initial hesitation about the requirements, Dale expressed no desire to change the document. In fact, at first, Dale seemed to consent to all the requirements, offering 26 statements where he interpreted the document literally and endorsed it as something that aligned with his motives for the Writing Program.

When asked to explain how he understood each requirement, initially, Dale commented that they were “fairly straightforward,” and offered a rather literal interpretation:

You’ve got to have around twenty pages; you’ve got to have four papers and a reflective essay […] I don’t know how else to understand them. I mean, twenty’s twenty, right? […] Four plus one is four plus one. […] I see this stuff as pretty cut and dry.
Moreover, at first, Dale suggested that the requirements did not conflict with his understanding of “current theory and practice in composition.” As he explained:

I also think that they’re congruent with recognizable and acceptable theory and practice in composition; there’s nothing in the goals and objectives, I think, that are, you know, that would run counter to…current theory and practice in composition. I think they’re ambitious, I think they’re forward-looking … I think they’re defensible.

This seemed to verify that Dale was a consenter. He strictly interpreted the requirements and apparently experienced no significant “double binds” between the requirements and his other motives for the program.

However, when we noted the program’s apparent emphasis on multimodality and digital composition, and asked Dale if he thought these were reflected in the requirements, Dale seemed to discover feelings of dissonance right before our eyes. In fact, in eleven t-units, he objected that the language in the requirements did seem to conflict with his desired outcomes for digital composing:

Look at the way…this is talking about papers and pages. In a digital environment, what’s a page? In a digital environment, what’s a paper? … what’s a journal? What’s a process or research log? … so I think you’ve put your finger on something that’s kind of squishy…because we’re using older definitions of texts here.

In the same breath, though, Dale separated himself from this objection and “transformed” into a reviser of the document. In fact, we counted eleven t-units in which Dale revised or re-saw the requirements language. That is, he no longer read words like “papers” and “pages” with strict literalness, and instead read into these words so that they could, with some imagination, account for digital composing:

In a practical sense, you can get there [to digital texts] from here [the language in the requirements], … I think maybe … the way to think about this, are they’re… equivalencies.

The requirements make no mention of “equivalencies.” That is, the document never explicitly states that a digital project can be seen as equivalent to traditional print-linguistic pages. Dale insisted, though, that a digital project—in movie-maker, for instance—could be viewed as equivalent to a certain number of traditional pages. Moreover, he stressed that, for instructors interested in moving students toward digital composing, a multimodal
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project could be assigned in place of (not merely in addition to) a traditional paper in order to satisfy the first requirement.

Dale expressed that, “down the road,” he could see “rewriting [the requirements] to reflect the digital.” However, he suggested that, for now, the language in the requirements should remain “conservative” with regard to digital composition in order to reduce the anxiety of long-time faculty unused to computer environments. Dale was very much cognizant of the fact that the new wireless classrooms and the relatively new push for multimodality amounted to a “big change” for many instructors who have traditionally been conservative in their approach.

Making Sense of Dale’s Response

We suggest that Dale’s interpretations of this textual object influence the degree to which his desired outcomes for the program are realized. One of Dale’s desired outcomes is programmatic coherence. Thus, Dale sometimes enforces the document—occasionally deferring to this textual object in order to help regulate and standardize to some degree the behavior of instructors. He also infrequently defends the document—explaining how it is commensurate with accepted composition theory and practice—when confronted by people who question the Writing Program. In this way, the document is a textual object that Dale sometimes relies on to handle certain administrative responsibilities that come with his job. Dale’s willingness to defer to and enforce the document could mitigate the destabilizing influence of his broader, revised interpretation.

Perhaps the document makes some regulative tasks easier in Dale’s activity system. Especially in the case of a conflict with a derelict instructor, Dale is able to defer to a standardized text as public knowledge for the “last word” on a subject. It is clear that Dale wishes to distance himself from the role of “program policeman,” and wants to ensure some degree of instructor autonomy. Dale is able to let the document itself serve as a final authority—a textual object approved by all major curriculum committees of the University and in line with current WPA Outcomes. The document, vested with this authority, does important political work as it helps to sustain a new and better Writing Program while freeing coordinators from “telling people what to do.”

It is also noteworthy that, though Dale consents to most requirements, he is also a reviser of the document. Dale indicated that the language in the requirements does not literally reflect composing in a digital environment, thereby suggesting that the language of the textual object conflicts with one of his desired outcomes for the program. However, his immediate reaction
to this was to re-see the language of the requirements so that “papers” and “pages” could mean multimodal projects. Perhaps, because Dale’s major responsibility was implementing the new computer classrooms, he was more likely to re-read the document in ways that allowed for digital composition. This reading of the document informs the way that Dale enforces the requirements, and, ultimately, informs the way that Dale sees the Writing Program (as “forward-looking” and “defensible”).

Maggie as Frequent Enforcer

As the Tier I coordinator, Maggie had much more interaction with instructors than Dale. This meant that she had to enforce the requirements more often than Dale did. Maggie mentioned enforcement in 53 t-units. On one occasion, she mentioned being confronted by an instructor who claimed that “within a classroom you do whatever you want—you have academic freedom.” Maggie’s response to this instructor was rather unambiguous:

I said, No, you can’t. You can do what you want to achieve the goals and objectives of the program which you teach. That doesn’t mean that, if I have these goals and objectives, I can go in and teach a single research paper […] That’s not the program…. And if I decide that’s what I want to do… well, I can’t.

This interchange suggests that Maggie believed enforcing the textual object was necessary to achieve the desired outcome of programmatic coherence.

Maggie also enforced the document by reading and reviewing all Tier I instructors’ syllabi. Maggie indicated that the reason why syllabi were collected was to ensure that instructors were incorporating the requirements in their classes. Again, this activity helped Maggie to reach the desired outcome of programmatic coherence. Maggie also suggested that she enforced the document in less authoritative ways, by working with and among instructors to facilitate satisfying the goals, objectives, and requirements in their classes. Maggie indicated that she did this in two ways: informal interactions with individual instructors, and formal meetings with groups of instructors. Maggie was, at the time of our interview, about to hold meetings with four groups of all Tier I instructors on ___’s Main Campus in order to discuss, specifically, how their syllabi were “working toward meeting the goals and objectives and requirements.” Maggie indicated that the meetings were intended to show instructors how requirements could be incorporated into their syllabi.

Interestingly, Maggie added that, in meetings with the Tier I instructors, she “constantly” referred back to her knowledge of the requirements.
and indicated that the document was “there all the time” in her consciousness. Importantly, Maggie suggested that all teachers ought to have the requirements in the back of their heads at any given time:

In any class, I mean, you almost… you have to have this pretty much part of your subconscious because this is what you’re looking to do [...] these [requirements] are sort of part of the subliminal thing that’s going on while you’re teaching. I mean, I would hate to think that teachers would have to get this [Requirements document] out and read it all the time.

One of the ways Maggie enforced her interpretation of the document was by recommending to instructors that they gain intimate familiarity with it and incorporate it into their consciousness as she has done. Maggie viewed this textual object as shared public knowledge and relied on it heavily to achieve the major desired outcome of programmatic coherence. This suggests how much the Requirements document as a textual object influenced day-to-day operations in Maggie’s activity system.

**Maggie’s Deferral: Using the Document as an Authority**

Often, Maggie did not include herself among the authors of the requirements, and instead referred to “the program” or “the committee”—some entity separate from herself—that was responsible for creating the new mandate. As an instructor and as a coordinator, Maggie deferred to what the requirements “said” to do in twelve t-units, emphasizing that she herself had to comply with the requirements, and was “not supposed to go off on [her] own.” When asked if the Requirements document made her job easier, harder, or the same as it was before, Maggie again expressed how the document enables her to adopt the role of enforcer when instructors fail to comply with program rules:

. . . having the goals and objectives and requirements makes your job easier because you can turn to it and say, look, this is what the program says, [but] that’s not what you’re doing.

Thus, Maggie found it helpful (perhaps necessary) to defer to the Requirements document in her day-to-day activities. The document was an authority to her—and everyone else in the program. Indeed, so powerful, so authoritative was the document itself in shaping behavior that Maggie deferred to the document as a textual object and assigned it a managerial voice. That is, she deferred to what the document does and does not “say to do,” and commented about what the document “tells [an instructor] to do.”
Maggie’s Interpretation of the Document

But how did Maggie interpret the Requirements document? What version of this textual object was she enforcing? These questions yielded important insights.

In some ways, Maggie’s interpretation of the document was much like Dale’s. For instance, Maggie, like Dale, commented on the flexibility afforded teachers by the goals and objectives document: “we’re not telling them how to meet them or with what book.” Moreover, Maggie, like Dale, commented that, while allowing instructors freedom, the document still inspired coherence in the program. However, unlike Dale, Maggie was a strict consenter through and through. She demonstrated her consent in 52 t-units, and never once objected. She understood each requirement literally and endorsed each requirement completely. For instance, to Maggie, requirement 1 was “self-explanatory.” Twenty pages of graded writing meant twenty pages of graded writing. Importantly, Maggie explicitly rejected the notion of “equivalencies” in her understanding of requirements 1 and 2. She never indicated that digital projects could account for a certain number of print-linguistic pages, or that a digital project could take the place of a traditional “paper” assignment. Unlike Dale, Maggie expressed to us that multimodal projects could not substitute for traditional writing assignments. What this suggests is that, as a consenter, Maggie read the entire document literally. Since neither the goals and objectives section nor the requirements section specifically calls for a digital assignment, she found it unnecessary to “re-see” either portion of the document to account for a digital assignment.

Maggie’s Recommendation of Additional Digital Assignments

However, again and again, Maggie indicated that digital projects were to be done in addition to (not in place of) the traditional writing assignments suggested in the requirements. In 36 t-units (compared to zero such comments from Dale), Maggie related to us that she was “all the time” explaining to teachers how to “accent” or “enhance” traditional writing assignments with digital projects—without allowing digital assignments to “take over” traditional writing. According to her, a digital project such as an audio essay “has a correlation to writing,” but it is not writing per se. She commented that, as a teacher, she would hate to devote a significant portion of her semester to working on a digital assignment because, in that case, she couldn’t “get all [her] writing in.”

Maggie observed that the document does not require students to create a visual text (“it doesn’t say to write visual texts yet”) or compose a digi-
tal project ("doesn’t say you have to have a digital assignment"). Interestingly, though Maggie clearly understood the requirements to be saying that assigning multimodal projects was not compulsory, she also suggested that multimodal projects should be assigned. At some points in our interview, Maggie seemed very much interested in persuading teachers to add to the requirements, and create simple multimodal projects: “maybe add a picture, or add… one PowerPoint or something.” Clearly, digital composition, to Maggie, was a desired outcome for the program—even though she indicated that it was not literally required in the textual object.

On the one hand, as a consenter, Maggie made very clear that digital projects are not required and should not “take over” a class. On the other hand, she made frequent mention of getting students to do “digital work.” In addition, she often made reference to certain kinds of digital media projects (sound and visual assignments) that students “need to do.” Maggie’s interpretation of the textual object, unlike Dale’s, did not allow for equivalencies. Instead, Maggie resolved the conflict between the language of the Requirements document (which did not account for digital composition) and her own desired outcome of multimodality by recommending digital work in addition to the work recommended in the textual object.

**Making Sense of Maggie’s Response**

Overall, Maggie made clear to us that the Requirements document influenced her—both as a coordinator and as an instructor. Maggie indicated to us that the document indeed represented a textual object that was influencing her behavior. In instances where Maggie had confrontations with instructors who resisted meeting the aims of the Program, she made clear that she deferred to the requirements in order to prove to instructors that their behaviors were unacceptable. Maggie’s job required frequent enforcement of the document (in reviewing syllabi, in formal meetings, in confrontations). This suggests that, for her, the textual object was central to achieving the desired outcome of programmatic coherence.

Maggie was certainly a consenter, who adhered to the literal interpretation of the requirements. However, she also recommended assigning additional multimodal projects (not in the requirements) to “enhance” the required print-linguistic papers. In this way, Maggie endorsed the requirements completely, while, at the same time, endorsing multimodality as an additional desired outcome of the program—supplementing those already stated in the requirements. Consequently, she may have unintentionally encouraged instructors to do more than what the requirements literally prescribed.
Conclusions

At the time of our study, early in a transition toward a new program, the coordinators may have had difficulty achieving two major desired outcomes. The first desired outcome of programmatic coherence was objectified in the Requirements document. That is, this textual object served as an agreed upon representation of desired outcomes for the Tier I program. The document had become a “hard fact of organizational life” for both coordinators—something that they deferred to (or referred to) when conducting administrative activities. A second desired outcome was a movement toward digital composition. The transition into wireless computer classrooms and the coordinators’ recommendations for multimodal work suggest that digital composition was a desired outcome for the Writing Program. The absence of a digital composition requirement in the textual object may have prevented both desired outcomes from being fully realized.

As discussed earlier, unanticipated variables which lie between a textual object and the desired outcomes of an activity system may prevent subjects from reaching desired outcomes (see Appendix B). In this case, the most notable unanticipated variable was the discrepancy in interpretation of the Requirements document. The coordinators sought to mediate a potential conflict between their desired outcome for digital composition and the language within the textual object which did not literally call for this outcome. More specifically, the coordinators tried to account for their desired outcome for digital composition by (re)interpreting the document in competing ways.

In a sense, the two coordinators were deferring to two different documents. According to Dale’s revised interpretation, a multimodal assignment could take the place of a traditional writing assignment. Meanwhile, in Maggie’s interpretation of literal consent, a multimodal assignment could in no way replace a traditional writing assignment, but should be done in addition to the stated requirements. Because of the coordinators’ differing interpretations it is unlikely that the desired outcomes for creating assignments in a digital environment were being stabilized by the document. More importantly, the desired outcome of programmatic coherence was potentially being thwarted by their divergent interpretations.

What our study suggests is that administrators should recognize the centrality of textual objects which delineate the goals and objectives of a Writing Program. These textual objects become most significant in a time of widespread curricular change, including the introduction of digital environments. It is natural that people unfamiliar with their new, digital surroundings would turn to a seemingly stable, authoritative document.
Moreover, on a pragmatic level, it is easier for instructors to refer to a textual object for information than to make a face-to-face appointment with a Writing Program administrator. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how Writing Program administrators could get a digital writing program off the ground without using textual objects to introduce instructors to the new curriculum.

Many Writing Programs are increasingly attempting to address the role of digital media in composition. The existence of these programs suggests the timeliness of the newly proposed technology section of the Outcomes Statement. Such programs may wish to follow the example of the ___ coordinators, each of whom played a different role in transforming the writing program. The ___ coordinators recognized the instrumentality of communicating new standards through stable and authoritative textual objects. However, the example of the ___ Writing Program also makes clear that coordinators must attend to the fact that all textual objects, including outcomes and requirements statements, are subject to interpretation. Inevitably, inconsistencies in interpretation will arise as administrators work to assimilate new curricular goals with pre-existing ideas and practices. Thus, Writing Program coordinators should take measures to reach and maintain consensus regarding interpretation of textual objects in their activity system.
Appendix A – Tier 1 Goals and Objectives List

Tier I English 11011 - College Writing I

Goals and Objectives for Tier I

1. To learn how to recognize and strategically use the conventions of academic literacy.
   a. Control formal features of syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
   b. Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
   c. Demonstrate appropriate means of documenting their work
   d. Learn common formats for different contexts

2. To understand and use rhetorical principles to produce public and private documents appropriate for academic and professional audiences and purposes.
   a. Focus on a purpose
   b. Respond to the needs of different audiences
   c. Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
   d. Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
   e. Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
   f. Use various technological tools to explore texts

3. To practice good writing, including planning, revision, editing, evaluating sources, and working with others.
   a. Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
   b. Use writing as an open process that permits writers to revise their work
   c. Learn to critique their own and others’ works
   d. Learn the advantages and responsibilities of writing as a collaborative act

4. To practice the processes of good reading.
   a. Experience and use the many layers of meaning implicit in “texts”
   b. Interact with a text to question the ideas it presents and the language it uses
   c. Read and respond to written and visual texts
   d. Learn to proofread and edit documents for academic and professional audiences
5. To learn web and digital environments valued by the university, for example, some or all of the following,
   a. Use the internet as a research tool
   b. Use word processing
   c. Back up files on disks, CDs or jump drives
   d. Send and receive email
   e. Enter discussion in chat rooms
   f. Access Web CT or Vista

6. To learn and practice how writing, at the university, is often based on previous research and inquiry and how to use this research in their writing.
   a. Use writing and reading for inquiry, rather than merely reporting
   b. Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
   c. Integrate their own ideas with those of others (that is, integrate sources to support their own stance)

Requirements for Tier I

1. To write approximately 20 pages (double spaced 12pt. font) of graded writing. In addition to these formal graded pieces of writing, students will also produce informal writing that may consist of, but is not limited to, journals, process or research logs, responses to reading assignments, free-write activities, peer responses, and multiple drafts for each graded, formal writing assignment.

2. To develop a minimum of 4 papers on selected topics and 1 reflective essay in a single-semester course; or in the two-semester extended “stretch” course 6 papers: 2 papers on selected topics and 1 reflective paper per semester.

3. To develop papers that have a point; that is, personal experience, narratives, or other modes should not be assigned for their own sake but to further a continuing argument or thesis. To focus on a variety of textual lengths and difficulties.

4. To document at least one paper with research that uses a recognizable documentation format and style.
Appendix B – Unanticipated Variables
Prevent or Ensure Desired Outcomes

Unanticipated Variables

Object/Motive:
Requirements Document

Unanticipated Variables
Varying and Conflicting Interpretations of Document: consent, revision, objection
Varying enforcement of document
Varying messages received by teachers from Coordinators

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

a. Authorized Substitution of Traditional Writing with Multimodal Composition (Desired by Dale)
b. Authorized Addition of Multimodal Comp. to "Enhance" Traditional Writing (Desired by Maggie)
c. Coherent Program (Desired by All)
d. Incoherent Program (Undesired)

Subjects: Coordinators

B

Coordinators’ Activity System
Appendix C – Questions for Writing Program Coordinators

Background Information

- When, how, and to whom did you distribute this text?

  a. Coordinators’ interpretations of the textual object
     - How do you understand each requirement?
     - How do you feel about the requirements? (Do you think the requirements accurately reflect what you want the Writing Program to be?)

  b. Degree to which the textual object has become part of the public arena that influences coordinators’ daily activities
     - How does this document influence your day to day activities as a Writing Program coordinator?
     - How often do you find yourself having to refer back to the document either by taking out a physical copy and looking at it, or referring to your memory of it?
     - Under what circumstances might you refer to this document (to explain it, to resolve conflicts, to revise it, to enforce it)? Is this usually done in person?

  c. Ways the coordinators influenced the instructors’ understanding and application of the textual object
     - How often do you find yourself having to articulate the meaning of particular requirements with teachers or with other coordinators? Is this usually done in person?
     - So, would you say that the document has made your job as a coordinator easier, harder, or the same?
     - How have you assessed whether teachers have adequately understood and appropriately used this document?
     - To what degree have most teachers succeeded or failed to understand and make use of this document in designing their courses?
Notes

1 The Outcomes Statement was originally published in *Writing Program Administration* 23.1/2 (Fall/Winter 1999): 59-63.

2 The *Guide to College Writing I & II*, better known as the *Guide*, is the only text required for students by the Writing Program.

3 “Tier I” is the name given to the FYC course.

4 The finished document was published and distributed to all writing instructors in April 2006. However, early and late draft forms of the document were seen at various times before April 2006 by several members of the ___ faculty: members of diverse committees who collaborated to compose and revise the text; the Writing Program coordinators and other administrators; friends of committee members and coordinators; a few non-tenure track instructors who were asked to provide feedback on a late draft form; instructors who were introduced to the document in developmental workshops prior to April 2006; graduate students who studied the document in a “Teaching College Writing” class prior to April 2006.

5 The goals and objectives for the Tier II course, typically taken by sophomores, place much greater emphasis on conducting research and writing in digital environments. For instance, the Tier II course specifically calls students to “engage in interactive multimedia projects.”

6 This description of the coordinators’ activity system is not entirely accurate, since one of the coordinators was not heavily involved in the composition of the document. However, because of his position within the department, he had the authority to make any changes he perceived as necessary and/or veto the document if it did not meet his approval. Because of his cooperation and consent in this manner, we think it is fair to include him as a subject in this activity system since the textual object can be said to reflect his desires.

7 Brian Street has noted that texts do not contain “autonomous” meanings. Meaning is always dependent, in part, on the interpretations of readers in particular social contexts (93). Frank Smith reiterates this idea, stating that a text’s meaning is not fixed; readers, guided by their interpretations, choose among several “alternatives for a meaning” (59). Several other scholars and researchers have also noted the role of readers in constructing a text’s meaning—Louise Rosenblatt was one of the first.

8 Psuedonyms are used in this paper.

9 It is important to note our unique position as researchers. As graduate assistants in the ___ English Department, we were teaching the Tier I course while conducting our research. We knew both Dale and Maggie, and worked under their supervision and guidance. As such, we were already familiar with each coordinator’s style and general philosophy about the program. This knowledge
informed the development of our research questions. In addition, our familiarity with the coordinators may have influenced our analysis in ways that are difficult to measure. However, as discussed below, our grounded theory approach to data analysis is an attempt to mitigate unwarranted conclusions.

10 We also contacted a number of instructors who agreed to participate in our study. Our intent for this research project was to investigate the interface between the activity system of the coordinators and that of the instructors. However, the scope of this paper is limited to our discussion of the coordinators’ activity system.

11 Obviously, because the interviews consist of self-reported information, it may be difficult to ascertain the veracity of responses; however, as instructors in the program, we could often rely upon our familiarity with Dale and Maggie’s administrative work to verify accuracy. For instance, we attended meetings led by Maggie which revealed to us her interpretation of the requirements. Maggie’s work in these meetings tended to corroborate our interview findings. Moreover, having had Dale as a “Teaching College Writing” instructor, we were very familiar with his interpretation and application of the requirements in his own teaching and administrative practices.

12 For example, what once appeared as an undifferentiated conversational turn from Dale, was divided into t-units as follows:

1. I mean these are the only guidelines that people have…
2. they’re not told what books,
3. they’re not told what curriculum,
4. they’re not told what assignments,
5. I mean we have the, most, open, format … that is possible.
6. And it is, this is not the most common format at all.

13 Although it could be convincingly argued that there is no ‘literal’ meaning of a document, due to the inherent ambiguity of language, we nevertheless find the term helpful. By “literal interpretation” we mean an interpretation that does not vary in any significant way from the actual wording of a document. This is distinguished from interpretations that find metaphorical or suggested meanings not actually printed. The literal interpretation seemed to be the most common understanding of the Requirements document and provides a baseline of comparison for other interpretations. In no way are we claiming that the literal interpretation is the authoritative or correct interpretation.

14 Upon recognizing the substantial discrepancy between Dale’s interpretation of the requirements and Maggie’s, we felt obligated to immediately inform the writing coordinators, following our interviews, that they were reading the document in very different ways and potentially giving instructors a mixed message about what was expected. Subsequently, the coordinators made an effort to reach a consensus: when we last spoke to Dale, he told us that he and Maggie would
“get on the same page.” The coordinators are in the process of trying to clear up potential confusion about this issue.

WORKS CITED


The Prospects for Rhetoric in a First-Year Composition Program: Deliberative Discourse as a Vehicle for Change?

M. J. Braun

Colleges and universities should encourage and facilitate the development of students’ capacities to examine complex situations in which competing values are at stake, to employ both substantive knowledge and moral reasoning to evaluate the problems and values involved, to develop their own judgments about these issues in respectful dialogue with others, and then to act on their judgments.


Institutions in a free society are as good as the rhetorical transactions that maintain them. It is disturbing to note, therefore, the increasing evidence that communication is ever more difficult to achieve and in some cases appears almost impossible… Communication problems are obviously present when groups are unable to gain an audience, open lines of communication, establish the possibility of persuasion, and thus alter belief and action related to their interests and welfare.

When I was interviewed for the WPA position at the University of West Florida, the hiring committee explained that the department wanted a director who would “take the composition program into the twenty-first century.” By hiring its first PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, the department hoped its new colleague would know what that meant. In my presentation to the faculty, I wanted to make it very clear what they would get should they hire me. I delivered my talk about one month following the invasion of Iraq, my comments echoing the concern and hope expressed at the Wingspread Conference of 1970 and in *Educating Citizens*, published in 2003, both of which argued for citizen education in the midst of a democratic crisis, the former, the crisis of 1967-69, the latter, the crisis following 9/11:

In the year and a half since the bombing of the World Trade Center, many professors continue to complain about how ill-prepared our students are to participate in discussions of the world they live in. I suggest, however, that this impression probably arises from disciplinary ideas embedded in the practices of English departments, rather than the deficiencies of our students, particularly disciplinary ideas about what properly constitutes the study of literature, writing, and culture. Among all of the literacies we attend to in English Departments, preparation for civic life has not been counted among them. It is this deficiency in our view of what constitutes English, not deficiencies in our students, to which we must attend in this post 9/11 moment. I hope that this moment becomes a wake-up call for us to rethink an idea that has been circulated for quite a bit of time in my field, but has been pretty roundly ignored when we think about what constitutes the study of English: the need for literacy education to prepare students for public and civic life.

I was offered the WPA’s position after presenting my vision of a program based on the historical and disciplinary assumptions of rhetoric, assumptions that radically break with traditional composition. I promised to create a program in which students would encounter texts as the genres that actually circulate in various discourses, not as pseudo-genres invented for the classroom, and would produce writers who are cognizant of the social, cultural, and political economic relations embedded in these discourses.

In what follows, I first outline the theoretical foundations of my argument that writing programs should be constituted according to the principles of rhetoric, not traditional composition as it was formulated in the
late nineteenth century. I then advocate for a method of transforming traditional composition programs that merges the ancient rhetorical notion of deliberative discourse, through which rhetors forge the future, with Chantal Mouffe’s argument that deliberation best serves the forging of the future when rhetors air out the agonal beliefs and values at work in the deliberation, a risky practice she calls “radical democracy.” I then describe what our writing faculty, as a small community with common purposes, was able to achieve through a radical democratic approach. This experience, I argue, demonstrates that the prospects for breaking with traditional composition are good when the process of change is carried out as an on-going practice of speaking about the conflicts. However, I also discuss the challenges to the development of a rhetorically-oriented writing program posed by institutional beliefs and values, not only those that recall the past, but those which portend one view of the future university, a university that seeks to break remaining ties to the civic project of liberal arts ideals.

Theorizing the Agonal Projects of Rhetoric and Composition

Early in my PhD studies, I became interested in the histories of English departments written by Sharon Crowley (Composition in the University), Ross Winterowd, Thomas P. Miller (Formation), and Michael A. Halloran that correlate the diminution of public literacy instruction, the core project of rhetoric, with the rise of modernism in English departments. I also began following the interdepartmental discussion initiated by Stephen Mailloux in what came to be called the “Rhetorical Paths in English and Communication Studies Series” in the Rhetoric Society Quarterly. In this still on-going series, disciplinary historians in English and Communications departments have discussed the prospects for strengthening the presence of rhetoric in the university (Crowley “Communication”; Keith; Leff; Mailloux; Miller “Disciplinary” “How Rhetorical”; Nystrand). This series evaluated the deleterious effects of another historical development that accompanied the modernist turn in English Studies, the separation of writing and speaking instruction at the departmental level which relegated writing to English/composition and speaking to speech/communications. The expulsion of rhetorical studies from English departments in the early twentieth century forced those who retained interest in rhetoric’s civic aims to form departments of speech (Halloran). The subsequent split of language instruction into writing and speech strangely placed writing and speaking at cross purposes: writing became a private and creative endeavor and speaking, a public and civic endeavor.
I was convinced by this scholarship that, as Crowley argues, “without an academic discipline devoted to its study, the use of rhetoric by powerful figures cannot be critiqued because the knowledge requisite to determine when and how an argument is fishy will be even harder to find than it is today” (“Communications” 101). Rhetoric is a “theoretical discourse” which “give(s) a central place to the systematic discovery and investigation of the available arguments in a given situation…both produced and circulated within a network of social and civic discourse, images, and events” (“Rhetoric Is”). Traditional composition, in contrast, “feature(s) an amalgam of literary study and instruction in current-traditional grammar and usage” (“Communications” 90-91) and emphasizes “classroom research and the composing processes of individual writers” (90).

Throughout her body of work on the separate disciplinary histories of rhetoric and composition, Crowley has argued that “composition, as it has been practiced in the required first year course for more than 100 years, has nothing what-so-ever to do with rhetoric.” For Crowley, rhetoricians construct theories of persuasive discourses as they occur in the dynamic flux of human activity surrounding forensic, deliberative, and ethical questions: what has happened to us, what is to be done by us, and, what constitutes a good society. In short, Crowley suggests, the field we refer to as Rhetoric and Composition mistakenly elides two epistemologically separate projects: Rhetoric assumes that writers communicate as participants engaged in a world of already existing texts, while composition assumes that individuals create original essays in which they express their ideas with aplomb, correct usage, and a distinctive, authentic voice. Rhetoric attends to invention, the study and practice of using language to persuade audiences to get things done ethically in a social and political world. Moreover, quoting Kevin De Luca, rhetoric must also include the study of the “the mobilization of signs for the articulation of identities, ideologies, consciousnesses, communities, publics, and cultures” (“Rhetoric is”). Rhetorical education, therefore, enables students to knowledgeably and ethically participate in opinion-making and knowledge-making discourses by developing their understanding of the multiplicity of ways persuasion takes place.

Composition, on the other hand, as it has been historically practiced in the first year English course, constructs students according to the bourgeois aesthetic (Crowley, Composition) and the assumptions of liberal political theory¹ (Roberts-Miller, Crowley Towards). Students are trained to write as modernist individuals free to express themselves aesthetically and independently of historically and currently circulating public discourses (Crowley Composition 30-45). These concepts arose from a number of historical factors traced by Crowley and others. The belletristic tradition of modern
English departments and the disciplinary assumptions of literary studies continue to ideologically dominate the department’s concept of what constitutes “good writing” (Crowley Composition, Winterowd), resulting in disregard for the living genres that circulate in everyday and academic life (Bawashi, Wells, Waldo, Weisser). Moreover, the influence of eighteenth and nineteenth century current-traditional rhetoric privileges the surface elements of correctness and perspicuity and expunges the study of rhetorical invention as a kairic project from writing instruction (Crowley, Methodical; Miller, Formation; Sipiora).

As they developed throughout much of the twentieth century and continue in many, if not most, programs today (Fulkerson, Hesse), composition courses teach students to identify with the political philosophy of liberalism which “presumes that rhetorical activity occurs in the following way”: “A free, knowing, and sovereign agent is moved by circumstances to survey the landscape; develop appropriate arguments concerning it; clothe them in persuasive language; and repeat them to an audience of equally free, knowing, and sovereign subjects who hear/read without impediment or distortion” (Crowley, Towards 36). According to the tenets of liberalism, public space and those occupying it are politically universalized as free environments and individuals. This idealization of political equality can only be sustained, however, if, as Habermas argues, the economic and the political are conceived of as separate spheres: “The state is conceived of as an apparatus of public administration and society is conceived as a system of market-structured interactions of private persons and their labor” (qtd. in RobertsMiller 26). Citizens must be considered political free agents because they are considered to be economic free agents, a notion that effectively eviscerates the collective from the public realm. In traditional composition, liberal political theory asserts itself ideologically in the form of de-contextualized and de-historicized conceptions of writer and audience. The writer, Roberts-Miller asserts, is restricted to speaking in a neutral, disimpassioned voice (28-29), the audience is generalized as sharing the same beliefs and values (81-82), and the reasoning process is ontologized, that is, fact is conflated with truth (76-77).

**The Generative Value of Agonal Deliberation**

The rhetoric program I promised to design would leave behind the history of composition by engaging the writing faculty in deliberative discussions about the disciplinary distinctions among literary studies, rhetoric, and composition. Through such discussion, I planned to promote the development of a first-year curriculum in rhetoric and establish the means through
which on-going research in rhetoric and rhetorical pedagogy could take place by challenging the ideological stranglehold of composition’s long first century.

For three years, the instructors, adjunct instructors, graduate students, and I devoted our energy to thinking through and deliberatively arguing about the disciplinary, pedagogical, and institutional matters implied by a programmatic shift from composition to rhetoric. In what follows, I map out the generative role played by a radically democratic form of deliberative discourse in the redesign of the first year rhetoric program. I hope to show that this discourse provides an effective vehicle for programmatic change if those engaged in it value a common democratic goal, even if they differ greatly in their beliefs and practices.

Deliberative rhetoric, as I use it here, involves a commitment to the agonistic and radically democratic strategies developed by Chantal Mouffe in *The Democratic Paradox*. Unlike the assumptions of Rogerian or liberal pluralist rhetorical strategies, Mouffe’s deliberative rhetoric does not seek consensus through compromise. Instead, it seeks the most informed and democratically ethical solutions that emerge through agonistic rhetorical exchange. All participants in this form of deliberation, Crowley argues, face risk because the positions with which they enter into discussion may be adversarial to others, and some positions may prove to be better and more ethical than others (*Towards* 196). The outcome of deliberative rhetoric is not compromise because the end of this radical democratic practice is not to satisfy some aspect of each participant’s original desires but to achieve the most ethical course of action. Practitioners of a radical democratic model must also realize that the most informed and ethical position may not win over the majority. This is especially the case, Crowley asserts, when some participants seek decisions that are motivated by anti-democratic ideologies (102-132). In seeking to win people over to change, therefore, deliberative rhetors “risk becoming outsiders to a community because they must, of necessity, advocate attention to discontinuity or difference. Whether they persuade or not depends upon the density with which the community’s beliefs are articulated with one another and upon the degree to which the system resonates for believers” (196).

Because I arrived at UWF advocating a radical departure in first year program, I could have found myself at risk of quickly becoming an outsider to the writing faculty. This did not happen, however, as a large majority of the writing faculty were receptive to the argument that rhetorical theory, not traditional composition practice, best serves our students: the majority of the faculty share Crowley’s concern that teaching writing must serve democratic purposes by helping to shape critical citizen identities. In this
sense, although I advocated “discontinuity,” the discomfort that always accompanies change was superseded by the community’s densely democratic desires. However, as the authors of *Educating Citizens* warn, there are deeply engrained institutional assumptions that developed throughout the twentieth century in American higher education that have undermined the civic orientation of the traditional liberal arts model, as well as new exigencies accompanying the corporate model of university management in the late twentieth century, both of which pose “serious threats to higher education’s capacity to educate citizens” (42). For this reason, Colby et al have argued that institutions must be willing “to slowly shift some of the entrenched practices and structures that work against the new vision” (48). The authors do not call for wholesale adjustments in the university structure, but for more flexible approaches to such things as interdisciplinary collaborations and a commitment to resisting market forces that devalue the collective work of faculty and re-value students as consumers and job seekers with no need for “extraneous learning” (43). These types of adjustments, as Crowley argues, require deliberative rhetoric because they call for a discontinuity of institutional structures. As events have turned out in my university, the weight of the past has joined the market forces of the present to place a rhetorical approach to writing instruction at my university at risk. Deliberative rhetoric, as a radical democratic practice, was successful at bringing about a sea change in writing instruction, but has not succeeded in shifting the structures of my university enough to ensure a future for rhetorical and civic education. In what follows, I demonstrate how deliberative rhetoric can be a vehicle for change, but also, how it can fail.

**The First Year: Deliberating about Rhetoric**

Because composition and rhetoric constitute two distinct disciplinary projects, replacing a composition program with a rhetoric program, in effect, means that the mission and objectives of the writing program must experience a sea change. I wanted our first year to be spent in the kind of wide-open discussion that characterizes a Burkian parlor, a deliberative, impassioned, and sometimes heated conversation through which we would build an understanding of the distinctions between composition and rhetoric. Drawing from the various knowledges of the writing faculty and scholarship from the field, we would change the goals of our instruction and the language with which we understood what we were doing, replacing the key terms and concepts handed down from composition’s long first century with the critical language of rhetoric. I wanted to know what people were already doing in their classes, but most importantly, what informed those
decisions. I hoped that by the end of the first year we would emerge from our Burkian parlor ready to put into place a pilot program the following year based on our new, collective knowledge.

I had reason to believe that our discussions would already be informed by some rhetorical concepts. When I first considered applying for the WPA position, I had been encouraged by the fact that the composition program’s web site described itself as following the WPA’s “Statement of Outcomes for First Year Composition” and I was anxious to see how the teaching reflected these principles. I had recalled participating in a discussion group about the statement when it was still in development at the 1998 Writing Program Administration (WPA) conference in Tucson, Arizona. At that time, I supported the WPA’s vision of propagating outcomes that would help raise the rhetorical content of first year composition programs, but I had been critical as well. I thought that the statement, though replete with rhetorical terms and concepts, nevertheless short-shrifted the central concern of rhetoric, actually circulating discourse. Even though the outcomes included the statement that students should “understand the relationship among language, knowledge, and power,” an understanding I considered to be the basis of a theory of civic discourse, I thought this concept had been treated as just one among many and would end up having little effect on the programs adopting the outcomes.

I also had my doubts about the extent to which the WPA outcomes actually informed the UWF program. During the summer before my directorship began, I was handed two huge binders of documents instructing me how to run the program I had been hired to transform, as well as how to teach the Composition II course the department had assigned me in the summer session. After reviewing the curriculum and sample syllabi, I wondered if, in good conscience, I would be able to teach in the program I had been hired to direct because first year writing instruction primarily followed writing process pedagogy that focused on the development of the student’s voice and was heavily informed by current-traditional rhetoric.

The standard Composition I syllabus in the program’s Instructor’s Course Guide for English Composition I described the course as “encourage[ing] students to reflect on their attitudes and approaches to writing” and “become active participants in their progress in developing the content and thought in assignments.” Through this process, students “understand the nature of writing” as “not merely communication of ideas, but … a way of generating ideas, of learning, and clarifying thinking.” This description of the writing process (rhetoric’s first canon, invention) identifies writers as self-focused individuals whose objects of inquiry are themselves, “their attitudes,” their “approaches to writing,” and “their progress.” Its communicative purpose
is assumed, rather than the object of study itself. More importantly, writing, by “nature,” is a process of self-discovery of what writers want to say, assisting their learning and thinking. These objectives epitomize traditional composition. The writing situation is arhetorical; it consists of writers and what they want to say. There is no text that precedes the writer and no consequences of the texts writers produce, either for audiences or contexts. The guide misinforms the student about the process writers actually engage in, one that begins with an understanding of the rhetorical situation as the writing situation. A rhetorical approach to the writing process would focus students’ attention on the texts that already surround them, the world of discourse of which they are already a part. It is only in the liberal imaginary of traditional composition in which individuals think, learn, and write by themselves. The writing process in rhetorical education, therefore, requires the writer to step into Burke’s parlor, discovering rhetorical strategies of persuasion, argument, and knowledge-making in already-circulating texts, strategies that assume various audiences, occasions, and purposes. The course goals, therefore, downplayed the central role of communication in the construction of texts by adhering to the expressionist notion that students can best develop their own voices by becoming aware of their own writing process, not by listening to the voices of others, understanding what these writers are arguing, identifying whom they hope to persuade, recognizing in what context the writers and audiences exist, discerning how they represent that context based on their assumptions, and coming to grips with what is at stake in the discourse. As students analyze the rhetorical situation, they are also researching a discourse, discovering its complexities and contingencies, and gaining awareness of the ethical and ideological underpinnings and consequences of the representations and positions taken by others and themselves. By privatizing the writing process as the writer’s self-discovery of her needs and how she translates these needs on paper, traditional composition excludes the social, the collective, and the purposeful nature of language.

In its discussion of assignments, the Instructor’s Guidelines retained traditional composition’s, rather than rhetoric’s understanding of composing (rhetoric’s second and third cannons – arrangement and style). In the standard syllabi for both Composition I and II, assignments/tests are referred to as a diagnostic essay, in-class essays, out-of-class essays (described as first drafts, revised drafts, and papers), quizzes, a final exam essay, a holistically-scored essay, and journal writing. Composition I covers “personal and academic writing.” In supplemental material for instructors, Composition I assignment suggestions are further broken down into description, narration, analysis, argument, and a research
or documented paper. These suggestions refer to what Robert Connors eulogized (although reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated) in his essay, “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse.” Modes pedagogy is arhetorical in that it is impervious to the rhetorical construction of actually circulating texts; rather, it is an “abstract model that seem[s] to be adaptable to anything which a rising young American might wish to say” (4). No one outside of an English classroom, in other words, sits down to write a compare-contrast paper. Although I was told that the modes had not been taught since the program had adopted the WPA Outcomes Statement, I noticed that the program still used one of their in-house publications, Student Successes 2002, a compilation of UWF student model essays organized around the modes classifications. I also noticed that in the notes taken during classroom observations by the senior faculty of newer instructors, the kinds of writing assignments discussed were modes. One instructor is praised for her “good explanation” of “the rhetorical modes” including “narration – the elements of a short story” and “comparison/contrast – used specific example, cats and dogs?” Another criticized an instructor because she “went over narrative only because student asked about narrative” and for having difficulty coming up with an example for her comparison and contrast assignment. Another instructor was praised for asking her students to “give me interesting stories…descriptions make up the story” and for commending a student for using a simile. In a sample assignment, an “argumentative essay,” students are informed that “A solid argument begins with a clear, unambiguous statement of what you believe and why you believe it.” The documented paper is described as “an argument in which you use sources to back up your claims in MLA format.” Practicing the modes and writing thesis-driven-with-reasons-attached “arguments” on a topic the student either has or has not researched is what Thomas P. Miller refers to as the “formalist” approach to traditional composition (“How Rhetorical”). The student is successful according to the extent to which the form is mastered; students’ texts have no other purpose outside of this mastery. Students also develop formalist attitudes about reading because of these kinds of assignments. This formalist approach also carries over into the way assigned readings are discussed in the program’s materials. In one class students read an excerpt from “A Confederacy of Dunces” (“notice colors and narrative style”) to prepare them to write a “descriptive essay” entitled “A Place to Remember.” In assignments like these, students are asked to read in order to imitate style, not to enter into any conversation with the text. This disconnection of reading from substance is also replicated in 10 minute “freewriting” exercises or journals entries. I saw no evidence that journal topics had any connection to subject of the paper being drafted. In sum,
formalism in no way prepares students for “academic writing” or any other rhetorical genre including, for that matter, the “personal essay.” Students have no purpose, audience, or reason to write outside of skills mastery.

Composition II covers “critical reading and writing in different rhetorical situations: personal, academic, civic, and workplace, the goal of which is to help students develop as writers in the university and beyond.” Composition II assignment suggestions are broken down into: a letter to the editor that is then rewritten for a middle or high school audience, “rhetorical analysis of a published article or speech,” a literary analysis in which students discover “the implicit argument in a literary work,” a Rogerian argument, an argument of evaluation in the form of a memo containing definition or cause-effect arguments, or a letter of application and resume. In addition, Composition II students are required to write a “proposal argument with researched (and MLA documented) sources” which may be written as a “memo,” “letter of inquiry,” “email inquiry,” “memo progress report,” or “letter of transmittal for the proposal.” Here I could see the influence of the WPA statement about genre on the curriculum. But the requirement that a memo or letter of inquiry should include MLA citation countered the supposed rhetoricity of the pedagogy. Public texts such as these certainly follow conventions, but the MLA citation system is not one of them. I also wondered how the relationship between reading and writing in the public sphere and the interplay of “language, power, and knowledge” in public texts were dealt with by instructors. Are the genres taught as discrete forms or as genres participating in complex political-economic, social, or cultural rhetorical situations? Are the ethical underpinnings and argumentative strategies of Rogerian theory presented as appropriate for all rhetorical situations? Are students given enough time to rhetorically analyze the multiple arguments in a discourse before stepping in to speak?

The students in both courses also received a heavy dose of current-traditional rhetoric, another staple of traditional composition. The standard syllabi were designed around precisely timed and regulated assignments from the Department’s Writing Lab which included diagnostic testing for grammar and usage, bi-weekly grammar mastery testing and remediation, intricate reporting systems, mandatory paper reading which privileged grammar remediation and thesis-driven papers that were effectively five paragraph essays, and holistic grading sessions that enforced this essay style.

I decided to officially open up a conversation about rhetoric among the writing faculty at the composition orientation meeting normally held before the fall semester begins. In my address, I drew clear distinctions between composition and rhetoric using terms and concepts from Berlin’s social-epistemic rhetoric that were to become key in the meetings and docu-
ments for the coming year. I began by asking why it is that we, in English Departments, subscribe to complex theories of language, discourse, and culture, but don’t bring these theories into first year writing. We know that writing emerges in the social and political world, rather than the creative mind of the individual. We also know that ideology probably has more to do with the persuasive power of language than logos. But do we teach this to students? We can teach these things, I argued, if we practice rhetoric, not composition. Rhetoric is the study of how we socially construct texts and, in turn, are socially constructed by texts. Rhetoric is the study of how language gets things done in the world by creating constructions that have both positive and negative effects. If we teach rhetoric, I argued, students will participate in the world of text by engaging with actually circulating discourses and genres, not with a series of disconnected topics about which they write in pseudo-genres that only exist in the composition classroom. All texts, including students’ own, have social, political or cultural implications and ideological assumptions of which they should become aware.

The conversation begun at that meeting continued throughout the fall semester. I turned every interaction into an opportunity to deliberate with individuals and groups on the distinctions between composition and rhetoric. Adjunct faculty dropped by so we could get to know each other. I asked them why they did what they did and how they thought assignments lead students towards literacy in the university and beyond. I posed a number of questions repeatedly in these conversations. If no actually circulating piece of writing is constructed in the classroom forms we teach, why do we teach this form? The answer to this question most often revolved around what I call the “basic foundation defense” which goes something like this: Before students can engage with more complex text, they have to know the basics. If they can’t even write a thesis, they will not be able to deal with more complex forms of argument. I often countered with these questions: “When we ask a student to commit to a thesis before engaging the discourse surrounding an issue, aren’t we creating a writing situation that deters students from engaging the complexities of arguments? Are we asking students to read and write in the genres that actually circulate in rhetorical situations or are we teaching ways of reading and writing that only exist in writing courses? Are we giving students enough time to immerse themselves in an academic or public conversation before asking them to argue about it? Is academic writing reducible to a “documented paper” in MLA format or does it entail disciplinary logics?

The basic foundation defense also carried over into conversations regarding the mastery model of teaching grammar built into the standard syllabus. I distributed Patrick Hartwell’s article that argued that students
improve in grammar, diction, and mechanics when problems are addressed in the rhetorical context of their own writing, rather than mastery exercises. I advocated that we develop in students a rhetorical understanding of syntax and hypotactic sentence structure.

Another site for deliberation was in a weekly discussion group with the graduate students who taught a one hour a week Composition Lab course for composition students deemed to need extra help. Many of these students also tutored in the writing center. Judging from the books that were assigned for Composition Lab, the one hour course was to have focused on grammar workbooks and reading/writing assignments in Student Successes, the in-house “aims of discourse” collection of model essays I mentioned above. I decided to throw the whole plan out and encourage the graduate instructors to use their hour with students as a writing workshop instead. The instructors and I discussed scholarly articles and built knowledge about writing workshop techniques. An article by Charles Bazerman, for example, challenged expressionist pedagogy by arguing that student writing should address what they read, not what they already felt or believed. As I look back on those discussions now, I recall that the graduate students, so indoctrinated by current-traditional rhetoric, were first silent, then defensive, and finally thoroughly engaged in our excursions in the rhetorical scholarship.

I also developed the department’s first graduate course in rhetoric, “Topics in Rhetoric,” that departed radically from the usual survey course in composition theory often required for first time TAs. In these seminars, graduate students who are slated to teach composition discuss a topic of controversy in rhetoric and composition that in some way or another helps us build the collective knowledge we need in the program. At the end of the semester, students hold an academic conference attended mainly by the composition faculty. This seminar, to date, has been the most fruitful way of informing our practice with rhetorical research. Topics have included: a seminar on the distinctions between literary and rhetorical studies and the intersections between critical/cultural and rhetorical theory; a seminar on the influence of liberal/modernist ideology on writing instruction and the implications of this ideology for the teaching of civic and public discourse; a seminar on the rationalist foundation of disciplinary rhetorics and the distinctions in scholarly knowledge-making systems. The scholarly papers that graduate students present at the academic conference spark discussion among the entire writing faculty. These papers, along with other pertinent scholarly articles, also inform the two day summer workshop for writing faculty as we prepare for the fall semester.

Composition Committee meetings became the central place in which we analyzed what we had been doing and why. The committee, three writ-
ing instructors, an adjunct instructor, a graduate student, and I, approached the questions by considering not only the distinctions between rhetoric and composition, but also what a program in rhetoric would look like, what principles it would follow, and what pedagogies would be possible. At first, there was enthusiasm for the ideas I was introducing, but general approbation was soon shattered when the particularities emerged. I recall that requiring themed courses became controversial for fear that students would become bored by discussing a single debate all semester. This opened up discussion about the difference between asking students to read “both sides of a debate” versus immersing students in the complexity of the discourse surrounding an issue and led us to research models of civic education (Colby et al) and Rosa Eberly’s concept of the “citizen critic.” We began to imagine pedagogical possibilities for teaching civic and public discourse as well as how to develop assignments and projects that asked students to analyze the arguments and genre formations of their readings. Probably the most dramatic pedagogy we have developed to date came out of a rather heated discussion about whether it was possible to require students to actually circulate their public writing in a public venue. We researched Herbert Simons’ creation of deliberative conferences at Temple University, and after discussing this model of civic engagement, we decided to gradually extend the graduate student conference to all Composition II students. At these conferences, first year composition students have invented all sorts of venues for their public writing, from a community-wide, rhetorically savvy campaign to provoke conversations on sexual violence to a film festival that encouraged students to see beyond the entertainment value of movies.

The majority of the writing faculty has been delighted to study and deliberate over questions that challenge long-held ideas about the teaching of writing and develop pedagogies for a program in rhetoric. The process we have engaged in over the last three years has been anything but orderly. Out of the deliberative chaos, we have developed a program that, in the words of one of our instructors, is now characterized by highly unified programmatic principles which, at the same time, offer instructors maximum flexibility in course design, assignment design, and pedagogical approaches.

Radical deliberation allowed the faculty motivated by scholarship and an approach to pedagogy as rhetorical invention to create the new program that bears little resemblance to traditional composition. In this regard, if we return to Crowley’s argument that rhetors who use deliberative strategies to bring about change face “the risk of becoming outsiders to a community because they must, of necessity, advocate attention to discontinuity or difference,” I can say that I was at no time at risk in my immediate community of writing instructors. Offering dedicated writing instructors a
chance to study, teach, and argue about the distinctions between composition and rhetoric, in other words, is like taking them home. It also turns out that offering students a chance to engage in challenging but meaningful research and text production has had an exhilarating effect. Our students’ comments on evaluations indicate that the majority of them experience this approach to writing as difficult, but intellectually stimulating. This energized atmosphere of civic concern and critical investigation among faculty and students, however, faces serious challenges that have threatened the program’s sustainability.

The Prospects for Rhetoric in First Year Composition

As indicated in *Educating Citizens*, the pressures of market forces on the university and deeply embedded beliefs about first-year writing, program administration, and general education were evident during the entire period of the program’s development, and we attended to them as they presented themselves. However, recent decisions regarding the program, labor issues, and curriculum reform have almost halted the program’s on-going development.

The first challenge has been posed by conflicting disciplinary assumptions about the nature of work in English departments. English departments hire PhDs in Rhetoric and Composition to improve their composition programs, but, as Jeanne Gunner suggests, most still are unwilling to understand that WPA work radically differs from the work of other English faculty. Granting a course release each semester implies that the work of a WPA is considered merely to require some adjustments in time management. But Gunner argues that WPA work continues to be rift with ideological conflicts about disciplinarity. The WPA is hired for her disciplinary expertise, but when she acts according to that expertise by creating new venues for the professional development of faculty, she begins to inhabit a collaborative space rife with ethical questions (Leverenz). Negotiating the program’s progress through this conflictual ideological and ethical terrain constitutes a scholarly life that is inconceivable to most scholars outside of the discipline. Indeed, William Lalicker argues that an important part of the WPA’s work is to challenge the traditional ideas that interfere with the WPA’s disciplinary agency.

The department came to understand my work as a burden to my identity as a professor rather than the professorial work of my discipline. At the end of my third year, the chair felt it was time to unburden me so I could begin to develop as a professor. This decision was made even though the dean had suggested to the chair that my work as a WPA should be evalu-
ated by the standards of my discipline. An instructor was named director in my stead who said that she reluctantly took the job because she is not paid enough to do it and doesn’t have the disciplinary background to provide professional development. At the time of this writing, the program is guided by a managerial, not a scholarly orientation. All venues for professional development, both formal and informal, have halted; new adjunct instructors and TAs are given the syllabus, assigned textbooks, and wished good luck. This turn of events sharply illustrates the second challenge our program, and most programs, according to Lalicker, face.

I am, of course, referring to the starkest contradiction of the discipline: Most people who teach composition do not have a degree in rhetoric and composition, are not involved in the on-going discussions in the field, and are only considered by the university in which they teach to be part-time adjuncts or graduate assistants just passing through. The labor issue continues to be at odds with not only what constitutes ethical employment practices, but, in our field, our very claim to be a discipline (Lalicker, Young). There is no other university discipline that does not require its adjunct faculty to have a graduate degree in the discipline in which they teach. The content of graduate course work and scholarly production in rhetoric and composition in no way resembles that of literary studies. Nevertheless, most people teaching composition courses have a degree in literary studies, not rhetoric and composition. By immersing our faculty into discussions of the disciplinary distinctions between literary and rhetorical scholarship, as well as current issues in the scholarship of rhetoric, our faculty gained a new sense of their work as a discipline distinct from literary studies. But because we have continued to have a turnover in adjunct faculty from one year to the next, we are always reinventing the wheel in one way or another, rather than steadily increasing our knowledge base. This situation has only been exacerbated since my role in the professional development of the faculty has ended. There are now adjunct faculty who have no scholarly basis for teaching in our program. What is practiced in the program is steadily moving away from what our new mission and course descriptions promise.

Anticipating that the labor issue would interfere with the success of the program, at the end of my first year and at the request of our Department Chair, the Composition Committee and I wrote a 76 page report to the University’s new President, Acting Provost and new Dean of Arts and Sciences entitled, “Effective Composition Instruction.” In the document, we outlined our new program and explained the difference between the traditional program we had and the rhetorically-oriented program we were developing. The report offered a theoretical argument that demonstrated how the new program could help develop academic and citizenship litera-
cies across the university. We appealed to the President’s promise to recognize and support those programs which could demonstrate that they were “centers of excellence.” We explained that in order to sustain a rhetorically oriented writing program, we had to continually train and maintain our faculty. New programmatic goals, we stated, are only achieved after years of practicing them in the classroom. No matter how dedicated and knowledgeable the adjunct faculty is, we argued, curricular innovation cannot be developed or sustained by a workforce whose membership is in constant flux. The faculty who had worked to create the program was clearly invested in it, but to keep them in the program, the university would have to invest in them. We requested that plans begin to be made to convert five adjunct lines into instructor lines. In the meantime, as lines were added, we requested that adjuncts be offered the opportunity to take my seminar for graduate credit, tuition-free, that a modest raise be offered to graduate students and adjuncts, and free parking be provided.

Our report was completely ignored. Receipt of the report was never acknowledged and all my attempts to open up discussion about it were in vain. During the second year of the program, we again tried to open up discussion of the labor issue by hosting a showing of the film, Degrees of Shame, to which we invited administration, permanent faculty, adjunct faculty, and graduate students from across the university. After the showing, the new President stood up and told us that our concerns would soon be moot. In the new university model he was working for, he would eliminate what he called the “redundancy of knowledge” among faculty. He would introduce a new model in which a few master professors wrote curriculum and standard syllabi which would be taught by the majority of instructors whom he characterized as not wanting to research, but to teach. This is the kind of flexibility, he assured us, most people today want in their lives. Although stunned by his vision of the flexible, post-industrial work force described by David Noble in his futuristic, nightmare study, Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education, the audience nevertheless recovered enough to ask for a meeting, which he granted. One month later, when the meeting began, the President, dispensing with the usual introductions of all of the participants sitting at the table, turned the meeting over to the Acting Provost who, he said, had already considered all of the ramifications of our request. The Provost spoke for half an hour on all of the adverse effects of turning adjunct positions into instructor lines. The final image he impressed upon us was the following scenario: The administration could declare that only permanent faculty could teach composition, but to pay for them, it would mean firing all of the adjuncts, canceling most of the upper division courses in the major, and requiring the literature fac-
ulty teach mostly composition. He reminded those at the table that meeting their request, would, ironically, put all of them out of a job and effectively end English Studies at the university. The meeting had been set up to deter any efforts on the part of faculty to open up deliberations over the educational and ethical consequences of the university’s labor practices. Later that year, I was informed that the administration was considering giving the department an instructor’s line, but it would be dedicated to increasing on-line technical writing courses, not first-year composition. To date, that line has not materialized. During the third year, I met with the Dean to request a raise for the adjunct faculty based on a case I made about the labor intensity of the work. She was very sympathetic and informed me that the administration was well aware of the labor-intensive nature of the work of writing instructors and suggested that the department make a “cost-benefit, not an ethical case” to raise the salaries of the adjuncts when it submitted the budget. The department chair and I worked on such a request which, of course, was not granted.

Finally, I developed relationships with professors who teach in the lower division who are dedicated to general education reform, all of whom have been highly supportive of pairing their department’s general education classes with composition and working towards a WAC or WID model. I met with the heads of advising and other support programs such as our Student Success program for first-generation students and our international student support program to discuss similar innovative ways of supporting rhetorical education. There has been a great deal of enthusiasm, but without administrative support, we have not been able to accomplish anything. I became hopeful during my second year when an announcement was made that the general studies curriculum would be reformed by pulling together a faculty taskforce. I indicated to the Dean my desire to be on this taskforce and informed her of the faculty across the disciplines who wished to partner with composition to improve student literacy. But, instead of pursuing the curriculum reform efforts it promised, the administration hired assessment experts from around the country with whom they interacted for a year. At the end of that year, the faculty responsible for supervising general studies course attended two days of workshops in which we were taught how to formulate learning outcomes by these experts, a task the composition program had already completed. During one of the workshop breaks, I asked the dean if curricular reform would follow the assessment initiative; she explained that assessment would preclude curricular reform because individual instructors’ performances and teaching strategies would improve once the assessment rubrics were in place. The administration had conflated curriculum reform with assessment in a way that insured that discussions
about curriculum reform would not take place. Just to be sure that I understood, the Dean said, “WAC is not on the horizon.”

Our attempts to open up deliberative discussion with the administration have failed miserably. Our experiences lend credence to Crowley’s argument that “whether [deliberative rhetors] persuade or not depends upon the density with which the community’s beliefs are articulated with one another and upon the degree to which the system resonates for believers” (196). The university, with its rhetoric of “excellence” and its preference for managerial systems instead of faculty initiative, seems to be far away from or even antagonistic to the beliefs of the writing faculty. We based our strategy for change on the hope that arguing for the educative value of a rhetoric program would win it support. The prospects for broadening the presence of rhetoric on our campus, indeed, even maintaining the quality of the two course sequence in rhetoric we have, do not appear to be good. We are teaching our students to engage in deliberative discourse and have used deliberative discourse to bring about considerable change in our pedagogies. We also learned that the institution similarly recognizes the power of democratic deliberation, and given its non-democratic aims, carefully chooses with whom it will enter into deliberation.

Note

1 By liberal political theory, Crowley, Roberts-Miller, and Mouffe do not refer to the contemporary, party-line identifications between conservative and liberal agendas. Rather, they refer to the theorizing of a liberal society which accompanied the rise of capitalism.

Works Cited


Braun / The Prospects for Rhetoric in a First-Year Composition Program


Review


Thomas Deans, Mandy Suhr-Sytsma, and Alisande Pipkin

Anne Beaufort’s *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* arrives as we are experiencing a swell of interest in an Introduction to Writing Studies approach to first-year composition (Downs and Wardle). Given Beaufort’s focus on how novice academic writers develop (or more often don’t develop) expertise and on how they transfer (or more often don’t transfer) skills from one course to another, she is likely to feed enthusiasm for that movement. She argues that writing courses should be more deliberately attentive to social context, skills transfer across contexts, and meta-awareness of how genres and discourse communities work. She pairs that argument with a longitudinal study of one student, Tim, as he journeys from freshman writing through courses in history and engineering to the beginnings of a post-college professional life. Ever pragmatic, Beaufort, by the end of the book, cycles what she learns into specific suggestions for first-year and discipline-based writing curricula.

Beaufort has a theory to promote, one built on the shoulders of genre, activity, and discourse community theories but distinct from them in the way she posits that the expertise of writers can be sorted into five overlapping knowledge domains: discourse community knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, process knowledge, genre knowledge, and subject matter knowledge. This taxonomy offers a functional vocabulary for defining where and how expert and aspiring writers need to focus their energies: on the ability to respond strategically to a given audience (rhetorical knowledge); on participating in the social networks and composing habits appropriate to a given task and context (process knowledge); on using genres as tools to get the work of writing done (genre knowledge); on mastering the content written about (subject matter knowledge); and on projecting an
insider’s—or at least apprentice’s—sense of the values, habits and conventions of a given organization or community (discourse community knowledge). Discourse community knowledge serves as the catch-all category; the other four are more tightly defined, represented visually as the overlapping circles of a Venn diagram resting on the larger platform of discourse community knowledge.

Beaufort’s endorsement of using the discourse community as a unit of analysis doesn’t take us anywhere new, but her claim that we can productively unpack writing expertise by focusing as well on the four distinct but inter-related sub-domains—rhetoric, genre, process, and subject matter—proves quite innovative and useful. This “theoretical lens” supplies us a durable heuristic, a manageable way to isolate elements of writing expertise and analyze them (or, just as often, the absence of them).

The five-part model made its first appearance in Beaufort’s earlier book, *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work*, where it emerged from rich ethnographic data she gathered on four college graduates making their way in a non-profit agency. Where that book proceeded with a mainly anthropological and inductive approach, *College Writing and Beyond* offers thinner data on its subject, Tim, and takes a more deductive tack. At the outset Beaufort remarks that her book is “a blended genre of both ethnography and argument” (6), but she more frequently employs the term “case study” to name her accounting of Tim’s experience. That strikes us as the more apt descriptor. She leads with theory and argument; the case study of Tim is woven in as illustration and support. The good news is that the five-part model does its job well and most of Beaufort’s claims are convincing. The bad news is that her curricular reform agenda predisposes her to emphasize the impediments to Tim’s development rather than his growth.

The opening chapter frames the book as a response to fundamental problems in university writing instruction. It revisits the “general writing skills” critique of freshman writing, agreeing with those who claim that composition lacks a vital context beyond the course itself. Interestingly, Beaufort extends that claim to writing-in-the-disciplines courses, which are usually insulated from such critique. Most writing courses, Beaufort argues, fall far short of their potential to foster transfer of writing skills or move students toward authentic expertise.

Chapter Two, “The Dilemmas of Freshman Writing,” describes Tim’s freshmen writing course, which was keyed broadly to an environmentalism theme but invited a new topic with each assignment. The course involved writing from personal experience, composing with sources, and doing a journalistic service-learning project. While Beaufort acknowledges that
the course introduced sound rhetorical principles and that Tim found the course personally rewarding, even liberating, she problematizes the class by examining its practices in relation to each of her five knowledge domains. She is especially concerned that the writing habits rewarded in freshman writing will not serve Tim well in other contexts.

In the brief chapter that follows, Beaufort compares freshman writing with Tim’s introductory history course. She compares the reading and writing expectations implied by the assignments and teacher feedback in each course, concluding that the literacy expectations contrasted rather sharply, especially with respect to the relationship of reading to writing (tighter reading-writing integration in history), the role of personal voice and experience in making claims (encouraged in freshman writing but not in history), and the depth of subject matter knowledge demanded (much more in history). Tim had a sense of these differences but only a vague vocabulary for describing them. His focus remained on pleasing each teacher.

In Chapter Four, “Learning to Write History,” Beaufort tracks Tim’s progress deeper into his history major. Even though Tim did fine as a student, Beaufort argues that he showed little real progress in grasping the genre, rhetorical or discourse community practices of his major discipline. Tim did not travel a progressive path toward insider status; he could adopt the ethos of a good student but never that of a practicing historian. This is in part, Beaufort argues, because the kinds of writing assignments Tim encountered in advanced history courses differed little from those in his introductory courses, and in part because the assignments and instruction did not make the features of the academic history discourse community explicit to Tim. A related concern is that Tim was often was assigned “school genres” rather than genres authentic to history scholarship. Beaufort asserts that Tim’s freshman writing experience offered him little help as he negotiated the demands of the courses in his major. In fact, she makes a point of documenting negative transfer from freshman writing.

Chapter Five, “Switching Gears: From History Writing to Engineering,” outlines another abrupt shift for Tim as, late in his undergraduate career, he decided to pursued a second major in engineering. As Tim responded to the demands from his engineering professors to write with precision and concision in standard engineering formats, he gained ground in discourse community, subject matter and genre knowledge. He also came to see his history writing in sharper relief. Still, the predominant rhetorical situation remained getting the assignment done for a grade. By graduation, Beaufort acknowledges, Tim was a more able academic writer but was far from expert in either history or engineering.
Following through on the promise of the book’s title to look beyond college, Beaufort interviews Tim two years after graduation, as he is working as a medical engineer. She discovers that it was not until he was immersed in the workplace that Tim arrived at a mature understanding of the kinds of rhetorical, process, genre, subject matter, and discourse community knowledges that engineering requires. Beaufort prods, “What, in the four years of his university experience, could have led him to be better prepared for the workplace writing he would do?” (141). She sees plenty of wasted opportunities.

In the final chapter Beaufort draws on the case study to leave us with three charges: 1) for researchers to study student writing and administrators to train teachers and tutors with attention to all five knowledge domains, 2) for teachers in all fields to teach skills that help learning transfer, and 3) for academic administrators to create vertical writing sequences that help students to develop in their writing across courses in a major.

Beaufort includes an epilogue that features an interview with Carla, Tim’s freshman writing teacher. The dialogue gets prickly as Carla reacts defensively to critiques of her course. It was gutsy of Beaufort to include this transcript of Carla’s response to the book manuscript. It not only makes Beaufort’s methods more transparent but also introduces counterinterpretations to several of her key claims. Perhaps more significantly even if not intentionally, however, the interview reminds readers of some big holes in the data on Tim. We learn not only that ten years elapsed between Tim’s freshman year and completion of the book manuscript. More tellingly, we learn that Beaufort collected no data from the second half of Carla’s class, the part for which Tim and his classmates wrote academic research papers. Beaufort therefore did not hear any of the conversations Carla, Tim, and the rest of the class may have had about the different contexts of the personal writing from the first half of the course as compared to the research papers in the second half. One has trouble understanding how Beaufort can claim with such confidence that Tim’s problems with academic writing in history result from negative transfer of personal writing habits from freshmen writing. Readers are also reminded, albeit indirectly, that Beaufort had access to only a handful of Tim’s undergraduate courses and papers, even if through interviews she got his global reflections on his own writing development.

In addition to the epilogue, the book includes three appendices: one reproduces two of Tim’s undergraduate papers, referenced in earlier chapters; another details Beaufort’s methodology; and another anticipates readers who might be thinking “How can I take what I learn in this book back to my own classroom?” by sharing thirty pages of Beaufort’s own assign-
ments and classroom activities. The assignments aim to enculturate students into a vocabulary of genre, process, rhetoric, discourse community, social context, and comparative analysis. For example, she teaches genre awareness by having students chart the subject matter, rhetorical, formal, and stylistic features of obituaries vs. journal abstracts; she defines “discourse community” for students and has them operationalize the term by comparing various academic discourse communities; she suggests assigning a process journal, a literacy autobiography, and mini-ethnographies of discourse communities; she lists heuristic questions keyed to the five domains of writing knowledge. All the assignments prompt meta-awareness of the context-driven nature of writing.

In *College Writing and Beyond* Beaufort confirms the main conclusions of her earlier book: that instruction in rhetoric is not enough to move writers to expertise; that genre knowledge plays as large a role in composing as genre theorists claim that it does; that demonstrating mastery of the subject matter is more important to the success of a text than most composition courses let on; that transfer of writing skills from school to work is dubious; and that the road to expertise is long and usually not realized until one is immersed in the workplace. But there are also new claims: that most traditional first-year writing courses—especially those that take an expressive approach, that presume a general writing skills agenda, that do not invite explicit reflection on genre and context, and/or that skip across several different topics—are fatally flawed; and that the current lack of vertical sequencing of writing tasks within a major curriculum marks yet another lost opportunity. Both books ultimately return to the supreme importance that provoking and scaffolding meta-awareness can play in speeding both cross-contextual transfer and progress toward expertise. The particular brand of awareness that Beaufort aims to promote—among both instructors and students—falls in step with the five knowledge domains that she emphasizes throughout the book.

Beaufort does not focus on ideological questions. When her argument gets theoretical, it traffics in genre theory more than critical pedagogy. Her concerns are ultimately quite practical, and the book opens and closes with simple but ever important queries: Why are we doing what we are doing? What really works? How might we teach better for skills transfer? Transfer gets surprisingly little sustained attention in composition studies but Beaufort reminds us that it is always on the minds of our colleagues across the disciplines. They, along with deans and provosts, ask: Why don’t graduates of freshmen composition handle the writing that they do in other courses more competently? Why don’t we see as much writing progress as we would like when students travel through a major? Are we spending our writing
program dollars wisely? Isn’t there a better way? Beaufort returns us to refreshingly fundamental questions about how to do what we promise the university we will do.

Works Cited


Review


Brad E. Lucas

The twelve projects that compose *Local Histories* exemplify the benefits of an edited collection: each thought-provoking piece is a useful contribution to the discipline, but taken together, they provide a compelling vision for historiography and show how scholars working at different sites—with limited materials—can rewrite the larger narratives that have dominated the field for decades. This collection stands out as an exemplary text for archival researchers, but it is also an important resource for WPAs to rethink the field’s origin stories and consider what archival contributions a program might generate for posterity. Part of the collection’s appeal stems from its origins in a CCCC Special Interest Group established to address the particular concerns of small colleges—a gathering of teacher-scholars who mobilized their research ideas into two large projects: a special issue of *Composition Studies* (2004) guest edited by Tom Amorose and Paul Hanstedt, and this collection, part of the Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture.

Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori, in her introductory piece appropriately titled “(This is not a) Foreword,” explains that the projects represented in *Local Histories* “resist straightforward summary” (ix), which, of course, makes this review especially challenging, but I think Gretchen Flesher Moon introduces these projects soundly by explaining that the contributors “weave documents from teachers and students over the warp of the official record” (11). Indeed, the archival contributions here both supplement and challenge the work of Albert Kitzhaber—as well as scholars like Robert Connors and John Brereton who built on his seminal work. More importantly, perhaps, is the collection’s general aim to challenge the dominance
of Harvard and other prestigious schools in the creation stories of modern composition. With these discoveries, some WPAs may need to update the notes used for addressing graduate students, new composition faculty, and other administrators.

In challenging our standard histories, the collection prompts us to redirect our collective attention to the Midwest, to the working class and normal schools, and to the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. In her contribution, for example, Kathleen A. Welsch highlights the differences between Harvard and the sensibilities of Midwestern students who sought higher education to fulfill life goals and improve their social class standing. Illustrating the work of two married students who attended Antioch College (Yellow Springs, OH) in the 1850s, Welsch documents their experiences and written essays to imagine how textbooks—vital for the initial histories of composition—were actually used in the classroom. Similarly, in their work with materials from Lafayette College (Easton, PA), Patricia Donahue and Bianca Falbo reveal that English Composition courses existed in 1858, nearly two decades before Subject A was introduced at Harvard. However, neither of these essays aims simply to rewrite the extant histories of the field. Donahue and Falbo, for instance, use one student’s journal to show how reading and writing were interrelated in the curriculum sponsored by Lafayette’s renowned philologist, Francis A. March, showing that March was not only the so-called “‘father’ of English literary study,” but also a dedicated teacher of writing, an “early compositionist” (39).

The sequence of the essays in Local Histories is bound to entice readers with the steady progression of other such discoveries. Through her study of Butler University (Indianapolis, IN), Heidemarie Z. Weidner urges us to seek answers about composition history in smaller institutions, revealing the early—and regular—presence of writing across the curriculum, assignments requiring multiple drafts with substantive revisions, student peer evaluation, and teachers holding conferences with individual students. Here, too, the aims of the project are manifold. Weidner showcases the contributions of Catherine Merrill, the first person to hold the Demia Butler Chair: a professorship established in the 1870s solely for women. Merrill assigned writing tasks for oral presentations, and she emphasized practice through daily writing exercises—years before Barrett Wendell’s “daily themes.” Fortunately, Merrill (and the other contributors) refrain from the agonistic discourse of trumping earlier work with these discoveries. Instead, these scholars seem to know that, with archival inquiry, our origin stories about composition’s nascent practices will continue to change.

Rather than follow a strictly regional or chronological progression, Local Histories follows the path of pioneering women by taking us into Julie Gar-
bus’s study of Progressive Era practices at Wellesley College (Wellesley, MA), focusing on the forty-year career of Vida Scudder—a woman whose anti-conservative pedagogy encouraged students to promote social change. Scudder, Garbus argues, offered the first course in the U.S. that connected literary study with socialist thought (78). Here, too, the archival work focuses on several areas likely to interest WPA readers. For example, pre-1900 composition pedagogy at Wellesley required students to participate in one-on-one conferences and encouraged students to write in multiple genres for multiple audiences. Furthermore, writing instruction was part of every year of instruction, culminating in a senior-year course in writing across the curriculum (82-83). Garbus’s project offers a good example of the benefits of archival approaches that evaluate a broad range of writing instruction and related courses, not simply the first-year course in composition.

In the four essays that follow, contributors study normal schools and their various practices in early higher education. Kenneth Lindblom, William Banks, and Risë Quay begin by offering Illinois State Normal School (Normal, IL) in contrast to the Wisconsin normal schools represented in earlier work by Kathryn Fitzgerald (“Rediscovered”). Lindblom, Banks, and Quay derive most of their findings through epistolary evidence: letters from the 1860s by two siblings who write about their painful experiences with a draconian spelling curriculum. In the school’s required spelling course, students were tested daily on 25 spelling words and were allowed one mistake before failing the course, which they would then have to re-take to graduate. Not surprisingly, this gate-keeping course usually took five attempts to pass, but the hurdle was an ongoing threat: if spelling errors resurfaced in other classes, students would have to begin the cycle anew (101). While the account of this militaristic spelling curriculum is astonishing, the letters chronicle the expected detrimental effects, revealing how young students enter college enthused with language practices, only to have the written word become a vehicle for discipline and despair. And while Lindblom, Banks, and Quay offer a counter-narrative to Fitzgerald’s earlier work, in the essay that follows, Fitzgerald herself returns to her data, the 44 student papers written in 1898 at Platteville Normal School (WI). Not only demonstrating that archival sources can be put to multiple uses for new performances, Fitzgerald also shows how students worked within and against genre constraints, particularly in terms of the discursive influences of the male-dominated culture surrounding Platteville at the turn of the century.

The two following essays focus on normal schools in Massachusetts, institutions that can complicate the educational landscape in the state that
hosts Harvard. Beth Ann Rothermel focuses on Westfield State Normal School, tracing the mid-nineteenth-century rise of the public normals and their mission of only training teachers, but not providing them with the same sort of education found in other colleges and universities. Rothermel shows how scholarship based on only official records might support the typical, or expected, narrative of the decline of rhetorical education, but other archival materials (notebooks, yearbooks, course descriptions) reveal that faculty indeed worked diligently to offer a fairly progressive rhetorical education for future teachers—not mere training in curriculum delivery. Then, Patrice K. Gray takes us to Fitchburg Normal School, opened in 1895 amidst a perceived literacy crisis in the area. This school was given a similarly narrow mission, with constraints, to train elementary school teachers in controlling their classrooms and providing standard forms of instruction. Due to the literacy crisis in Fitchburg, remediation was a concern, followed by an insistence on competence that could be assessed through one-shot writing tasks. One positive byproduct of such practices was an archival collection of 400 essays, student “performance pieces” that allow Gray to imagine pedagogical practices from an array of students’ references to their teachers (169). This study reveals a variety of approaches that faculty encouraged their students to take. Some students identified their own paper topics and determined what research would constitute their work, whereas other students chose to find connections between the literature they studied and their lives on campus.

At this point, readers are likely to think that the collection privileges the ephemeral or individualistic archival materials: the letter, diary, student paper, teacher journal. I would have appreciated visual representations of these artifacts, even a few, simply to provide a glimpse into the archives, and more discussion of methodology would have highlighted the discoveries that can be teased out from small treasures. Some scholars, like Garbus, do note the difficulties of archival work (e.g., Vida Scudder burned much of the material that documented her teaching practices), but most of the methodological issues are given short attention or relegated to end-notes. Fortunately, none of the contributors overstate their claims based on the—often scant—evidence that they work with. In the penultimate essay, William DeGenaro offers a study of William Rainey Harper’s contributions to higher education. However, DeGenaro works only with published materials, and his contribution is particularly noteworthy because poorly circulated, locally published, and out-of-print publications seem to be given scant attention in archival work—compared to the more cherished artifacts that more directly connect human hands to the printed page. With attention to the institutional development of the junior college, DeGenaro’s project is
markedly different in focus and scope, but nonetheless interesting in its tell-
ing of Harper’s design of a two-tiered system for the University of Chicago, a “Junior College” for freshman and sophomores that would feed into and serve the “Senior College” for juniors and seniors (a model later exported to California and elsewhere). The instantiation of gate-keeping systems like this, coupled with the series of essays on normal schools, makes for a com-
pelling case for further archival work to complement—and challenge—the range of composition’s origin stories.

Similar to DeGenaro’s essay, Jeffrey L. Hoogeveen’s work appears at first glance to be an outlier for its focus on activism in Lincoln University (PA) during the Vietnam era. It’s a unique study, a form of archival-institutional critique in which curricular shifts are linked to both local and larger political and cultural influences—ones that contain enough residual sway in the present era to blur boundaries between archival and qualitative-eth-
nographic research. In an intriguing reconstruction of the shift in writing curriculum at Lincoln, Hoogeveen documents the rise of student-faculty political alliances (primarily regarding civil rights) with a concomitant, and apparently reactionary, shift in writing pedagogy to focus on surface correctness and grammar. Given the attention to the sequence of essays in *Local Histories*, I can’t help but see the final study in this collection serving as a cautionary tale for all of us in our historical and administrative work: not only that continued attention to our deep past might reveal knowledge of our most esteemed and enduring practices, but also that writing about recent events on our own campuses may be just as “archival” (and similarly limited by a paucity of evidence). Moreover, such work will likely remind WPA readers that many problems we want to banish to the past are simply in abeyance because we continue to remember what has come before us.

*Local Histories* is the product of talented scholars with a deep invest-
ment not only in their own work, but in promoting of vision of archival and historical study that should direct the field’s future research. The chal-
lenges to the dominant histories of composition are important contribu-
tions, discoveries that deserve attention not only for their historical import, but also because the essays in the collection are so well crafted. For busy administrators, this is a collection that can be read in small doses, enjoyed for the narratives within, and remembered for the ongoing struggles that they represent.

**Work Cited**

Fitzgerald, Kathryn. “A Rediscovered Tradition: European Pedagogy and Compo-
sition in Nineteenth-Century Midwestern Normal Schools.” *College Composi-
Review


Duane Roen

Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life is an engaging study of academic writing. Based on three years of methodical research, the book offers insights into the ways in which postsecondary faculty across disciplines define, teach, assign, and evaluate “academic writing.” To gather material for the study, Thaiss and Zawacki interviewed faculty in fourteen disciplines, surveyed nearly two hundred students, conducted focus-group discussions with thirty-six students, used assessment results from twelve faculty workshops on writing-intensive courses, and acquired forty timed essays from undergraduate students—a rich array of data.

In Chapter One, “What’s Academic? What’s ‘Alternative’?,” Thaiss and Zawacki offer working definitions of “academic writing” and “alternative discourse.” Functionally defining the former as “any writing that fulfills a purpose of education in a college or university in the United States” (4), the authors provide examples illustrating that academic writing is more broadly construed than most scholars assume. Thaiss and Zawacki also offer three characteristics of academic writing that seem to be widely accepted across disciplines: “Clear evidence in writing that the writer(s) have been persistent, open-minded, and disciplined in study” (5); “The dominance of reason over emotion or sensual perceptions” (5); and “An imagined reader who is coolly rational, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response” (7). Like other scholars, Thaiss and Zawacki acknowledge that emotions and the senses can occur in academic writing, but they “must always by subject to control by reason” (6) [emphasis in original].
The authors, like so many other writing scholars, are also interested in what constitutes alternative discourse. From their research, they posit that there are at least five means by which a writer can render discourse “alternative”: (1) “alternative formats,” (2) “alternative ways of conceptualizing and arranging academic arguments,” (3) “alternative syntaxes,” (4) “alternative methodologies,” and (5) “alternative media” (12). One motive for producing alternative discourse is to resist conventional discourse—a purpose commonly treated in feminist and cultural theory, and contrastive rhetorics. The first chapter also offers extended definitions of key terms that appear throughout the book: “discipline” and “genre.”

In Chapter Two, “Faculty Talk About Their Writing, Disciplines, and Alternatives,” Thaiss and Zawacki present data that remind us of some persistent issues in many scholarly discourse communities. For example, the faculty represented in the chapter feel pressure to write primarily or even exclusively for scholarly peers because writing for the general public is considered risky, especially for faculty struggling to earn tenure. Thaiss and Zawacki’s observations remind me of the influential work of Ernest Boyer, who, in Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate, argues that the full range of academic work—discovery, application, engagement, teaching and learning—needs to be considered scholarly if the academy is to serve society well. Their observation also reminds me of a perspective that I share whenever the opportunity arises. That is, the academy would serve itself well if each publishing scholar were to write one piece—book or article—for the general public for every ten pieces that he or she writes for peers. Further, each scholar should write at least one piece on teaching for every ten pieces that he or she writes. If we write only for our own scholarly discourse communities, we miss opportunities to convince the rest of the world that our work is valuable.

In Chapter Two Thaiss and Zawacki also note, as they do elsewhere in the book, that publishing scholars see the need for “objectivity in their academic disciplines” (38). This observation reminds us that some disciplines tenaciously persist in embracing the modernist view that objectivity is possible. Until I read Thomas Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions in graduate school and many postmodernist perspectives thereafter, I also had thought that objectivity was possible in some fields. However, objectivity is about as elusive as Sasquatch.

In Chapter Three, “How Our Informants Teach Students to Write,” Thaiss and Zawacki describe a relatively wide range of assignments that faculty use to help students achieve established learning goals. The authors also posit that faculty members’ criteria for “good writing” are based on academic, disciplinary, subdisciplinary, local or institutional, and idiosyncratic
or personal perspectives. Further, faculty differ widely in their conscious awareness of the criteria that they use for judging the quality of writing. As Thaiss and Zawacki show, this variety of assignments and criteria often perplexes students, especially early in their college careers.

Chapter Four, “Students Talk About Expectations, Confidence, and How They Learn,” includes data gathered via surveys, focus-group interviews, and timed proficiency-exam essays. Thaiss and Zawacki report that, among other things, students at George Mason University write in response to a relatively wide range of assignments in their major courses, can articulate criteria for writing in their majors, and generally feel that they have freedom in choosing topics for writing. In response to the surveys, students indicated that the most common writing assignments are research-based papers, critiques, and summaries/abstracts/outlines.

As a result of their analyses of the student data, Thaiss and Zawacki hypothesize that students experience three stages of development as writers in a discipline. In the first stage, “the writer bases a sense of disciplinary consistency on writing experience in very few courses with criteria in these courses generalized into ‘rules’” (109). In the next stage, “the writer encounters different exigencies in different courses, and the sense of inconsistency, sometimes interpreted as teacher idiosyncrasy, supplants the perception of consistency” (110). In the third stage, “the writer understands the differences as components of an articulated, nuanced idea of the discipline” (110). Not surprisingly, Thaiss and Zawacki note that students learn to write more confidently and proficiently by writing frequently across a range of faculty and courses, by reflecting on their writing, by receiving feedback on early papers, and by studying models.

Chapter Five, “Implications for Teaching and Program Building” is an especially helpful chapter for faculty, particularly those who conduct workshops on writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines. In reflecting on their data, Thaiss and Zawacki describe some best practices for WAC/WID pedagogy. Although all twelve of Thaiss and Zawacki’s best practices are useful, I’ll note only several of them here—to avoid revealing too much about the story. They include the following: “Define expectations clearly and place them in the context of the discipline or in contexts meaningful to you” (142); “Provide students with contextualized feedback on their writing, especially early in a course” (147); “Give students opportunities for reflecting on their own growth as writers and rhetors, in the academy and as related to the workplaces they will enter” (152); and “Give students opportunities for exploring and understanding the variety of rhetorical environments they’ll encounter in college and the workplace” (154).
Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life is a valuable resource. Anyone who conducts workshops on writing across the curriculum or writing in the disciplines will find the book useful for several reasons. First, Thaiss and Zawacki offer insights into how faculty already conceptualize and implement writing in their disciplines. Second, in Chapter Five the authors provide practical strategies that faculty can use for assigning writing in a wide range of disciplines, including composition. In the many WAC/WID workshops that I conduct for faculty, I usually draw on John Bean’s Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom, and I will continue to do so. However, I will now also encourage faculty to consider the practical, data-driven guidance that Thaiss and Zawacki offer.

I also plan to use the book the next time I have an opportunity to teach a graduate course on WAC/WID. Students in such a course could gain valuable insights into the discourse conventions of disciplines other than their own. I will encourage graduate students to engage in course research projects that replicate small parts of Thaiss and Zawacki’s study. I also will encourage some students to consider dissertation projects that replicate larger chunks of the study. We need more studies like this to map the current national terrain of WAC, WID, and disciplinary discourse communities.

There is much discussion in the profession that we need more data-driven research to inform our practices and to support our arguments for teaching writing in diverse settings. Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life represents one kind of study that can help teachers and administrators design more effective curricula and pedagogy in a wide range of courses. Thaiss and Zawacki put forth a model for others who want to conduct research that is both insightful and practical.

Author’s Note

I thank Jeanne Rose and Lori Salem for helpful comments on an earlier version of this review.

Works Cited


Review


Bruce Horner

This collection presents the “lessons learned” by teacher-scholars working at a variety of schools bearing the official U.S. government designation of being “Hispanic-Serving Institutions” (“HSI’s”). The designation dates from 1994 to recognize “accredited, degree granting public or private, non-profit colleges or universities with 25% or more total undergraduate full-time equivalent (FTE) Hispanic enrollment” (Laden 186; quoted in Introduction 2). While in some ways this collection would seem to be targeting, and of most use to, teachers working in HSI’s or expecting to do so, it will also be of use to composition teachers, scholars, and program administrators at all schools for its contributions to growing inquiry among compositionists into the complex relationships between language, identity, postsecondary academic performance, race, and (social) class in the U.S. college composition classroom.

As many of the chapters demonstrate, the HSI designation glosses over significant differences among the many schools so designated. Indeed, perhaps chief among the “lessons” the collection offers teachers working or expecting to work at HSI’s is the diversity in the language practices, sociocultural identities, and histories and expectations of academic performance of students enrolled in HSI’s. The collection also cautions against any homogeneity in imagining HSI teachers and pedagogies. For example, while all three of the collection’s editors teach at one institution—Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC)—they represent quite diverse cultural, regional, and academic backgrounds and teaching experiences (5-7). Likewise, the schools represented by the collection’s contribu-
tors include a mix of two- and four-year institutions, and cut a wide swath across the continental U.S.

There is the threat, of course, that acknowledgements of significant diversity among HSI’s and their students might dissolve the justification for the designation itself, and thus the need for a collection such as this one. But in fact, like the term “Latino/a,” the range of the designation’s referents arises out of the different geographic, socioeconomic, ethnic, and historical inflections given to what remains a socioculturally and statistically significant appellation. As Beatrice Méndez Newman notes in her chapter, Hispanics continue to be historically underrepresented in U.S. postsecondary schools, graduate at significantly lower rates than white students from college, and tend to be first-generation college students, and HSI’s attract students whose economic and academic circumstances limit their access to postsecondary education (17-18). Whatever diversity exists among HSI’s and their students does not efface these structural inequities. Of course, the reach of such inequities goes beyond HSI’s and their students. As several of the contributors observe, insofar as the Latino/a population is a growing one in the U.S., the work of teachers at HSI’s serves as a reminder of what teachers and writing program administrators elsewhere are also experiencing or will experience soon (vii, 1). And insofar as the structural inequities currently visited upon Hispanics in the U.S. intersect and overlap with those of class and race, the accounts presented here of experiences at HSI’s will be immediately relevant to teachers working at schools not identified as “HSI.”

The collection is divided into four parts: two introductory chapters that make up Part 1 are followed in Part 2 by four chapters exploring the interface between faculty and student expectations and practices, primarily as these play out in pedagogies; Part 3 consists of three chapters presenting arguments for developing effective writing programs at HSI’s; and Part 4 offers two chapters on the uses of personal narrative as a way of exploring culture. These are preceded by a foreword by Michelle Hall Kells and the editors’ introduction. Both the foreword and the editors’ introduction provide useful overviews of the issues with which all the contributors to the collection continue to wrestle. Michelle Hall Kells sets the collection in the context of legacies of colonization, the U.S. civil rights movement, recent immigration demonstrations, trends in composition scholarship, and the history of higher education practices, including disparities in the working and learning conditions obtaining in postsecondary education. The book’s introduction offers a brief history of HSI’s put in the context of both the monolingual ideologies afflicting U.S. culture and the individual editors’
personal and professional histories that have brought them to work on this collection.

Because of space limitations, I restrict the focus of my comments to those chapters that, to me, present most sharply both the distinctiveness and broad significance of the authors’ work teaching writing with Latino/a students at HSI’s. The authors of the second introductory chapter—“Teaching English in a California Two-Year Hispanic-Serving Institution”—rather than offering a simple account of work at one school, model the myriad intersecting ways in which to locate such work by placing their teaching in a broad and layered context of useful statistical and other studies on differences in schools and student populations and the larger economic and political climates in which these operate. Presented as a conversation between three Santa Barbara City College teachers (Jody Millward, Sandra Starkey, and David Starkey), the chapter highlights especially the ways in which, as their experiences at SBCC show, the chief deficits many of their Latino/a college students face are limits of time, funding, and academic support resources and services, not lack of commitment, intelligence, persistence, or energy. Perhaps more than any other chapter, this chapter gives a feel for the variety of pressures, challenges, and rewards of working at an HSI.

The four chapters comprising Part 2 demonstrate, individually and collectively, that HSI students, schools, teachers, and their pedagogies are “Not All the Same.” In “Discovering a ‘Proper Pedagogy’” (i.e., one proper to the location of one’s teaching and one’s students,) Dora Ramírez-Dhoore and Rebecca Jones of the University of Texas-Pan American present their attempts to work past, and help their students work past, numerous disabling myths about language: that students must choose between a reified, monolithically-conceived academic discourse or a home language; that any possession of Spanish is a mark of shame; that there is a “game” to be played in academic writing; and so on. In Chapter 4, Isabel Araiza, Humberto Cárdenas, Jr., and Susan Loudermilk Garza challenge myths about HSI’s and HSI students. They report that their study of the literacy and language practices of first-year students at TAMU-CC and faculty perceptions of those students revealed that the language used by the vast majority of TAMU-CC students more than 90% of the time was English, and that there was little difference between the monolingual Latino/a English-speaking students and the Latino/a students who also spoke Spanish and/or Tex-Mex in either their parents’ schooling history or in their participation in “cultural” activities with high value in dominant culture (e.g., attending concerts): instead, pretty much all students at TAMU-CC are marked, or markable, as “at risk.” However, they also found that many TAMU-CC faculty had mistakenly expected TAMU-CC students would speak Span-
ish, as is the case at some (though clearly not all) HSI’s, and they showed little understanding of TAMU-CC’s significance as an HSI.

These authors’ conclusion that “we cannot make assumptions about our students’ dominant languages and literate practices . . . [but] have to discover their lived literacies and language use” (95) is further illustrated by the contrasting picture of student language and literacy practices presented by the authors of “Más allá del inglés: A Bilingual Approach to College Composition.” Working at Miami University, a private, four-year HSI in a community where bilingualism is maintained and carries far less social stigma, Isis Artze-Vega, Elizabeth I. Doud, and Belkys Torres argue for teaching courses in bilingual composition. Drawing heavily, and by necessity, on the much larger scholarship on bilingual education in K-12 schools, they provide a compelling argument and helpful suggestions for developing such courses to combat monolingualist ideologies and to acknowledge and strengthen their students’ linguistic sophistication in using more than one language. And in “Un pie adentro y otro afuera: Composition Instruction for Transnational Dominicans in Higher Education,” Sharon Utakis and Marianne Pita, of Bronx Community College, argue for composition courses that teach a “critical bicultural curriculum” to meet the needs of their students, who expect to maintain not only two languages but a transnational identity, and whose interests are at odds with the hidden curriculum of “Americanization” they find operating in many ESL courses. Such a course is needed, they argue, to “problematize the teaching of English” by challenging dominant and damaging myths about English and other languages and their relation to identity (126-27).

Of the several chapters offering lessons in program-building, I was most interested in Isabel Baca’s account of the development of a basic writing course at El Paso Community College, whose student population, unlike the students at TAMU-CC, is far more likely to be bilingual in Spanish and English. Baca bases her argument on a range of concepts regarding bilingualism: François Grosjean’s “functional” definition of bilinguals as “not two monolinguals in one person, but different, perfectly competent speaker-hearers in their own right” (471; quoted in Baca 151); Guadalupe Valdés’s concept of “incipient bilinguals,” who “use their native language to help them learn the linguistic rules of a second language” (152); and scholarship on the effect of language attitudes on language learning. These support Baca’s argument that students’ acceptance of the dominant “fractional” view of bilingualism (as less than the sum of two discrete parts, English and Spanish) interferes with their ability to draw on their linguistic knowledge in one language when using another. And this leads her to call for a pedagogy of bilingualism understood as fluency not in two discrete
languages but in creative movement between and with them, an argument in close alignment with other recent arguments for pursuing cross-language relations in composition (156; see Canagarajah, Lu).

*Teaching Writing with Latino/a Students* shows, above all, the inadequacy of reified linkages of language and identity for understanding and undertaking the work of HSI’s. At times, individual arguments in the collection may reinforce such linkages in the terms invoked for defending what seem immediate, urgent, and legitimate institutional and student needs and rights—terms like “home language,” “Standard Written English,” “academic discourse,” and “code switching.” These terms suggest discrete, uniform communities of homogeneous language use and identity. Yet, taken as a whole, while insisting on the educational rights, abilities, and contributions of HSI students, the collection serves to “disinvent” comfortable, disabling myths about the homogeneity of HSI students, their language(s), the academy, HSI’s, and about any uniformly appropriate pedagogy for HSI’s and HSI students.¹ In the absence of the comfort such disabling myths proffer, and in recognition of our students’ rights and abilities, we must, as the collection’s title suggests, instead learn to teach not “to” or “for” but “with” our students. While this lesson is in many ways not new, the contributors to this collection show that it is a lesson that we must continue to keep re-learning, and to keep finding new ways to articulate to, and with, our students, our schools, and each other.

Note

¹ On the need to “disinvent” common notions about language and identity, see Pennycook (6-7).

**Works Cited**


Announcements

Call for Proposals. East Central Writing Centers Association 2009 Conference, April 3-4, 2009, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. “Writing Center Ecologies: Developing and Sustaining Our Resources” (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/ecwca). The term “ecology” has many associations, from nature and the environment, to more recent applications of information ecology and media ecology in rhetoric and composition. The metaphor of ecology can be applied to the relationships among various projects and working groups within writing centers, and to the relationships among writing centers, writing programs, English Departments, WAC initiatives, strategic plans, etc. Tutors, writing center administrators, and others involved with writing center work are invited to submit proposals related—but not limited to—the following topics:

- Consider the politics of ecology and the idea of ecologies as systems. How does your writing center function as an ecological system? What are the ecologies of your department and your campus?
- How do you ensure the sustainability of your writing center? How will you address challenges to ensure sustainability?
- What kind of partnerships, relationships and/or infrastructure have you used to develop and enrich your resources? How can you extend existing partnerships and cultivate new ones? What does your writing center bring to these partnerships?
- How do writing center theories sustain both in-house environments and larger, public spaces? How do writing centers perform “public scholarship” that sustains us and the community?
- How do you build a self-sustaining ecology in your writing center through policies, practices, and relationships?
- What are the environmental issues facing your writing center? How can you develop a “green culture” in your center? What are some creative solutions you have for making your writing center greener? Why should writing center tutors and administrators be concerned with environmental issues?
- How does technology fit into your ecology?
- In what ways can globalization and diversity affect the ecology of your writing center?

Session Formats

- Presentations: Single presentations will be 15-20 minutes in length. If you submit your proposal alone you will be placed with like presentations for a session.
Announcements

- Panels: Consist of 3-4 presenters who are coordinating their presentations around a central theme. Each presentation will be 15-20 minutes in length.
- Roundtables: Round tables are talks designed around a specific theme and are often highly audience interactive. Several speakers will address a central question from a variety of angles, and then open the question to the audience and answer audience questions.
- Workshops: These sessions are designed to be fully interactive with the audience and facilitate the audience in gaining material, hands-on knowledge around the given topic.
- Posters: These presentations are designed to be stand alone posters which are informative and meant to be viewed at anytime during the conference. There will also be a dedicated time and space for the authors of the poster to answer questions and interact with conference goers about their topic.

Submitting Proposals

Proposals should be submitted online using the webform available at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/ecwca. The deadline for proposals is Monday, December 15, 2008. For questions or comments, please contact: Linda Bergmann, Writing Lab Director (lbergmann@purdue.edu) or Tammy Conard-Salvo, ECWCA President and Writing Lab Associate Director (tcsalvo@purdue.edu)

JAEPL (Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning) invites submissions for a special issue about the believing game and closely related issues, guest edited by Peter Elbow. For more about this theme, see the four essays in Volume 14 of JAEPL (November 2008 release) by Peter Elbow, Pat Bizzell, Mary Rose O’Reilley and Nat Teich that initiate a conversation about the believing game. Deadline for submission: January 30, 2009.

Peter Elbow writes: “For this issue, I welcome essays that push and explore and expand what you see in these four essays. I invite essays that explore the application of believing game to diverse arenas-and not just in the academy. Also: I frame the believing game as a complement to what I call ‘the doubting game’ or ‘critical thinking’—which I characterize as the assumed or preferred mode of thinking in our culture. But is there a preferred mode, and if so how does it relate to the believing game or methodological believing? I am also interested in responses that question or criticize the believing game.
Electronic copies are preferred—10-20 pages double spaced, MLA citation style. If you apply by mail, please send four paper manuscripts along with postage for mailing three copies to readers. Send essays to Peter Elbow at 47 Pokeberry Ridge, Amherst MA 01002. You can address questions to him at elbow@english.umass.edu. Send editorial inquiries to Kristie S. Fleckenstein, Co-Editor, JAEPL, Department of English, Florida State University. E-mail: kfleckenstein@fsu.edu. Visit JAEPL’s website at: https://www.sworps.utk.edu/aepl/html/jaepl.htm

Call for Papers. We are soliciting additional essays—to join an already promising set of contributions—for an edited collection exploring the intersections between pedagogical theory/practice and the emerging field of Animal Studies. The collection is tentatively titled Pedadogy: What I Learned about Teaching from My Dog. While personal reflections about the human/dog bond are welcome, we are especially interested in essays that theorize this bond and provide thoughtful responses to questions such as the following: How has your relationship with canis familiaris, perhaps the most ubiquitous nonhuman companion animals, shed light on your understanding of the relationships you have developed with human students? How might that influence be situated within the contexts of various “dog related discourses,” both scholarly and popular? How might these discourses be effectively mined in the interest of innovative classroom practice? How might these discourses be rhetorically examined and evaluated? Other possibilities are welcome. Please send all queries about proposals, essays, and deadlines to Patricia Donahue (donahuep@lafayette.edu) and Bianca Falbo (falbob@lafayette.edu).

Call for Proposals: Research Network Forum at CCC. 22nd annual. March 11th, 2009. Hilton, San Francisco, California. Proposal Deadline: Friday, October 31, 2008. Homepage: www rnfonline.com. Questions? Email chairs@rnfonline.com. The Research Network Forum was founded in 1987 as a pre-convention workshop at CCC. The RNF is an opportunity for published researchers, new researchers, and graduate students to discuss their current research projects and receive responses from new and senior researchers. The forum is free to CCC convention participants. You need not be a work-in-progress presenter to attend. As in past years, the 2008 RNF will feature two plenary sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, each a little over an hour long. These sessions include presentations from each plenary speaker followed by a brief question period. At the subsequent roundtable discussions, work-in-progress presenters discuss their current projects (in an eight-minute presentation) and gain the
responses of other researchers, including the discussion leaders. Work-in-progress presenters are grouped by thematic clusters, in which they will discuss their projects with other researchers and a discussion leader who is a senior researcher. Participants also include editors of printed and electronic journals of composition/rhetoric who will discuss publishing opportunities of completed works-in-progress. Work-in-Progress Presenters should bring three typed questions which they should copy and distribute to participants at their table (15 copies for the two sessions will do). We encourage participants to bring a copy of the journals they edit/publish, any other publications, and announcements, which will be displayed at the RNF meeting.

Please join us in San Francisco to present a Work-in-Progress presentation or serve as a Discussion Leader (for those who are seasoned, established researchers) and/or Editor (for those who edit journals/presses). Electronic proposal forms will be available at www.rfonline.com. You may appear on the RNF Program in addition to having a speaking role at the Conference on College Composition & Communication.

The Conference on Basic Writing is pleased to announce the 2009 CBW/CCCC Fellowship, a $500 award given to a teacher of basic writing to subsidize travel to CCCC in San Francisco in March, 2009, and participate in the Conference on Basic Writing Pre-Conference Workshop (Wednesday before CCCC). Applications due December 1, 2008.

Award recipient notified January, 2009. Winner presents on professional interests at the CBW SIG March, 2009. Fellowship applications should include a comprehensive two-page letter that details the benefits of attending the CBW Workshop and CCCC. This letter should clearly and specifically address the following key issues:

- How will attending the CBW Workshop and CCCC benefit the interests and needs of the students with whom you work?
- How do you plan to share the information and ideas gathered at ecce with colleagues?
- How will this experience help you to become more active in advocating for students in basic writing (or other preparatory/developmental writing) courses?

A completed Fellowship application should include this letter, a current curriculum vita and, if applicable, the title and abstract of an accepted 2009 CCCC presentation. Questions, concerns, and completed Fellowship applications should be forwarded by email or campus address by December 1, 2008, to Dr. Sonya L. Armstrong, Northern Illinois University, Department of Literacy Education, 148 Gabel Hall, Dekalb, IL 60115; sarmstrong@niu.edu.
The CBW/CCCC Fellowship is intended to support basic writing (including preparatory and developmental writing) instructors who might otherwise have difficulty attending CCCC. Priority will be given to applicants who clearly demonstrate how attending the 2009 CBW workshop and CCCC will benefit their own professional development, their students, and their colleagues. Fellowship applicants need not have had a paper accepted for presentation at CCCC. However, if presenting at the CCCC, titles and abstracts of papers should be included with the application. The Fellowship winner should plan to attend the CBW Pre-Conference Workshop (the full Wednesday before CCCC). Also, the Fellowship recipient will be recognized and invited to speak briefly at the CBW SIG at CCCC.

Series editors Margot Soven and Susan McLeod announce a new series with Parlor Press on Writing Program Administration. The series provides a venue for scholarly monographs and projects that are research or theory-based and that provide insights into important issues in the field. We encourage submissions that examine the work of writing program administration, broadly defined (e.g., not just administration of first-year composition programs). Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Historical studies of writing program administration or administrators (archival work is particularly encouraged);
- Studies evaluating the relevance of theories developed in other field (e.g., management, sustainability, organizational theory);
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- Examinations of the politics of writing program administration WPA work at the community college.

Queries should be directed to Susan H. McLeod (mcleod@writing.ucsb.edu), University of California, Santa Barbara; and Margot Soven (soven@lasalle.edu), La Salle University. For complete submission guidelines, see http://www.parlorpress.com/submissions.html.
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