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This 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.

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Submissions should be approximately 4,000–7,000 words, though occasionally longer articles will be accepted if the subject warrants.

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From the Editors

We are happy to report that the number and quality of the articles being submitted to the journal is continuing to rise. In response to this development, we have added four new members to the WPA editorial board who bring expertise in a variety of areas, but are especially skilled in reading more quantitative research studies of the kind that members are conducting and reporting. We welcome Norbert Elliott, Patricia Ericsson, Asao Inoue, and Scott Warnock to the group. These editorial board members, along with those already in the group, provide thorough and thoughtful reviews of the articles we judge to warrant outside readings.

We have added two new features in this issue. First, we have created a space called “WPAs in Dialogue,” in which readers can respond to anything that appears in the journal. For this issue, Linda Adler-Kassner has taken up some points raised by Keith Rhodes in “You Are What You Sell” from the Spring issue. And Keith Rhodes offers a response.

With the other new feature, we bring you two items from the organization. First, we are fortunate to have Joe Janangelo’s plenary address from the summer WPA conference in Philadelphia. If you were not able to attend the meeting, this printed version of Joe’s talk is one opportunity to see some of what you missed. Next year, we will hope to get all the plenary addresses to publish in the journal. Second, we are publishing the results of last year’s survey on mentoring. The findings of the survey were discussed by the Executive Board and shaped the conference this summer, but since not everyone is aware of the results, publication of this important study seemed appropriate to us. The survey’s introduction provides the varied perspectives of those who conducted it: Joe Janangelo, Sheldon Walcher and Duane Roen. Their careful presentation of the findings, both positive and negative, provides much food for thought for every member of WPA. We hope you will read it carefully (along with everything else in this issue, of course) and respond in the new “Dialogue” section if you are so inclined.

Looking ahead, in the Spring issue, we will offer a travelogue for Baton Rouge and Louisiana so that members will go to next summer’s WPA con-
ference well informed about pertinent issues in the area where we will be meeting.

In this issue

Chris Gallagher’s “Assess Locally, Validate Globally: Heuristics for Validating Local Writing Assessments” offers a heuristic for reviewing assessment quality and for developing “validation arguments framed within the principles and terms that the field and individual programs value.”

Cynthia Haller’s “Toward Rhetorical Source Use: Three Student Journeys” provides a careful analysis of how three students read and integrate source materials in their research papers. This close qualitative study contains useful insights about students’ reading and their implications for the teaching of writing that will be instructive for WPA readers.

In “Undaunted, Self-Critical, and Resentful: Investigating Faculty Attitudes Toward Teaching Writing in a Large University Writing-Intensive Course Program,” Lori Salem and Peter Jones report on a qualitative study of faculty attitudes towards teaching writing intensive courses in the disciplines. Although their work was done at a large, urban institution, their findings may be useful to WPAs working in many other situations.

Our WPAs in Dialogue forum affords Linda Adler-Kassner an opportunity to articulate compelling differences between the activist agenda she theorizes within her book, The Activist WPA, and Keith Rhodes’s call for a strategic and responsible organizational branding of CWPA Composition. His reply clarifies his sense of the common ground between the two visions.

In the printed text of Janangelo’s plenary, he invites us to think carefully about how we approach our WPA work. He asks: “How can we chase and cultivate unlimited WPA work? One way is to look within and beyond celebrated ideas to see if they have become sedimented ideations. Another way is to hold suspect—rather than dear—our philosophic and pragmatic inheritances.” He proposes other approaches that warrant much further thought.

The Mentoring Survey report comes to us from Joe Janangelo, Sheldon Walcher and Duane Roen. In their introduction, each of them explains his interest in the project and his role in the work that was done. The report itself follows the introduction and concludes with a detailed discussion of some initiatives from the study that have already been adopted by the CWPA Executive Board. All members of this organization will learn a great deal from reading the findings in this report.

For our fall / winter WPA Symposium, we invited WPAs who have earned excellence in teaching awards to engage the issue of teacher quality
in the teaching of writing. Larry Beason, Beth Brunk-Chavez, Clyde Moneyhun and Diana Ashe offer both their best sense of the issue and strategies for determining teacher quality.

Reviews

Lorelei Blackburn and Ellen Cushman’s book review essay considers new and pivotal books by community literacy scholars and examines the rightful location of writing programs, the landscape of institutional change, and the situatedness of writing programs within universities and local communities.

In his review essay, “As Writing Professionalizes, Asking What, How, and Why,” Douglas Hesse examines the professionalizing and administrative turn of composition through the lens of six recent texts. Hesse’s review encourages us to ponder whether we are privileging our “identities as administrators over those as teachers and scholars.”

In her review essay, “Conflicted Brokers: The Local, Historical, and Political of Basic writing,” Kelly Ritter discusses three books concerning the present and future direction of basic writing instruction at the college level. Based on her analysis, she calls for a field-wide reconsideration of the current configuration of “basic writing” based on the impact of local, historical, and political contexts have on individual basic writing programs.
Assess Locally, Validate Globally: Heuristics for Validating Local Writing Assessments

Chris W. Gallagher

ABSTRACT

Drawing on recent assessment scholarship in rhetoric and composition, this article describes an assessment quality review heuristic that allows writing program administrators to develop validation arguments framed within the principles and terms that the field and individual programs value. Such heuristics may be used to evaluate local assessments and to make a case for them beyond programs. Because they are grounded in our disciplinary knowledge, values, and commitments, these heuristics can serve as a vehicle for exerting leadership for writing assessment at a time when standardized tests are gaining traction in higher education.

Though compositionists specializing in writing assessment find plenty on which to disagree, the “basic principles” proposed by O’Neill, Moore, and Huot in their Guide to College Writing Assessment—that writing assessment be site-based, locally controlled, context-sensitive, rhetorically based, accessible, and theoretically consistent (57)—are widely echoed in our assessment scholarship. Their contextualist approach is shared, for instance, by Bob Broad, who advocates “organic” and “locally grown” writing assessments (see his What We Really Value and Organic Writing Assessment). Similarly, Haswell et al. use the term “homegrown” (40) to describe the assessments they value, noting that the moral of the story they tell about Washington State’s assessment program “is that writing teachers should be leery of assessment tools made by others, that they should, and can make their own.” The authors note that their “adventure into assessment was sui generis, as [they] believe all such ventures elsewhere might be” (14). Even Patricia Lynne, who is critical of much of what she considers to be mainstream assessment scholarship in the field, advocates a “contextualist para-
“digm” that attends closely to local environments and “the relationships among those involved in the assessment” (117).

This insistence on local, “organic” assessments, while admirable, creates certain challenges for WPAs. First, there are conceptual difficulties. “Local” and “organic” are not the same thing. An assessment may be local without having arisen naturally from a local ecology (assuming we can conceive assessment in these terms in the first place). Further, such an assessment might serve the needs of teachers and students within a program quite well, which suggests that adapting assessment methods or strategies originating elsewhere might be perfectly appropriate and effective. More troubling, local assessments might not serve local needs and interests well. They may be poorly constructed, unaligned (or misaligned) with curriculum and instruction, and even blatantly unfair and discriminatory. Finally, to the extent that they are local, assessments are likely to be difficult to make legible to those who do not share the local values, beliefs, assumptions, conventions, and discourses. For instance, it may be difficult for those outside the program Bob Broad examines in What We Really Value to make sense of the long and complex maps and lists of criteria such as “Significance/Development/Heart,” “Focus/Pace/Concise,” and “Tight/Subtle/Minimalist/Show Don’t Tell” (34-37).

This accessibility challenge—what O’Neill et al. describe as making the assessment program “transparent to those affected by it as well as others invested in its results”—often turns out to be more complicated than “communicat[ing] in language that is accessible to the constituencies” (57). What we must communicate about our local assessments, after all, is not just information, but an argument. Even the most conventional criteria for establishing assessment quality—validity and reliability—are now understood in writing assessment and educational measurement scholarship to consist of arguments supported by theoretical rationales and evidence (Parkes, Llosa, Huot). Jay Parkes, for example, suggests that a reliability argument “articulates the reliability values most relevant to the particular measurement situation and then the most appropriate evidence and theory to support an argument for the presence of that value” (2). Though not all compositionists value reliability as it is traditionally conceived—a point I will return to later—we should be able to appreciate Parkes’ suggestion that the onus of an assessment argument is to present a case not only for our values but for the presence of those values in our assessments.

Parkes’ work challenges WPAs to develop methods of evaluating, documenting, and arguing for the quality of our local assessments. The trick is to develop methods that are rooted in local interpretations of disciplinary values and the local values of our programs while being intelligible and
persuasive to audiences beyond our programs. To that end, this article proposes a method, in the form of a heuristic, for validating local assessments.

In this article I use “heuristic” to mean a method for invention and problem-solving—in this case a tool for evaluating and reporting on the assessment quality of local assessments. This validation heuristic is intended to be generic enough to suggest some typical moves and conventions but flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of local (program) values. It is also intended to suggest ways in which we can craft persuasive arguments, both within and beyond our programs, about what we value in assessment, writing, teaching, and learning. In the sections to follow, I will present a sample heuristic, describe its potential uses, and demonstrate how it reflects local and disciplinary values in an accessible and I hope persuasive fashion. I conclude with some thoughts about the implications of using such heuristics within the current educational and assessment policy context.

A Heuristic for Assessment Quality Review

This heuristic asks program participants to study an individual assessment—be it for placement, proficiency, program assessment, or faculty evaluation—within the context of their program and its values. By “assessment,” I mean a procedure for gathering, interpreting, and evaluating student work for any programmatic purpose as well as any use of data generated from that procedure. The heuristic should be completed for each assessment use. It is not enough to declare a certain type of assessment—directed self-placement, for instance—“valid” and “reliable.” We need to validate particular decisions we make based on assessment data, not just the test/instrument (see Broad; Huot; O’Neill and Huot).

The product of the heuristic is a highly contextualized but broadly intelligible profile of the assessment. This profile includes brief narrative descriptions and analyses as well as relevant appendices, including assessment artifacts (copies of the instruments, sample student work, meeting agendas and protocols, statistical results, technical reports, etc.). Here I present a sample heuristic. Please bear in mind, however, that I am not proposing the validation heuristic for all writing programs; this heuristic is the result of a particular negotiation of disciplinary and local values, and while it could be adapted by any writing program, it is not intended to be adopted wholesale. What I am proposing in this article is the development and use of heuristics of this sort by writing programs. (See the appendix for an example of a completed profile based on the featured heuristic.)
An Assessment Quality Review Heuristic

A. Briefly describe the writing program, including curricular and instructional goals, institutional constraints and opportunities (e.g. resources issues, labor conditions, professional development offerings), and student and teacher demographics. Append relevant documentation.

B. Briefly describe the assessment and its relationship, if any, to other assessments conducted in the program. If this assessment is part of an overall assessment plan, append the plan.

C. Answer the following questions about the assessment under review.

1. *Meaningful*
   - What are the purposes of this assessment? What are its intended uses?
   - How were these purposes arrived at? Who formulated them?
   - Why and to whom are those purposes significant?
   - How were these purposes made known to students and teachers?
   - How does the content of the assessment match its purpose?

2. *Appropriate*
   - How is the assessment suitable for this context, these participants, and its intended purposes and uses?
   - How does the assessment reflect the values, beliefs, and aspirations of the participants and their immediate communities?

3. *Useful*
   - How does the assessment help students learn and help teachers teach?
   - How does the assessment provide information that may be used to improve teaching and learning, curriculum, professional development, program policies, accountability, etc.?
   - Who will use the information generated from this assessment and for what purposes?

4. *Fair*
   - How does the assessment ensure that all students are able to do and demonstrate their best work?
   - How does the assessment contribute to the creation or maintenance of appropriate working conditions for teachers and students?
does it ensure adequate compensation and/or recognition for the labor required to produce it?

5. Trustworthy

- How are the assessment results arrived at and by whom?
- How does the assessment ensure that these results represent the best professional judgment of educators?
- How does the assessment ensure that the results derive from a process that honors articulated differences even as it seeks common ground for decisions?

6. Just:

- What are the intended and unintended consequences of this assessment—for students, teachers, administrators, the program, the institution, etc.?
- How does the assessment ensure that these consequences are in the best interest of participants, especially students and teachers?

D. In light of this review, what changes, if any, do you plan to make to this assessment?

Uses of Validation Heuristics

While I can imagine that Parts A, B, and D of this heuristic could be useful, both as an inventorying exercise and a reporting mechanism, for any writing program, Part C—the crux of the assessment quality review—is flexible and should be crafted by each writing program. In the next section, I will show how Part C of the heuristic I present is a particular working-out of disciplinary and local values. Here, I want to explore potential uses of such heuristics.

The primary purpose of validation heuristics is to guide program participants through a contextual evaluation of the effects of assessment on their teaching and learning. At a minimum, to answer the questions thoroughly, program administrators would need to examine and account for teachers’ and students’ experiences with the local assessment. More ideally, groups of administrators, teachers, and possibly students would collaboratively evaluate their assessments and complete their heuristic. This heuristic, then, would enable these stakeholders to explore together the extent to which the assessments reflect both their local values and disciplinary values—thereby making assessment design, validation, and planning visible
and collaborative features of the writing program. (Such heuristics could easily be integrated into self-studies conducted for QEP, accreditation, and ongoing programmatic assessments.) Because heuristics are adaptable to local values and interpretations of disciplinary values, they honor the diversity of writing programs and accommodate changes in local and disciplinary values over time.

At the same time, heuristics may be used to inform and persuade a range of audiences outside writing programs, including colleagues, upper administrators, accreditors, parents, and the local and regional community. They are a method for formative review, but also for summative documentation. (As the example in the appendix shows, heuristics may help invalidate an assessment, and the arguments and profiles that result might be used to persuade audiences that the assessment should be discontinued.) The documentation is intended to be accessible to the program’s audiences, but framed in the program’s terms, based on its disciplinary and programmatic values. It is both an argument for those values and an argument about the extent to which those values are present in particular assessments.

Depending on a program’s circumstances—and most particularly the expectations of its various audiences—validation heuristics could produce a single document (a profile) meeting both formative and summative purposes, or they could produce multiple documents, each tailored to its specific audience. In addition, WPAs might choose to feature only certain parts of the profile for particular purposes: to focus instructors’ attention on assessment purposes, for instance, or to make a case to administrators for the reliability of the assessment.

Validation heuristics also provide an opportunity to collaborate across programs on the basis of shared values. Because validation arguments are grounded in part in disciplinary values, it is likely that there will be significant overlap in institutions’ heuristics. Thus, groups of institutions may decide to use the same heuristic. Nor is it difficult to imagine that a single heuristic or a small set of heuristics could be used for professional peer review as part of the CWPA’s Consultant-Evaluator Service or CCCC’s Writing Program Certificate of Excellence program.

To be sure, some compositionists will resist these standardized uses of heuristics, agreeing with David Reinheimer that “[j]ust as local assessment grows out of the local curriculum, the local population, and other local parameters, so too should a local validity argument grow out of the local assessment context, rather than being imposed on a context for which the argument is not appropriate” (171). I agree that validity arguments should never be foisted upon programs; that is not what I am arguing for here. But I would argue that even local validation—Reinheimer’s primary concern—
is made more meaningful and defensible when conducted in the context of local interpretations of disciplinary values. This does not mean that local values are sacrificed to disciplinary values; indeed, in order to be consonant with composition and rhetoric’s disciplinary values, any such heuristics would need to be rooted in the local, in particularity. This sounds like a contradiction, but it’s merely a paradox: a general expectation to be responsive to the local context.

A final point: validation heuristics need not be applied to every assessment a teacher or even a program administers. Rather, programs would develop reasonable sampling plans and use technological platforms that make this work manageable. The point is not to join our K-12 colleagues under the mountain of paperwork they have been subjected to by the standards and assessment movement. The point is to evaluate the quality of our major assessments and to provide adequate and persuasive information to our various audiences about the quality of our local assessments.

Negotiating Local and Disciplinary Values

The sample heuristic presented earlier represents a particular negotiation of local and disciplinary values. While far from idiosyncratic, the criteria in Part C—meaningful, appropriate, useful, fair, trustworthy, and just—are nonetheless a result of deliberate choices among an array of options. They are meant (hypothetically, at least) to represent the values and goals of a particular writing program at a specific moment in time.

While I have composed this heuristic (and profile) for illustration purposes, an appropriate first step for writing program administrators and instructors—a step I am just now embarking on in the program I recently began administering—would be to review writing assessment literature and determine which assessment quality criteria best suit the values, needs, and beliefs of their program and its various audiences. Even this initial activity has great heuristic value, as program participants discover and clarify their ideas about writing, teaching, and assessment. Participants first need to decide which criteria are most important to them, and then they need to decide what those criteria mean and how they would be realized and documented in assessment practice. The key is to choose criteria that will be persuasive to program participants and audiences, since any validation is an argument for using the specific criteria identified; essentially, each heuristic says, “These are the important questions to ask.”

Assessment quality criteria are different from the “basic principles” identified by O’Neill et al., the “principles for effective assessment” proffered in the NCTE-WPA White Paper on Assessment, or the “best assessment prac-
tices” proposed in the CCCC’s “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement” (some of which are discussed below). These principles and best practices can and should guide our choice of criteria, but they do not operate at a sufficient level of specificity to allow us to make judgments and decisions about the quality of particular uses of assessments. In fact, when we turn our attention from these more general principles—on which our field has reached broad consensus—to specific criteria, we find vigorous and healthy debate. This is why Part C of the heuristic must be adaptable: it represents a local interpretation and negotiation of disciplinary values that reflect a range of professionally defensible options. In this way, the heuristic preserves local choice while tying programs to the discipline’s ongoing work on writing assessment.

Perhaps the most pointed debate among assessment experts in the field revolves around the twin pillars of educational measurement: “validity” and “reliability.” While scholars such as Brian Huot insist that sophisticated understandings of these terms can harmonize with our values, others—such Patricia Lynne—argue that they are inextricably linked to an objectivist paradigm that conflicts with our social constructionist disciplinary worldview. Writing administrators and instructors may, and do, take a range of defensible positions on this debate. The heuristic presented here reflects a particular stance on it: that Huot is right to suggest we cannot and should not ignore these terms, which are widely recognized within and beyond the discipline, but Lynne is right to suggest that (for that very reason) we cannot fully disassociate them from their objectivist “baggage” (3), and therefore we should not allow them to circumscribe our thinking about what we value in writing assessment. In other words, the heuristic frames both a validity and reliability argument within rhetoric and composition’s contextualist framework without explicitly invoking these terms.

Briefly, the validity argument of the heuristic follows Huot and O’Neill’s suggestion that “validity as it is currently understood is about validating decisions based on an assessment” (4). It proposes that we must examine both the conditions in which an assessment is conducted (and that it helps create) and the consequences of the assessment. For instance, fairness requires that conditions are in place for all students to do and to demonstrate their best work. This is traditionally called “opportunity to learn.” But we are not concerned only with whether material has been taught to all students before testing, as this quality criterion is conventionally understood; as James Paul Gee has demonstrated, presenting the same material to all students in the same way and then assessing them in the same way on that material, without accounting for their varying embodied and textual experiences with the desired literacy practices and with others who engage
in those literacy practices, is patently unfair. To meet the standard of fairness necessary for validity here, then, the assessment must acknowledge, value, and make room for students’ and teachers’ linguistic and cultural differences. In terms of consequences, justice requires that we examine both the intended and unintended consequences for all parties: students, teachers, administrators, programs, institutions, and so on. We must examine the extent to which the implementation and the results of each assessment use are in the best interests of all participants. We are concerned with effectiveness: we evaluate the validity (or lack of validity) of an assessment based on the effects it brings about within its context of use.

The reliability argument of this heuristic is framed in similar terms. The standard for trustworthiness—the core of the reliability argument here—is collective professional judgment rendered in the context of a search for common ground through articulated differences. The point is not to decontextualize the reading practices of teacher-scorers in search of some Platonic “true score” ratified by consistency; it’s precisely the opposite: to contextualize and support professional judgment through conversation. Moreover, in this model, that conversation seeks to use human differences—in interpretations, values, beliefs, experiences—to generate multiple, usable meanings. Here, following the lead of Huot, Huot and Neal, Broad, Lynn and others, the heuristic builds on Pamela Moss’s “hermeneutic” approach to reliability, which involves

holistic, integrative interpretations of collective performances that seek to understand the whole in light of the parts, that privilege readers who are most knowledgeable about the context in which the assessment occurs, and that ground those interpretations not only in the textual and contextual evidence available, but also in a rational debate among the community of interpreters. (86)

At the same time, this heuristic does not demand consensus, which composition and rhetorical theory long ago revealed as a problematic condition for community (see Harris, Myers, Trimbur). Rather, it calls for acknowledgement, documentation of, and collective inquiry into differences. In this way, it is located within the interpretive tradition described by Clifford Geertz in Interpretation of Cultures, in which “progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate. What gets better is the precision with which we vex each other” (29).5

It is important to note that the validity and reliability arguments presented by this heuristic are negotiations, rather than applications, of disciplinary approaches to these concepts. For instance, the validity argument is
consistent with the conception of validity in the NCTE-WPA *White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities*, which in turn relies on the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education’s definition of validity in its 1999 *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*: “Validity refers to the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores entailed by proposed uses of tests” (American 9). But it is inconsistent with the more traditional but still widely held notion that validity represents the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure (see Huot, O’Neill and Moore, 503-509, on the persistence of this notion in our field). At the same time, it complicates the white paper’s construction of reliability as the provision of “consistent results, no matter who conducts the assessment.” Instead, the heuristic is more in line with the notion of reliability advanced by CCCC’s “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement.” While this statement contains no explicit mention of reliability, it insists that “[b]est assessment practice is direct assessment by human readers,” noting that while machine scoring “may promise consistency, [it] distorts[s] the very nature of writing as a complex and context-rich interaction between people.” The statement also indicates that best assessment practice gathers “multiple perspectives on a performance,” including those of peers, instructors, and students themselves. Like this statement, the heuristic presented here frames its reliability argument in terms of richly contextualized, collaborative judgments rendered by diverse human interpreters with a rich understanding of the context.

The heuristic also follows the lead of both of these professional documents in valuing assessments that are “appropriate” and “fair.” But while it basically adopts the NCTE-WPA’s understanding of “appropriate” assessment as “fit[ting] the contexts and decisions that will be made based on it,” it goes beyond that statement’s definition of “fair” as “provid[ing] an equal opportunity for students to understand the expectations, roles, and purpose of the assessment [and] guard[ing] against any disproportionate social effects on any language minority group” to include affirmation of cultural and linguistic difference as well as attention to labor practices.

Similarly, the heuristic is influenced by Patricia Lynne’s work. Its emphasis on *purpose* is consistent with her understanding of “meaningful” assessment as “conducted for specific and articulated reasons” (15). And though the heuristic does not explicitly use “ethical” as a criterion—mainly because that notoriously vague and slippery term might be a rhetorical liability in some local contexts—it does seeks to address “the broad political and social issues surrounding” the assessment (118) and incorporates her thinking into the criteria of “fair” and “just.”
The point is, this heuristic—indeed any such heuristic—reflects an interpretation and a negotiation of disciplinary values and an argument for that interpretation and negotiation. Some writing programs will choose to follow Lynne’s lead and reject “validity” and “reliability” as key criteria, others will be committed to or will feel compelled to use them, and still others will invoke them without using them explicitly, as the sample heuristic does. This decision will depend both on local considerations and on how convincing program participants find Lynne’s argument that these terms cannot operate coherently outside of an “objectivist paradigm.” In any case, because they are locally adapted, validation heuristics are flexible enough to accommodate a variety of programmatic assessment values and approaches.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, our disciplinary presumption in favor of the local is overmatched by a more general presumption against it: “local” equates in many people’s minds to chaos, a free-for-all. As Broad notes, our “home-grown, do-it-yourself” paradigm competes with attractively packaged “fast-food-style” offers by commercial testing corporations “to make assessment faster and simpler by cutting it off from the rest of our work as educators” (2). Standardized testing continues to make in-roads in higher education, and upper administrators, policymakers, and the general public continue to imagine faculty and students as targets of assessment rather than generators of it. In fact, standardized tests are presumed to be more valid and reliable precisely because they are created outside the local context. In the wake of the Spellings Commission’s attack on the “complacency” and “recalcitrance” of the professoriate, higher education policy leaders have adopted accountability systems (such as the Voluntary System of Accountability) that rely on standardized tests (Schneider in Association), assessment vendors have piled on by calling into question faculty’s assessment capacity (see, e.g., Hersch; Dwyer, Millett, and Payne), and both nonprofit and for-profit assessment companies have redoubled marketing of their off-the-shelf wares (see Hutchings). In this context, local assessment is a hard sell. We need to demonstrate that our assessments—whether directed self-placement, dynamic criteria mapping, eportfolios, learning records, etc.—are of high quality. We need to show that there are multiple ways to achieve high assessment quality. And we need to do so on our terms, framed in arguments congruent with our local and disciplinary values.

The advantage of using validation heuristics for this purpose is that they provide a useful method for internal, formative review while offering an accessible and persuasive reporting format. These heuristics may be used
by individual programs to educate and edify their various audiences. For example, I used the heuristic here as an invention activity to generate arguments to university administrators that we ought to move away from the existing placement program and toward a version of directed self-placement (see the appendix). Though the heuristic reveals the lack of quality of the assessment we were using—a possibility we all must prepare for—it gave our program an opportunity to articulate our values and bring our practices more in line with them. In addition, administrators were quite pleased to learn that the Writing Program had conducted such a thoughtful, careful review of its own assessment. So another advantage of using such heuristics is that they demonstrate an incontrovertible professional commitment. This suggests that we needn’t approach assessment validation as a PR endeavor; instead, we can and should undertake serious reviews that reveal both the strengths and the weaknesses of our assessments. The purpose of using validation heuristics is to inquire into the quality of our assessments in order to improve them.

As I have suggested, such heuristics may be used by groups of programs that desire a comparative look. But even then, the heuristics don’t lend themselves to ranking or standardization because they rest on the notion that local assessments can be shown to be of similar quality despite—actually, because of—their differences. This kind of inter-institutional evaluation is criterion-referenced, not norm-referenced. It bypasses the kinds of insidious rankings of radically dissimilar programs and institutions that issue from standardized tests in favor of contextual portraits that include data on student learning as well as information about the quality of the assessments used to generate those data. Such a move should gladden the heart of even the cold consumer who rules accountability’s cold calculus.

Notes

1. This list is based on Brian Huot’s earlier formulation in (Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning; the authors added the final principle to Huot’s original list.

2. In addition to the scholars cited here, see Barlow, Liparulo, and Reynolds; Reinheimer.

3. Parkes identifies a set of “components” of a reliability argument, but they are too confined to a technical understanding of reliability to be borrowed wholesale by WPAs. They are: “1. A determination of the social and scientific values… most relevant to the scenario at hand. 2. Clear statements of the purpose and the context of the assessment. 3. The definition of a replication in the particular
assessment. 4. A determination of the tolerance or level of reliability needed. 5. The evidence. 6. The Judgment: Putting it all together” (6).

4. In this article, I use the term “validation” advisedly. It is a term of controversy in our field because it implies that “validity” is our master term. While some of us (most notably Huot) accept this premise, others (most notably Lynne) do not, as I discuss later in this article. When I use “validation,” then, I mean, broadly, inquiry into and reporting on assessment quality.

5. Thanks to Matt Noonan for directing me to this quotation.

6. Huot, O’Neill, and Moore suggest, following Michael Kane, that most validation research generated by testing companies has “a confirmationist bias” (Kane qtd. in Huot et al. 507). WPAs have the opportunity to conduct more rigorous, thorough, and honest validation research on their own assessments. We might also gain insight, and rhetorical advantage, by applying our validation heuristics to standardized tests.

Works Cited


**Appendix: Sample Profile**

*Note:* This sample is intended to be illustrative. It was not composed in the ideal (i.e., collaborative) manner described in this essay, and so it must be considered hypothetical. Moreover, as one reviewer of this article rightly noted, it does not include the kind of empirical data one would ideally
include in a serious validation activity. However incomplete, this profile demonstrates how validation heuristics may be used to evaluate extant assessments against a program’s theoretical rationales, invent arguments that support or challenge the current assessment, and lay the conceptual groundwork for new assessments. Finally, this sample is not meant to function as a criticism of anyone involved in the profiled assessment, which was created in response to an institutional crisis. Indeed, the assessment suffers under the scrutiny of the writing program’s strong, well-conceived theoretical rationales.

A. Briefly describe the writing program, including curricular and instructional goals, institutional constraints and opportunities (e.g. resources issues, labor conditions, professional development offerings), and student and teacher demographics. Feel free to append relevant documentation.

Our First-Year Writing Program (FYWP) consists of four courses: Introduction to College Writing, College Writing, and versions of these two courses for English Language Learners (ELLs). The two introductory courses (one for native speakers and one for ELLs) are credit-bearing, but do not fulfill the university’s first-year writing requirement. Students placed in these courses subsequently must take and pass either College Writing or the ELL version of College Writing to fulfill the requirement. We run approximately 150 sections of these courses per year staffed by a diverse corps of instructors, including TAs, part-time lecturers, and full-time lecturers. Their respective pay rates are appended [not included in this sample]. Instructors receive some initial and ongoing training (workshops and meetings), but the latter offerings are limited. The FYWP, located in an English Department, has no independent budget. All first-year writing courses use Bartholomae and Petrosky’s *Ways of Reading*, though instructors usually supplement the textbook with other texts in various genres and media. Our focus is on critical reading and writing of academic and multimedia essays. Students are asked to locate their own ideas in the context of scholarly and public conversations on complex topics. Classes are conducted in a collaborative workshop setting, and students are asked to compose multiple drafts of each essay. Their work culminates in reflective portfolios that include polished essays totaling 6000-7000 words. See attached Learning Goals [not included in this sample].
B. Briefly describe the assessment and its relationship, if any, to other assessments conducted in the program. If this assessment is part of an overall assessment plan, append the plan.

The assessment under review is a diagnostic exam conducted for placement in the four courses described above. Almost all students are initially placed in College Writing. On the first day of class, all students in required first-year writing courses receive a prompt, typically involving a short passage from the Introduction to *Ways of Reading* and a question that asks them to interpret the passage and apply it to their own experience as readers and writers. (See attached sample prompt [*not included in this sample*].) The prompt calls for a detailed, coherent essay composed in class and passed in to the instructor. Students are given the class period to compose their essays, though many of them do not use the entire allotted time. After class, the instructors read the essays and identify any students whom they believe would be better placed in another course: either an introductory course or one of the ELL courses. These essays are shared with a Writing Program (WP) administrator, who conducts a second read and either confirms or rejects the instructor’s placement recommendation. The English Department staff reassigns students who are placed out of College Writing. Every effort is made to effect these placements during the first week of classes. There is no official appeal mechanism. This placement assessment is not, at this time, tied to an overall programmatic assessment plan.

C. Answer the following questions about the assessment under review.

1. *Meaningful:*
   - What are the purposes of this assessment? What are its intended uses?
   - How were these purposes arrived at? Who formulated them?
   - Why and to whom are these purposes significant?
   - How were these purposes made known to students and teachers?
   - How does the content of the assessment match its purpose?

   The purpose of this diagnostic exam is to place students into the writing course in which they are most likely to succeed. It was implemented several years ago as a stopgap after a summer placement exam was defunded. (University administrators determined that the summer placement mechanism, in which WP instructors read and made placement decisions before the semester began, placed too few students out of College Writing to justify the cost, which mainly consisted of hourly pay for readers.) WP adminis-
trators feel they did not have much time to plan or pilot this exam, and as a result, it has always had an *ad hoc* dimension to it. They have felt uneasy about the exam on several counts (holding it on the first day of classes, its impromptu nature, the use of one writing sample to make an important placement decision, etc.), but they have not had the time or the resources to design and implement a viable alternative.

Placement is significant to all parties involved. Students who are placed into a lower-level course must take (and pay for) two courses to fulfill their requirement. On the other hand, students who are unprepared for the rigors of College Writing may benefit from an extra semester of writing experience and instruction and may well fail College Writing if they are not placed out of this course. Placement out of College Writing also impacts students’ schedules, and this happens after the semester begins. Similarly, the Writing Program must adjust to last-minute shifts in enrollment. WP administrators and instructors also have an interest in providing students with the most appropriate instruction. Students’ advisors must work to accommodate changes in students’ schedules. The university as a whole is impacted by these shifts in enrollment (and the attendant tuition implications), and its leaders too are invested in providing students with the most appropriate instruction.

Students are given no advance warning that the diagnostic exam will take place on the first day of classes, though information about the exam is provided on the WP website. The purpose of the placement procedure is described to them by their instructor before the exam begins. Instructors are provided the prompt and procedure, including criteria for evaluating the essays, before the semester begins. No formal on-the-spot norming is offered; instead, this assessment is influenced by William Smith’s “expert reader” model, in which teachers are essentially “trained” by their experience teaching the course into/out of which students are being placed. The exam is frequently discussed at workshops and meetings, however.

The content of the exam—a short passage from *Ways of Reading* and a question about students’ own reading and writing experiences—is meaningful in the context of courses in the program, as they use that textbook. The WP administrators have worked hard to design prompts that would encourage students to write about their reading and writing experiences in the context of the goals of the writing course. Instructors find that the diagnostic essays provide them information about their students and help prompt discussion about the purposes and goals of the course.
2. **Appropriate**

- How is the assessment suitable for this context, these participants, and its intended purposes and uses?
- How does the assessment reflect the values, beliefs, and aspirations of the participants and their immediate communities?

While the content of the exam may be meaningful in the context of the FYWP, the testing conditions are not appropriate to this context. Students are asked to write impromptu essays on topics they have not chosen in a timed environment without the benefit of research, sustained reflection, or extensive drafting and revision. The FYWP values research, reflection, and writing process. It also values supportive communities of writers, which is difficult to establish after the first-day exam puts teachers and students into an immediate evaluative relationship.

3. **Useful**

- How does the assessment help students learn and help teachers teach?
- How does the assessment provide information that may be used to improve teaching and learning, curriculum, professional development, program policies, accountability, etc.?
- Who will use the information generated from this assessment and for what purposes?

It is not clear that the exam has learning benefits for students; indeed, it may send the wrong message to students about what their writing course will entail and what is valuable about writing. Again, the information provided by the essays may be of some pedagogical use to instructors early in the courses. WP administrators also have used this procedure to gather information about, and to prompt discussion on, how teachers read student writing.

However, the information provided by this assessment has not been used systematically by the program or the university. It would be possible to run correlations between placements and indicators of students’ preparation (high school GPA, SAT/ACT or TOEFL scores, etc.) or the grades they eventually receive in their writing courses. However, no such analyses have been undertaken. It would be possible to determine if any groups of students fared particularly poorly on the diagnostic. This analysis has not been conducted, either. It would be possible to examine placement trends over time in order to plan for course enrollments. This has been done in a loose way, but not formally. These analyses have not been conducted in a serious way.
way because institutional data have proven difficult to obtain by busy WP administrators and because those administrators have had no alternative at hand should the analyses prove the diagnostic to be problematic.

4. Fair

- How does the assessment ensure that all students are able to do and demonstrate their best work?
- How does the assessment ensure that cultural and linguistic differences among teachers and students are recognized, valued, and given voice in the assessment and in the teaching practices it encourages?
- How does the assessment contribute to the creation or maintenance of appropriate working conditions for teachers and students? How does it ensure adequate compensation and/or recognition for the labor required to produce it?

The diagnostic does not ensure that all students are able to do and to demonstrate their best work; it provides a limited snapshot of their ability to perform a particular kind of writing—short essays on assigned prompts—under specific constraints. Writing assessment experts agree that high-stakes decisions—for some students, taking an extra class is high stakes—should not be made on the basis of a single piece of writing (see for example CCCC’s “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement”).

Students whose first or strongest language is not English and students with disabilities may be put at a particular disadvantage by the testing conditions. Again, we do not know if the instrument demonstrates a consistent bias against particular groups of students. We do know that some instructors are quick to identify variations from standard edited American English as errors and that some consistently nominate ELLs for placement out of College Writing even when the essays are strong apart from typical minor errors we encounter in ELL writing.

Neither instructors nor students were involved in the design of the diagnostic, which was formulated quickly by WP administrators in response to a funding decision by university administrators. No formal surveys have been conducted, and no recommendations have been solicited, from either students or instructors, but judging by anecdotal evidence, it does not seem to WP administrators that the exam enjoys wide support.

The summer placement procedure paid WP instructors for reading essays and making placement decisions. Full-time and part-time instructors, always financially strapped, counted on this summer pay. The first-day diagnostic reassigns this work as a teaching duty conducted during the
first week of classes. For instructors who are already not highly paid, this extra labor, in addition to provoking general anxiety, erodes staff morale. Though a good deal of labor goes into the assessment—both by the WP administrators who design it and the instructors who implement it—it costs the university nothing.

5. Trustworthy

- How are the assessment results arrived at and by whom?
- How does the assessment ensure that these results represent the best professional judgment of educators?
- How does the assessment ensure that the results derive from a process that honors articulated differences even as it seeks common ground for decisions?

Under the “expert reader” model, most student essays receive one reading. This seems defensible, given that Smith’s studies found very high reliability among teachers of the same course (90-96%), even without any on-the-spot formal training or norming (198). However, the WP has never sampled essays, as Smith did, to determine agreement rates. Nor has it systematically gathered data on agreement between instructors and the administrators who conduct second reads.

Instructors are provided with a set of criteria (formulated by WP administrators) for evaluating the essays and a sheet on which they record the rationale for their judgment. In practice, these sheets are little used and decisions are generally arrived at through conversation between instructors and program administrators. These conversations tend to be thoughtful and text-based (i.e., grounded in a close reading of the student’s essay), and they are aimed at rendering shared professional judgment about the student’s likelihood of success. The WP administrator assumes the role of final arbiter. Occasionally, the administrator is convinced by an instructor’s reading or vice versa. Interpretive differences are not quashed, but nor are they generally given full voice, given the vagaries of the structural hierarchy.

6. Just:

- What are the intended and unintended consequences of this assessment—for students, teachers, administrators, the program, the institution, etc.?
- How does the assessment ensure that these consequences are in the best interest of participants, especially students and teachers?
The primary intended consequence for this assessment is that students are placed in the courses in which they are most likely to receive the most appropriate instruction and to succeed. Secondarily, instructors receive useful information about students and a place to start class discussions early in the semester. It is not clear that the assessment succeeds in ensuring the primary intended consequence; no data have been systematically collected to demonstrate that students are properly placed. Anecdotal evidence supports the achievement of the secondary intended consequence; that is, instructors regularly describe using the diagnostic essays for pedagogical purposes in the first couple weeks of class.

The unintended consequences are legion, including the sacrificing of instructional time—on the first day of classes—to testing; the immediate establishment of an evaluative relationship between instructors and students; significant anxiety for students and instructors alike; last-minute disruptions in students’ schedules; the sending of a false message about what the program values; and additional labor for poorly paid instructors and program administrators during the first week of classes. All of these unintended consequences are inherent in the design of the assessment.

D. In light of this review, what changes, if any, do you plan to make to this assessment?

Though WP administrators, instructors, and students generally have done their best to make this assessment meaningful, we view it as falling short on all the quality criteria that matter to our program. For this reason, we are abandoning it. After conducting research on various placement assessments in use around the country, the Writing Program Committee, which consists of representatives of the various groups of instructors in the program, believes we ought to consider re-instituting the summer placement procedure. In the meantime—that is, next year, while we pursue possible resource avenues—we will pilot a procedure we are calling “guided self-placement.” This procedure is a modified version of “directed self-placement,” a mechanism currently in use at a wide range of institutions (for information on DSP, see http://faculty.gvsu.edu/royerd/dsp/). In our version, students familiarize themselves with our offerings, conduct a self-assessment, and, in consultation with the advisors, place themselves into one of the four first-year writing courses. In advance of the first day of class, they write a short essay in which they describe their prior experiences with writing and reading and explain how these experiences led to their current level of confidence and competence in writing. These essays will be col-
lected and reviewed by instructors who, in consultation with WP administrators, will make placement recommendations. These recommendations are not binding, but we will encourage students and their advisors to take this professional advice seriously. See the attached “guided self-placement” flyer for students and the Frequently Asked Questions sheet for advisors [not included in this sample].

Though guided self-placement does not overcome all the weaknesses of our diagnostic exam, and while we will continue to explore other options as we pilot this one, we view it as more consonant both with our programmatic values and the values of our discipline, rhetoric and composition. It is a vast improvement over the diagnostic exam. It doesn’t require students to take a high-stakes test on the first day of class. It doesn’t require teachers to sacrifice their crucial first day of instruction. It doesn’t require students to write under testing conditions that don’t correspond to the conditions under which they produce writing in our courses. It doesn’t involve the English Department staff in changing students’ schedules. Instead, it asks students to take responsibility for their education while providing them guidance; allows teachers and students to form a teaching-learning relationship from the first day of class; asks students to produce a piece of writing under more natural conditions; continues to use the expertise of teacher-readers; and involves students, teachers, and advisors working together in the best interest of students.

As we implement the guided self-placement procedure, we will gather and analyze various kinds of data: feedback from instructors and students (via surveys and interviews); percentages of students accepting vs. rejecting placement recommendations; agreement rates between readers (we will select a sample for second reads as well as document the agreement rates between instructors and administrators); correlations between placement recommendations and writing course grades; correlations between our placement recommendations and various indicators of student preparedness (high school GPA, SAT/ACT/TOEFL scores, etc.); analyses designed to reveal differential impact of certain groups of students; trends in placement recommendations and acceptance/rejection of these recommendations (assuming we continue to use the procedure over a period of some years); and more. We will also build a database of students’ essays about writing, as we anticipate they will provide a treasure trove of valuable insight into students’ writing and reading experiences.

Works Cited


Toward Rhetorical Source Use: Three Student Journeys

Cynthia R. Haller

Abstract

This case study investigates how three students in an upper-division research writing course incorporated sources in their research papers. The student who used source material to perform a variety of argumentative functions established a more rhetorical argument than the two who used source material solely as data, or evidence. Differences in students’ argument structures paralleled differences in their formulation of research questions, the nature of the sources they selected, and their engagement with their sources. Findings suggest that disciplinary sources can facilitate construction of rhetorical argument but may interfere with argument development, when unfamiliar or difficult enough to hinder comprehension. Results provide direction for how faculty and writing program administrators can facilitate more rhetorical use of sources, especially as students begin to engage disciplinary discourses. Additionally, findings indicate that further research on academic reading and student source use can enhance theories of academic literacy development.

Introduction

As students develop academic literacy, they learn to read and respond to texts as authored, contingent knowledge situated within various academic disciplines and communities. When they initially encounter unfamiliar disciplinary discourses, however, they may suffer slowdowns and setbacks in their writing. For many students, even learning to use written academic English can be like acquiring a new language (Horning). Accessing and using disciplinary texts, as Jamieson has described it, is like learning a second academic language. To be successful, students must move beyond competence in the academy’s “home language”—summarizing, understanding and responding to prior arguments; developing and stating claims; and
using evidence to support claims—toward competence in the “second languages” of their disciplines (89-90).

What does it mean to construct an academic argument using disciplinary discourse? What challenges do students face as they begin developing this capability? How can faculty and writing program administrators help them meet these challenges? To address these questions, I investigated how three students taking a junior-level research writing course incorporated sources in their arguments. Analysis using a Toulminian framework revealed differences in their handling of sources. The two students who used source material solely as data, relying on self-evident warrants to establish their conclusions, failed to establish a new knowledge claim supported by rhetorical argument. By contrast, the student who used source material to perform a variety of argumentative functions established a new knowledge claim with a rhetorical argument. Differences in students’ incorporation of sources paralleled differences in their development of research questions, selection of sources, and strategies for engaging sources. Findings provide guidance for how faculty across the curriculum and writing program administrators can scaffold the rhetorical use of sources, especially as students encounter unfamiliar, specialized texts. In addition, results suggest that further research on academic reading and student source use can help composition scholars build more robust theories of academic literacy development.

**Rhetorical Argument and Disciplinary Discourse: Developmental Dilemmas**

In preliminary stages of academic reading development, students tend to focus on textual content, structure and function of texts, paying little attention, if any, to rhetorical contexts (Haas and Flower). Additionally, they view the texts they read as autonomous and authoritative rather than authored and contingent. Successful upper-division students, however, begin to approximate the more rhetorical reading and writing practices of professional academics, including the rhetorical use of sources—that is, the use of sources to enhance authorial status and support contingent knowledge claims (Geisler, *Academic Literacy*; Penrose and Geisler). To build authorial status, or *ethos*, expert writers use sources to construct and display relationships with members of their fields (Rose, “What’s Love Got to Do with It?”). Additionally, they construct narratives of disciplinary knowledge that make a place for their own work, thereby generating authorial capital in the “disciplinary economy” (Rose, “The Role of Scholarly Citations”).
But how do academic writers use sources for *logos*, to construct arguments that support their knowledge claims?

In assessing the *logos* of academic arguments, two criteria are particularly important: reasonability (Thaiss and Zawacki) and novelty (Kaufer and Geisler). For understanding how reasonability is constructed, Stephen Toulmin’s argument framework is particularly useful, especially regarding assessment of field-specific, or disciplinary, argument.1

Toulmin maintains that practical reasoning, since it involves contingent knowledge, follows a jurisprudence rather than mathematical model. In this jurisprudence model, *claims* are supported by *data* (evidence). The justification for using data to authorize claims is supplied by *warrants*, or assumptions, which are often implicit rather than explicitly stated. Toulmin’s sample argument on citizenship is instructive here. Say that we know for a fact that Harry was born in Bermuda (*data*). Based on the *warrant* or assumption that people born in Bermuda are generally British citizens, the *claim* that Harry is a British subject is reasonable.

On its surface, this data-warrant-claim framework is consistent with a mathematical model of argument, with the warrant serving as the middle term of a logical syllogism. But practical reasoning, because it involves contingent knowledge claims, often requires additional structural elements. To convince audiences unfamiliar with the ins and outs of citizenship in Bermuda, the arguer might need to supply *backing* for the warrant—for instance, specific statutes and legal provisions showing that people born in Bermuda are generally British subjects. To pre-empt potential objections to the argument, the arguer might also need to acknowledge potential *exceptions*, or conditions which would make the data-claim connection untrue—for instance, if Harry has become a naturalized U.S. citizen. Finally, *qualifications* might be needed to identify the force, or probable validity, of the claim—for instance, what is the likelihood of Harry being a British citizen, given the constraints that hedge the claim? (Toulmin 92-97; see also Kneupper). As students begin to recognize the contingencies of their knowledge claims, they should begin to see the need for backing, exceptions, and qualifications in supporting those claims. Presumably, material from their sources will appear within all of Toulmin’s argument components.

In addition to being reasonable, academic arguments are expected to be novel. They should establish new knowledge claims, not simply reiterate what is already known (Kaufer and Geisler). Regarding the ability to generate new knowledge, Kellogg, a cognitive psychologist, identifies three stages of writing development. In the first stage, knowledge-telling, writers’ working memories are capable of generating only a mental representation of the ideas and knowledge that are in their minds; hence, such writers are
limited to directly recording, or “tell[ing],” those representations. Writers in the knowledge transformation stage, however, are able to hold two mental representations in working memory at once: a representation of their ideas and a representation of the text they are writing. As they compare these representations, they adjust both, which results in knowledge transformation. The knowledge-crafting stage, in which new knowledge is created, is usually achieved only by those who write extensively as part of their profession. It requires that writers hold three concurrent knowledge representations within working memory: their ideas, the emerging text, and an anticipated reader’s likely response.

As students learn to construct the novel rhetorical knowledge claims that characterize academic discourse, their engagement with disciplinary texts can be helpful. Reading disciplinary sources models rhetorical argument and supplies the field-specific content necessary to construct disciplinary arguments (Haas, “Learning to Read Biology”). Additionally, as students achieve higher levels of domain knowledge, their knowledge becomes more highly organized, which translates into the ability to respond more effectively to writing assignments (Langer).

On the other hand, disciplinary discourse can also, at least initially, hamper students in their writing. For one thing, early encounters with discipline-based writing confuse students’ understanding of writing criteria. Thaiss and Zawacki found that students who had limited experience with writing assignments and courses tended to believe the criteria for good academic writing to be consistent across disciplines. Those who had taken more courses and done more assignments, however, became aware that generalized writing criteria could not account for the diversity of new forms, genres, and styles they were encountering. This second group mistakenly ascribed the criteria for good writing to the idiosyncrasies of professors and/or courses. Only students who had had extensive experience with reading and writing within their disciplines and across a range of disciplinary contexts were able to successfully identify, explain, and engage discipline-based criteria for writing (109-10).

Unfamiliarity with disciplinary language can also disrupt student writing at the level of sentence generation, precipitating regression to overdependence on source vocabulary and syntax. Students frequently patchwrite when they first encounter unfamiliar discourses, using words and syntax that very closely resemble their source text. Whereas Howard originally characterized patchwriting as a kind of “first step” toward academic literacy (Howard, Standing in the Shadow of Giants), her later work has refined that view. Students, as it turns out, patch-write throughout their academic careers, even at the graduate level (Howard, “Plagiarizing (from) Graduate
Students”; Pecorari). Citing her own initial difficulties in grappling with Foucault’s “What Is an Author,” Howard argues that all writers, expert and novice alike, engage in patch-writing when they experience “cognitive difficulty” in dealing with “wildly unfamiliar material” (Howard, “The New Abolitionism” 90). The difficult discourses and domain knowledge of disciplinary texts, then, can affect students’ ability to make sense of and use those texts as sources.

Finally, unfamiliar disciplinary sources can have a negative effect on writers’ ability to build the multiple mental representations necessary to transform and craft knowledge. Since working memory is finite, a “knowledge-crafter’s” ability to hold three different mental representations at once is not achieved by an increase in working memory capacity. Rather, it is achieved by reductions in the cognitive demands of writing, which frees up working memory to handle multiple representations. According to Kellogg, cognitive demands of writing can be reduced in two ways: first, by writing practice, which routinizes procedural writing strategies such as planning, generating sentences, and reviewing one’s writing; and second, by an increase in domain expertise, which facilitates more efficient retrieval of content from long-term memory. Students’ lack of domain expertise, by contrast, increases their difficulty in accessing and using disciplinary texts. This increased cognitive demand interferes with their ability to use that content to construct the mental representations that enable knowledge transformation and knowledge crafting.

In the study reported here, funded in part by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, I investigate the challenges students face in using sources to construct arguments, especially as they encounter the unfamiliar, specialized discourse of their disciplines. Specifically, I explore how three students taking a junior-level research writing course incorporated source materials into their major project, a research paper.

STUDY CONTEXT

Academic research and writing, a required upper-division course at my institution, aims to initiate students into academic research writing within their chosen majors; accordingly, students are expected to develop a research question related to their majors; use reliable and relevant disciplinary sources to address the question; and write a report of their research using the genre of the academic research essay. Because the course is designed to be taken mid-career and specifically focuses on disciplinary discourse, it provides a good site for exploring source use during the transi-
tion between the “first language” of academic writing and the “second languages” of disciplines.

Research subjects for the study were solicited through course professors’ distribution of a flyer describing the project. Students were offered a stipend of $100.00 for their participation, and interested students were asked to return their contact information to me. I had originally hoped to be able to choose subjects randomly from a large number of volunteers, but only seven potential subjects responded. To ensure sufficient data collection, I therefore engaged the students I considered most likely to complete the course and the research study, based on a review of their previous course completion records. Maria, a first-semester junior, was a new transfer student from one of the community colleges in our university system. A Russian immigrant for whom English was a second language, she planned to major in occupational therapy, but she first needed to complete the pre-requisite research writing course. Maria had 16.5 credits of community-college level occupational therapy courses and was working part-time in a nursing home, where she was able to observe occupational therapists at work. Tasha was also a first-semester junior transfer student interested in occupational therapy, but she had not taken any preliminary courses at her community college, nor did she have relevant work experience. Marvin, the third student, was a first-semester senior from Nigeria majoring in information systems management. He had previously done some development of an Internet grocery ordering system while working at a supermarket.

The students submitted copies of all source material they had used for their papers, as well as all drafts of their papers. I interviewed each student twice, once during the early development of the research paper and once after completion of the paper. For the portion of the research study reported here, I analyzed the structure of three students’ arguments and how the students appropriated source material within those arguments. I then considered how the origins of the students’ research questions, the nature of the sources they consulted, and their approaches to source use compared with the quality of their arguments.

**Argumentative Structure and Source Use**

Using Toulmin’s model as a framework, I first determined the structure of each student’s argument, identifying the central claim, the data and warrants that supported the claim, and any backing, claim qualifiers, or exceptions the students included in their arguments. Guided by their in-text citations and my own examination of their sources and papers, I then analyzed how they had incorporated material from their sources relative to
these components. The argumentative structure of the student papers, along with boldface indication of where source material is embedded, is presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3. The analysis revealed differences among the students not only in the structure of the arguments they made, but also in how they incorporated source material into their arguments.

Maria’s Argument: Knowledge-Telling, Integrated Sources

Maria’s research question was, “How can people with memory problems improve their memories?” As shown in Figure 1, her central claim was that memory can be improved by engaging in certain practices, such as sufficient sleep, healthful eating, cognitive compensatory techniques, etc.

Analysis of the structure of the argument revealed that Maria used her sources exclusively as data. She selected and organized material from her sources into two groups: the first group identified causes of memory loss and the second described techniques proven effective in remediating memory. Two warrants authorize her claim. A first warrant, “Addressing the causes of a condition [memory loss] can improve that condition [memory loss],” readily justifies using the data on the causes of memory loss to support her claim. A second, “Techniques effective for remediating [memory loss] in one situation are likely to be effective in comparable situations,” justifies connecting her data about remediating techniques to her claim. Maria did not articulate these warrants within her paper. She didn’t have to; they are so self-evident they require no backing and can remain implicit. Both are based on generic, widely accepted commonplaces. Indeed, I have bracketed the words [memory loss] in the warrants to highlight the wide range of conditions and/or problems that might be easily substituted: water pollution, child abuse, poor grades, overheated engines, war, etc.

Maria integrated her sources successfully in her argument. Apart from a nursing dictionary entry she used to define memory early in the paper, all of the source material she included related to and supported the argument itself. In terms of argumentative function, however, her source use was limited: she used sources solely as repositories of data and evidence. Maria’s argument fails to rise above the level of knowledge-telling. All of the solutions to memory loss stated in her claim can easily be found in her source material.

Tasha’s Argument: Knowledge-Telling, Non-integrated Sources

Tasha’s research question was “How are Occupational Therapists using technology to help individuals compensate for cognitive and functional mobility limitations?” As shown in Figure 2, her claim was that therapeutic technologies can remediate physical and cognitive limitations.
Research Question: How can people with memory problems improve their memories?

**DATA (GROUP 1)**

Causes of memory loss include:
- Insomnia, alcohol, cigarettes, medication, dehydration (Cardoso)
- Stress (Norman)
- Hormones involved in being a new mother (Rhodes; personal experience)
- Diseases (work experience in nursing home)

**WARRANT 1**

[Since] Eliminating the causes of a condition [memory loss] can improve the condition [memory loss]

**CLAIM 1**

Eliminating insomnia, alcohol and medication abuse, smoking, dehydration, pregnancy hormone fluctuations, and diseases will improve memory loss

**DATA (GROUP 2)**

Techniques successful for remediating memory loss include:
- Exercise and Diet ("Age")
- Vitamins (Rhodes)
- Some kinds of tea ("Tea")
- Mnemonic strategies (North), e.g. peg-word systems (Mastropien and Scruggs) and chunking (Howe)
- Rehearsal, learning new skills, using a cell-phone organizer (no source cited)
- Assistance from occupational therapists in using compensatory techniques (Linsey and Lowell; observations from work experience at nursing home)

**WARRANT 2**

[Since] Techniques successful for remediating a problem in one situation [memory loss] are likely to be effective for comparable situations [memory loss]

**CLAIM 2**

Remediating techniques such as good exercise and diet; beneficial teas; mnemonic strategies like peg-word systems and chunking; rehearsal; learning new skills; cell-phone organization; and other cognitive compensatory techniques will improve memory loss in many situations

Figure 1 Maria’s Argument Structure
**Research Question:** How can occupational therapists use new technologies to help individuals compensate for physical and mental limitations?

**DATA**
Successful technology-based remediations for cognitive and physical limitations include:
- Wheelchair technology that improved the mobility of an ataxia patient (Gillen)
- Computerized aids that improved memory and provided task guidance for those with cognitive deficits (Maxon, Garland)

**WARRANT**
[Since] Technologies successful for remediating one problem [physical and cognitive limitation] are likely to be effective for remediating comparable problems [physical and cognitive limitations]

**CLAIM**
Technology based remediations for physical and cognitive limitations [e.g., wheelchair technologies, computerized aids, etc.] are likely to be effective for treating physical and cognitive limitations.

**UNINTEGRATED SOURCE MATERIAL**
- First body of section is a patch-written summary of two journal articles, including much material with no relevance to claim
- Second body section enumerates various health conditions and technological solutions, but no metadiscourse ties these health conditions to either physical or cognitive categories

Figure 2 Tasha’s Argument Structure
Like Maria, Tasha used her source material solely as data. She organized the source data into two groups, mirroring the two types of limitation she articulated in her claim: physical and cognitive. Tasha’s warrant, like Maria’s, is generic. It could be applied to any topic and it would still be self-evident. Her argument also remains at the level of knowledge-telling.

Tasha, however, was far less successful than Maria at integrating sources into her argument. She included much “loose,” unintegrated source material—that is, source material whose purpose within the argument is difficult or impossible to decipher. Specifically, the first two pages of the body of her paper are a patch-written summary of two journal articles. The next two contained some potentially relevant source material about how technologies have been used to treat client conditions, but Tasha did not tie this material to her claim; that is, she supplied no metadiscourse to guide the reader in understanding the material’s argumentative function. Thus, these four pages come across as outside of rather than integrated into her argument, interrupting its logic. Additionally, because Tasha used patch-writing extensively, strong echoes of external voices interfere with the strength and clarity of her own.

Marvin: Rhetorical Argument, Integrated Sources

Marvin asked “What role does information technology play in widespread obesity and the breakdown of traditional food culture?” (Figure 3). His argument was more rhetorically sophisticated than either Maria’s or Tasha’s.

For one thing, he showed a rhetorical awareness that knowledge claims are subject to dispute, explicitly positioning his own claim (that information technology contributes to obesity and the breakdown of traditional food culture) against what he presented as a rival claim (that McDonaldization is the primary cause of these breakdowns). For another thing, the nature of his warrants differs from that of Maria’s and Tasha’s. Marvin’s first warrant, that increased inactivity contributes to increased obesity, is not self-evident; but it would likely be widely accepted in U.S. society, where the public is currently inundated with messages about obesity prevention. Marvin, however, cites the warrant as located in two of his sources, which increases the credibility of the warrant even further. The second warrant, that the automations information technology is introducing into the food industry disrupt traditional food culture, is field-specific, that is, dependent on disciplinary knowledge—in this case from both information systems and food culture studies. Marvin treats this second warrant as one for which his readers will need backing, which he supplies from his sources. Finally, Marvin adds an exception to his claim, which neither Maria nor
Research Question: What role does information technology play in the widespread obesity and breakdown of traditional food cultures generally blamed on McDonaldization and the fast-food industry?

DATA GROUP 1
- Information technology [computer use] contributes to increased inactivity (Weight Control Information Network; the Thailand Nation)
- Information technology [Internet food ordering] decreases activity by decreasing trips to the market

DATA GROUP 2
Information technology is automating the food industry:
- It creates options for on-line food ordering (Batcheldor; supermarket work experience)
- Efficient Consumer Response (ECR) and other automated business systems enable the food industry to adapt better to consumer demand and reduce costs (Gill)

WARRANT 1
[Since] Increased inactivity contributes to increased obesity and other health problems (Weight Control Information Network; the Thailand Nation)

CLAIM 1
McDonaldization (Fischler) is not solely responsible for observed increases in obesity (CDC): information technology contributes to obesity as well.

WARRANT 2
[Since] Information technology’s automation of the food industry disrupts traditional food culture

CLAIM 2
McDonaldization (Fischler) is not solely responsible for the disruption of traditional food culture: information technology contributes to this disruption as well.

EXCEPTION TO CLAIMS
[Unless] the power of information technology as an educational tool is harnessed to support healthful eating and traditional food culture (Koeppi and Robey)

WARRANT 2 BACKING
- ECR compromises freshness of food because food inventory must be altered or genetically engineered to produce pre-set shelf life levels (no source listed)
- ECR and other automated food systems are profit-motivated, not ethically motivated, so they don’t consider quality of life issues related to food systems (Batcheldor; Gill)
Tasha did. Specifically, he acknowledges that information technology can contribute to healthful eating and positive food culture when it is used for education about nutrition, exercise, and health.

Marvin fully integrated the sources he used into his argument. Additionally, his claim transformed the knowledge in his sources. The source material he cited as data demonstrated that information technology increases inactivity and automates the food culture; to get from there to his claim, he established and backed two field-specific warrants, the first connecting inactivity to obesity and the second connecting information technology’s automation of food systems to disruptions in traditional food culture. There’s little new in the data or warrants themselves, most of which are taken directly from sources; however, Marvin’s functional use of some of his source material as warrants transforms the data taken from other sources into a new knowledge claim.

Marvin’s argument stands out from Maria’s and Tasha’s in three ways. First, it makes a new knowledge claim. Second, it is structurally more complex, requiring employment of almost the full range of Toulmin’s argument components (only a qualifier is missing from the argument). The third difference, however, is perhaps the most intriguing. Functionally, Marvin incorporated his source material within a wider range of argument components than either Tasha or Maria. This broad dispersion tightened the bonds between his sources and his argument. His source material is embedded more completely into his argument; but one might also say that his argument is embedded more deeply into his sources. In other words, Marvin, unlike Maria and Tasha, inhabits his sources as a rhetorical partner, rather than simply sampling them for facts and evidence.

Research Processes: Questions, Source Selection, and Source Engagement

How did these differences in the students’ arguments correlate with differences in their research writing processes? While it’s impossible to ascertain causal relationships between writing processes and products, it can be helpful to compare the two to identify how specific writing processes are implicated in product characteristics. Since framing a research question, selecting source materials, and reading and analyzing sources can all be expected to influence the development of a research argument (and also vice versa, given that writing is a recursive process), I analyzed what students said about how they performed these processes.²
Research Question Formation

In the interviews, I asked students about how they had arrived at their research questions. Maria tracked the origin of her research question, (“How can people with memory problems improve their memories?”) to a personal issue: her own memory problems after the birth of her son. She also cited the pragmatic goal of improving her own memory as a primary motivator of her interest:

Well, um, at the time when I gave birth to my son, like, before and after my pregnancy, I saw symptoms of a loss of memory, such as, you know, I couldn’t remember my appointments... And I noticed for the first time, that I’m doing bad in my classes, and I’m weak, my brain is very weak, and I’m like, what’s the problem with me, you know? … I want to go to do research on this, so, before I did research on this, and then, all of a sudden, I had Writing 303, she’s like, you can use any topic. So I was like, I want to go deeper into this, you know, cause it’s a very interesting topic.

Tasha became interested in her research topic through a newsletter for prospective occupational therapy students, which she had picked up in the department office while looking for information about the major:

And one of the questions that [the newsletter] asked, or answered...was how OT overcomes, coming into new technology, and how, you know, it’s such a great benefit to the OT practice. So that made me curious and made me want to know what some of the new technologies advancements.... and then when [the teacher] said well, your career would be a good choice and she gave examples, well, it brought me back to that letter that had puzzled me, because, you know, the letter was brief and short, it didn’t go into detail what these new technology [sic] was, and then I remembered, oh, I would like to know more...

Marvin described his research question as emerging from classroom discussions of teacher-assigned readings and the teacher’s specific directives for topic choice. Marvin’s instructor, unlike Maria’s and Tasha’s, assigned three thematic readings about food at the outset of the course. She asked students to relate their own research in some way to the issues that emerged from class discussion of the readings. Marvin attributed his question to an amalgam of the class discussion on food and culture and his own knowledge of his academic major:
From the class, well, the main discussion was on food and culture, how they are interconnected, so then eventually we had to come up with our own research, the professor just said you might try to incorporate your major, so I just said come up with, you know, try and see how information technology contributes to food culture.

Maria described her question, then, as originating outside the academy; Tasha, within the academy but outside the context of the course; and Marvin, from within the context of the course itself—even, more specifically, the context of the course readings.

Source Selection and Engagement

Maria. Maria limited her source material primarily to items located through an Internet search rather than through library databases, even though students are expected to use those databases to locate discipline-based sources for their projects. When I asked Maria how she had located her sources, her response clearly indicated her desire to keep her workload to a minimum and her sources as simple and accessible as possible:

M: OK. I went on the Internet. Uh, the database, see because I don't want to go to libraries here and there, you know, it's a big thing. Then, what else? Uh…

INT: You mean, wait, you didn’t want to go to like, too many libraries?

M: OK, yeah, I didn’t want to go because me, I don’t have time, I have a family, it’s too much for me, and what else? York College, I went on the computer and I found the codes for the books for memories. So I went down and I saw some books here and there, some of them were not useful at all. Some of them were too deep, you know? But I want something in general, for personal [garbled] to read and understand them you know?…like, for example, I read this book, it’s about all types of memory, oratory memory, verbal memory, and then its says how the brain conducts it into this and this and that. This, I don’t think a person should know how the brain is connected, because there’s too much hard words in there.

Maria’s decision to limit herself to easily understood sources simplified the cognitive demands of her writing task. She did end up citing two scholarly journal articles and a nursing dictionary in addition to her lay
Haller / Toward Rhetorical Source Use

sources; but she primarily relied on lay sources, which meant she did not have to labor to interpret specialized source material. By avoiding the scholarly literature, however, she missed rhetorical debates of specialists regarding the causes and best treatments for memory loss, debates that might have increased her awareness of claims and counterclaims about improving memory loss. Though her resistance to specialized sources kept her sources more understandable, it kept her from becoming acquainted with disciplinary, rhetorical arguments. In her paper, Maria neither questioned nor criticized any of her source information on the causes and treatments of memory loss. She viewed and employed the content she gleaned from her sources as statements of fact, not propositions subject to debate.

Tasha used far more specialized sources than did Maria, moving beyond sources intended for a public audience to sources that were deeply embedded within narrower discourse communities. Ferreting out the rhetorical contexts in which her articles were embedded would have required a great deal of reader sophistication. For example, the first article she happened upon, “Rehabilitation Robotics in Europe,” was written neither for a public audience nor directly for occupational therapists, but primarily for engineers and politicians (Dallaway, Jackson, and Timmers). Published in an IEEE journal and co-written by two Belgian robotics engineers and the “Directorate General XIII of the European Commission,” the article is a long report summarizing European technological research in rehabilitation robotics. In particular, the authors performed work funded by a specific initiative, TIDE. TIDE is an acronym for “Telematics for Improving the quality of life for Disabled and Elderly people;” however, the authors don’t bother to unpack what the acronym means when they bring it up. Instead, the reader has to either know the acronym already or know to look in the Appendix, which glosses all of the acronyms in the article. The TIDE initiative, according to the authors, was designed as “a precompetitive technology research and development initiative specifically aimed at stimulating the creation of a single market in rehabilitation technology in Europe” (2). Understanding this explanation requires the reader to know what is meant by both “a precompetitive initiative” and “a single market.”

Tasha told me this was the first source she located. Her introduction to rehabilitative robotics, then, was a 20-page techno-political article targeted at tracking technology development in Europe, with an eye to marketing concerns. The article does not address how such robotic technologies might be integrated into occupational therapy practice. Though Tasha did use material from the article in her research paper, she did not integrate it into her argument (see Figure 2). The first section in the body of her paper
includes what is essentially a patch-written attempt at sequential summary of the article, not a selection from it of material relevant to her claim.

Unlike Maria’s lay choices, Tasha’s specialized sources forced her to work her way through a complex web of rhetorical contexts threaded with highly specialized vocabularies and insider references. Even the sources from journals within her own field, that of occupational therapy, were complicated by differences in purpose and audience. One of the occupational therapy articles she examined, a case study of an ataxia patient’s use of powered mobility published in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy, was relatively accessible and included pragmatically useful treatment information. Another of her occupational therapy articles, however, a specialized research report published in the Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development, paid little attention to practical application.

The highly specialized discourses of Tasha’s sources may at least partially account for her tendency to patch-write throughout much of her paper. Even patch-writing was hard for her to do successfully, as shown by the following comparison of a passage from Dijkers and deBear to Tasha’s patch-written version (patch-written words and phrases are bold-faced in both):

Source passage:

Therapeutic applications were actually developed by Khalili and Zomlefer (7) who constructed a continuous passive motion robot; the Cambridge group which built a manipulator to assist in the developmental education of young children with severe physical impairments (6) and Engelhardt and colleagues, who piloted robots for range of motion of wrists and ankles. (Dijkers and deBear 2)

Tasha’s patch-written version:

The therapeutic application developed by Khalili and Zomlefer, constructed a motion robot to assist in the developmental education of young children with severe physical impairments, such as the use of robot [sic] for range of motion of wrists and ankles.

Tasha clearly did not recognize that the source passage summarizes discrete work reported by three separate author groups. In her patch-written version, she conflates the three independent research studies; and her text-splicing invented an imaginary technological device that does not exist. Her source’s dense citation of other sources appears to have confused her, and her passage reveals a writer at sea in an alien discourse. She attempted to
preserve her source’s meaning by patch-writing the author’s actual words, but her patch-writing actually distorts that source’s meaning.

This lack of success in incorporating sources is somewhat ironic. Unlike Maria, Tasha followed the teacher’s direction, choosing and using peer-reviewed, discipline-based articles as sources for her research. At one point during her initial interview, Tasha proudly explained to me that she had not only used the college’s library databases to find her sources, as instructed, but had also visited a nearby public, research-based library, where she worked closely with a reference librarian to locate specialized sources in medical and government databases. Doing what she was asked to do, however, may have hampered her research writing. Unlike Maria, who successfully musters material from lay sources to support her claims, Tasha is not able to control her sources in relation to her argument. Instead, she patch-writes extensively, producing a paper that is an intellectual quilt of disparate passages from her sources.

Marvin. Marvin consulted a variety of source types, both lay and disciplinary: general reference works such as American Economic History, trade magazines such as Information Week, and websites such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He also reported a sequential approach to his selection of sources that parallels Ballenger’s description of productive research process. Ballenger recommends that students begin research on a subject by reading general or specialized encyclopedias to get the big picture, which he calls “surveying the landscape” (42). The purpose of this survey is to understand where one’s own eventual research topic and question will be located within that landscape. When I asked Marvin how he had decided what sources to use for his research, he pulled out the stack of sources he had brought to the interview, pointing first to a general reference book, American Economic History:

Once again, I just, I was actually looking for if they [American Economic History] had any thing, economic history definitely IT would be included there, so my main interest was to find out if there was anything about food within economic history.

Interestingly, Marvin did not include the American Economic History in his final “Works Cited” list, which suggests that he did indeed use it as a means of locating his question rather than as a basis for his eventual argument.
Ballenger advises students to next “survey the electronic landscape,” doing Web searches and consulting search results sufficiently to develop “enough working knowledge to talk for a minute about it [one’s subject] without repeating yourself” (44). Marvin’s second step was similar, except that he surveyed the library databases rather than the Web:

Then, the rest of these [Marvin points to his collection of articles] from the databases, you actually access those, you know, websites, the database will give you a little abstract, just to describe what is included in that source, so I would just from that little summary, if that goes into the key word search that I’m actually looking into, then I would open the website.

Marvin described how this “survey” helped him progressively narrow his topic and question (Ballenger 50-55). His first database search resulted in thousands of hits; after playing around with multiple search terms, he eventually narrowed those hits down to a workable number of articles for possible use. To identify the articles he expected to be most useful, he looked for a concurrence of two terms in the article: information technology and inactivity. His method finally brought him to a focused, coherent body of work:

so eventually that led to my, you know, focus, like they, if all the sources played along with the same lines, I would just say, this is something I could use, this is something I could use. So, that’s how I eventually decided to focus my research on [computers and their contribution to inactivity].

Marvin also described principles he used for excluding some sources from consideration. He had focused primarily on the EBSCO database in his search, but had also experimented with some science and health databases. Though these databases had brought up interesting information about food and technology, his awareness of time constraints had led him to focus on the more relevant EBSCO search findings:

EBSCO was the best, and yet the science and the health-related website, they had good information, but they, I guess my time was low, I didn’t have much time to really dig deep, but most of them I mean, the best sites would just come up with basic information specific to you know, biology, or things like that.

Marvin’s approach to selecting his sources was more consonant with the productive approach described by Ballenger than were either Maria’s or Tasha’s. Marvin first sought to understand the “big picture” of the food and information technology landscape; he then zeroed in on more specific
sources as he narrowed and reshaped his original research question, eliminating tangentially related sources from consideration. Maria based her selection of sources primarily on accessibility, abandoning early her search for potentially accessible scholarly sources that might speak to her question. Tasha lacked discrimination regarding the specialized sources she found, trusting to the single criteria of “found in a database” rather than considering how her sources spoke to one another and “played along with the same lines.”

**Discussion**

Though findings of this case study cannot be generalized, they do suggest that academic literacy can be indexed to certain patterns of argumentation and source use. Accepted models of academic literacy development indicate that amount and range of experience with disciplinary sources enhances students’ ability to view sources as rhetorical and to incorporate those sources into rhetorical, discipline-based arguments (Geisler, *Academic Literacy*; Haas and Flower; Penrose and Geisler; Haas). My findings support that indication, and further suggest that how students develop research questions, select sources, and engage sources are implicated in their construction of arguments.

A complex argument like Marvin’s, which employs several of Toulmin’s structural components, is by its very nature likely to be more rhetorical than a simple data-warrant-claim argument. Backing, qualifiers, and exceptions are all structural elements that address the contingencies of knowledge claims. The presence of backing in an argument indicates the arguer is aware that a warrant is not self-evident; thus, he/she provides backing to buttress the warrant. The presence of exceptions shows the arguer is aware that a knowledge claim is valid only under certain conditions and/or in certain contexts. Finally, the presence of qualifiers indicates the arguer’s awareness of the force, or probability, of the claim. Presumably, students new to academic literacy would be less likely than more advanced students to see a need for and include backing, exceptions, and warrants in their arguments, since they view knowledge as authoritative and autonomous. Structurally, their source material will wind up primarily as data by default. As did Maria and Tasha, they will use sources primarily as repositories of what they view as factual information and use generic commonplaces as warrants. Students with increased academic reading experience, however, are exposed to disciplinary authors’ use of field-specific warrants, as well as their inclusion of backing, exceptions, and qualifiers to address the contingencies of their claims. They are also exposed to rhetorical debates within
the discipline, which reinforces the contingency of knowledge claims. With the dawning of rhetorical awareness, source texts begin to become useful not only as repositories of data, but also as fodder for more rhetorical components of argument.

As students learn to incorporate sources within a full range of argument components, they create a tighter, more complex weave between their source material and argument. If the sources are primarily discipline-based, distributing source use across argument components will embed the argument deeply within a matrix of disciplinary discourse. Such an argument is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle from its matrix of sources, since elements of that matrix comprise part of the argument itself. The student who constructs this kind of argument is more likely to be viewed as having a legitimate home in a discipline than a student who simply gleans bits of knowledge from the field, using stray pieces of information as data in generic arguments.

Engagement with disciplinary texts, however, also can complicate the construction of rhetorical arguments. As Kellogg has pointed out, domain content in long-term memory is readily accessible to writers steeped in domain knowledge. This quick access frees up space in working memory, making it more likely that they can maintain the multiple mental representations necessary for knowledge transformation and/or knowledge-crafting. Students’ immature level of domain knowledge, by contrast, will place increased cognitive demand on their working memories, adversely affecting their ability to generate and maintain multiple mental representations. In the case of student research papers, the “domain knowledge” needed for constructing a field-specific argument is also at a far remove, generally located less in their own long-term memories than in the “long-term memory” housed in their textual sources. Maria was probably able to tap into the “long-term memory” of her sources more efficiently than was Tasha because of the accessibility of her readings. Her Internet-based articles were accessible to a lay audience, whereas Tasha’s sources, predominantly specialized research articles, were more opaque. Neither Maria nor Tasha achieved knowledge transformation in their arguments, but it may have been for different reasons. In Maria’s case, the use of lay sources insulated her from rhetorical contingencies regarding the causes and treatments of memory loss. In Tasha’s case, insufficient domain knowledge may have compromised her ability even to “tell” knowledge.

In contrast to Tasha and Maria, Marvin’s access to disciplinary domain content and his rhetorical awareness were enhanced. First, class discussions of the readings on food and culture, by increasing Marvin’s familiarity with the articles’ content, increased the efficiency of his access to domain knowl-
edge relevant to his argument. Second, the “knowledge of the landscape” Marvin procured by reading background references enhanced his ability to contextualize his sources and his own writing within the fields of information technology and food studies. From the perspective of Kellogg’s model, Marvin’s more ready access to the domain knowledge in his sources would have freed up working memory, which could then be used to generate the multiple representations of knowledge necessary to structure a rhetorical, knowledge-transforming argument. His understanding of the overall landscape would have contributed to his understanding of how his claim fit into a field of alternative claims.

**Study Implications**

Findings of this study have implications for pedagogy, writing program administration, and composition research. Given the finite capacity of working memory, teachers must consider and address differences between the level of students’ disciplinary knowledge and the level needed to incorporate sources effectively in rhetorical arguments. With respect to writing in the disciplines, teachers need to be made aware that students’ observed inability to work effectively with disciplinary sources may be as much a function of domain expertise as writing capability. Faculty across the curriculum and writing program administrators can then collaborate to design programs that facilitate progression from using lay sources to engagement with disciplinary sources. Last, given the close relationship between source use and reading comprehension, theories of academic writing development need to be more fully informed by theories of academic reading development.

**Implications for Pedagogy**

Study findings suggest that the complexity of source readings should be taken into account when structuring writing assignments. The more deeply that readings are embedded in disciplinary networks and/or depend on prior domain knowledge, the more that instructors will need to provide scaffolding. Students, for instance, could be asked to summarize two difficult readings before being asked to write an essay comparing them. Class and group discussion work could be used to enhance understanding of the readings. Instructors might also consider conscious reduction of other cognitive demands of writing assignments to offset the difficulty of the readings. An assignment that asks students to evaluate and critique a reading, for example, is likely to be more cognitively taxing than one that asks them to write an abstract. Balancing cognitive demands of reading with cogni-
tive demands of writing doesn’t mean that instructors must “dumb down” course reading and writing. As Langer has pointed out, different types of writing assignments call upon different types of topic, or domain, knowledge: for some assignments, a broad knowledge of domain facts may be sufficient, whereas others require more hierarchical organization of domain knowledge. Readings that may seem out of reach because of students’ inability to incorporate them effectively into a cognitively difficult writing assignment may be workable with less difficult writing tasks. Similarly, students may be more adept at difficult writing tasks when using more accessible readings. Too little cognitive demand in reading or writing tasks may actually slow students’ progress toward academic literacy, since exposure to disciplinary discourse provides an essential basis for rhetorical reading and writing.

The study also underscores the complexity of rhetorical source use, providing direction for source use pedagogy. As others have already pointed out, rhetorical source use involves far more than teaching formatting and documentation conventions for quotation, summary, and paraphrase. Rose has successfully made a case for teaching the ethos of source use (in both “The Role” and “What’s Love”). This study suggests that teaching the logos of source may be in order as well. Some attention in composition courses to argument construction, and especially to the variety of ways sources can be incorporated into arguments, can help students understand how to position their claims against the claims in their sources; how to look out in their sources for material that indicates exceptions and/or qualifiers to their claims; and (though this may be more difficult to teach) how to employ some of the material in their sources as warrants, and/or as backing for warrants. Classroom discussion of how authors of course readings embed sources in their arguments can sensitize students to the full range of options for source use, thereby enhancing their ability to transform, rather than simply tell, knowledge.³

Changes in source use pedagogy, to be fully effective, need to be matched by changes in source use assessment. Assessments of student source use should consider not simply students’ adherence to or deviation from conventional forms of reference formatting, but also their skill in incorporating source materials into rhetorical arguments embedded in disciplinary discourse. Correcting formatting errors, without providing feedback on the relationship between students’ use of sources and their arguments, leaves the impression that good source use depends primarily on the placement of commas and periods.
Implications for Writing Program Administration

Writing program administrators should search for programmatic ways to articulate what students do with sources in first-year composition with what they do in advanced composition courses, other general education courses, and disciplinary coursework. Advanced composition courses can be designed to build on source use work in first-year composition. Additionally, though first-year composition courses and WAC/WID programs are often separately administered, WAC directors and first-year writing directors can collaborate closely on curricular and pedagogical issues relevant to source use.

With respect to general education courses, WAC directors have been highly successful in promoting writing-to-learn exercises. Promoting activities that support students’ development in rhetorical source use might be a next step. Many general education courses rely exclusively on textbooks, which usually present a discipline’s knowledge as if it were unilateral, authoritative, and noncontestible (Geisler, Academic Literacy; Angelil-Carter). Professors, however, could structure general education courses to wean students from exclusive consumption of textbooks, deliberatively giving them a taste of disciplinary discourse. Toward the end of the course, for example, students could be asked to read, discuss, and compare two accessible scholarly articles that offer diverging perspectives on a topic covered earlier in the course. This approach would give students exposure to the rhetorical discourse of the discipline while providing adequate scaffolding and classroom support.

Some might argue that such work would be a waste of both teachers’ and students’ time, since most students taking in a general education course will not be going on to study further in that discipline. Thaiss and Zawacki found, however, that students with high levels of disciplinary writing competence, however, can articulate not only the criteria for good writing in their own fields, but also how those criteria differ from criteria in other fields. Exposure to a variety of disciplinary discourses in general education courses, then, may actually further the development of students’ writing competence in their own disciplines.

Writing program administrators also need to be involved in discussions with faculty across the various disciplines to better ascertain their expectations regarding student source use. Contributors to Haviland and Mullin’s volume Who Owns This Writing? interviewed faculty and administrators in various disciplines to explore how views of intellectual property informed pedagogies of source use, source attribution, and plagiarism. Writing pro-
gram administrators can profit from similar conversations, both formal and informal, with colleagues across the disciplines.

**Implications for Composition Research**

The ability to incorporate source material effectively is intertwined with the ability to write rhetorically, and vice versa. Composition scholars would do well, therefore, to consider how research on academic reading speaks to theories of academic writing development. Some researchers in the field have made good headway relating students’ reading practices to their development of academic writing expertise (Geisler, *Academic Literacy*; Penrose and Geisler; Haas and Flower; Haas), but the bulk of reading research is currently housed in educational literature. Greater cross-fertilization of composition literature with educational literature may increase the robustness of theories of academic writing development. Additionally, when designing projects on academic writing, composition scholars can incorporate questions that deliberately extend knowledge about source use. Studies investigating discipline-based writing assignments might examine the types of sources and source uses called for. Studies of academic genres might examine the different stances toward and uptakes of sources common within the genre, and how students negotiate those differences. Projects on student research writing can include investigations of students’ source search and selection processes. Those examining the impact of preprofessional experiences (such as internships) on students’ academic writing ability can look specifically at how such experience may affect their ability to understand and use disciplinary sources.

More work needs to be done to understand fully the *logos* of source use in academic writing. A continuum of development in rhetorical source use might be established. Expert use of sources in argument need to be explored further and compared with that of students, using not only Toulmin’s framework but other approaches to *logos* as well. Of high importance is investigating the impact of 21st-century literacies on argumentation and source use, both within and outside the academy. How are sources used by students and experts for multimodal arguments? Have new forms of discourse changed the rules of argumentation and therefore the rules of source use? Cultural critics have noted that electronic communication, with its new modalities, is not well suited to the reading and writing of long, complex arguments (Carr). Have current shifts in communication practices altered the very fabric of academic argument? If so, how have source use practices been affected? And how should college faculty teach source use,
given that the character of academic, disciplinary discourses may be undergoing a sea change?

Addressing these and other questions about source use is foundational to informed pedagogies for reading and writing in the academy. To a large extent, successful academic writing depends on mining sources for knowledge and using that knowledge flexibly to construct new knowledge claims. Faculty, writing program administrators, and composition researchers can profit from a fuller understanding of these processes.

Notes

1 Toulmin’s is neither the only possible nor the definitive model of argumentation, but it is generally considered by rhetoric and composition scholars to be robust and well-suited for the analysis of rhetorical arguments. Its extensive use in first-year composition curricula and textbooks testifies to its relevance to academic discourse; it has also been set forth as a useful heuristic for constructing research reports (Booth, Colomb and Williams).

2 Self-reporting is always suspect, but I was not looking for accuracy concerning specific cognitive operations. Rather, I was interested in how students described their research process. To increase the likelihood that students would not deliberately mis-represent what they had done, I was careful not to signal which answers might be more “acceptable” than others. Responses that specifically went against what teachers had recommended, such as Maria’s admission that she didn’t use the library databases, suggest students were being honest about how they recollected their processes.

3 Students may even achieve a level of knowledge-crafting in their arguments; however, as Kellogg points out, this level is usually reached only by people who write extensively as part of their profession.

4 It is worth noting that two students in this study, Maria and Marvin, were able to use their work experience as knowledge sources in their arguments. Maria knew about the diseases that could cause memory losses from her work in a nursing home, and had observed occupational therapists using memory remediation techniques. Marvin’s supermarket experience with Internet-based grocery ordering helped him understand the implications of that form of information technology for grocery shopping.

Works Cited


Undaunted, Self-Critical, and Resentful: Investigating Faculty Attitudes Toward Teaching Writing in a Large University Writing-Intensive Course Program

Lori Salem and Peter Jones

Abstract

This article investigates attitudes toward teaching writing among a large group of faculty in the disciplines who teach in a writing-intensive course program. Attitudinal survey data was collected and analyzed using factor and cluster analysis techniques. The analysis revealed five clusters of faculty who share distinct beliefs about teaching writing. These results are interpreted in reference to previous research about faculty in WAC/WID programs, and also to large-scale survey research about faculty attitudes in higher education. We argue that faculty attitudes toward teaching writing are knitted into larger frameworks of beliefs about what it means to be a faculty member.

It is nothing new to say that writing across the curriculum programs depend on the willingness of faculty across the disciplines to reconsider and reshape their classroom pedagogy to make it more amenable to writing instruction. Eric Miraglia and Susan McLeod’s review of continuing WAC/WID programs found that faculty support was critical to the success of a program, and that “[v]irtually all WAC activities are [. . .] designed to encourage colleagues across the disciplines to make changes in their pedagogy [. . .]” (51). But persuading faculty to focus on and make changes in pedagogy is not easy, and it depends not only on the persistence of the WAC director, but also on the attitudes toward writing, teaching writing, and faculty life that faculty themselves bring with them.

Given the overarching importance of faculty attitudes in the success of writing programs, it is curious that the research in writing studies has not delved more deeply into investigating them. This is not to say that accounts of faculty attitudes don’t come up in our published literature—they do—
but faculty attitudes have generally not been the subject of sustained, methodologically rigorous research. Instead, when faculty attitudes are discussed, it is often in the form of anecdotal accounts of individual instructors’ behaviors and comments, especially accounts of faculty “resistance” to aspects of the writing program. Patricia Donohue’s “Strange Resistances” is a good example of this. She describes how faculty in her university showed resistance to the writing program by ignoring phone calls and emails, cancelling planned meetings, and falsely claiming to have made pedagogical changes in their classroom (34–35).

Such anecdotal accounts of faculty attitudes can have value in helping us discover common themes in our experiences across different universities. But they can also be very problematic when they aren’t checked and challenged by research because they can lead us to misread the nature and prevalence of certain faculty attitudes, especially “resistance.” And more problematically, there is a gap between describing what someone said or did (e.g. failed to return phone calls) and discerning their underlying attitudes and beliefs. It’s easy to assume that we know what attitude drives a faculty member to respond in a particular way, especially when we ourselves are involved in the interactions. But precisely because we are involved and interested parties, it is also easy for our interpretations to be biased by our own concerns and beliefs.

In their 1996 study of WAC programs, Barbara Walvoord, Linda Lawrence Hunt, H. Fil Dowling, and Joan McMahon locate the main source of our misinterpretation of faculty attitudes in a conflict of interest (3–7). When a WPA does research on a program that she herself directs, she will naturally want to demonstrate that the program and her leadership of it are effective. This creates a conflict when disciplinary faculty do not want to follow where the director is leading. It is difficult for a director to report openly and objectively on faculty beliefs when those beliefs are opposed to the pedagogies and practices that our field advocates, and when those beliefs are thwarting the programmatic changes that the director is trying to institute. But Walvoord and her coauthors also suggest that it is possible to minimize this conflict of interest by using research methods that decenter the WPA’s own agenda by explicitly grounding the investigation in faculty members’ ways of thinking (11–16). A recently published account of faculty in a writing in the disciplines program provides compelling evidence that this approach works. In Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines, Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki present a thorough and carefully researched analysis of faculty who teach in a WID program. Their research method explicitly addresses the complexities that arise when the researchers and their participants are colleagues in the same institution.
The result is a nuanced portrait of university writing instruction that centers around the influence of disciplinarity on faculty members’ attitudes toward teaching writing.

*Engaged Writers* offers testimony to the complexity of faculty attitudes toward teaching writing (and to the inadequacy of the notion of “resistance” to capture them), but it still leaves a gap in our understanding because it only addresses the beliefs of a small and selected group of instructors. Thaiss and Zawacki followed fourteen tenure-line faculty members, who were chosen because the authors knew them to be highly experienced and excellent teachers of writing (27). Thus, while we have an excellent understanding of the beliefs of the instructors profiled, we can’t assume that their beliefs are representative of the larger group of university faculty who teach writing.

In our own research, then, we bring to bear our experience and training in quantitative methods to investigate the attitudes of a large, nonselected group of faculty in the disciplines who teach writing-intensive courses. We created and administered a survey, and we used statistical techniques designed for analyzing attitudinal data. We interpreted the results of the study against the literature from composition studies about WAC/WID faculty. But to avoid a WAC/WID bias, we have also drawn on a body of research from outside composition studies: namely, the mostly quantitative analyses of university faculty attitudes that are produced by and aimed at researchers of higher education. This research—which uses national databases such as those at the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Center of Educational Statistics, among others—investigates faculty attitudes toward and satisfaction with a wide variety of aspects of academic life, from workload, to departmental interactions, to professional development, and more. Taken as a whole, this literature suggests that faculty members’ overall job satisfaction is influenced by a complicated set of ideas related to the fairness and appropriateness of their teaching, as they perceive it. Or, put another way, their overall professional satisfaction is bound up in what Mary Wright has called the “ambiguous” role of teaching in academic faculty lives (333). As we will see, the faculty in this survey reflected complex, and in some cases markedly contradictory, perceptions about teaching, and these shaped their attitudes toward writing instruction in ways that both challenged and surprised us.

Our goal, then, is to offer a map of the attitudes toward teaching writing that prevail across the whole range of faculty who teach in a writing-intensive course program, and to relate those attitudes to previous research about faculty attitudes, both in terms of teaching writing and in general. We investigate their attitudes with an eye toward understanding which beliefs are common, and which are rare, and how various ideas and atti-
tudes fit together. And we investigate whether aspects of faculty identity—gender, discipline, rank, and years of experience—correlate with particular attitudes about teaching writing.

The Local Context for this Research

The writing-intensive course program at Temple University, where this research was conducted, comprises a set of mostly upper-division courses that are taught by faculty in the disciplines for students in their own departments. All Temple students are required to complete two writing-intensive courses as part of the requirements for their major. In a typical semester, there are around 300 sections of writing-intensive courses offered.

At Temple, courses earn a writing-intensive (wcourse) designation when departments submit a proposal to the Writing-Intensive Course Committee, which is the faculty committee that oversees the program. The proposal includes a course syllabus, as well as other course related documents, and it must demonstrate that the course meets the writing-intensive pedagogy guidelines. Once the proposal is approved, department chairs may assign any departmental instructor to teach the course, provided the instructor uses the approved syllabus, thus the faculty who teach in the program can include instructors at all ranks. For the semester in which this research was conducted, approximately 35% of the wcourse instructors were tenure-line faculty, another 35% were fulltime non-tenure-line “teaching” faculty, and the remaining 30% included part-time instructors and teaching assistants. Some of the wcourse faculty have decades of teaching experience, while others are new to teaching, or new to teaching writing-intensive courses. Writing-related pedagogy seminars and other faculty development opportunities are sponsored by the Writing Center (which is the administrative home for the program) and also by the university Teaching and Learning Center. Participation in faculty development is voluntary, and in the semester during which this research was conducted approximately 20% of the faculty participated in development activities.

The Development and Implementation of the Survey

As Walvoord and her coauthors have suggested, an essential part of the project in researching WAC/WID must be to explicitly set aside what we presume to be important so that we can register the beliefs of faculty on their own terms. For this reason, our research began with a series of four, two-hour focus groups with faculty in the program. We recruited a total of twenty-five faculty participants who were representative of the overall wcourse faculty in terms of discipline, years of experience and employment
status, and we designed an open-ended script to allow their concerns to emerge. To ensure that faculty could speak freely, the groups were facilitated by a trained social science researcher who was neither associated with the writing program nor known to the faculty participants. The conversations were audio recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed thematically.

Three broad themes emerged from this initial analysis. First, particular aspects of writing pedagogy were of great interest to participants. Faculty in the groups spent a good deal of time talking about how they taught their classes, including how they handled particular aspects of teaching writing (to grade drafts or not, to use rubrics or not, to “stage” papers or not, strategies for encouraging substantive revision, the value or lack of value for peer review, etc.). Second, faculty voiced a variety of concerns related to training and competence in teaching writing. Some described concerns they had about their own performance as writing teachers, while others wondered about whether other groups of faculty (especially faculty who speak English as a second language, new faculty, and part-time faculty, etc.) were capable of teaching writing. Finally, faculty spent a lot of focus group time parsing the attitudes and commitments of the various stakeholders in writing-intensive courses. They discussed students’ commitment to learning to write, their colleagues’ and chairs’ understanding of and support for the course program, their own commitments to teaching writing, the university’s support of writing instruction, and so on.

Based on these focus group sessions, we designed survey questions to query instructors’ attitudes and beliefs about issues they raised. We also included a variety of demographic and descriptive questions, mirroring previous large scale analyses of university faculty attitudes toward teaching. We added to this a single question about respondents’ linguistic background, because that issue had been raised in the faculty focus groups. Finally, we included two open-ended questions in the survey. The first recognized that some faculty teach more than one writing-intensive course (e.g., they may teach one pitched at seniors and another pitched at sophomores). The question invited them to discuss the differences among the courses they had taught. The second invited respondents to add comments about anything they wished. (The complete survey can be found in the appendix.) The survey and our overall project were reviewed by our IRB office and considered exempt.

At the end of the spring 2009 semester, we sent emails to all 298 instructors who taught a writing-intensive course that semester. The email contained a link to the survey, which was available online at Surveymonkey. We received 140 responses, representing a 47% response rate. The response group was generally representative of the overall group of writing-intensive
course instructors in terms of gender, status, discipline, and years of teaching experience.

Attitudinal Survey Data and Factor Analysis

The simplest analysis of survey data involves nothing more than totaling up respondents’ answers to individual questions, and reporting the results as averages. But averaging the answers in this way masks the differences among respondents. If 50% of survey respondents checked “strongly agree” on a particular question, while the other 50% checked “strongly disagree,” the averaged results would suggest that the group is neutral on that point, whereas in fact they are polarized. Second, the averages approach treats each attitudinal question in isolation, whereas researchers who analyze attitudinal data recognize that attitudes toward individual issues are often linked to larger underlying beliefs that guide and pattern responses to groups of questions. Since our goal was to map the attitudes of a large group of faculty, we chose to perform a pair of statistical analyses—factor and cluster—that are designed to discover meaningful patterns and groupings among respondents.

A factor analysis starts with the premise that respondents’ answers to attitudinal questions may be linked to underlying beliefs (or “factors”) that are not directly queried in the questions but that guide respondents’ answers. The analysis works by looking for patterns in respondents’ answers to questions. When a statistically significant pattern emerges, the researchers review the questions to figure out what is the underlying belief or preference that links them and to name the factor accordingly.

The factor analysis of respondents’ answers to the attitudinal questions on our survey of uncovered five factors that defined faculty experience:

1. **Enthusiasm about teaching (or lack of enthusiasm).** Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that courses were worthwhile for students also agreed that teaching courses was worthwhile and fulfilling for themselves professionally. They also reported that they like teaching courses, and they disagreed that teaching courses was frustrating.

2. **Confidence in teaching ability (or lack of confidence).** Respondents who reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the assignments they created for their courses, also said that they were satisfied with how they responded to students’ papers, how they incorporated information literacy instruction into the class, and how they managed the time spent grading in the course. They also re-
ported being satisfied or very satisfied, overall, with their own performance as teachers of writing.

3. **Belief in the Fairness of the Workplace (or belief in the opposite).** Respondents who said that teaching a writing-intensive course meant that they were doing more work than their colleagues who didn’t teach such courses also reported that their other duties as faculty members suffered because of their involvement in wcourses. These faculty also disagreed that the university provided adequate support for wcourse faculty, and they disagreed that they received appropriate rewards for teaching wcourses. They disagreed that their workload was “fair” compared to colleagues who don’t teach wcourses.

4. **Belief that Grammar Instruction Belongs to the Writing Center (or belief that it also belongs to classroom instructors).** This factor was entirely related to the question about the Writing Center’s role in working with students on grammar. Respondents either agreed or disagreed that the Writing Center should be responsible for correcting grammar errors in students’ papers.

5. **Preference for Teaching Underprepared Students (or the opposite).** This factor was defined by a crisscross pattern in response to questions about student preparedness and teacher satisfaction. Respondents who disagreed that their students were well prepared for wcourses rated their own satisfaction with teaching the courses higher. And where faculty reported that students were well prepared, they rated their satisfaction with teaching wcourses lower.

**Cluster Analysis of Faculty Attitudes**

We performed cluster analysis to investigate how the five factors described here are combined and distributed among the faculty who responded to our survey. The analysis uses the factors described above as basis variables to identify clusters that have high internal consistency and that are significantly separated from other clusters. An individual respondent might be characterized by one or more of these five factors—for example, he would be strongly characterized by both the “enthusiasm” factor and the “confidence” factor if his answers followed both of those patterns closely, but only weakly characterized, or not at all, by the other factors if his responses didn’t follow the patterns. Our analysis revealed five distinct clusters—four with meaningful numbers of cases, and one that appears to contain a pair of “outliers.”
Cluster #1: The Undaunted Crusaders

Approximately 30% of the respondents were characterized by factors one, two, three, and five. They combined strong enthusiasm for teaching and a strong confidence in their own teaching ability with a negative view of the fairness of the workplace and of their students’ preparedness. They believe that teaching a writing-intensive course involves lots of work over-and-above a normal workload, work for which they are both uncompensated and unrecognized. Nevertheless, they are committed to teaching, they express a sense of personal responsibility to teach students how to write, and they are averse to simply “passing students on.” The Undaunted Crusaders report the highest level of overall satisfaction with teaching courses.

Students’ lack of preparedness looms large in the Undaunted Crusaders’ responses to the open-ended questions, and their comments are often framed in terms of students not meeting expected levels of skill and achievement. One wrote: “[E]ach wcourse I’ve taught, including the senior capstone, has an element of remedial work required just to get students up to speed.” Another wrote, “I teach seniors and I wonder how we can possibly graduate students who still can’t construct a sentence.”

For the Undaunted Crusaders, students’ lack of preparedness is often tied to the failure of other instructors—at the university and/or in secondary schools—to adequately address students’ development as writers. One respondent wrote:

Students do not learn how to write in high school anymore which forces us to have to teach them to write in addition to all of the other information required for the successful completion of the writing intensive course. It takes hours and hours to line edit their work. But if I’m not going to do it, who will?

This response is worth quoting at length, because it captures the whole logic of the Undaunted Crusaders:

As an adjunct teaching this course, and the amount of time and effort I exuded for it, I feel quite dissatisfied with the pay [. . .] I made the same amount of money teaching [a non-wcourse] last semester, which in terms of hours the courses are DRASTICALLY different. On the two major assignments I prepared for the students, the total grading time (drafts included) was well over 40 hours. [. . .] I believe I was quite thorough, and the grading could possibly have been done with less detail. However, that would have been at the cost of the
students’ development. [. . .] I presume, based on my own experience alone, that many teachers of wcourses would not put in the amount of time required.

In spite of the fact that they do not feel that the university is providing adequate support for them as wcourse teachers, and in spite of the fact that they fault other instructors for not being committed to teaching writing, the Undaunted Crusaders were not in agreement that the Writing Center should be responsible for correcting grammar errors in students’ papers. This may be because they construe the work of teaching grammar as part of their purview as instructors of record, as the comment about line-editing suggests. Or it may be that they view the Writing Center as a kind of fellow traveler in the unrecognized labor of teaching writing. One respondent wrote: “The Writing Center provides a valuable resource to the university—but it is obviously under-resourced. Too much demand, not enough supply.”

The Undaunted Crusaders commitment to teaching writing evokes some of the faculty members who are profiled anecdotally in WAC/WID research, especially faculty who become enthusiastic advocates of and participants in writing-intensive course programs (see Walvoord et al. 8). However, one could also easily imagine these faculty “resisting” some WAC/WID pedagogies, particularly those, like “minimal marking,” that would ask them to pull back on line editing their students’ work. They would resist anything that made them feel that they were passing students on.

Their responses to the survey also echo the findings in some of the general studies of faculty attitudes. Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin found that new faculty members at all ranks were deeply committed to teaching, but that many felt stymied by the lack of collegial and institutional support for teaching (14–16). Several studies report that large percentages of faculty believe that they care more about teaching than their institutions and colleagues do (Lindholm 135; see also Leslie). Wright found that faculty had higher levels of overall satisfaction when they were in departments where expertise about teaching was broadly dispersed and shared, compared to departments where one or two people played the roles of “experts” (347–48). Thus, faculty who are strongly committed to their role as teachers recognize that teaching is a shared enterprise. When they believe that teaching work and resources are distributed unfairly among departmental colleagues, their job satisfaction suffers (Johnsrud and Rosser).

In this case, part of what defines the Undaunted Crusaders experience of teaching wcourses is precisely this sense of unfairness. There is no question that they see this work as valuable and are pleased with their own role in it, but they strongly believe that they are carrying more of the real work of teaching than others. It may be that faculty who have a strong notion
that teaching writing is very important are particularly prone to seeing failures on the part of their colleagues, simply because of the nature of writing development. Students may produce weak papers simply because they are struggling with difficult content or new genres. The Undaunted Crusaders may not realize that what they take as a poorly prepared student is often a student engaged in a normal developmental learning process. Poor student writing is not necessarily evidence that those students have been passed on by previous instructors.

Cluster #2: The Self-Critical/Humble Colleagues

This group, which comprised around 40% of the respondents, was characterized by factors two and three. They were satisfied with the fairness of the workplace, and at the same time they were dissatisfied with their own performance in the classroom.

The comments in the open-ended questions pointed to not knowing what they were expected to do as course teachers and not having access to resources, like faculty development workshops. For instance:

I had been told that the course I teach was a W-I course by another grad student instructor. The professor who I work most closely with never told me that and no one has told me what that means, what I should be doing in that regard.

Whereas the comments by the Undaunted Crusaders emphasize working ever harder in the face of obstacles, the comments of the Humble/Self-Critical Colleagues reflect no such motivation. One wrote: “We were suggested to assign a ‘Portfolio Reflection’ assignment but this was difficult to grade, and I won’t do it that way next time.” It may be that the Humble/Self-Critical Colleagues see effective writing pedagogy as outside their locus of control. One instructor noted:

Getting students to take advantage of submitting drafts, and opportunities for revisions is next to impossible. I almost always grade on a portfolio system: no grade is official until the last and best version. But for 75 or 80 percent of the students that means nothing. The problem is structural and demographic. Five courses is too many when you work 40+ hours a week as well. But we’re pretty much stuck with it.

Time spent grading turned out to be a significant issue with the Humble/Self-Critical Colleagues. In the survey, we asked instructors to estimate the amount of time spent per week grading student work. In keeping with their responses above, the Humble/Self-Critical Colleagues reported
spending significantly less time per week responding to student writing, compared to instructors in all of the other clusters. Perhaps because of this, the Humble/Self-Critical Colleagues were unlikely to say that teaching a course disrupted their other duties as faculty members.

Previous research has shown that perceived competence—including how we perceive our own competence, and how we think our colleagues perceive us—correlates with faculty satisfaction and productivity (Johnsrud, “Measuring”; Blackburn and Lawrence; Blackburn and Bently). Given that, it is not surprising that the Humble Colleagues report relatively low satisfaction with their work as writing-intensive course instructors. It would be hard to draw satisfaction from an experience in which you feel incompetent. What is somewhat more confusing is their seeming lack of motivation to improve their teaching. But one explanation may come from the research on faculty worklife, which suggests that faculty members’ commitment suffers when their satisfaction suffers (see Rosser, “Faculty”). In this research, “commitment” is typically gauged by faculty members’ intentions to leave their institutions; however, it is not too much of a stretch to say that if a faculty member was dissatisfied with her teaching experiences, she might be likely to disengage from her experiences in the classroom.

What the Humble Colleagues may not see is that teaching writing is a struggle for everyone. Few faculty receive substantial training in teaching writing, and some of the best practices in teaching writing are not easy to implement. The particular teaching issues that the Humble Colleagues mentioned—the difficulties of getting students to engage in substantive revision, the ins-and-outs of grading by portfolio—are practices that most writing instructors, including highly experienced instructors, find challenging. The Humble Colleagues may think that teaching writing is “easy” for other people, and they may take their own perfectly normal pedagogical struggles as evidence of their own lack of competence.

Cluster #3: Confident but Resentful Colleagues

The third cluster, which comprised 20% of the survey respondents, was characterized by factors one, two, three and four. They were satisfied with their own teaching performance, but they reported low enthusiasm for teaching and a negative view of the university’s support for them as teachers. Of all of the respondents, those in cluster three were most convinced that the Writing Center should be responsible for correcting grammar errors in their students’ papers. They also had the highest score on the individual item that queried whether their other work suffered because of teaching courses.
Their written comments suggest that the Confident but Resentful Colleagues have stronger commitments to their disciplinary identities and knowledge than they do to teaching, particularly when they have to teach “skills” like writing. For some, this was expressed as a conflict between teaching content and teaching writing, as the comments by these two respondents suggest:

I fear that the new guidelines for the wcourses will make it more difficult for my students to write AND absorb the very challenging material that they get in my [. . .] course. I’ll see.

And:

With the heavy student load and the significant deficits which students bring in terms of information literacy and the writing process it is difficult to teach these skills while teaching the actual subject matter for the course.

Like the Undaunted Crusaders, the Confident but Resentful Colleagues had a negative view of the fairness of the workplace, and both groups expressed frustration about this in the open-ended comments. But whereas the Undaunted Crusaders’ frustration was relatively targeted—at other faculty for passing students on, at the university for not recognizing their extra labor with increased pay—the Confident/Resentful Colleagues expressed a generalized resentment aimed at everyone and no one. One referred to teaching a somewhat overenrolled wcourse as “absurd and abusive.” For this group, the whole situation of teaching these courses is filled with so many problems that it is a fool’s errand.

Overall, these respondents reflect a sense of having been conscripted into the role of writing instructor, and having too little control over the circumstances of their work. They emerge as a group that would prefer not to be teaching in the writing-intensive course program at all. In the words of one instructor:

My writing intensive course is taught in the upper senior semester. It is completely asinine to attempt to teach competent writing in the last semester of a student’s career. As someone who has been compelled to teach this course, and this course only for the last decade, I have substantial experience with [my department’s] undergraduates. [. . .] It is clear to me that whatever efforts are made to enhance the writing skills of our students either are not sufficient or not effective.

It is easy to see how the Confident/Resentful Colleagues might be depicted as “resistant” in the WAC/WID literature, especially if they were
required to attend a WAC/WID workshop. These are not faculty who want to learn how to teach writing; as their comments about the Writing Center suggest, they simply don’t believe that teaching writing should be part of their jobs in the first place.

In a certain way, the Resentful Colleagues’ attitudes are not surprising. Studies have shown that perceived lack of control over one’s work and work environment leads to reduced satisfaction among faculty (Perry et al.). Additionally, some studies of faculty satisfaction suggest that when faculty feel that their teaching loads are too high, their overall job satisfaction decreases (Rosser, “Faculty”; Rosser, “Measuring”). But these studies stand in sharp contrast to the research cited earlier which reports that faculty satisfaction increased when teaching was valued and viewed as a shared enterprise. In fact, the contrast in the research literature mirrors the contrast between the Undaunted Crusaders and the Resentful Colleagues, and it is fundamentally a conflict about the nature of faculty work. If one believes, as the Resentful Colleagues seem to believe, that faculty work is really about doing research and that other activities—teaching, grading, completing paperwork, etc.—properly belong to other people, then teaching writing-intensive courses is almost guaranteed to be a frustrating experience. If, on the other hand, one believes that faculty work centrally includes participating in the collective work of educating undergraduates, then one is more likely to see writing instruction as a worthwhile endeavor.

In fact, those two conflicting notions of faculty work—the professor-as-researcher and the professor-as-teacher—have coexisted in academic life since the beginning of the modern university system. If asked, most faculty members would probably describe their own beliefs as encompassing both roles, in various measures, but the notion of professorial work as research-only enjoys enough standing in academia that one finds it expressed almost as a neutral and uncontested fact. In Rosser, for example, teaching was construed as a negative if too much of it was required, but the research design did not even allow for the possibility that teaching might enhance a faculty members’ job satisfaction. In other words, too much teaching detracted from satisfaction but appropriate amounts of teaching did not add to satisfaction. Moreover, in the same study “support for professional development” is defined in such a way that it includes money for attending conferences and doing research, but excludes anything related to teacher development and classroom pedagogy (“Faculty” 287–88).

Cluster #4: One-Time Victims of Poor Communication

The fourth cluster, which represented 9% of the respondents, was characterized by factors four and five. They reported that their students were gen-
erally well-prepared, yet they were very dissatisfied with their experience as course instructors. At the same time, they strongly disagreed that the Writing Center should be responsible for teaching grammar to students.

These findings were initially difficult to interpret, but an explanation emerged in the respondents’ answers to the other parts of the survey, including the open-ended questions. Half of the respondents in this cluster reported that they had no access to the approved syllabus before the semester began. One respondent detailed the problems this caused:

I did not receive any sample syllabi or any guidance that I had not solicited from colleagues [. . .] so I constructed my syllabi based on what I expected from students I’d taught at another institution. In both cases, as the semester progressed I found myself radically revising my expectations of student skill levels and analytical tasks I could reasonably expect them to perform. [. . .] I found myself retooling my assignments and assessment criteria.

Another respondent did not discover that the course she was assigned to teach was writing-intensive until well into the semester:

I was assigned my first writing intensive course for last fall and not told it was a writing intensive course, let alone that there was some approved syllabus I was supposed to follow. [. . .] I literally inherited a syllabus [that] was not writing intensive. I adapted it some, but it still met very few of the writing intensive goals, partly through my ignorance, and partly through unwillingness to change a syllabus too much midstream (and feeling that this might be illegal/unfair.) In the meantime, again through inexperience I designed a course that was not supposed to be writing intensive in a way that was in fact writing intensive (for 45 students) And I spent hours and hours working with students on their papers. I believe in the process. I care about student writing. There is room for more support and oversight in this process.

Of all of the dissatisfactions reflected in the survey, the problems this group experienced were depicted as the most narrow and most changeable. Whereas the Confident but Resentful Colleagues were generally sour about their experiences, the One-time Victims were frustrated about specific things that went wrong, while still recognizing other aspects of their courses that went fine. Their responses to the questions about teaching effectiveness reflect this. They were dissatisfied with the aspects of their pedagogy that were hampered by the lack of information early on, like how
they designed their assignments. But they reported strong satisfaction with the aspects of pedagogy (e.g., responding to student writing) that they were able to shape during the semester, as the teaching situation became clearer.

Perhaps most tellingly, this group strongly disagreed that teaching a course caused their other faculty duties to suffer. Their comments suggest that they embrace their role as teachers of writing. They were simply undone (for a semester) by a lack of information.

Neither the research on WAC/WID nor the research on faculty attitudes in general reflects directly on this question of poor communication; however, the latter does include several studies that reflect on the centrality and importance of department chairs in faculty members’ acclimation to and satisfaction with the university (see Rice et al.; Bensimon, Ward, and Sanders). Indeed, in most universities departments are the main disseminators of information and departments are also responsible for making teaching assignments. Our survey queried faculty about where they turned for information about the writing-intensive course program, and to whom they turned for advice about teaching. Their answers pointed overwhelmingly to their home departments and departmental colleagues. More than 80% said they sought support from their departmental colleagues, while only 35% said that they sought support from the writing program. These results match the findings reported in Wright (338).

The One-time Victims’ comments, then, suggest that one of the factors that influences faculty attitudes toward and understandings of writing-intensive course programs is the cross-departmental nature of writing programs. Since course programs are not housed in faculty members’ own departments, information cannot be disseminated along the normal channels. The potential for communication failures increases. This may be especially true for new faculty and for large universities.

Cluster #5: The Outliers

The fifth cluster comprised only two respondents whose views might best be described as extreme on all counts. They were very enthusiastic about teaching, but had a very negative view of their own skill as teachers. They had a very negative sense of the university’s fairness toward course instructors. They believe students are very well-prepared, but they rated their own satisfaction as course instructors very low.

Since this cluster comprises only two individuals, we can’t make too much of the numbers, and indeed we could have simply collapsed this group into one of the other clusters. But allowing them to stand as a separate group made sense, both mathematically as it allows the statisti-
cal coherence of the other clusters to emerge, and theoretically, as this pair may represent a truth about university faculty. Most faculty groups seem to include one or two people whose views are both very strongly held and very idiosyncratic. It’s useful to recognize that they exist, and that they are part of our curricular programs. It’s also useful to see that they are a distinct minority.

**Non-Findings**

Once clusters are identified, they can also be characterized in terms of their results on factual/descriptive data, such as demographic information. Particular clusters may be associated more strongly with certain genders, ages, disciplines, etc. When we saw the factors and clusters emerging in the analysis, we were convinced that the groups would be distinctive demographically. We thought the Humble/Self-Critical Colleagues would include disproportionate numbers of inexperienced teachers, and that the Confident but Resentful Colleagues would include disproportionate numbers of tenure-line research faculty, and that the Undaunted Crusaders would include disproportionate numbers of full-time, non-tenure-track, “teaching” faculty. As it turns out, however, none of these suppositions was born out in the analysis. There were no statistically significant differences among the clusters in terms of age, gender, discipline, number of years teaching, or the status of the instructor. All of the clusters here (apart from the Outliers) included a more or less representative sample of the overall population.

This non-finding is surprising given that large scale surveys of university faculty have found differences in attitudes toward teaching that correlate with age, status, gender, and discipline. It may be that those differences exist but we simply couldn’t see them in our comparatively small sample. It may also be that those differences were masked by other factors, like the local culture of particular departments or colleges at this university.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Part of the goal of this research was to add to the existing research on writing and writing instruction, and particularly to address questions of methodology related to attitudinal research. Our study questions the relatively simplistic understandings of faculty attitudes that have characterized some of the research on WAC/WID faculty. Walvoord and her co-authors argued that framing faculty attitudes toward WAC/WID as either “acceptance” or “resistance” is problematic because it is overly dependent on the program director’s agenda. This research suggests that such a formulation is also problematic because “acceptance” and “resistance” are one-dimensional charac-
teristics. Faculty attitudes are better understood as multidimensional and interrelated collections of factors.

Moreover, our study suggests that these complex sets of attitudes don’t necessarily map onto our common ways of understanding faculty identities. Women don’t appear to share attitudes about teaching writing that are distinct from men’s attitudes, nor do attitudes correlate with discipline, status, age, or any other demographic factor, at least not in this data set. Moreover, the attitudinal factors that we were able to identify don’t connect with each other in ways we might have anticipated. It makes sense in hindsight that faculty who are least confident about their teaching would be the ones who felt most supported by the university, but we would not have anticipated that at the beginning. And who would predict that the faculty who are most convinced that their workloads are unfair are also those who are most satisfied with teaching writing-intensive courses?

The most important finding of this study is that faculty attitudes toward writing instruction are knitted into frameworks of beliefs about what it means to be a faculty member and about what ought to be the appropriate distribution of roles and responsibilities in a department and at the university. The cluster analysis suggests that these beliefs differ quite markedly, and because of this teaching a writing-intensive course means different things to different people, even when outwardly the teaching situation may look the same. At least half of the faculty in this survey believe that getting students to write college-level papers is extremely difficult because the students are very poorly prepared as writers. For some, these “facts” mean that teaching a writing-intensive course is an inappropriate and meaningless waste of their valuable time. For others, these same “facts” mean that teaching writing is both worthwhile and satisfying. If the latter group is frustrated, it is precisely because they cannot understand why their valuable work isn’t being fully recognized and rewarded.

Finally, our research argues for the value of deepening the methodologies that we use to investigate attitudes and beliefs toward writing and writing instruction (whether of faculty, students, administrators, parents, or whomever.) Understanding what people believe, and why they might or might not embrace change, is a complex business that calls for rigorous methods. There is an easy tendency to assume that we can infer attitudes from demographic factors—faculty in the sciences value XYZ; tenure-line faculty think PDQ; etc. There is also a tendency to assume that we understand people simply because of proximity. In other words, we often assume that we “know” what faculty in our own universities think about writing and writing instruction, simply because we work near them and interact with them. Finally, there is a tendency to assume that the attitudes we hear
expressed most frequently (or most forcefully) are the attitudes that are held most commonly. In fact, all of these common assumptions are challenged by this study.

Conclusions: Thinking about Practical Applications

Most research on university writing programs begins with pragmatic concerns about building better programs, and ours is no exception. Part of the goal of this research was to find ways to improve our program, and especially to find ways to better support faculty. In fact, the results did suggest to us several practical changes. For example, the attitudes expressed by the Humble Colleagues made us realize that the way we advertised our faculty development opportunities could be off-putting for some faculty. Our advertisements for seminars made a point of acknowledging instructors’ expertise, saying that faculty who participated in the seminars would be invited to draw on their own experiences in order to share best practices with each other. But for faculty who felt uncertain about their own knowledge, this may have been intimidating. We now offer seminars that are billed as “introductions” to writing pedagogy. We also developed a writing fellows program that provides a full semester of support for faculty who want to try new writing-related teaching pedagogies.

Similarly, the attitudes expressed by the Undaunted Crusaders made us realize that our program needed to find opportunities to recognize the work of writing-intensive course faculty. We developed a university-wide prize for teaching excellence in writing-intensive courses. We also collaborated with the deans of the colleges to develop a system for regularly acknowledging the work of w-course faculty. Now, faculty who teach in the program receive letters—co-signed by their dean and the writing program director—acknowledging their teaching, and acknowledging their participation in faculty development, if they have done so.

For WPAs at other universities, these particular programmatic changes may not be relevant, but the general idea of the research—that our programs serve faculty with different attitudes and different understandings of their work as writing instructors—should be broadly applicable. Overall, this research suggests that WPAs don’t work with “a faculty;” rather, we work with a variety of faculties who have different perceived needs and expectations. Given this, we should expect that the services and supports we offer (like faculty development workshops) will sound appealing to some, but not others. And similarly, the ways we publically represent the program’s goals will make good sense to some, but not to others. The more we can find ways to diversify what we offer and say, and the more we can explicitly address
the different worlds of ideas and opportunities that faculty inhabit, the more likely we are be supporting the full range of faculty in our programs.

**Works Cited**


Wright, Mary. “Always at Odds?: Congruence in Faculty Beliefs about Teaching at a Research University.” *The Journal of Higher Education* 76.3 (2005): 331–53. Print.

**APPENDIX**

*Writing-Intensive Course Instructor Survey*

1. For how many years have you been teaching at Temple University?
2. Which best describes your own academic training
   a. Fine/Performing Arts
   b. Humanities
   c. Social Sciences
   d. Science/Technology/Engineering/Math
   e. Business
   f. Education
   g. Other (please specify)
3. What is the highest degree you have earned?
   a. Bachelors
   b. Masters
   c. Doctorate
   d. Other (please specify)
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your age?
6. Which best describes your employment status as an instructor at Temple University?
   a. Graduate teaching assistant
   b. Adjunct/part-time instructor
   c. Fulltime non-tenure-track instructor
   d. Fulltime tenure-track (not tenured)
   e. Full-time tenured instructor
7. Which best describes you?
   a. Native speaker of English
   b. Non-native speaker of English
8. How many total courses/sections are you teaching this semester?
9. Of these, how many are designated writing-intensive courses?
10. Writing-Intensive Courses must go through a process of certification, in which a proposal is submitted to the Writing-Intensive Course Committee for approval. Which sentence best describes your involvement in the proposal process for the course you are currently teaching?
   a. I was solely responsible for drafting the proposal
   b. I worked with others to draft the proposal
   c. I was not involved in drafting the proposal
11. When an approved course is taught, the instructor should have access to the course syllabus that was approved. Did you have access to the approved syllabus for this course?
   a. Yes, because I wrote the approved syllabus
   b. Yes, because I was given a copy of the approved syllabus
12. Which sentence best describes how the course syllabus you are using this semester relates to the approved course syllabus?
   a. I used the approved syllabus without changes (apart from routine updates)
   b. I made minor changes to the approved syllabus
   c. I made major changes to the approved syllabus
   d. I don’t know/I did not have access to the syllabus

13. Do you believe that the course you taught this semester met the guidelines for writing-intensive courses?
   a. All of the guidelines were met
   b. Most of the guidelines were met
   c. A few of the guidelines were met
   d. I don’t know

14. What is the level of the writing-intensive course you are teaching this semester? (If you are teaching more than one, please check all that apply.)
   a. 1000-level course
   b. 2000-level course
   c. 3000-level course
   d. 4000-level course

15. How often do you use grading rubrics in your writing-intensive course?
   a. Every writing assignment
   b. Most writing assignments
   c. A few writing assignments
   d. One writing assignment
   e. Don’t use

16. How often do you require revision in your writing-intensive course?
   a. Every writing assignment
   b. Most writing assignments
   c. A few writing assignments
   d. One writing assignment
   e. Don’t use

17. How often do you use “staged” assignments, for which students turn in their work in parts that build on each other?
   a. Every writing assignment
   b. Most writing assignments
   c. A few writing assignments
   d. One writing assignment
   e. Don’t use

18. How often do you require drafts of student writing before they turn in their final papers?
   a. Every writing assignment
   b. Most writing assignments
   c. A few writing assignments
   d. One writing assignment
   e. Don’t use
19. How often do you require that students incorporate outside sources of information into their writing assignments?
   a. Every writing assignment
   b. Most writing assignments
   c. A few writing assignments
   d. One writing assignment
   e. Don’t use

20. What kinds of outside sources materials do students typically incorporate into their written works for your course? (Please choose all that apply.)
   a. Academic books
   b. Popular books intended for lay audiences
   c. Materials from reference books
   d. Journal articles
   e. Newspaper or magazine articles
   f. Government documents
   g. Television or film media
   h. Internet sources
   i. Other (please specify)

21. How often do students receive instruction about information literacy in your course?
   a. More than once per semester
   b. Once per semester
   c. Never

22. What percentage of the student’s final grade is based upon writing assignments?
   a. 100%
   b. 75–99%
   c. 50–74%
   d. Less than 50%

23. On average, how much time per week do you spend responding to students’ writing assignments in a single section of a writing-intensive course?
   a. More than 15 hours
   b. 10–15 hours
   c. 6–9 hours
   d. 3–5 hours
   e. 1–2 hours
   f. Less than 1 hour

24. On average, how much time per week do you spend preparing to teach a single section of a writing-intensive course?
   a. More than 15 hours
   b. 10–15 hours
   c. 6–9 hours
   d. 3–5 hours
   e. 1–2 hours
   f. Less than 1 hour

25. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following aspects of your course
[very dissatisfied – somewhat dissatisfied – neutral – somewhat satisfied – very satisfied]

a. The writing assignments you created for this course
b. The way you responded to your students writing in this course
c. The time you spent grading
d. Your effectiveness as a teacher of writing in this course
e. The way you incorporated information literacy practices into your assignments for this course

26. How many students were enrolled in your writing-intensive course?
27. For how many of these students were you responsible for grading and/or providing feedback on writing assignments?
28. Do you encourage your students to go to the writing center?
   a. Yes
   b. No
29. If yes, how often do you encourage them to go?
   a. For every writing assignment
   b. At least once every semester
   c. Rarely/occasionally
   d. I only discuss the Writing Center with certain students

30. In the past three academic years, have you had a writing center fellow assigned to your course?
   a. Yes
   b. No
31. In the past three academic years, have you had a Peer Tutor from the Provost’s Academy assigned to your course?
   a. Yes
   b. No
32. In the past three years, have you invited a university librarian to meet your course?
   a. Yes
   b. No
33. Which of the following faculty development opportunities have you used? (Please check all that apply.)
   a. Attended a Temple University–sponsored seminar related to teaching writing
   b. Met one-on-one with someone in the Writing Center to talk about my course
   c. Met one-on-one with a university librarian to talk about my course
   d. Met with my department chair to talk about my course
   e. Met with colleagues/peers to talk about my course
   f. Read information online about teaching writing
   g. None of the above
34. If you answered none of the above, please tell us why. Check all that apply.
   a. I already feel comfortable/confident about my ability to teach writing
   b. The times that activities were offered didn’t work with my schedule/didn’t have time
c. I didn’t know that these opportunities were available
d. I didn’t see activities related to the specific topics I was interested in
e. I am not interested in learning about teaching writing
f. Other, please specify

35. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?
[very dissatisfied – somewhat dissatisfied – neutral – somewhat satisfied – very satisfied]
   a. The number of students in your writing-intensive course
   b. The services your students received from the tutors in the writing center
   c. The services your students received from a writing fellow
   d. The faculty development seminars you attended
   e. The support you received from your department chair/colleagues

36. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.
[strongly disagree—disagree—neutral—agree—strongly agree]
   a. I believe that writing-intensive classes are worthwhile for the students
   b. I believe that teaching writing-intensive courses is worthwhile for me professionally
   c. I believe that my students are prepared for the writing assignments in my writing-intensive courses
   d. I spend more hours teaching/reading/grading in my writing-intensive courses than my colleagues do teaching non-writing-intensive courses
   e. I think it should be the responsibility of the writing center to correct grammar in my students’ papers.
   f. I believe that my other duties as a faculty member suffer because I teach a writing-intensive course
   g. I like teaching writing-intensive courses
   h. I feel fulfilled professionally teaching writing-intensive courses
   i. I feel frustrated having to teach writing-intensive courses
   j. I believe I have adequate university support to teach writing-intensive courses
   k. I think I receive appropriate rewards (merit, recognition, promotion) for teaching writing-intensive courses
   l. I believe I have a fair workload compared to other faculty members in my department

37. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your experience of teaching a writing-intensive course?
   a. strongly disagree
   b. disagree
   c. neutral
   d. agree
   e. strongly agree

38. For instructors who taught more than one writing-intensive course: If you have found some courses to be markedly different from what you consider a “typical” course, please tell us about them. In what ways are they different?

39. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences teaching writing-intensive courses?
Preface

We begin by thanking everyone who contributed ideas and insights to the CWPA (Council of Writing Program Administrators) Mentoring Survey, CWPA President, Linda Adler-Kassner, for supporting our endeavors, and the WPA journal editors—Alice Horning, Debra Frank Dew, and Glenn Blalock—for inviting us to share this report with the journal’s readers. Our work has a history worth sharing. In 2008, then CWPA President, Joe Janangelo, developed the idea of the organization offering some mentoring activities, services, and resources for colleagues engaged in WPA work in various roles and institutions. After working with Sheldon Walcher to establish a Mississippi affiliate of CWPA, Joe invited Sheldon to collaborate with him on the CWPA Mentoring Project. Sheldon suggested surveying our members, and designed a survey with a bit of input from Joe. Together, they wrote (and rewrote) their report of the survey results to help CWPA officers and board members improve the organization in relation to respondents’ expressed ideas and needs. CWPA Vice-President, Duane Roen, reviewed our final draft and accepted an invitation to join us in our work. To tell the story as we experienced it, we offer an introduction written in three voices that, like our work, flow from I to we and back again.

It’s Intentional: Some Thoughts from Joe

I would like to begin by describing what I mean by the title, “The CWPA Mentoring Project.” For me, the key word is project, a term that can be used as a noun and verb. As a noun, project denotes something intentional and describes work that involves forethought, deliberation, contemplation, and planning. Such work also involves effort and resources (Dictionary.com).
Importantly, project also suggests something that is ongoing and future-oriented. This meaning is expressed in the verb *to project*, which means to send something (ideas, thoughts) forward and to think about oneself and others in the future.

I am drawn to the idea of building something with no designated end point. My hope is that in working with our colleagues at the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) and the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), we can design and sustain something that will be of meaningful service to people who pursue (and who are preparing to pursue) WPA work. My guiding belief is that to participate in writing programs means to participate (tacitly, explicitly, eventually, and often iteratively) in their administration. This is often true whether or not one has the title “Writing Program Administrator,” “Coordinator,” “Director” or even faculty of full-time status. A complementary belief is that mentoring others and providing service to colleagues, students, staff, and administrators is the way of life for those of us pursuing WPA work (Dew and Hornig). WPAs, with our various titles, are often helping others, learning from them, and advocating for them. It is no surprise that pursuing such work can leave people feeling exploited and depleted (Farris, George). One of the most open secrets of WPA work is that our Rotarian-like work ethic and the institutional expectation of “Service above Self” can have deleterious effects on people’s career satisfaction and productivity. This expectation is especially true at what get called “mid” or “smaller size institutions” where one or two people continually do the lion’s share of the WPA work while trying to lead, develop, and enjoy their own careers.

In conceptualizing “The CWPA Mentoring Project,” our main goal is to learn from our members—to learn about the desires and needs of people who spend their working lives practicing and pursuing WPA work. By asking directed and open-ended survey questions, we hoped to learn in detail about the differences between what I call the *intended* and the *delivered* CWPA. In plainer terms, I wanted to learn when and where the organization’s events, artifacts, activities, and practices are serving our diverse members well and whether and where they need improvement, reconceptualization, and redesign.

The concepts *when* and *where* are important because this mentoring project seeks to make changes that are useful to and needed by our members at situated and specific points in their working lives and careers. In concert with an understanding of WPA work as multifarious and complex, the concept and practice of diversity by design comes into play (see Survey section E). Just as there is no one model, label, or container for WPA work or identity (think of writing centers, writing across the curriculum, adjunct
faculty, and graduate students), there is no universal point of situated or enduring need. Rather, there are many intersecting points such as demographics, access, and rank. This nexus of sometimes conflicting desires and needs (see Survey section B) plays out daily in writing programs as each of us (with our own plans, strengths, and talents) study and work the physically “same” yet sometimes experientially very different space.

We are committed to enacting diversity by design. Along with our other founding partners Tim Dougherty (a graduate student at Syracuse University), Michael Day (a Writing Program Director at Northern Illinois University), and Michele Eodice (IWCA immediate Past President and Director of the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum at the University of Oklahoma), we are devoted to making certain that this mentoring project pays serious and ongoing attention to the ideas, voices, and needs of pre-service WPAs, in-service WPAs, and to seasoned and experienced colleagues. That means un-thinking some of the tacit assumptions of academic work in higher education. It also means working collaboratively to learn from, rather than speak for, members of our community. Some of those members include

- graduate students who are the current and future generations of scholars;
- colleagues in writing centers, writing-across-the-curriculum programs, and assessment experts (to name a few) who have shared and vested interests in student success and literacy instruction;
- colleagues who do WPA work at two-year colleges from whom we have much to learn, but to whom the terms Writing Program Administrator or even Writing Program may appear remote, pretentious, or inapplicable;
- colleagues at “mid-” and “smaller-size” institutions for whom the old Research I model of institutional practices or career paths does not respectfully (much less fully) apply;
- and seasoned (mid- or later-career) colleagues who may wish to provide and receive mentoring.

In seeking, describing, and valuing these streams of input, I hope that sharing the survey report will help serve, build, and change the community. I hope and suspect that respondents’ ideas and responses will serve as important provocations for CWPA to become even more responsive to members’ suggestions, frustrations, and evolving needs. The idea that the project, the survey, and the report would uncover some degree of member dissatisfaction and even unhappiness was no surprise.
The idea of offering CWPA a rigorous challenge and critique was a design goal, one that returns me to the term *project*. To project means, among other things according to dictionary.com, “to present (an idea, program, etc.) for consideration or action.” It also means “to throw or cause to fall upon a surface or into space, as a ray of light or a shadow.” In seeking members’ candid and critical feedback, I was neither hoping for nor expecting to hear only words of cheer and celebration. It is important to see the “shadows” of discord (e.g., the survey reveals and discusses members’ problems, concerns, differences, and perceptions of estrangement and divide) as fuel for organizational intake, reflection, assessment, development, and change. Expressions of dissatisfaction and even unhappiness with WPA work and on occasion with CWPA serve as opportunities for challenging and vital conversations. Welcoming such conversations without overstaging them, or inveighing traditional ideas or models about what they “mean” necessitated a commitment to listening and to dialogical methods of inscription. Listening carefully to our members’ ideas, suggestions, critiques, and admonitions would become a learning experience for which Sheldon and I are very grateful. Perhaps not surprisingly, presenting our members’ comments, and reflecting on them in ways we hope are fair and accurate, offered both of us stimulating ethical and rhetorical invitations and challenges. Sheldon discusses these things in the next section; Duane follows with some ideas for using the survey at your institutions. Most of all, we are eager to hear what does—and does not—speak to you about the survey and our narration of the results. What are your situated and perhaps evolving ideas, problems, issues, needs, talents, inspirations, and resources? Please share your ideas for inclusion, improvement, and reciprocity in mentoring—and in the mentoring project—with us. We welcome your input, especially in the new “Comment and Response” section of the journal.

**BACKGROUND AND GOALS OF THE MENTORING SURVEY: SHELDON’S STORY**

I was excited when Joe Janangelo first asked me to work with him to develop a series of mentoring panels for the 2009 Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference in Minneapolis. As an assistant professor and director of composition at a research university in the deep south, I understood that mentoring had already become an important issue to me. Like so many untenured WPAs in our organization—and countless others I have since met who engage in WPA work without acknowledgement or recognition—I have found opportunities for professional development,
networking, and collaboration few and far between. Indeed, despite the wealth of resources and leadership provided by the Council of Writing Program Administrators on a national level, the day-to-day reality for many writing program administrators is a sense of deep isolation, particularly for those of us at institutions where the work of rhetoric and composition has been historically marginalized and continues to be undervalued. In my own case, this sense of disconnectedness and alienation was exacerbated by the lack of any formal mentoring program within my department, the absence of any center for teaching and learning excellence on my campus, and no real network or local association of writing teachers. (Among other things, the results from the Mentoring Survey suggest that stories like this are far from unique; in the words of the old song, none of us is ever really, “alone in being alone.”)

So the invitation to become involved in the Mentoring Project was intriguing not only because I knew it would provide new opportunities to meet and network with WPAs from across the country, but I felt that as one of an increasingly large group of untenured WPAs hired directly out of graduate school to do administrative work (some still refer to us pejoratively as “Junior” WPAs), I might bring to the project a perspective and a set of concerns not always evident in the ways CWPA has conducted itself in the past. Indeed, I would argue (and this too is echoed in aspects of the survey data reported below) that the Council of Writing Program Administrators is in the midst of a generational shift. Jonikka Charlton and Shirley Rose have reported in their own survey work significant changes in both the demographics and preparation of WPAs over the last decade, with an increasing number of program administrators not only holding untenured and non-tenure track positions, but also receiving more extensive training in graduate school in both the theory and practice of program administration.

These trends suggest several new realities of the academic job market, and a cursory review of the job-list over the last few years shows the degree to which institutions increasingly seek to hire experienced, well-trained program administrators at the instructor or assistant professor level. The old commonplace that one should never consider taking on administrative work before tenure seems not only naive given today’s economic climate, but also dismissive of the long hours of training, experience, and hard-won expertise many within the profession gain as graduate students, adjunct faculty, staff, and instructors. At the same time, many senior colleagues in the field remain rightfully concerned about the political and professional dangers of engaging in administrative work without the security of tenure. These competing pressures—expanded job opportunities for untenured
and non-tenure track WPAs, along with the increased vulnerability (both to individuals and the profession as a whole) this shift ushers in—pose vitally important questions that need to be thoughtfully discussed by everyone concerned with the future of the field.

But the fact remains, a growing number of WPAs not only receive training in rhetoric and composition in graduate school, but also have engaged in various forms of administrative work (from course coordination to programmatic assessment, class scheduling and budgeting, to providing training to new tutors or teachers) long before they are explicitly hired to do such work. And even for those who never actively seek such training or experiences while in graduate school, the very success of organizations such as CCCC and CWPA has transformed how most people understand the work of composition instruction. Where lore and localized practice once predominated, a profession now stands; for those who have come of age within the framework of a field called rhetoric and composition, the world may look quite different from how it appears to those who had a hand in establishing it.

Given this shift in the ways many new WPAs are being prepared for and coming to administrative work, the issue of mentoring becomes both more salient and more complicated. Traditional visions of mentoring in which more experienced, knowledgeable, and established “senior” colleagues advise, guide, and inculcate younger protégés into the values and practices of a profession seem increasingly out of touch as the nature of WPA work and the mission and practices of many academic institutions, and the character of the profession itself appear to be changing. Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of the Mentoring Project as an initiative has been this overarching desire to be radically inclusive, diverse by design, and adaptable. As Joe has already suggested, the choice of the term project denotes not only something deliberate and planned, but also future oriented, ongoing, and open to revision and change. This choice in turn begs us to re-imagine mentoring not as hierarchical, unilateral, and conservative (that is, concerned primarily with preserving and reproducing the values, practices, and beliefs of the past), but as co-equal, collaborative, dynamic, and progressive.

Within this expanded view, all mentoring becomes co-mentoring in that regardless of rank, institutional affiliation, training or background, those who come together to exchange ideas leave the experience mutually enriched. WPAs who have been long in the field certainly have much to share with those who are just beginning their careers (e.g., maps for navigating treacherous political waters), but new WPAs have much to give in return, often bringing to the work new theoretical perspectives, technical knowledge and skills, and a host of different research questions. And those
who labor in the often under-recognized spaces of program administration (as well as those who work at the intersection of academia and government, non-profit and for-profit organizations, publishing houses, and a host of other sites often not regarded as “scholarly”) have even more to share. They perceive teaching, writing and administration not simply as we hope they might be, but see the ways this work actually affects students, impacts communities, and engages and reflects trends and practices on regional, national, and even international levels.

**Rationale for a Mentoring Survey**

In keeping with this vision of expansive, mutually enriching co-mentoring, my own contributions to the Mentoring Project were to develop, administer, and then analyze the results of the 2009 Mentoring Project Survey. My work on this aspect of our larger project was motivated by four interrelated concerns, the first being a desire to achieve some tangible outcome from the conference itself. That is, in keeping with our belief of mentoring is an ongoing “project,” it seemed crucial that in addition to providing opportunities for dialogue and professional exchange within the designated “mentoring panels” at the conference in Minneapolis, we needed to find some way to harness the energy, experience, and collective intelligence of participants in a creative and productive way. In other words, I wanted the Mentoring Project at the conference to have its own project, a mechanism for collecting and reporting the widest range of ideas and beliefs in a way that would serve as a catalyst for further action.

Closely related to this plan, we believed from the outset that for the Mentoring Project to be successful in the long term, it should not only recognize and promote excellence in mentoring and professional collaboration, but also foster additional opportunities for critical inquiry and research. That is, we want the Mentoring Project to focus on mentoring not only as a set of practices, but also as a dynamic form of research in itself. So the idea of developing a “mentoring survey” was appealing as a way not only of researching mentoring, but also of mentoring further research. My hope is that the results of this work will not only give us more insight into how mentoring is understood and practiced programmatically and organizationally, but also provide a basis for future inquiry.

Because co-mentoring has been central to our understanding of the work of the Project from the outset, it was also important that the design of the survey encourage the widest range of participants at various levels of interest and engagement in the field to voice their experiences, beliefs, and concerns. This drive for inclusivity and diversity is reflected not only in how
the survey was developed and distributed (i.e., administered both electronically and in print versions, with several laptops devoted solely to the survey at the 2009 conference, as well as multiple calls for respondents online through a range of different sites, etc.), but also in the variety and types of questions posed. For example, one section of the survey that provided some of the most interesting and nuanced responses asked participants to discuss “what they wish they had known or thought to ask before taking whatever job or position they currently hold”—a subject about which everyone (from grad students just beginning their studies, to tenured faculty recently promoted to senior administrative positions) had a lot to say!

The survey also explicitly delved into respondents’ understandings of mentoring, the types of mentoring they had experienced in the past, and their hopes for mentoring in the future. Not surprisingly, a high number of non-tenure track and untenured WPA respondents indicated a desire for more co-mentoring in the future, as well as for greater access to online material and resources. The Executive Board of CWPA has already heeded these calls, and has approved a host of new initiatives, including the establishment of a Mentoring Blog to be hosted by CWPA.

Finally, because the Mentoring Project itself is an initiative undertaken by a group of people within a professional organization (Council of Writing Program Administrators), I was mindful of the work of James Paul Gee and other scholars of organizational communication regarding enactment or how discourse works within organizations not only to reproduce ideology and sets of practices, but also to promote and make possible new subject-positions and relationships. In surveying mentoring (which on one level can be seen as a process by which people attempt to gain access to knowledge and power within a community they may not feel fully part of), I believe we not only gain more insight into the often unspoken values and beliefs that underpin the work of our field, but simultaneously, we make possible new ways of imagining (and therefore enacting) that work. If nothing else, my hope is that the survey and the accompanying report give us not only new ways to talk to each other about the work we already do, but also new ways of imagining our relationships to each other, and new ways to define our mission as an organization moving forward, always forward.

**Using the Survey: Some Thoughts from Duane**

We hope that the mentoring survey serves as a tool for fostering mentoring of current and future writing program administrators, and that it leads to more “stories of mentoring,” such as those collected by Michelle Eble and Lynee Lewis Gaillett. In our conversations with colleagues at the annual
CWPA conference in recent years, we have heard many stories about successful mentoring, tales of colleagues helping colleagues solve political problems that have no easy solutions. Those stories need to be told in conference presentations, journal articles, and book chapters because they can help more colleagues more fully appreciate what Donna Strickland and Jeanne Gunner observe about our work: “that writing program administration, like teaching, is a political act with consequences” (xiii). These stories of mentoring can become part of the “story-changing work” that Linda Adler-Kassner champions, work that shapes the narratives of WPAs’ practices.

We also hope that the mentoring survey fosters conversations in writing programs and in the larger administrative units that house them—departments or colleges. Although CWPA can initiate dialogue among its members, the discussions also need to occur at members’ home institutions if they are to have a larger impact. At the local level, colleagues can pose questions such as the following:

- Why do we need mentoring at our institution?
- What should be the goals of mentoring at our institution?
- What are the opportunities for mentoring at our institution?
- How can we encourage colleagues to participate in mentoring?
- Who can effectively mentor whom at our institution?
- How can mentoring be structured at our institution to enhance the likelihood of tenure and promotion?

These and other questions can help to extend mentoring to sites where it can have the greatest effect.

The Mentoring Survey also reminds us that CWPA needs to partner with other organizations that share common interests with CWPA. These include the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) and the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), as well as their regional affiliates. Because our work is so entwined with the work of these organizations, with some CWPA members belonging to one or both of the other groups, such collaboration and cooperation can inform and strengthen mentoring initiatives.

Finally, we hope that CWPA members and others will send us suggestions for enhancing the WPA Mentoring Project. For example, what sessions can we add to the annual conference to focus greater attention on mentoring in the organization? What mentoring resources can be made available on the CWPA web site? How can CWPA more effectively form mentoring coalitions with other professional organizations?
Summary of Results from the CWPA Mentoring Survey

Sheldon Walcher, Joseph Janangelo, and Duane Roen

Introduction

This summary reports results of the CWPA Mentoring Project Survey, the research component of a larger initiative begun by Joseph Janangelo, Duane Roen and Sheldon Walcher in March 2009 and aimed at fostering opportunities for professional development and mentoring at the Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in July of 2009. These efforts consisted of planning seven additional mentoring panels at the conference, and developing an online survey to assess attitudes toward mentoring and general professional concerns of members of CWPA.

As many questions within the Mentoring Survey asked participants to evaluate their experiences with various facets of CWPA, much of the Discussion section of this report has been organized to highlight specific information that may be of interest to different constituencies within the organization. Specifically, we focus on five topic areas that seemed to emerge as most pressing at the time: mentoring, technology, CWPA events, institutional diversity, and differences in priorities/needs of various constituencies. We then conclude by reporting some of the recommendations made by survey respondents on various issues, as well as steps that have been undertaken by the Executive Board of CWPA since the first submission of this report to address many of these concerns (see Initiatives Undertaken).

While the bulk of this report focuses on problems and concerns that respondents identified, it is important to note at the outset that the overwhelming majority of feedback received was positive, constructive, generous, often warm and quite funny, and extremely thoughtful—precisely those qualities participants repeatedly mentioned and were eager to celebrate about their colleagues and the organization as a whole. In fact, we are focusing on critical comments (some of which appeared several times in the same survey responses) so that those critiques can serve as catalysts for conversation and change, which is the larger point of the WPA Mentoring Project.

Indeed, out of 109 people who answered the question, “How satisfied are you overall with the tools, resources, and opportunities that the Council of Writing Program Administrators provides its members for professional development and collaboration?” not a single respondent answered that they were unsatisfied or dissatisfied with the work of the Council. Indeed, over 70% of respondents claimed that there was either no room or only
minor room for improvement in the work of the organization, which is an incredible testament to the fine work of the Council and the quality of its leadership over the years.

In fact, the final open-ended question of the survey asked respondents if they had anything else they wished to add, and a number wrote with great pride and admiration of the work of the Council:

“This is a great organization, and I look forward to everything it does in the future.”

“CWPA is a godsend!”

“I feel very lucky to be in the position I hold, and the WPA is becoming increasingly essential to that work. Thank you for all of your efforts on behalf of our field and colleagues.”

“WPA does a great job—better than most professional organizations to which I have belonged.”

“This is a great, thoughtful survey - or at least it gave me a chance to be thoughtful about this great organization. I do feel I have a great many mentoring relationships in WPA!”

Three Key Findings

Still, the survey asked people to reflect critically on their experiences, and to offer specific suggestions on how the organization could improve the professional development and mentoring support it provides members—and respondents certainly were not shy about doing exactly this. Indeed, beyond the specific topics that will be detailed in the Discussion Section, three broad patterns seemed to emerge.

First, the data clearly suggest that CWPA is made up of an increasingly diverse membership, and that the various constituencies within the organization have different needs, attitudes, priorities and beliefs. Not only did responses significantly differ on some key issues, these differences often seemed to break along lines of rank and institutional affiliation. Thus, while there are many areas of agreement across positions, ranks and institutional contexts, the interests and goals of many WPAs also appear to diverge significantly at times.

In many ways the differences in attitude and belief among various groups follow what one might expect; in other cases, the results were surprising and require further investigation. For example, one group that responded in ways often difficult to predict were those who identified themselves as Associates, and seemed to profess needs and beliefs quite different
from both their more senior and more junior colleagues on some key issues. Another group whose needs and concerns seemed somewhat at odds with what one might expect on several issues were Non Tenure Track WPAs (which for the purposes of the survey included staff, part-time and full-time instructors, and graduate students).

Second, the data seem to indicate that there is a strong perception among several constituencies that CWPA is made up of “insiders” and “outsiders,” and that the interests and concerns of larger research institutions often dominate the conversations and practices of the organization. Even initiatives such as the Mentoring Project itself—which aimed at creating more opportunities for inclusive, egalitarian exchanges across all levels—was described by several respondents as paternalistic and unidirectional. Whether this impression is accurate and reflects some of the attitudes and practices of the organization in the past, or merely indicates a level of anxiety and confusion among certain members, the sheer existence of such a perception is troubling. Indeed, such complaints—though certainly not predominant—were fairly widespread, coming from respondents of all ranks and in all sorts of institutional contexts.

While initiatives such as WPA Directions and “WPA Listens” forum at the 2009 Conference represent clear attempts to include a wider array of voices and perspectives within CWPA, many respondents feel more could be done to create structured and recurring opportunities for exchange and collaboration. (Many of these comments are included in the Recommendations section below.)

Third, it is clear both from the level of interest generated by the survey (and the Mentoring Project more generally), as well as the number of respondents who actively called for more such opportunities in their open-ended responses, that CWPA should investigate ways to provide/promote more formal mentoring within the organization. The fact that over half of respondents at all ranks (51.8%) indicated that they would “Very Likely” or “Definitely” participate in a mentoring program if it were offered by the organization, and a significant number said they would certainly consider it (32.1%), indicates that such an initiative would be welcomed by many members.

Further, a majority of the most marginalized members of the organization—namely, untenured and non-tenure track WPAs—indicated they had no access to mentoring opportunities within their current institutions (58.3%), and more than 22% said they were not even involved in informal mentoring relationships.

Add to this the high number of respondents who indicated that their current program either has no mentoring system, or that the one in place needs
improvement and it becomes clear that additional forums where mentoring best-practices could be discussed would be enormously beneficial.

**Five Areas of Concern**

This section details five topics/areas of concern that emerged from all the data collected, as well as some specific suggestions on how these issues might be addressed in the future. Before proceeding, we include a breakdown of the overall demographics of survey respondents.

**Overview of Demographics**

The Mentoring Survey was administered both online and in print formats beginning on July 8, 2009, and in the eight weeks that the survey was open for data collection, 124 people participated in the study. Of this number, 108 participants finished all sections of the instrument—a completion rate of just under 88%.

The largest percentage of respondents identified their current professional status as Assistant Professors (30.3%), followed by Associate Professors (23.8%) and Full Professors (11.5%). Graduate Students and Full-time NTT Instructors each accounted for the same number of respondents (7.4%); followed by Staff (4.1%). Nearly 15% of respondents identified themselves as “Other,” the highest number of which described themselves as full-time non-tenure-tract (NTT) administrators (graduate students, staff, and instructors currently serving fulltime as WPAs.)

A majority of respondents identified themselves as currently writing program administrators (69.7%), and their current institutional/organizational affiliation as University (81.1%); followed by Liberal Arts College (14.8%); and Two-Year College (3.2%). In terms of the overall size of their institutions, the largest number of respondents described their organizations as consisting of more than 30,000 members (25.4%); followed by 20,001-30,000 (24.6%). Then, almost an equal number of respondents described their institutions as falling into each of the remaining size categories: 15,001-20,000 (12.3%); 10,001-15,000 (13.9%); 5,001-10,000 (11.5%); and less than 5000 (12.3%).

**The Desire for Mentoring**

As suggested in the introduction, some clear differences emerged in the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of various ranks and stakeholders taking the survey. Nowhere did these differences seem more pronounced than in responses to mentoring, beginning with the most direct question posed in
the survey on this topic, “If the Council of Writing Program Administrators were to offer some kind of mentoring program, how likely would you be to participate in it?”

As Figure 1 indicates, willingness to participate in CWPA sponsored mentoring seemed to significantly decrease the higher one’s professional rank.

![Likelihood of Participating in Mentoring](image)

**Figure 1**

Among Assistant Professors, 40% indicated that they would “Definitely” participate in such a program if it were offered, while just 14.3% of Associate Professors seemed to agree. No Full Professors (0.0%) indicated that they would “Definitely” participate in such a program.

At the other extreme, not a single Assistant Professor (0.0%) indicated that they would be “Not Likely” or “Definitely Not” participate in a mentoring program, whereas 19.0% of Associate Professors and 11.0% of Full Professors described themselves as “Not Likely” to participate. Additionally, 11.1% of Full Professors indicated that they would “Definitely Not” participate in such a program.

Whether such responses reflect differences in access to mentoring in other forms for the various ranks, or suggest disparate attitudes about the nature and purposes of mentoring is unclear. When asked whether their “current organization/institution [has] a formal mentoring program for members,” and if so, whether they participate in such a program, each of the ranks again responded quite differently. 50.0% of Assistant Professors
indicated that their institutions provided no form of mentoring for faculty, whereas 34.5% of Associates and 35.7% of Full Professors responded similarly. Of those who reported having access to some form of mentoring within their current institutions, 88.9% of Full Professors participated in it, as did 80% of Assistants. Interestingly, 70.6% of Associates reported participating in mentoring at their institutions when they had access to it, and 6.9% of these same Associates indicated not knowing whether their institution had any kind of mentoring available.

Access to institutional mentoring was very poor for survey respondents who identified themselves as NTT (graduate students, staff, and instructors) and currently serving in WPA positions, 84.6% of whom reported having no form of mentoring available within their current institution. Respondents who said they did not have access to formal mentoring within their institutions were asked in a separate question to identify all other types of mentoring relationships they were currently experiencing. Again, 61.5% of respondents who identified themselves as NTT and currently serving as WPAs indicated “not being in a mentoring relationship of any kind.” Similarly, 23.8% of Associates also reported not being in any kind of mentoring relationship.

The question defined informal mentoring as a “relationship that was created spontaneously and maintained informally” among the mentoring partners. And as Figure 2 indicates, these types of mentoring experiences were among the more common across all ranks—particularly among Assistants (52.0%). In contrast, E-mentoring (“a relationship that occurs primarily or exclusively online”) was an experience that not a single NTT WPA nor Full Professor reported being engaged in, while 16.0% of Assistants and 19.0% Associates reported some experience with E-mentoring.

Finally, Group Mentoring (a “relationship in which more than a pair of individuals come together, with one or more in the group providing support or direction to the others”) was reported as far more common among Full Professors (22.2%) and Associates (19.0%) than Assistants (12.0%) and NTT WPAs (7.7%).

Another question asked respondents about different types or styles of mentoring relationships they had experienced in the past, and the overwhelming majority of respondents at all ranks cited Hierarchical Mentoring as the most common (52.2%).

The question defined Hierarchical Mentoring as “mentoring primarily between two people at different stages of their careers” in which “the primary role of the mentor is to provide advice and guidance to the mentee, who in turn primarily consults the mentor when questions or problems arise.” In contrast, Peer Based mentoring was defined as primarily taking
place, “between people at similar stages of their careers” with the primary role of both parties being, “to share information and to assist each other when problems or opportunities arise.”

No Full Professor or Associate Professor described having experienced Peer Based mentoring. In contrast, 25.0% of NTT WPAs and 24.0% of Assistants said they experienced Peer Based mentoring.

Co-mentoring (defined as a relationship between, “people at different stages of their careers, or between people in different fields/professions” with “the primary role of both parties to share information and to assist each other when problems or opportunities arise,”) was least common among Assistants (12.0%), while all other groups reported being significantly more familiar with this style: Associates (38.1%), Full Professors (33.3%), and NTT WPAs (33.3%).
Finally, the survey asked respondents who identified themselves as currently serving as WPAs whether they had any kind of mentoring system implemented within their own programs, and if so, how effective they believed those systems to be.

Again, each rank of WPA seemed to have very different experiences with—and views on—mentoring within their own programs (Figure 3). 44.4% of Full Professors indicated that their programs already had a mentoring system in place, and that this system seemed to work well. Only 4.0% of Assistants said the same thing about their own programs. 23.1% of NTT and 23.8% of Associates (23.8) shared this assessment.

Assistants (36.0%), Associates (47.6%), and Full Professors (33.3%) agreed that while they had mentoring systems in place, they needed some improvement. In contrast, only 7.7% of NTT WPAs said that their mentoring programs needed improvement. This may be due to the fact that 53.8% of NTT WPAs indicated that their program had no mentoring system at all, but said that they thought having one would improve things.

Among Assistants, 44% indicated that their program had no mentoring system, but said that having one would be good. Among Associates 14.3% and 11.1% of Full Professors seemed to agree, but this may be explained by the fact that both groups indicated already having some kind of mentoring system in place. No NTT WPA or Assistant indicated that their program “Has no mentoring system and does not need one,” whereas 4.8% of Associates and 11.1% of Full Professors said that their programs neither had nor needed such a system.

The only thing that all respondents who had mentoring systems in their programs unanimously agreed on was that such systems should continue: not a single respondent said, “Yes, my program currently has a mentoring system, but it should be eliminated.”

Conclusions

Clearly there are differences in how WPAs at various ranks perceive, define, and pursue mentoring. It is also understandably hard for people to commit to a potential or an incipient program without more information. Yet the fact that so many untenured and NTT members have little access to mentoring and expressed a need for it, while many tenured respondents seemed less eager to become involved in such relationships, suggests that CWPA can play a role in providing flexible and adaptable initiatives, support, and recognition for such relationships in the future.
Because e-mentoring is one model we wanted to explore for this project, an entire section of the survey asked participants to rank their familiarity with and use of a number of technologies, including web-based communication and social networking tools. The survey also asked respondents to rank the use of these technologies personally and professionally, and also on programmatic, departmental and institutional levels.

Personal use: the most common form of technology identified by respondents was having or using Facebook/MySpace (70.1%); followed by YouTube (67.7%), then personal web sites (61.9%). The least common form of technology used personally was Twitter (24.2%); followed by Podcasts (28.4%), and Wikis (39.6%).

Professional use: the most common form of technology identified by respondents was having or using websites (76.3%); followed by wikis
then YouTube (51.7%). The least common form of technology used professionally was Twitter (13.5%); followed by Podcasts (31.5%), and Facebook/MySpace (42.7%).

Two noteworthy trends:

- Websites were the only technology reported widely used on programmatic (89.1%), departmental (94.0%), and institution-wide (97.8%) levels; websites were the only technology whose use consistently increased as respondents were asked to consider larger institutional structures and clearly dominate other forms of web-based communication at these levels.

- While blogs are used with some frequency on personal (43.8%) and professional (48.4%) levels, and are used on an institution-wide level with some frequency (37.9%), they are one of the least popular forms of communication on programmatic (27.8%) and departmental (14.6%) levels. Another survey section asked respondents to rank their familiarity with and usefulness of various tools that CWPA members have access to. A similar trend was apparent. The WPA Listserv

![Technology use graph](image-url)
(94.6%) and Website (93.6%) remain the most commonly used and appreciated forms of communication, while the WPA Member Blog remained the least used and valued (17.8%).

Conclusions

It would seem that the use of blogs is not prevalent among most of our survey respondents. Even though they are perhaps one of the most writing-intensive forms of web-based communication, blogs are also extremely labor-intensive to produce, and seem to work best when institutional resources and support are devoted to their creation and upkeep. As noted previously, there also seem to be differences in the ways that various ranks of WPAs use technology with respect to forming and maintaining mentoring relationships; a number of Assistant and Associate respondents reported being involved in e-mentoring, whereas not a single NNT or Full Professor responded similarly. Thus, for e-mentoring to be a viable model for CWPA to pursue in the future, care must be paid both in how participants are recruited and supported, but also how such a system is explained to those not currently familiar with such tools. Indeed, beyond it uses in mentoring, many respondents specifically cited technology issues as something they would like to see addressed in various ways and forums in the future.

CWPA Events at the MLA and CCCC Conferences

Because we were interested in learning more about how CWPA members view and utilize current forums for social networking and professional exchange, we asked respondents to evaluate several longstanding initiatives supported by the organization. While respondents were universally positive about the value and usefulness of the CWPA Conference, Summer Workshop, and Institutes, other events were seen as needing improvement.

Among respondents, 73.8% indicated that they had never attended the CWPA Reception at Modern Language Association’s (MLA) convention, and of those who had attended 40.7% described the event as “Not Useful,” while a majority found the event only “Fairly Useful” (55.6%).

While 57% indicated that they had attended the WPA Breakfast at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) convention, 36.8% also described this event as “Not Useful,” and 47.4% found it only “Fairly Useful.”

Some respondents who indicated that there was room for improvement elaborated on their concerns. Representative comments include:
“WPA Breakfast—I attend every year and feel like it doesn’t quite serve the purpose that it could. Have we ever thought about having a WPA Happy Hour? Why is it so early in the morning? And it conflicts with the Newcomers’ Breakfast—an event that many of us should be attending.”

“I do love the CWPA. However, I jokingly refer to the WPA breakfast as boys and bacon. I stopped going a few years ago because I was getting up really early in the morning to listen to lovely people congratulate one another - kind of exclusive in feel. I don’t think that is true of the workshops or the conference.”

“While the CWPA is made of very friendly, kind people, it can act as a closed community at times. Specifically, I have attended the breakfast and receptions at CCCC and while I introduced myself around, and made attempts to talk with people, I was mostly ignored and made to feel unwelcome. It will be difficult for me to make myself attend these events in the future.”

Of particular note in these responses (and echoed within comments or a variety of other topics within the survey) is the perception that CWPA is made up of “insiders” and “outsiders,” and that while the organization is open and welcoming to newcomers in many venues, at other times it can seem closed and paternalistic. As one respondent explained:

“My experience with the organization has been that the fora in which many of my colleagues have participated have been very, very helpful. My interactions with the leadership of the WPA has been much less warm, inviting, and engaging. It may be my own peculiar perception, but I have always felt as though there was an inside and an outside, and that the leadership was inside. There are exceptions, of course, but the lack of public opportunities for interaction with the leadership as a body has been problematic for me.”

Another respondent specifically cited the CWPA Breakfast as one such event that seemed less inviting and rewarding to newcomers:

“Graduate students shouldn’t bother attending the WPA breakfast at Cs, unless they go with a well-networked faculty member who will make sure to introduce them to people. The breakfast is, rightly, a time for people who have known each
other for years to socialize; those not already connected, in my experience and that of some grad student colleagues who attended with me, are ignored. I think there are other, better venues for grad students to meet long-time WPA members.”

Conclusions

While a majority of survey respondents expressed a high degree of satisfaction overall with events and activities sponsored by CWPA, because the MLA Reception and WPA Breakfast are specifically designed to provide more opportunities for social and professional exchange for all our members, the perception among some that these events could be more inclusive deserves further thought. Indeed, the Executive Board has undertaken two recent initiatives to address many of the perceptions expressed by survey respondents (see Initiatives Undertaken below). Other suggestions include planning alternate receptions at venues such as the annual meetings of the International Writing Center Association (IWCA) and Two-Year College Association (TYCA), and investigating ways to restructure current events.

CWPA, WPA Work and Institutional Diversity

In addition to the perception among some respondents that the organization can at times feel comprised of insiders and outsiders, others felt that CWPA seems overly focused on the concerns of large research programs to the detriment of smaller institutions. Such comments were fairly common in answers to two open-ended questions:

1) If you indicated there is room for some improvement with respect to the tools, resources, and opportunities the Council of Writing Program Administrators provides its members for professional development and collaboration, what are some of the things you’d like to see changed?

2) If the Council of Writing Program Administrators were to provide additional forums to discuss professional issues in the future, what topics would you like to see covered?

Representative responses include:

“I do sometimes struggle as a WPA at a small liberal arts college to find my peers among all the enormous state-U WPs that (understandably) tend to dominate discussion, development, and even pedagogy. There are a lot of things that we can
share, but sometimes the more industrial solutions deployed by an ASU just don’t translate (at all) to my situation—and I have trouble finding alternate models.”

“WPA roles have many configurations; sometimes it appears that the conversation focuses primarily on those who direct curriculum in large research universities. But many of us work in quite different environments, and I’d like to see this acknowledged.”

“More emphasis on WPA work at other than R1 institutions.”

“I’d like to see more outreach to a variety of types of colleges, including small and community colleges.”

“A lot of the focus seems to be on the larger institutions, and as a member of a small institution, I would like to see some additional focus there.”

“I think it would be useful for WPA to consider the different institutional contexts that people work in and figure out how to address the idea that what happens at a large research institution applies to all schools.”

“Encourage wider range of approaches/points of view.”

“WPA seems dominated by large public institutions, and that experience is not relevant for me.”

Further, some respondents mentioned these issues in responses to a third open-ended survey question:

3) Aside from professional development and mentoring issues, are there any other topics or areas that you would like to see the Council of Writing Program Administrators address in the future?

“Administration at small colleges.”

“I’d like to see more outreach to a variety of types of colleges, including small and community colleges.”

“More emphasis on WPA work at other than R1 institutions.”

“A lot of the focus seems to be on the larger institutions, and as a member of a small institution, I would like to see some additional focus there.”
Conclusions

The number and variety of responses echoing these concerns across several different questions suggest that many members feel this is a significant issue, particularly when considering that 23% of respondents said their institutions had fewer than 10,000 students, and 18% identified their institutions as Liberal Arts or Two-Year Colleges.

At least two avenues have been suggested for addressing this concern. First, the Nominating Committee could take deliberate steps to create a slate of nominees that guarantee at least one ballot choice between faculty at “smaller” institutions, just as it does with our official Two-Year College faculty slot. Ideally, there would be other slots open to Liberal Arts or Two-Year College faculty. However, one possible concern with this approach is that when only one person is designated to “represent” a constituency that often compels them to act as a lone, exemplary voice.

A larger strategy would be to revisit all of our activities and artifacts (e.g. the conference, journal, the CWPA Mentoring Project) to make sure that dialogical forums are in place to serve our multiple constituencies. For example, CWPA might sponsor a pre-conference institute and online conversations on “WPA Work in College Contexts” just as we did with the CWPA 2009 MLA Session “WPA Work in Community College Contexts.” As CWPA continues to “reach out” to other organizations such as IWCA and TYCA, and full-time non-tenure-track faculty, we should continue to work on drawing institute leaders and plenary speakers from smaller and two-year institutions.

Perceived Divide between Untenured and Tenured WPAs

Many respondents perceived a division in the attitudes, beliefs and goals of untenured and tenured members of the organization. Here are some representative concerns that were voiced:

“I do feel I have a great many mentoring relationships in WPA, but I do feel like the voices of quite experienced jWPAs get left out at the Executive levels and the more explicit shaping of the organization.”

“Why do we - the academy - so mistrust change? So mistrust junior faculty?”

“Despite gestures to the contrary, the organization often seems less interested in nurturing junior faculty and untenured WPAs than it could/should be. Further, the latest generation of WPAs have been trained for their positions—and have cer-
tain expectations and beliefs about the field—that our predecessors simply could not have had because most of this field didn’t exist then. So we all need to be more attentive to shifting values and beliefs about the nature of our work.”

“I do think there needs to be a real change in the ‘support’ for jWPAs. The mentoring program at the conference is a good step, but it’s too unidirectional. How come it’s such a hierarchical model of collaboration? I know that when I mentor students I learn so much from them. Isn’t that true for sWPAs? I feel I hear this as an underlying thread in the conference but it’s not coming from the most established voices. I would like to see CWPA try not to speak FOR jWPAs but WITH.”

“I think it’s time to shake up the leadership in the workshop - things are changing and instead of arguing that junior WPAs and graduate WPAs shouldn’t be in those positions, shouldn’t we talk about how those can be engaging positions? The CWPA feels a bit paternalistic to me. Well-intentioned, but paternalistic nonetheless.”

“Additional opportunities for professional development at the junior level would be beneficial. The organization seems very hierarchical in its structure and culture.”

Survey results appear to confirm that there are differences in outlook and priorities of our members at various ranks. In particular, one question explicitly asked respondents to discuss what they believed should be the main purpose of a professional organization such as CWPA. Given the multi-purposed nature of CWPA’s identity and work, it makes sense that there were significant differences reflected in the ways that various ranks prioritized the various possibilities:

Assistant Professors identified “Establishing guidelines and standards for practice,” as their top priority for CWPA (36.0%). Associate Professors ranked, “Advocating on behalf of the profession,” as their number one priority (42.9%). Full Professors cited, “Creating forums for networking and the sharing of information,” as their chief organizational concern (44.4%).

Similarly, there were differences in how the various ranks responded to a question asking respondents how satisfied they were “overall with the tools, resources, and opportunities CWPA provides its members for professional development and collaboration.”

Among Full Professors, 44% indicated that they were, “Extremely Satisfied – no room for improvement,” as compared to 23.8% of Associate
Professors who felt the same way; whereas only 4.0% of Assistant Profes-
sors shared that view. In other words, 96% of Assistant Professors felt some
improvements could be made; of those, 20% believed somewhat substantial
changes were required.

Conclusions

Since exactly half of respondents (50.0%) identified themselves as untenured
or non-tenure track (assistant professors, full-time instructors, staff, and
graduate students), the perception that significant differences between
senior and junior levels of the field exist is not too surprising. The sur-
vey itself—which presupposed that mentoring is an important topic, and
attracted respondents who are interested in receiving additional support
within CWPA—this call for change in the culture and practices of the
organization is both expected and desired. Both the Mentoring Project and
the Survey are designed to be tools for organizational learning and change.

At the same time, it is clear that there are differences in the ways that
untenured and tenured WPAs understand and perceive mentoring, the
organization, and the work of the field. While providing additional oppor-
tunities for professional exchange and networking may address some of
these concerns, CWPA should create additional forums for examining and
discussing these differences.

Additional Recommendations from Respondents

This report has touched on several different issues in such a short space
that it is difficult to propose just one set of actions or initiatives that might
address everything covered. Since we received many thoughtful sugges-
tions, requests, and recommendations from survey respondents on a wide
range of topics, and it seems only fitting that we end by reporting directly
some of what they had to say.

First, many people made excellent suggestions about mentoring:

“I do think more can be done in terms of supporting peer and
hierarchal mentoring within the organization, such as provid-
ing more structured support for the relationships that develop
at the WPA workshops. I realize that this is difficult because
we are all so busy. However, simple things like setting aside
“reunion” times at the WPA or CCCC’s conferences might
be a start.”
“WPA Workshop—as a former workshop leader, I think that the workshop has a lot of value. I wish I had attended as a new WPA. But I think that we could provide better networking opportunities for those new to the WPA role (participating in the workshop) and other WPAs who have been in the organization, and in the profession, for awhile.”

“I do think there’s room for more mentorship. The colleagues that I met through the WPA Summer Workshop have stayed in touch and been an incredible resource, but it would have been nice to have a pool of people with more experience that I could have felt comfortable getting into contact with.”

“I wish there was an opportunity for WPA career-path mentoring that was confidential.”

“I think we are missing out on more opportunities for online mentoring, as well as a more formal online version of the WPA conference.”

“Formal mentoring relationships would be good. Not enough help for senior faculty who can still benefit from mentoring by other senior faculty.”

“A more structured mentoring program available—perhaps even for specific areas: mentoring in assessment, working with administration, professional development, etc.”

“There has been no particular effort yet to provide sustained, programmatic mentoring: using the organization/institution of WPA to match volunteer mentors with less-experienced faculty for extended mentoring with some common organizational goals to be achieved over time (say, a two-year stint, initially), or to formally link/support groups who co-mentor across time about specific issues in WPA.”

“Since relatively few WPAs find themselves employed in institutions that also employ senior/former WPAs, a huge number of WPAs can find job-related mentoring only through national contacts. The WPA organization could serve WPAs and the profession well by designing and supporting some kind of organizational/institutional mentoring program.”
“While there are many sources of information for its members, it would be wonderful if there were more hands-on/forum type opportunities online for WPA members.”

The Mentoring Project committee and the Executive Board have undertaken a series of initiatives we believe help to address many of the concerns and requests expressed above; in the meantime many respondents also had a number interesting suggestions concerning outreach, particularly with respect to institutions other than large research-oriented schools. I also would like to see a way for the WPA to reach out to those WPAs or de facto WPAs who are going it alone without the resources to come to the summer workshop or conference or even the knowledge about WPA. For example, I’m thinking about those playing the role of WPAs in community colleges. To do this, I suggest we look at working with TYCA, which has developed an increasingly vibrant set of regional organizations, each of which holds its own conference.”

“Perhaps offering regional meetings, lists, or discussion opportunities would be helpful. Networking with other WPAs in my area has been more difficult than I would have anticipated.”

“At 4Cs I talked to someone (Eli Goldblatt?) who said that there were plans afoot to establish local/regional branches of the WPA. I would *love* to get involved with other WPAs in my geographical area to network, co-mentor, help with professional development at each other’s institutions, etc.”

“Regional conferences would make access to f2f networking opportunities and mentoring more accessible for WPAs with few or no travel funds.”

“Conferences, summer institutes and workshops, and breakfasts are very expensive for colleagues who do not receive support from their institutions and who are on a budget. Is grant funding available to lower the costs of attendance?”

Clearly many respondents hope to see CWPA promote its affiliates program, as well as do more to support local and regional conferences and meetings, particularly with travel budgets so limited. Additionally, several respondents asked if additional funding opportunities might be available through CWPA to assist members from under-represented institutions and
constituencies to attend the summer conference, workshop and institutes. One or two respondents also suggested that CWPA could do more to provide online access to many of the events and sessions at the summer conference, through streaming video, Skype, live-blogging, or other technologies.

Several respondents wanted to see more opportunities for professional development and collaboration, and some representative comments include:

“I wish there were more opportunities for targeted professional development. I am struggling with moving my work toward publication, and I wish there was a way to access support from WPA.”

“How about running a summer institute for *teams* from institutions, say the WPA, a departmental faculty member, and an administrator? Like a briefer version of the Knight Institute at Cornell?”

“I’d like to see alternative multi-day workshops focused on a single issue: assessment programs; portfolio programs; faculty development programs; etc.”

“I would like to see more concrete help for JWPAs to clarify their job descriptions and self advocate on their campuses.”

“I’d like to see the conference foster more collaborative work sessions, which could be designed to actually develop and forward the agenda of the organization, with less time spent on concurrent sessions, as those are more appropriate to a different type of conference. With the level of folks at this conference, the time would be better spent in conversation rather than presentation.”

“Better opportunities for networking and collaboration on research—what about a research network forum of some sort?”

“Research and quality research; collaboration with the other wpa-related orgs more—writing center and wac/wid—too much overlap in positions but distinct conferences are troubling.”

**Initiatives Undertaken So Far**

In response to the many helpful comments and suggestions made by respondents to the CWPA Mentoring Project Survey—as well as the count-
less other recommendations and requests received throughout the process of planning and conducting the WPA Mentoring Portal Sessions at the CWPA 2009 conference—several initiatives have been approved by the Executive Board in the last few months.

1. To achieve more inclusive and diverse perspectives on professional development and mentoring, the WPA Mentoring Project Committee has been expanded to include Michael Day (Director of the First-Year Composition Program at Northern Illinois University), Timothy Dougherty (a graduate student at Syracuse University), and Michele Eodice (Director, Writing Center & Writing Across the Curriculum at the University Oklahoma and immediate past President of the International Writing Centers Association). In continuing its work, the Committee will seek more volunteers, suggestions, and ideas.

2. The CWPA Mentoring Project collaborates regularly with WPA-GO (WPA-Graduate Student Organization). This organization seeks to strengthen connections between graduate students and professional WPAs through social networking and educational development opportunities. In support of graduate student WPA preparation, WPA-GO works with faculty WPAs to provide the following: mentoring activities, workshops, scholarships and awards, and social events. WPA-GO is administered by the WPA-Graduate Student Committee (WPA-GC), a committee within the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

Current officers of the WPA-Graduate Student Committee (WPA-GC) are co-chairs: Cristyn Elder (Purdue University) and Megan Schoen (Purdue University).

Local conference chair: Ryan Witt, Temple University (2010 conference)

Committee members: Meaghan Brewer (Temple University), Timothy Dougherty (Syracuse University), Steven Lessner (Michigan State University), and Ryan Skinnell (Arizona State University).

WPA-GO membership does not require fees in addition to CWPA membership dues. All members of CWPA are welcomed to join WPA-GO and are encouraged to participate. To officially join WPA-GO and receive WPA-GO updates, please send an e-mail to wpago1@gmail.com with “Join” in the subject line. You can also follow on Facebook by sending a friend request to WPA-GO.

Timothy Dougherty is a member of The CWPA Mentoring Project; Joe Janangelo and Duane Roen serve as advisors for WPA-GO.
3. Based on the success of the Mentoring Portal events at the 2009 Conference, it was agreed that future conferences and events will include some opportunity, session, or other recognition of mentoring as a commitment to the future of the field. The 2010 Conference in Philadelphia featured two days of mentoring events suggested and led by CWPA members. WPA-GO members led four conference sessions and participated in many others.

4. To provide additional opportunities to learn from colleagues working in a range of institutional and professional contexts, a rolling Mentoring Blog will encourage members to ask and respond to questions pertinent to their professional development and work. The blog will offer posts by volunteer and invited bloggers (representing a wide range of perspectives, experience, and ranks), responding to questions posed by members. In addition to serving as a clearinghouse for professional development, we are investigating ways such a site might be used to facilitate the formation of mentoring relationships (a space where those seeking mentoring on a variety of levels might be matched up with others). The Committee will be working on this during fall 2010. Stay tuned for news.

5. In response to the results of the WPA Mentoring Survey, CWPA President Linda Adler-Kassner asked the Breakfast Committee to devise ways of making the CCCC CWPA Breakfast more collegial and interactive. To that end, the 2010 CWPA Breakfast featured themed “Table Talk” tables that were aimed at supporting conversations and building community. Board members and WPA colleagues served as “ambassadors” and WPA will make a more focused effort to make sure that newcomers receive a warm and attentive welcome.

6. The Mentoring Committee and volunteers will also compile annotated mentoring resources by developing an online space where members can post links to works about mentoring (in any medium or genre), with 500-word descriptions of its relevance. We hope this will help members seeking information about how mentoring is implemented across institutional contexts and various levels (undergraduate mentoring, graduate, faculty, etc.).

7. We hope to honor excellence in mentoring by developing a digital “Mentoring Mosaic” where members can post stories about successful mentoring. Highlighting such moments will give us all a better sense of best-practices, traditions, and innovations in mentoring. It will also give
members a public opportunity to honor those who have helped them, and may prompt reflection and contributions as people comment on and respond to such stories.

Conclusion

In closing, we would like to thank everyone who participated in the survey. There is much more work to be done, both in terms of assessing the specific needs and concerns of the various constituencies that make up CWPA, as well as in developing new programs and initiatives to address these needs. There is also much more to report, and we look forward to sharing much more of what we have learned from surveying our members in the near future. But it is clear that the strength of our organization lies in the diversity, ingenuity, and generosity of our members. The time and care that respondents took to reflect on their experiences and offer concrete suggestions to complex problems shows just how resourceful our colleagues are when given the opportunity. Indeed, as one respondent so succinctly put it: “I’m sure there’s room for improvement, but every time I turn around some brilliant person has thought of a new, improved tool, resource, or opportunity. I love this organization!” In many respects this is the essence of effective mentoring: providing occasions for people to meet and to share their ideas to improve the tools, resources, and the opportunities available in an organization they admire and love. We hope the mentoring survey and this preliminary report in some small way serve these ends as well.

Notes

1. Originally submitted to the Executive Board of the Council of Writing Program Administrators by Sheldon Walcher, Joseph Janangelo, and Duane Roen on September 26, 2009. (Revised to include initiatives undertaken: September, 2010)

Works Cited


Notes on Comp: When “WPA” Work Hints at Suspicion

Joseph Janangelo

I am writing to offer a perspective and a provocation. My topic is the concept of suspicion as it pertains to WPA work and scholarship. My hope is to suggest ideas and contexts worthy of conversation and debate. To begin, I draw from the work of two scholars.

WARY AND SUSPICIOUS

The first is writer and lawyer Nathalie Sarraute’s critique of the traditional novel’s reliance on clearly delineated character and plot. In her 1956 collection of essays *The Age of Suspicion*, Sarraute attacks nineteenth-century canonical literature. She targets great books that feature clearly delineated characters, elaborate plots, and explicit symbols and images that add up completely. She characterizes these vaunted works as calcified, boring, and so predictable that they do not communicate as persuasively as they used to or, to put things more skeptically, as they were said to do.

Disdainful of such monuments, Sarraute indicts them as over-determined and overdone. She also finds that in terms of their alleged ability to embrace—much less express—new ideas or vanguard, complicated thinking they are just plain done. She argues that the great novelists’ style and approach have become so obvious and declarative that they have created benign and boring artifacts that are bereft of sophistication, critical thinking, or innovation. To buttress her critique, Sarraute quotes Stendhal’s famous statement “Le génie du soupçon est venu au monde,” which is translated as “the genius of suspicion has appeared on the scene” (57).

Calling suspicion a “sophisticated” (57) reaction to such declarative and moribund discourse, Sarraute outlines the grounds of readers’ resistance. “To begin with, today’s reader is suspicious of what the author’s imagination has to offer him” (57). Weary of overdrawn texts and their obvious messages, the reader “is wary of the abrupt, spectacular types of action that model the character with a few resounding whacks; he is also wary of plot,
which winds itself around the character like wrappings, giving it, along with an appearance of cohesiveness and life, mummy-like stiffness” (61). Such reactions are holistic in that “the reader has grown wary of practically everything. The reason being that, for some time now, he has been learning about too many things, and he is unable to forget entirely all that he has learned” (61).

Sarraute notes that such wariness is healthy and reciprocal: “But that’s not all. However strange it may seem, the same writer, who is awed by the reader’s growing perspicacity and wariness, is, himself, becoming more and more wary of the reader” (67). This mutuality works because “It shows, on the part of both author and reader, an unusually sophisticated state of mind. For not only are they both wary of the character, but through him, they are wary of each other” (57). This project has an endgame. “Suspicion, which is by way of destroying the character and the entire outdated mechanism that guaranteed its force, is one of the morbid reactions by which an organism defends itself and seeks another equilibrium” (73-4). Championing that equilibrium, Sarraute writes that “We have now entered upon an age of suspicion” (57).

Another scholar I wish to cite is author and activist Susan Sontag. In 2003’s Regarding the Pain of Others, Sontag writes about viewers’ reactions to photographs of war and travesty. She asserts that such photos’ credibility stems from a shared acceptance that they are fact-based, “Their credentials of objectivity were inbuilt” (26). Sontag acknowledges that there are complications because “those who stress the evidentiary punch of image-making by cameras have to finesse the question of the subjectivity of the image-maker” (26). She notes that image-makers are engaged in persuasive projects and adds that “photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus” (6).

Of course consensus of intention (how makers intend their words and images to be seen, interpreted, and used) can be undermined by the vagaries of public reception. Sontag attributes that to circulation. “Normally,” she writes, “if there is any distance from the subject, what a photograph ‘says’ can be read in several ways. Eventually, one reads into the photograph what it should be saying” (29). She explains that “The photographer’s intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it” (39). Further complications inhere as viewers evince wariness. Once images go public—I am thinking here about the visual, graphic, and aural texts in the 2009 NCTE National Gallery of Writing and CWPA’s wing in it, and about the public discourse that we
who pursue WPA work produce for public arenas (e.g. web sites, campus, and other scholarly venues)—their intended intellectual and truth value is contested and their evolving reception is insecure. As Sontag notes, “The truth is they [the images and captions] are not ‘simply’ anything, and certainly not regarded just as facts” (26). Beyond that, “As important as people now believe images of war to be, this does not dispel the suspicion that lingers about the interest in these images, and the intentions of those who produce them” (111). It is true that, engaged in the project of seeking and cultivating public attention (Lanham) for our work, we experience a loss of control because we cannot completely stage public perception or reception. Sontag hints at this when she discusses gallery installations and says that “A museum or a gallery visit is a social situation, riddled with distractions, in the course of which art is seen and commented on” (121). Such situations derail when viewers’ gazes decenter. This is no surprise because “Most depictions of tormented, mutilated bodies do arouse a prurient interest” (95).

Prurience, sometimes characterized as wanton interest and restless desire, has a place in public discourse. For a quick example, one might notice the coverage of Matt Gutman, “hottie-of-the-oil-spill.” ¹ If we entertain the idea of looking and desire beyond the strictly erotic sphere, we might consider visual and graphic texts that plant multiple ideas and images in viewers’ minds. Such examples would include Salvador Dali’s famous double paintings. ² These texts have the capacity to convey multiple things at once with images that are terrifically and, at times, terribly suggestive.

In “Regarding the Pain of Women: Questions of Gender and the Arts of Holocaust Memory,” holocaust scholar James E. Young discusses the ethical issues involving texts that draw and attract unwelcome desire. Young discusses Yad Vashem and how spectators’ desire undermines any museum’s noble goals. He adds that “At the same time, despite the museum’s stated aim of maintaining the exhibit’s historical integrity, the institution may have refused to acknowledge another historical reality: the possibility of visitors’ prurient gazes” (1783). Viewers routinely take from images what they want and need to see. That act has implications for image makers and gallery curators: “For the line between exhibition and exhibitionism remains as fine as it is necessary, even when historians and curators are scrupulous” (1783). Describing the tension between the intended and delivered viewing experience, Young asks an important question, “Can curators vouch for the integrity of every museum visitor’s gaze” (1783)?

Let’s think about longing—those desirous, covetous looks that can undermine WPA work and workers in campus and online contexts. I am going to suggest that unwelcome desire and unwanted looking/reception
are often characterized as prurience—a sordid and covetous presence that forces itself on the wholesome and the good. The key trait about those criminal looks is that they seem to belong to others. Thinking of WPA work, WPAs, CWPA, and the many productions we engender and endorse, the question I would ask is this: *is our gaze ever prurient?* My answer would be yes, at least as our detractors might see it. I would add that striving to understand suspicion of our work can offer valuable perspectives and strategies if and when our public projects do not work out as well as we hope they will.

**The Integrity of Prurience**

If we accept suspicion into our intellectual and working lives, some questions arise. They include: In looking at our projects, what might our detractors see? What might be there for them to see? Here I would like to try a turn and offer some thoughts that may lead to strategies for enacting and pursuing WPA work.

First, we might try seeing ourselves and our work as *spectacular*. In using that term, I am thinking of Liz Conor’s work on gender and celebrity. Along with many fine celebrations of student writing and composition instruction, spectacle occurs on campus with the intersections of WPA work and the idea of casting. Many academic units (often “departments” in two-year and smaller colleges and “programs” at larger schools) have a large *cast*, if not a budget, and feature (year-to-year with adjunct status) significant numbers of self-perceived institutional *extras*. The ideology of the spectacular pertains as we engage in work and productions that are meant to be seen, admired, and emulated by many. This would include the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition” (replete if never complete with its technology plank), assessment galleries, and a National Gallery of Writing. Such projects are rightly designed to be seen, to make noise, and to have an enduring impact. Such work is always rhetorical and often emblematic. As Sontag notes, “Photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes; sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan” (85).

Spectacle pertains to our public discourse as we work hard to solicit, compel, and control attention. We cannot control viewers’ gazes, but we can see and question the idea of positioning these projects as such spectacular, formidable, shellacked, consensual, and invincible texts. Here, it is good to remember Young’s suspicion of a public exhibition because of “its conversion of victims into *objets d’art*” (1778) which then “become part of the iconic currency…” (1781). Creating such currency tempts “the propensity
to idealize” (1781), which leads to “hardened idealizations” (1778). Those idealizations soon become emblematic; they “serve as fixtures around which other survivors’ stories are told” (1778). A potential problem with designing emblematic artifacts (e.g. “best practices” and outcomes statements) is that they can suppress diversity while modeling and inspiring the intellectual calcification that come from unity of thought, practice, or approach. The trouble with purveying and defending such concepts and practices unilaterally is that those texts have become naturalized so that they are difficult to question or even see. By adhering to such monuments—the artifacts and their expressed certitudes—we might imagine that we are a collective “we” (WPAs or CWPA) who are always right.

Questioning such certitudes helps me wonder, if in reaching for big attention, we are—to play a bit with Sontag’s title—disregarding or dismissing the disdain of others to our and our causes’ detriment? I invite you to re-read our profession’s many position and outcomes statements. Witness their clarity and self-evidence as their participants’ collective voices resound in unity. In such work, “we” exist. Moreover, we’re (we who are so bonded that we can employ that contraction) are sure enough to use emphatic, declarative discourse. To be clear, we rightly put ourselves and our ideas out there in such public texts. My question is why, once we employ such emphatic approaches, are we surprised and angered when its meets with resistance, critique (sometimes “savage,” another quality of the prurient) or worse, silence? We sometimes crave a spotlight, but we might understand that it may not always be the flattering follow-spot we seek. Some lights roam; others glare. But must they blind? My question—and it is a suspicious one—is this: In describing our work and goals, could “we” become more self-critical than self-valorizing or satisfied? Doing that might leave room for important and game-changing questions, dissent, advice, resistance, and innovation.

Questioning further, what could it mean to engage skeptical gazes as credible, rather than ignorant, recalcitrant, or prurient? For one, it might mean not assuming that the spectacles we stage are always as persuasive as we intend them to be. A major trait of WPAs is resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity and work effectively with change. Perhaps we could combine resilience with a sophisticated receptivity—note just rebuttal—to critique? We might look suspiciously at our projects to see if (and how) our campus, public, and scholarly activities may appear capricious, detached, or self-indulgent. We might ask ourselves skeptical questions instead of waiting for our detractors to pose them, so we can form our individual and collective responses. Working warily, we could anticipate the critique and its echo by asking ourselves, what are we doing with issues
such as technology, service learning, and portfolios, and why? Doing this effectively means developing the ability to see and to see through our work.

**Transparently Reflective**

The project of seeing and seeing through our ideas and work relates in part to staging. Here it is good to remember Sontag’s claim that “the practice of inventing dramatic news pictures, staging them for the camera, seems on its way to becoming a lost art” (58). WPAs often stage big time, but it is how we stage that merits discussion. Too often, we assume that our projects speak for themselves and that viewers will see what we see in them. This thought reflects traditional notions about perspective. For example, “The photographs [Virginia] Woolf received are treated as a window on the war: transparent views of their subject” (Sontag 31). We sometimes compose and treat our projects as if they offer perfectly clear and transparent views on their topics. If we call that strategy and its utility into question, we might shift our approach from clear and transparent to distanced and reflective. That means resisting the lure and lore of transparency by creating texts that are at once clear, opalescent, and reflective.

This idea stems from Jay David Bolter and Diane Gromala’s *Windows and Mirrors: Interaction Design, Digital Art, and the Myth of Transparency*. Bolter and Gromala link transparency to the idea of cinematic forgetfulness. Many popular films are built to absorb viewer attention and keep us from detecting, much less questioning, the design elements and rhetorical strategies at work. This smooth discourse experience is a popular storytelling strategy, one that some digital projects still emulate. As Bolter and Gromala note, “When designers are building a complex new system . . . the user is not supposed to become conscious of the interface” (43). Accordingly, “When we watch a film, we can sometimes get so absorbed in the story that we temporarily forget about everything else, even that we are watching a film at all” (27). I would point out a parallel between such smooth storytelling and similar moves made in academe. I am referring to what I call “fast car scholarship,” where authors preface and/or bolster their arguments by saying “studies show” and present parenthetical references to make quick work of the “studies” and of the complications of conveying in-depth (in-text or in detailed notes) what the sources they are referencing actually said (in context) and how the authors are making use of their words. Such moves make for smooth and fast storytelling, but does this foster serious and persuasive scholarship?

Bolter and Gromala contend that digital work has the potential to highlight the interface and interrupt the pleasure, adding that introducing ten-
sions that complicate and disturb the storytelling is a goal: “As designers, we want the interface to disappear for the user for part of the time, but not completely and not irrevocably. At some subliminal level, the user must be aware of the interface at all times” (53). For an analogy, think of enhanced DVDs and CDs in which voice-over commentaries, outtakes, extended scenes, and games disrupt the text in order to draw attention to the details of the artifact’s history, tensions, and composition. Bolter and Gromala recommend letting viewers see the strategies, decisions, and decision making, adding that rhetors “must mix strategies and create an interface that is both transparent and reflective” (68). They remind us to expect viewer curiosity: “The film as an interface has become transparent for us. Sometimes, however, we want to step back and appreciate how the film was made” (27). From this provocation, I take two ideas. The first is that viewers want windows into projects and their storied horology. Another is that readers will not always assume that rhetors’ views are clear and transparent. Intelligent readers and viewers are skeptical and curious; they have design questions and want to see their needs and issues reflected in the design. Bolter and Gromala suggest that we reward that curiosity. They note that “Every digital design functions as both a window and a mirror” (27), adding that “This is a contemporary alternative to transparency: it is the mirror rather than the window—the strategy of reflection, multiplicity, self-awareness in action.” (66).

To help us achieve this sensibility, the authors suggest a tool and a strategy. They contend that “Looking into a silvered mirror is an experience of looking at and through at the same time” (34). They go on to say that “We are really looking at the surface of the mirror, and what we are seeing is a reflection of ourselves and the world around us” (34). The silver is contributory to healthy, if dissonant, perception because it underscores the idea that no medium or perspective should be perceived or purveyed as “exclusively transparent” (27). The silver reminds us that our lenses have accretions, floaters, slivers, residue, and dark, sedimented spots. It makes us wonder if we saw everything and undermines the fantasy of having a transparent, omniscient view of anything.

My ideal WPA working mirror is a silvered one that lights up and is capable of being hand held. First, the lights offer a big surround; there is no one spotlight on anything. All those lights create an afterglow (the image in our eyes) that helps us see double. One example is Prada’s New York’s epicenter digital mirrors where you can look and see yourself looking and being seen. Another example is the Marianne Boeskey Gallery’s I.G.Y. exhibition, which features mirrors and windows. Such seeing is valuable because it is multidirectional; it provides angles and insight we might not
otherwise have. Pertinent to WPA work, hand-held mirrors are portable, with the potential to be taken places. Think of how our “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” suggests portability and applicability (designed for use in Writing Centers, HBCUs, and two-year colleges). Best of all, more than one person can look into mirrors at once. In terms of reflections, everyone looking is engaged in them (the gazing and the reflecting) with us. There is no periphery and no one is relegated to frame status. Everyone gets to look, to see, and be seen looking. Thinking of WPA work, I would ask: whose and which gazes do we see and characterize as prurient, pedantic, or predatory? Whose gazes have we screened out? This awareness of surface—the sense that the windows we look through could also tell us some things about ourselves, challenging us to see what we fail or cannot yet bear to countenance and discuss—could help us encounter and engage, rather than just rebut, our detractors’ views. That awareness could yield a double-seeing that accepts the look of others without seeking agreement or conveying castigation. Multidirectional looking (reflecting and receiving) gets us past the kind of looking in which “the other, even when not an enemy, is regarded only as someone to be seen, not someone (like us) who also sees” (Sontag 72). The other is now someone who has a right to see and to see differently, critically, and even suspiciously.

Multidirectional Looking

Building on these ideas, I wish to suggest some philosophical approaches and compositional strategies, not as maxims but as notes aimed at stimulating conversation.

1. **We could become wary of declaration as a default rhetorical strategy for our public discourse.**

I devote this section to our public discourse, which includes “best practices,” outcomes statements, and white papers. In composing and circulating such projects, declaration and unity are the prestige rhetorical stances, the *ne plus ultra* of academe. But is there *ne plus autre*? I understand the temptation for us to speak in unity in public through such texts, yet suspect that they (the texts and the above-mentioned strategies) represent less than optimal modes of communication. In this section, I will explore the limitations of declaration.

I do not doubt that presenting a unified front helps us play big. Declaration helps us compose a public shout out—a collaborative *tour-de-force* that lets everyone know which ideas and practices we think are dangerous and which are “best.” But what if their force seems forced? For one thing, such
texts often fuel their wording with memorable sound bytes. Such bytes can, in turn, sound bromidic and bereft of nuance. Moreover, they can sound reductive rather than reflective of complicated thinking. They can also sound clichéd and a bit canonical. Expressing ourselves through collective certitude (e.g. “as teachers we are committed to . . .”), we risk invoking platitudes which may not impress skeptical readers as complicated, progressive, or even open-minded thinking.

The goals and habits of communicating emphatically lend themselves to the language of certitude and the superlative (e.g. the “best”). Both the content and terminology of “best” practices can make readers wary. Sounding somewhat dogmatic, their strength relies partly on our assent to various clichés about students, their writing, and their interests. Moreover, such documents and terminology can be perceived as having an insistent, even coercive and mandatory resonance. Such texts, whatever their stated and intended dialogism, can reveal a tendency to stipulate. They somehow convey the ideas “this is best” and “do it something like this.” Employing certitude can offer control, but it can sound controlling. Insistent and invincible, such texts invoke collective, pedigreed authority and may resemble the finished, shellacked, and “hardened idealizations” Young critiques (1778). Epic, spectacular, and perhaps overdrawn, such documents may also let us appear calcified and close minded in our thinking, leaving little room for the conversations we seek to inspire.

In addition to undermining complexity of thought, the univocality of best practices can occlude and efface diversity. Such statements tend to evoke “students,” “teachers,” and “literacy practices” in normative and stereotyped ways. I understand the need for such documents. But in composing or “best practices” and white papers (that’s an interesting term when we consider why our attempts at diversifying our organizations do not always play out so well), we might ask: best for whom? United and univocal, such defining documents belie good intentions. For example, are we truly including, via research and the sustained input and expertise of our two-year colleges, writing center colleagues, and teachers of English language learners, or just speaking for/to them? Worse, have we included “representative” (perhaps perceived as token) members as “contributors” and signatories because we have a moment? When we offer proclamations of unity and agreement, declaring that readers should fund or support programs so teachers can teach in certain ways, should we continue to register surprise or dismay at the suspicion that we may be proffering a unity which upon further inspection, is not otherwise in evidence? Again, there are benefits for appearing to be “on the same page” or screen, but I wonder if such inleague scholarship can lead to the like-minded being perceived as a bit sim-
people-minded or worse as falsely and temporarily united to gain strength in unity. In discerning the limitations of declaration as a rhetorical strategy, the next time we prepare to say things with great and shared strength of opinion, we might evince suspicion and wonder: Who are we perceived to be persuading, silencing, effacing, or kidding?

Another thought is that these texts’ clarity and declarative qualities can appear (and here I think of Sarraute’s admonition of literary monuments) staid, static, predictable, and dull. Such documents are expected, and readers brace themselves for them. Once braced, they may stop listening. Simply put, such documents may have become rather common and generic: yet another text that expresses similar ideas in familiar ways. This is a naturalized strategy; the idea of teachers speaking collaboratively and declaratively to audiences is a familiar practice. But is it an effective one?

2. We could evince double-seeing by becoming distant from our work itself and in our public explanations of it.

Seeing our projects from a distance might help us compose them more effectively. One strategy would be to become less emotionally involved in our work; that means seeing it from the perspectives of the skeptical and unconvinced. In “Unpopularity of the New Art,” philosopher José Ortega y Gasset contends that “Seeing requires distance” (28). He adds that clarity comes from “the emotional distance between each person and the event they all witness” (15). I would add that our events—our spectacles—are best seen from a distance. Like a film presented in DVD format, they can be letter-boxed. In preparing our spectacles, why wait for others to suspect us? We might engage focus groups of believers and non-believers. We might imagine a very critical reaction before it happens. Picture this as an activity in WPA seminars: “If this (anticipated or unsolicited) email or statement appeared in your in-box, what would you see? What would it need to become more effective or persuasive?

Consider our campus work. In pursuing WPA work, we might stand back and remove ourselves from the action. What if we weren’t so involved in the situation under discussion? Would our words, actions, and artifacts still make as much sense? Remember that in public discourse, there is no uninterrupted monologue without critical reaction, response, and interruption by readers and viewers. Sontag links that to editing and adds, “Splice into a long take of a perfectly deadpan face the shots of such disparate material as a bowl of steaming soup, a woman in a coffin, a child playing with a toy bear, and the viewers . . . will marvel at the subtlety and range of the actor’s expressions” (29-30). Consider the WAC or writing center faculty
workshops that some of us lead each term. What if we began them by welcoming and addressing our colleagues’ counter-arguments and incredulity about the efficacy of our goals and work? That might be an intriguing and persuasive place to start, rather than extolling the self-evident virtues of our perspective and work.

This raises another point. It strikes me that in our campus and public discourse, and in our scholarship, we can sometimes be more than a bit insistent and directive. To my mind, there is too little public and even less dignified place for disagreement. Once known for outsider independent thinking, is WPA work and scholarship falling prey to engendering and disseminating a bit of a “party line”?

3. We could consider meeting suspicion with irony.

Sarraute suggests that suspicion is contagious. She notes that having infiltrated the literary arts, “the cinema too would appear to be threatened. It too is infected by the ‘suspicion’ from which the novel suffers” (73). Ortega reiterates this view, arguing that infected by irony, “the new art ridicules art itself” (48). Even if we define WPA work as a relatively new art, it would seem odd to suspect ourselves. After all, we often have enough critics and detractors ready to ridicule our work. What’s more, we have learned that self-effacement does not get us far.6

But if we turn the metaphor, we might see WPA work as not infected but *inflected* by irony. Many people (students, colleagues, government officials) are already suspicious of us. Let’s anticipate the mockery and the parody as we compose our public projects and discourse. Let’s see and see through our ideas and work to envision their sometimes ripe potential for parody and ridicule. Here I remember Sontag’s discussion of Oscar Wilde “when he announced his intention of ‘living up’ to his blue-and-white china” (“Notes” 289). As a member of CWPA and NCTE, I wonder, can we live up to our guidelines, galleries, outcomes and position statements? Can we live them down? The joke, the critique, the parody, however incisive, need not always be *on* us. We might want to participate in them. A question then becomes: can we see ourselves becoming our own print and online ironists?

4. We might internalize irony to welcome skeptical looking and to look suspiciously at our work and projects.

Instead of demonizing or combating audience incredulity, we might anticipate and counter it with irony and self-reflection. We might acknowledge publicly that no idea or practice is absolutely, right, best, clear, transfer-
able, or beyond quibble. My favorite counterargument belongs to a friend who rebutted a colleague’s critique by saying: “Yours is a fact-based attempt to colonize my interpretive practice.” Using skeptical outsider logic, that response has merit. Looking skeptically at our projects and pedagogy might mean taking a less dispositive approach and making our suspicion about our work more visible. Evincing the vulnerability to think and compose beyond certitude could help us envision valuable critiques and parodies of our work. By anticipating and acting on that input, we could

- compose our proposals, syllabi, articles, grants, videos and web sites in multiple ways;
- become more aware and in control of our performativity;
- wonder aloud if it is even arguable that we as campus WPAs or as an organization are not doing everything well all the time;
- explore how our titles and key terms (e.g. Council of Writing Program Administrators) can sound judgmental, censorial, and foreboding, thus complicating projects of making our organization more inclusive and diverse. (For the more ecclesial readers among us, calling ourselves the Diet of Writing Program Administrators could make us sound even more foreboding.)

5. We could come to understand that some people suspect us of self-interested editing and elision.

Most public texts are heavily revised and edited before they are released. There are almost always versions and outtakes. Young notes this phenomenon when he describes the purposeful edits that were made to the *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Young suggests that they were rhetorical and related to storytelling: “There was also no place for Anne’s early sexualization in her father’s nonsexual remembrance of her . . .he split off her necessarily gendered experiences from the universalized notion of her martyrdom” (1780). Our admirers and critics are perceptive; they know that we are telling, releasing, and circulating a version and parts of “the” story. They suspect us of amplifying, editing, and eliding some things. They also know that we left things out. We should not be surprised when such elisions and edits receive amplified attention in written responses or when online rhetors edit our work and place that material (to their minds) back in (think of YouTube response videos).
6. We might see our work, our roles, and our identities in quotation marks.

In “Notes on Camp,” Sontag writes about a sensibility that “sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but a ‘woman’” (280). She explains that “To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater” (280). As a thought experiment, what would happen if we looked into our working silvered mirrors and saw our work, identities, titles, and organization not as WPA, but as “WPA?” Are there differences between working in a writing center and “writing center”? By taking a distanced view, we might see and appreciate the driving metaphors and labels of our lives and work as others perceive them. That could help us enact them with less of the earnest, stress-producing emotions that can complicate and undermine effective and rewarding performance.

7. We could anticipate the idea that discourse travels and participate in its reframing.

In Rhetorical Refusals: Defying Audiences’ Expectations, John Schilb reminds us that discourse travels. This is especially true with the Internet, where discourse is said to roll. Such rolling underscores the idea that any text “will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it” (Sontag 39). Describing the complexity of divining or guiding such uses, she writes with prescience about the difficulty of “creating a perch for a particular conflict in the consciousness of viewers” because the fact that those viewers are “exposed to dramas from everywhere requires the daily diffusion and rediffusion of snippets of footage about the conflict” (21). Discussing Internet culture, she adds that “Nonstop imagery (television, streaming video, movies) is our surround . . . ” (22). It is true that there is not just one camera or angle of perception. On the Internet, there is no point zero of perception. The same text (statement, white papery, gallery) is changed (with elements amplified and/or minimized) in its appearances on Inside Higher Education and the online version of the Chronicle of Higher Education. Visual rhetoricians and narrative theorists reiterate that there is no one discursive “perch” (Sontag 21). Any story is fair game for extraction and multiple refractions on sites such as YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and Towleroad. Perhaps our WPA seminars, institutes, and workshops might become places to explore how such surrounds can mentor and affect intended stories and their evolving permutations?
8. Remembering that discourse travels, don’t let it travel alone.

Traveling discourse is vulnerable discourse. In composing for viral venues, we would do well to anticipate our work’s migrations without presuming that our artifacts are so artful and articulate that they will speak, persuade, and multi-task by and for themselves. They may need companion texts and commentaries to elucidate and further their designers’ purposes.

9. In designing a project’s companion texts, don’t assume that prefaces, however eloquent, can do all the persuasive work. They may need embedded and infused companion texts.

In *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface*, Kevin Dunn describes the aims of prefatory rhetoric. Discussing the texts that introduce and frame major works, he calls them a “starting place for considering the rhetoric of self-presentation” (1). Such “authorizing strategies” (1) can include prefaces, preambles, introductions, and other “introductory materials” (xi). Dunn examines the limitations of such texts and notes that prefatory rhetoric can succumb to “parodic redactions” (150). He adds that “the prefatory threshold has become little more than an ornamental façade, a façade that shows in its pillars and tracery the vestiges of a once functional structure of rhetoric” (154). In composing our work for ongoing and possibly viral interactions, we need more than introductory prefaces to explain, contextualize, and persuade viewers of the value of our work.

10. In composing companion texts, we would do well to think virally, beyond “frame” strategy and ideology.

We could learn from DVD bonus content which offers effective models of infusing and embedding visual and aural texts within projects. Those projects feature pop-up screens, and running commentaries (not just in English), director’s cuts, games, and outtakes to contextualize the text. To move beyond frame ideology (a prefatory text that appears cursory, defensive, and easy to dismiss), we might consider activities such as *weaving, threading, and infusing*. We could use evolving media to thread the counter-arguments and our responses to them into our work. We have the technological capacities, and many of us are working with graduate and undergraduate students to improve their rhetorical acumen in these arenas. Let’s consider importing more of these strategies into our scholarship.
“Seeing” Self-Awareness in Action

I would like to point out some examples of suspicion in purposeful action. They feature scholars who have used vision, irony, and courage to discuss the complexity of WPA work. I begin with two CWPA Conference plenary speeches. In 2007, Jaime Armin Mejía discussed diversity in “Mentoring and Preparing the Next Generation of Latino Teachers and Scholars of Writing.” He alluded several times to what he could not say “in polite company.” In 2002, then CWPA immediate past President Barbara Cambridge gave a plenary address in which she hinted at the power of backstory: “Be ready for unexpected opportunities to catalyze enduring commitments.” Both scholars alluded to within (not behind) the scenes fissures to illuminate the cross-action instead of just spotlighting a finished artifact; they invited us to go there. Here are some other scholars that have undertaken such work:

In “An Agenda for the New Dissertation,” MLA President Sidonie Smith questions the naturalized aspects of genre and asks, “How might the dissertation be reimagined as an ensemble of forms”?

In a disruption of self-satisfied outsider “celebration,” Judith Butler refused the Berlin Pride Award arguing that “racist complicity” undermines the goal of diversity.

In a 2010 virtual conference “Extending the CCC Conversation with Cindy Selfe and Doug Hesse,” Selfe and Hesse led a conversation about the convergences of print and digital literate practices. At one point, a caller suggested that teachers might tell students that there are “better ways” (either print or digital) to compose a given text. Selfe wisely countered and questioned the concept of better ways. To my mind, Selfe was right. If artists like Billie Holiday subscribed to “better ways” thinking, she might not have sung behind the beat, thereby changing and advancing ways of performing and hearing popular music. Shall we have a Billie Holiday—a transformative voice—in WPA work? Could we?

Another example is Harry C. Denny’s Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring. Describing efforts to transform writing centers into sites of diversity he becomes admirably self-critical, and adds, “I tend toward warm and fuzzy conversations about diversity that raise con-
sciousness but rarely upset or threaten—especially myself” (33). Denny adds, “The trick to pulling off that sort of conversation is honoring experience without the student coming to feel objectified or patronized” (79). This candid narrator engages in self-scrutiny to reveal his situated presence and his imperfections.

Denny’s scrupulous self-provocation brings me to Michele Eodice’s 2009 WPA plenary address where she took CWPA to task for its quest for power and suggested that we are on our self-interested way to becoming a mighty WPA “plow.”

A fine example of critical thinking is John Schilb’s suggestion that Compositionists should consider re-allying with rhetoric, an idea he expressed at the 2009 Modern Language Association’s annual convention (a site to some of WPA naissance and to others of annoyance) and that was debated online in Inside Higher Education.8

The tendency toward debate and self-critique also appears in the most recent issue of the WPA journal where the editors publish ongoing and sometimes contentious conversations about diversity in WPA work.

The brave and continuing conversations such as those mentioned above do not strive for closure. Instead they, like conversations on the WPA-Listserv, enact “the daily diffusion and rediffusion of snippets of footage about the conflict” (Sontag 21).

A final and very public project that comes to mind is the Common Core State Standards Initiative web site. The site enhances its project’s credibility by being both transparent and reflective. Its designers take the time to explain the work’s history and share windows into the document’s process of composition and revision. The site features streams of input including “Voices of Support” (with video testimonials from teachers, politicians, and administrators), and other pages such as “News” and “Get Involved.” Deliberately dialogic (which enhances the creators’ ethos), it offers a button called “Have something to Say?” that invites people to “Click here to upload your own video.” By including these participatory portals (along with examples of “Feedback Groups” and commen-
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...tary), this site presents itself as an act of honest and transparent storytelling. Its visible interface reveals the document’s many edits and revisions. By inviting viewers to see inside the evolving story, the site offers inside views of the interface and the “surround” (Sontag 22). As a public performance of transparency in action, this site seems both candid and canny.

All of the above-mentioned authors and projects offer hints for expressing the complexity and depth of WPA work and scholarship. These rhetors move beyond declaration and revelation to unpack the investments and processes. Like those multi-tasking Prada mirrors, their arguments comment and reflect in multiple directions. These rhetors also think beyond frames; their windows are telling and observant mirrors that we can look at and through. These individuals use their suspicious and scrupulous voices to engage in complicated—and I would add—generative acts of wary storytelling.

**Drawing Conclusions while Sketching a Future**

Here I must suspect my own thoughts; all of these ideas put WPA work and storytelling at risk. Life and public persuasion are messier without the controls of certitude and declaration. Evincing suspicion is a time-consuming and high maintenance activity. To our detractors, our enactments of wariness may appear precious and pesky. Self-awareness may seem studied and self-conscious; it may evoke nostalgia for more naïve and uncontrived times and discourse. Evoking nostalgia leads me to evoke a term from art history, that of the *primitive*. That word, which refers to fifteenth and early sixteenth century Flemish and Italian painters, is a loaded term. Yet in art history its use is not pejorative, but laudatory. Consider this description:

> This rather misleading name for what is, for the most part, a highly accomplished body of late-medieval and pre-Renaissance paintings, arose in the nineteenth century. It expresses the Romantics’ sense of nostalgia for the pure, spiritual and innovative character of this monumental, technically innovative and highly skilled school of oil painting.9

Sontag relates nostalgia to war photography. She mentions the naïve artists who, if they were “untrained and inexperienced” were the talented precursors to contemporary artists (28). Such artists had perspectives and value. In fact, “The less polished pictures are not only welcomed as possessing a
special kind of authenticity. Some may compete with the best, so permissive are the standards for a memorable, eloquent picture” (27).

Nostalgia and dignity make me think of our forebears—our colleagues who first undertook and then named WPA work. Their creativity fit the celebratory definition of the primitives. They were the first to see; they saw differently; they saw double; and they saw the work that (whatever the cost to their lives and careers) needed to be done. On campus and on guard, they were resourceful and inventive breakthrough artists (teachers, leaders, and scholars) who worked very hard creating methods and strategies to make WPA work happen. With limited resources or models, the WPA primitives worked before us and for us. Furthermore, many of them inspired, mentored, and taught us.

But turning from tribute back to suspicion, it strikes me that there are two guiding assumptions about this generation of artists (and our forebears). First, the primitives are inventive and influential. Second, the primitives are always someone else. Of these beliefs, I would ask: What if we are earlier in the story than we think we are? What if, in our understanding and practice of WPA work, we are all “the primitives?”

Discussing terms such as primitive, vanguard, and contemporary reminds me that experiencing so many transformative ideas and evolving technologies can make life feel as if we were living in an existential jump cut between ancestry and legacy. Besides (and in some schools working literally beside) the inventive primitive, there are multiple permutations and versions of forbears. These would include the accidental WPA, the evolving WPA, and the intentional Writing Program Administrator. Today, we salute what I call Born WPAs—those who choose by their degree program to make a life and a living pursuing such work. With all of these colleagues at work, it is an interesting and a complicated time for communication among generations. What do forbears owe the young? Do the born WPAs bear any enduring responsibility to their elders, their peers, or ensuing generations? If you accept my comparison of born WPAs to the new artist, a conviction Sarraute repeats—despite its masculine language—might ring true. Sarraute heralds the artist’s “deepest obligation: that of discovering what is new.” She says it results from “his most serious crime: that of repeating the discoveries of his predecessors” (74). That tension between repetition and innovation leads me to ask something of our WPA knowledge and experience, of our legacies and inheritance: What shall we keep, use, renovate, and jettison? Perceptions of experiential links and disconnects can too easily undermine the conversations among generations. Ortega hints when he writes, “Or to put it differently, an ever growing
mass of traditional styles hampers the direct and original communication between the nascent artist and the world around him” (44).

I am interested in mentoring such communication. This returns me to the words “Le génie du soupçon est venu au monde” which were translated earlier as “the genius of suspicion has appeared on the scene” (Sarraute 57). It is worth noting that other translations are possible. In one of them, génie is genie, someone that can change. Soupçon is a drop, suggestion, a hint. If the “scene” can be expanded to include moments of WPA preparation, development, mentoring, scholarship, and practice, what hints would we offer to the Born WPAs? What hints would we prepare for the WPAs Yet Unborn? What would we confide in and ask of them? To evince wariness, one question might be, born of what and of whom? Born to do . . . ? Using our memories to make the past WPAs and CWPA part of an ongoing project, which hints would we offer, seek, take, and privilege? Out of all the hints sought and surrendered which ones shall we circulate? Which shall we cherish?

Looking back, we might say we know why “they” (the oppressive colleagues who made martyrs of many of our forbears) had WPAs: to do the dirty work. But now we might wonder why do they keep having WPAs? Our silvered mirrors might help us ask: Why do we keep having WPAs? Are there ends to “WPA” work, courses, identities, and scholarship? How long shall we keep doing that work? Can there ever be tipping points? Will we ever have enough WPAs? How will we know? Who counts as we?

If “we” were to participate in suspicion, what ideas or activities might we hold suspect? What do we feel secure about and what might we rethink? Things we could suspect – and activities and artifacts we might put in quotation marks—could include programmatic and institutional portfolios and the pressures to tell a good (happy and successful) story, self-sponsored literate activities, celebration, technology, diversity, mentoring, assessment, professional development, WPA work in two-year college contexts, WPA work in smaller-size institutions, visual rhetoric, writing center work, WAC, and readiness. Another term we might explore is pertinence. We might wonder about “best practices” normalizing and effacing diversity by overstating community and driving multiple constituents toward expressing document-worthy textual agreement and closure. We might think beyond the job title “WPA” and learn about leadership/administrative roles in their various situated deployments. Also, we might not assume that the old research-one model pertains across institutions and campuses.

Instead of making finished public arguments and telling stories in ways that limit readers and viewers only to listening and viewing, we might compose more telling stories in more ironic (and perhaps more credible)
discourse that envisions and deploys strategies of viral thinking and traveling, evolving, and sometimes splintering texts. For example, at WPA and CCCC, I have heard fine presentations about evocative objects of WPA work and identity. I wonder what could happen if we discussed objects of *agida* —the lousy, dispiriting, and perhaps incriminating object or email we receive, keep, and send? We might test our work on focus groups of un-persuaded constituencies; doing that could help us see how vulnerable our arguments may appear to others. Looking at and into such silvered mirrors would remind us that the idea, problem, strategy, statement, or practice may have been around for a while and that others can be articulate (if wrong-headed) in their objections to our take on it. Moreover, silvered mirrors remind us that ours is not the only bright light on campus or in academe. Others want to shine, too. In composing WPA scholarship, could we find ways to include versions and permutations of our work? We could use online tools to discuss our assumptions and outtakes. Including a rhetor’s commentary that shows the germinal ideas, revisions, and edits, including feedback by reviewers and editors, could offer us ways of discussing the thinking, tensions, and commitments within our published artifacts.

These are but some of the anticipatory and reflective moves WPAs and CWPA could make to explain what we are doing for, with, and to undergraduate and graduate students. Articulating such moves could help others notice how we are building a future. Stewart Brand takes up this idea in *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They’re Built*, where he outlines “steps toward an adaptive architecture” (190). Brand argues that spaces—and I would add disciplines and organizations—are best redesigned by those who live and work there. He adds that ethical builders feel mandates to become responsible long term ancestors. In other words, what we (don’t) do now impacts future generations. Thus, in building for the future, we can use materials like bronze and marble, “which age well and take advantage of deep experience” (190). Thinking about how we might work to become more credible and helpful ancestors to the born and as yet unborn WPAs who will need to chart their own experience, I advocate using perspective, suspicion, and irony as *permeable materials*, which help us build ideas, beliefs, and practices that seek to become superseded.

Yet in valuing permeability, there is still much work ahead. Seeding ideas that travel and morph involves questioning the WPA lessons we have learned too well. Such work can seem both unproductive and unsettling. But I take wary solace in Tim Dean’s idea that “Once you commit to following a train of thought irrespective of where it leads or how risky it seems, then you may find yourself thinking new thought and discovering spaces that you would not have come across otherwise” (28). *Risky* carries vivid
viral resonance here because Dean’s topic and title are *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*.

How can we chase and cultivate unlimited WPA work? One way is to look within and beyond celebrated ideas to see if they have become sedimented ideations. Another way is to hold suspect—rather than dear—our philosophic and pragmatic inheritances. Yet another is to keep developing our capacities for intellectual suppleness, something I equate with scrupulousness. Pursuing WPA work without presumptions of certitude, declaration, or automatically credible and viable legacy can mean investing in a little less product and welcoming a complicated sense of project. It can also mean seeing our drawing board as just that and as one of many. When “WPA” work hints at suspicion it invites us to see ourselves drawing and to grow from becoming wary of both the board and the boring.

**Notes**


3. Conor posits the idea that early film stars were depicted in public media as representing spectacles of feminine beauty and talent that merited, yet eluded, viewers’ emulation.

4. Horology refers to the inner workings of instruments used to measure time. See [http://watchinghorology.com/](http://watchinghorology.com/) for discussions of some timepieces that are outwardly simple, yet internally very complicated. One entry “Grand Seiko Fan Event 2010” reads: “Here is a series showing Masuda-san demonstrating the assembling [of] a Grand Seiko Spring Drive movement. She uses the microscope only to check that alignment is perfect.” These windows into processes, details, and histories of composition—which I hope we will build into presentations of our public projects—illustrate what I mean by the term “storied horology.”


6. I am not seeking to re-inscribe the vulnerability of WPA work and identities, but to preserve the value of outsider thinking and to suggest that no idea, however circulated or celebrated, is beyond quibble. For the record, I do think that vulnerability can be a source of bravery and strength. There is truth in John Waters’ words “Damaged people make the best warriors, so get busy” (275).
7. Denny’s candor and approach comport with Sarraute’s idea that first-person narration is the most ethical approach to writing fiction. Sarraute explains that the author “realizes that the impersonal tone, which is so well-adapted to the needs of the old-style novel, is not suitable for conveying the complex, tenuous states that he is attempting to portray” (65). Wary readers wonder “Who said that?” Thus “A story told in the first person satisfies the legitimate scruples of the author. In addition, it has the appearance, at least, of real experience and authenticity, which impresses the reader and dispels his mistrust” (66).

8. See Scott Jaschik’s “What Direction for Rhet-Comp?” Inside Higher Education. December 30, 2009. http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/12/30/comp. See the “Comments on” section for a very interesting discussion of various perspectives. More recently, in “Turning Composition toward Sovereignty,” Schilb offers another idea. He suggests that “We ought to ask ourselves, then, whether we take Foucault’s notion of power too much for granted” and should question our over-reliance on “agency” as a critical concept (3). Moreover, Schilb contends that “our scholarship on sovereign discourse should increase” (5).

9. The full text of this praise can be found at <http://www.casa-in-italia.com/artpx/flem/Bruges.htm>. The “Description of Early Flemish Altarpieces” at <http://www.wga.hu/tours/flemish/index.html> offers an especially reverential view of these artists:

The dawn of the 15th century saw the beginning of a new era in Flemish art. In 1399, an altarpiece painted by Melchior Broederm was delivered to the town of Dijon. This work defines the moment at which the technique of illumination, the finest exponents of which were the Limbourg brothers, yielded its supremacy to the art of painting on wooden panels. Miniaturists were no longer in the vanguard. Their place had been taken by a new breed of artist—the painter.

Broederm’s Dijon altarpiece was the first fruit of this new art, and the first work to embody a new set of conventions. His style derived from the International Gothic style. It was imbued with a natural elegance and refinement, and its rich textures can be seen as the pictorial equivalent of the values of the European aristocracy. It was a large-scale art, that rose to the challenge inherent in its dimensions; but above all, it entirely superseded the essentially decorative approach of the miniaturists. Miniature work, by its very size, could only incorporate a few isolated details. Henceforth the subjects of art, although still predominantly sacred, would be approached in a comprehensively realistic manner. Painting was to be an art firmly rooted in the world. A pictorial revolution was born.

I wonder if people will ever discuss WPA work in such terms, as a “vanguard” accomplishment and a “revolution.”
10. It is interesting to note that our forbears designed the organization’s name as “Council of Writing Program Administrators” rather than “Council for Writing Program Administrators.”

11. Sarraute is quoting Arnold Toynbee’s description of novelist Gustave Flaubert’s teachings.

12. *Agida* denotes the pain that comes from aggravation and stress.

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WPAs in Dialogue

Response to Keith Rhodes’s “You Are What You Sell: Branding the Way to Composition’s Better Future”

Linda Adler-Kassner

Having recently moved from the familiar environment of the Midwest to the far less familiar west coast, I’ve thought a lot lately about the ways in which things with similar names can be so entirely different. The Canyon Live Oaks that I see when I hike in the Santa Ynez Mountains, for instance, share a root with White Oaks growing in the Midwest, but they’re very, very different trees—small leaves, dense branches, lower to the ground than those to which I am accustomed.

This difference between things that seem the same at the top—in the name “oak,” for instance—but which are actually quite different also is an appropriate metaphor for the differences between Keith Rhodes’s argument in favor of branding and the community organizing-based strategies that I outline for building connections with others and promoting messages about writing in my book, The Activist WPA. Branding, Rhodes claims in “You are What You Sell,” holds promising strategies for composition instructors (and the Council of Writing Program Administrators) to advance a particular vision of composition instruction, a way of selling and acting upon understandings of what writing instruction means. Rhodes says that his argument in favor of branding “augments The Activist WPA in interesting ways” (69). Like the similarities among the oaks I see here in California and those in the Midwest, there are similarities between Rhodes’s case and the one I make in The Activist WPA. Both of us want to affect the ways that people understand writing and writers in order to make a change for the good; we both think that this can be done, in part, by listening to others’ ideas and working with them.

There are many elements of Rhodes’s argument, then, that I find compelling. I am also aware of the complex reactions I have to the idea of
branding to begin with. That said, I don’t think that we are saying the same things. Like the common oak and the live oak, our analyses share certain elements, such as the idea that changing and promoting stories about writing and writers is important. But also like those two different oaks, they have very, very different trunks and roots.

The first chapter of *The Activist WPA* is called “Working from a Point of Principle.” It’s at this point, identifying and working with the fundamental principles that underscore the work that we do to create stories (our own, the ones we create with colleagues, those we build with others outside of our programs and/or institutions), that Rhodes’s argument and mine take different shapes. Personal principles, I argue, must form the basis of any efforts we undertake as administrators or teachers, and this identification of one’s fundamental values is at the core of what we do. In making this point, I draw from a number of sources, from Parker Palmer to Mary Rose O’Reilley, from Robert Coles to Saul Alinsky. Later, in the last chapter of the book, I discuss the principles that underscore my own approach—not ones that I claim others should adopt, as Rhodes intimates (69), but ones that inform my own practice. I am careful to note, too, that I am presenting these:

not because I feel that these are representative or more virtuous than other principles, but to both share and model the kind of thinking that I have done about the … process [of beginning with personal principles and extending out to more social activities] that is at the heart of the change-making processes [described in the book]. (169-170)

While I do not make the case that *tikkun olam* or prophetic pragmatism (the principles at the core of my own work) should be extended to all of composition (as Rhodes suggests [69]), I do argue that writing instructors and program directors always work from a point of principle and that part of the challenge of changing stories (if that is something that we want to do) is identifying those principles and beginning to consider how and whether they intersect with principles held by others.

In chapter two of *The Activist WPA*, I make the case (as I have throughout my research, a vestige from my previous life as an historian) that we must understand the historical roots that contribute to the frames surrounding our work—the soil from which our proverbial trees grow. In the case of writing instructors, this means understanding the ways in which education writ large and writing instruction specifically have developed through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We must understand this background (this cultivating medium, as it were) because we need to con-
sider where, whether, and how we want to put our own tap roots down into it—that is, we must be conscious of how and whether we would like to draw on, replicate, or diverge from the various elements present in it.

Here, too, Rhodes’s argument and mine might seem similar (in the ways that “oak” and “live oak” might seem), they seem to me to grow (from my perspective) from two very different trunks and differ considerably. Where my work extends from community organizing theory, itself an outgrowth of small “r” republicanism rooted in America’s development as a nation, the branding theory that Rhodes builds upon is rooted in the rapidly expanding global economy of the 1950s. Branding began, in fact, with the convergence of an explosion of communication technologies in the 1950s and 1960s, especially the arrival of television in many American homes, and the explosion in the availability of consumer goods as the nation righted itself from the economic impact of World War II (e.g., Scholz and Friends). With this explosion of availability came a need to distinguish one kind of something from another, similar, kind of something—and thus, branding was born. It is absolutely the case that branding has evolved into a sophisticated practice that uses some of the same strategies as the community organizers I observed (and from whom I draw extensively) in *The Activist WPA*, including careful research into history; careful listening and identification with values and goals; collaboration; commitment to quality (and, ideally, ethical practices); and consistent practice within the brand. But the roots of branding and of community organizing are quite different—indeed, they are in many ways in opposition to one another.

This idea of “marketing” is another, more subtle point around which Rhodes and I have fundamental differences. Because of its origins, branding will always be about creating a market, as Rhodes contends. This means that it will be about selling a brand—what Rhodes suggests might be Brand CWPA. To be sure, there is a great appeal (especially in the kinds of conversations that we hear so often about what writers can’t do, or what we should do when we teach them) in being able to fall back on something like Brand CWPA. To this end, as Rhodes notes, I have long worked with colleagues in the WPA Network for Media Action to create resources that writing instructors can use to make cases about particular elements of writing instruction on their campuses, and to compile communication strategies (drawn from many more expert than I) that might be useful to them as they make these cases.

That said, in *The Activist WPA* I contend that once writing instructors or program directors have identified the principles at the core of their practice, they might draw on several models to build alliances with others through a process that always involves making connections, identifying
issues, and connecting back to principles or values. Two of these models, interest- and issue-based organizing, involve a combination of identifying issues upon which to take shared action with allies, and then seeking consensus around values. The other, values-based organizing, involves seeking consensus around values first, and then taking action on issues once shared values are achieved. While this last model might be most appealing because it means we always work from what we believe and hold to be true, it also holds the least potential for building alliances because it leaves virtually no room for questioning, reconsidering, or compromise. While Rhodes suggests that Scott Bedbury’s principles of branding take into consideration input from or the values of others, they seem to focus on pitching a product to the most receptive audience, and developing the brand from there. This approach is certainly one possible way to promote a story about writing and writers; however, it seems to me quite different than the strategies involved with either interest- or issue-based alliance building. Also, as noted earlier, it also does not build upon the same foundation of principle as any of the three approaches discussed in The Activist WPA do.

In an article that also draws on the points of my own principles discussed in the last chapter of The Activist WPA, my co-author Susanmarie Harrington (who also shares these principles) and I invoke the work of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber as a broad frame for the work of composition. While the focus of this article is on using the idea of responsibility (rather than accountability) to shape assessment work, Buber’s ideas also speak to the differences I am identifying here between the metaphor outlined in Rhodes’s article and the concepts upon which I draw. In conceptualizing responsibility, Harrington and I suggest that it is rooted in the development of

an I-you relationship [that involves] understanding and some degree of sacrifice of one’s own hard-held values in order to genuinely engage in dialogue with another, you, to understand your identity and principles. Together, I and you forge a new, shared sense of being, at which point they can become “subject to coordination,” the basis for shared understanding and action.... Buber explains that in order for humans to understand ideas in themselves as well as in relation to other ideas, we must understand them “through relation,” in connection with ourselves and others. (87)

This sense of responsibility, I contend in The Activist WPA (as well as in this article and, I hope, all other aspects of my life as a person and a professional) holds considerable promise as we consider how to approach critical
questions associated with writing instruction, including how to represent our work and build alliances with others. This perspective is rooted not in the desire to sell a “brand” of composition (no matter how collaboratively it is shaped), but in the need to work collaboratively, across perceived boundaries and barriers, to make a difference in the lives of those with whom we interact every day (students, other instructors, administrators, so-called stakeholders, and everyone else). While it may be construed to sound like “marketing,” the idea of principle-based responsibility is as different from it as the Canyon Live Oak is from the White Oak in the Midwest.

Works Cited


An Agreeable Response to Linda Adler-Kassner

Keith Rhodes

I am grateful to have Linda correct any misapprehension of her own work that might have been caused by my characterizations. I strongly wish to promote her work, and one of my own strong goals was to persuade even more people to read *The Activist WPA*.

In interesting ways, the discussion comes down mostly to the tricky matter of invoking “principle” in postmodern times. I base my own willingness to invoke principle in American pragmatism, a rational I have explained at other times, but not in this piece. I do not want to go deeply into that philosophy in this reply either, but it strikes me that Linda and I both act like philosophical pragmatists here. We share a provisional optimism that a community of inquiry can use a well-regulated rhetoric to arrive at better conclusions to guide practice, and that ideas can be evaluated by their consequences. Those are my terms (more accurately my condensed appropriation of C. S. Peirce’s terms), not Linda’s; but they apply congenially to
her work. Linda grounded her principles not only in a long ethical tradition but also in demonstrably helpful practices and their results. Her commitment to the very idea of principle has much to do with why I find *The Activist WPA* to be a thrilling work, and why I decided to propose ideas that I think are consistent with that work but that I think open up additional forms of action.

Thus, in my turn to branding I was particularly taken with Scott Bedbury’s idea that highly successful marketing will most likely also be based in principles. Of course, the nature of the principles will differ because the very first principle in commercial marketing will be to earn a profit. Yet, as I point out in my article, Bedbury cautions strongly against trying to fool customers. Ultimately, it’s entirely possible to earn strong profits by honestly selling valuable products that customers want; in his view, that approach to marketing turns out to be the most sustainable kind of branding. In composition, we have the luxury of being free to focus strongly on producing valuable courses that our students want, and that everyone else who funds our courses wants students to take. Thus, we can consider principles other than revenue to a very large degree. That is why I find value for us in a species of branding that already advises us to base our work in our history and principles.

What we cannot do, in any sort of principled way, is to pretend that we are not to any extent involved in commerce. Students pay money for our courses. We earn money by offering them. If we were to base our classes openly on principles that nobody except us valued, our discipline would soon cease to exist. If we were to compel students, parents, and taxpayers to continue to fund such an activity simply by hiding from them the principles that they do not value, we would certainly not be acting ethically. Fortunately, I contend, and I think Linda contends, that the most principled version of composition pedagogy has enormous value to offer to students, and by means of that transaction even further value to offer all the other sources that fund us. Indeed, I have contended that we have more value to offer than most audiences realize. It would literally be good for students and other “customers” to buy more of our “product” at higher prices, so long as we provide everything we can actually offer.

In that last part lies the problem. When students sign up for a composition class, they usually have no real way to know what they are getting. Responsible, principled academic branding and marketing efforts (like accreditation) would simply give our audiences/customers more ability to know that they are getting more of what our profession actually values. It would offer us the chance to go beyond simply having our values and allowing others to have theirs; it would let us open up the community of inquiry.
and allow students and other funding sources to participate more fully in the entire transaction that informs our principles.

At bottom, we should also consider that the American preference for market solutions is itself a principle, even if one in need of constant checking. Markets, at their best, favor what you know over who you know. At their best, they are egalitarian meritocracies. Of course, it takes a lot of intelligent work and regulation to make them operate at their best. The mythical wisdom of the “invisible hand” has been vastly over-rated. Yet there are good arguments why it has happened that regulated markets tend to take the place of official edicts in the most free and egalitarian nations. Thus, I hope that we do not decide that marketing and branding, essentially branches of rhetoric specialized for interaction with commerce, are somehow inherently unprincipled. Ultimately, markets are themselves a kind of rhetoric, a way for audiences to evaluate messages. We would need to meld marketing ideas with our own principles and create a hybrid practice of composition branding, certainly. But above all, I hoped to show that doing so was entirely possible, entirely compatible with our best ideas, and entirely ethical if we simply keep to our own well-tended principles. As with all things commercial, we need intelligent regulation. We do not want to do only that which produces the most revenue. But revenue gained from offering better quality is not inherently an unprincipled thing.

Works Cited


A Symposium on Fostering Teacher Quality

Within this symposium, we the editors of WPA: Writing Program Administration posit issues of concern to WPAs across our wide array of administrative contexts. For our 2010 fall/winter issue, we invited articles from WPAs, who have earned awards for excellence in teaching. With the following prompt, we invited contributors to consider the issue of teacher quality in the teaching of writing:

In 2011, NCTE will mark its centennial. As one way to celebrate this milestone, the Research Forum of NCTE is encouraging various groups in the organization to focus on teacher quality and teacher retention. In the “2009 Report on the NCTE Research Forum,” Peter Smagorinsky, forum chair, says:

This topic seems to be of interest to all constituent groups of the council, including CCCC. Teacher retention is less a factor for the tenure-track professoriate who generally stay unless told to leave, but is a major issue in first-year composition programs, where courses are taught by an unstable cadre of graduate students and part-time or contingent faculty who are often employed as much for their availability as their proven effectiveness. Establishing quality criteria and monitoring and assessing teachers’ performances are just as critical in that setting as they are in any other area of formal education. (3)

Focusing on the quality of teachers and teaching has been central to the work of WPAs. For WPAs especially, as Smagorinsky suggests, teacher and teaching quality are inextricably related to challenges of supporting, assessing, and retaining teachers. What seem to be unacknowledged in this particular focus on quality are the relationships among teachers, teaching performances, and student learning. WPAs regularly face challenges of assessing and documenting student learning, especially with the increasing emphasis on accountability in higher education, for documenting learning and for encouraging evidence-based practices. How are we making connec-
tions between teaching and learning (or more aptly, teaching for learning)? Some other questions to consider:

- How are writing programs addressing these challenges?
- How is teaching quality connected with learning quality?
- What are the relationships between student learning (measured in ways other than grades) and the quality of the teaching and the teacher?
- How (and in how many ways) should we determine teacher quality?
- How are quality teachers identified? Developed and supported?

We further invite our readers to contribute to this discussion, either on WPA-L or within this symposium for our spring 2011 issue of WPA. Please submit your response to journal@wpacouncil.org.

Fostering Quality through Sense of Place

Larry Beason

If teacher quality is defined in terms of student learning, then two major components of a “good teacher” must almost certainly relate to the cognitive and affective sides of teaching. That is, a quality teacher has an academically sound understanding of writing—one that addresses an array of issues involving rhetoric, composition, linguistics, pedagogy, and the making of meaning. The teacher, in short, must understand just how complex learning to write is and know appropriate strategies that facilitate learning.

But a quality teacher, as students readily remind us, must not only be an expert but have a suitable attitude. This mindset does not need to be consistently warm and fuzzy. What is important is the teacher should be caring and enthusiastic about student success. This affective dimension, perhaps more so than the teacher’s cognitive understandings, extends to the social nature of the classroom, for a classroom community is heavily dependent on a rapport established in large part by the teacher’s attitude.

The relationship between quality teaching and the affective goes beyond the attitude a teacher projects. A sense of dedication, for instance, is also determined largely by one’s emotional outlook. Indeed, being able to stay committed to teaching—even in the most challenging of circumstances—is what I would call quality teaching. Whether we are talking about an untenured professor, a new TA, or an experienced adjunct, the writing teacher faces challenges ranging from relatively low pay, to not being fully respected by peers and administrators, to wondering where the next teach-
Dedication and motivation help the teacher deal with these emotionally-draining factors.

Considering that such difficulties are beyond any one person’s control, how do we develop the affective component of teaching? For me, this has been one of the most difficult aspects of being a WPA and trying to improve teaching quality. We know we should treat teachers respectfully, truly listen, and be a teacher advocate. It’s easy to say that is about all we can do, since a person’s emotional outlook is beyond our ability to change. That might be true to an extent, but surely WPAs can foster affective growth among teachers, even in adverse situations.

I believe one useful lens for understanding this affective side of teaching is to consider how a sense of place relates to writing teachers. Since the 1970s, the notion of “having a sense of place” (or home) has received considerable attention from scholars in fields as diverse as leisure studies, anthropology, and geography. In general, sense of place is viewed as a largely positive attitude toward a location, but physical geography is not as important as the meaning a person gives the surrounding. Place attachment, or a feeling of rootedness, is a powerful human need that helps people connect and “be themselves.” It results in emotional ties to places that “involve a sense of shared interests and values…bringing a sense of belonging and order to one’s sociospatial world” (Cuba and Hummon 113).

If we foster a sense of place among teachers, I believe we also foster a positive attitude that in turn enhances teaching. First, though, we need to appreciate the extent to which places are human constructs. Consider nomadic peoples, whose sense of home is not based on a fixed locale but on a sense of community among wanderers who share values, stories, and experiences. Place attachment does not exist until people give meaning, boundaries, and purpose to a surrounding. Obtaining a sense of place, while not divorced from a person’s cognitive understanding of the world, is an emotional need that cuts across cultures. Humans require a healthy sense of place to feel satisfied, accepted, and attached to significant people and events in their lives. Without such feelings, how can a person feel good about themselves, their surroundings, or their job?

Given the bland nature of most college classrooms, the good news is a feeling of rootedness does not depend on the visual appeal of the writing teacher’s classroom (or office). The bad news is composition programs usually rely on teachers whose situation is not conducive to either the spatial or non-spatial means by which place attachment is created. Long-term residence, for example, is often a key building block for positive feelings of rootedness, yet many writing teachers are fully aware their jobs are short-term. Integration into the community is important for place attachment, but in
composition programs, this integration is hampered not only by short-term residence but by the fact that adjuncts, TAs, and non-tenure track faculty often feel undervalued by established members of the academy.

However, we must remember that, despite these impediments, the “non-physical” determiners of place attachment take many forms, some of which can be nourished by both teacher and WPA. If so, the chances of enhancing teachers’ attitudes and motivation—and thus teaching quality—are greatly increased.

Let me give an example, one which also reminds us that challenges to quality teaching and sense of place are not limited to TAs and adjuncts. Not long ago, a tenure-track teacher was told quite unexpectedly that she would have to leave her department in a year’s time. Needless to say, this was devastating news, and one would be hard pressed to believe she could still feel a sense of place in her department, especially as she taught a heavy 4/4 load the next year (almost entirely composition). What I found remarkable was the teacher said that she still found a place where she belonged—when, as she explained to me, she defined it not as “the department” but as the learning experiences she and her students encountered in the classroom. One reason we all need a sense of place is it can be emotionally restorative—offering a sense of belonging when such feelings are endangered. What this teacher did was “relocate” herself in an invigorating context by defining her professional place in terms of the learning and connections that occurred with her writing students, no matter what was happening outside this sheltered realm.

We have little control over many aspects of the place where adjuncts, TAs, and diverse faculty work. But one way we can address their affective needs through a sense of place is to focus teachers’ attention on positive aspects of their classroom. I once believed this was a result of quality teaching—that the best teachers would accentuate the best parts of teaching and have the best attitudes. I now realize it is usually the other way around: we can promote quality teaching by reminding teachers of the positive. In many ways, it is the most important step I take with new as well as experienced teachers—emphasizing that, despite the enormity of our task and the feeling we are not sufficiently valued, the majority of students work hard, show improvement, do honest work, and are thankful (eventually) for our high standards.

The challenge for WPAs is how to remind teachers that the classroom is our place—our sharing of goals, values, and painful as well as happy memories. I find no better method of doing so than the time-consuming individualized approach of being proactive in working with teachers, not waiting for them to come to me. Talking to writing teachers about their
job invariably leads to lamentations. These are worth addressing, but it is possible to be encouraging and find a positive side without being Pollyannaish or naïve, even if it is nothing more than asking the teacher if, say, plagiarism truly reflects most students’ performance. Almost always, teachers recognize this is not the case, even if the problem is particularly annoying with a handful of students.

Sense of place, being a powerful emotional need, can shape the affective side of one’s teaching in ways that lead to quality teaching. The creation (not to mention evolution) of a sense of place means many things that go beyond the scope of this essay, but I can say in all honesty that the concept has encouraged me to step forward and help individual teachers remember that their classrooms are not only abstract sites of institutionalized learning and outcomes assessment, but real places that offer significant interactions and growth—for them as well as students. In doing so, I also occasionally remind myself that my own sense of place as a WPA is defined by promoting quality teaching, not by the bureaucratic matters that too often litter our desks and monitors.

Work Cited


Embracing Our Expertise through Faculty and Instructional Development

Beth Brunk-Chavez

Like it or not, First-Year Composition programs are often treated like the Rodney Dangerfield of the university. Students aren’t clamoring to take these required classes, some instructors would rather be teaching “something else,” and administrators—while they certainly appreciate the value of writing—don’t always show their appreciation. In other words, FYC gets little respect.

Add to this the fact that, as NCTE 2010 Research Forum chair, Peter Smagorinsky points out, First-Year Composition courses are generally “taught by an unstable cadre of graduate students and part-time or contingent faculty who are often employed as much for their availability as their proven effectiveness.” The result is that we find ourselves in an unenviable position: little respect across campus alongside, and sometimes because of, a perceived “ill prepared” and temporary faculty. This position is a famil-
iar trope to anyone who directs and/or teaches in a First-Year Composition program. One way to flip this script is to create a program community that builds upon and actively promotes the strengths of the highest quality teachers.

Creating and sustaining a high quality faculty and program community can be achieved by merging faculty development with program/instructional development. In “What is Faculty Development?” the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) defines faculty development as those programs focusing on the faculty member as teacher, professional, and person. Faculty development programs hold the “philosophy that the faculty member [is] the driving force behind the institution” and believe in assisting the faculty to be as productive as possible as a means of improving the work of the program and institution. POD additionally defines instructional development as that which focuses on the course, the curriculum, and student learning. The philosophy behind instructional development programs is that “members of the institution should work as teams to design the best possible courses within the restrictions of the resources available.” Integrating faculty and instructional development to the point at which they are nearly indistinguishable enables FYC programs to improve nearly every aspect of instruction, promote student learning, and establish a strong, unified community of instructors.

While university-wide as well as discipline-specific publications related to faculty and instructional development are available, our field understandably gives more attention to that “unstable cadre of graduate assistants” who are considered unstable primarily because they are new to the teaching of writing. But what about the rest of our faculty? WPAs may assume, for a variety of reasons, that our seasoned lecturers don’t need ongoing development beyond an orientation here or a workshop there. Additionally, including contingent instructors can be a challenge. We feel guilty asking them to participate when they may be paid poorly, may have limited time, or may not appreciate the need to join the writing program’s community. However, reminding ourselves that improved teaching quality often leads to increased student learning invites us to locate areas where meaningful faculty and instructional development are required. As Margaret Willard-Traub notes, “faculty development is not only a teaching moment but . . . also an opportunity for reciprocal exchange, learning, and knowledge production” (434). Combining faculty development with instructional development encourages all faculty to become a strong teaching member of a writing program community.
In FYC at the University of Texas at El Paso’s experience, improved faculty development came from a dramatic redesign of our program. In 2007, our program benefitted from a Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board grant to redesign our course delivery and student evaluation; we added to the task a redesign of our varied and outdated curriculum. By revising these three cornerstones of instruction simultaneously, we were able to strengthen our relationships between teachers, teaching performance, and student learning as we strove to develop a more outcomes-based program. In turn, this work enabled us to promote a stronger, more respectable image of FYC across campus.

Our redesign approach was to establish some broad tenets before working on the particulars. The task of creating a program that embodied these tenets drew on the strengths of the most respected, innovative, and effective teachers. Nominating outstanding faculty to participate in the decision making, to help promote the changes, and to prepare the program to act on these changes is the best way to develop and improve upon the teaching strengths of the sometimes temporary community of instructors. Everyone, from the seasoned lecturers to the new teaching assistants, is deeply involved in this productive community. The involvement takes on different forms at different points of the semester and is dependent upon the level of experience and engagement. Everyone is invited to participate and present at workshops and provide feedback for revisions to every part of the program. Everyone has the opportunity to improve students’ writing at various contact points, and as a result, we have been able to “embrace our expertise” rather than bemoan our inevitability as the instructors of those required first-year courses. “Embracing our expertise” has become a tagline that we share on presentations, workshop handouts, and other faculty and instructional development materials. The attitudinal change has also enabled us to become a strong, well-respected program on campus.

An obvious downside to integrated faculty and instructional development is asking instructors to do more in their already busy, overworked lives. For this reason, WPAs should work with the instructors in the program. Instructors appreciate the opportunity to do meaningful work, but they don’t want to feel like they have to shoulder it all. A significant challenge in combining faculty and instructional development is the request that instructors rethink the way they teach, the way they think about writing, the way they use—or don’t use—technology, and so on. It’s possible, of course, that not all instructors will agree about what’s best for students. As Carrie Shively Leverenz states, as WPAs, we should acknowledge the “irreducibility of difference” in teaching philosophies and approaches and also maintain a “conversation . . . in hopes that our differences will prove
provocative and productive for [the program] and for our students” (117). Is this quick work? No. Is this easy work? No. But is it valuable work that can change the program’s culture and its image on campus? Yes. Will integrated faculty and instructional development improve the quality of instruction? Yes. Will it help our students become stronger writers and researchers? Yes! In 1998, The ADE Bulletin published a call to improve graduate education: “Departments and institutions should reexamine graduate programs to ensure that the offer the highest quality training in analysis and pedagogical methods and that they are responsive to curricular trends” (“Statement” 23). Most writing programs are well equipped to do this, but we must include all instructors, from the most permanent and experienced, to the most unstable and new, in this endeavor. When we do, rather than asking for respect, we are embracing our expertise and, by extension, composing our students success.

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Fostering Cultures of Great Teaching

Diana Ashe

During a visit to our English department meeting last week, our Dean fielded questions about matters ranging from the budget outlook to our upcoming accreditation review. Several of the questions, predictably, focused on the possibilities for alleviating our heavy reliance on part-time faculty members to teach our composition courses (currently between half and two-thirds of our introductory composition courses, depending upon the semester). Our Dean has a strong record of finding ways for us to make additional, full-time hires as our university continues to grow, even in difficult budgetary times such as these. He emphasized the goal of putting more full-time faculty—he called it full-time “teaching power”—into those courses, agreeing with a colleague that full-time positions with ben-
erits make all the difference. We should, he said, “entrust this instruction to people who are fully invested in being us” (Cordle).

I’m not the only one in the room to quietly rejoice when I hear our Dean reinforce this particular value. It is hard to disagree with Dean Cordle’s assessment that full-time positions, with benefits, are more likely to bring us instructors who have that investment in our institution and in our students; indeed, the difference in working conditions alone is likely to heighten the “teaching power” that instructors bring to class with them every day. Empowering instructors through full-time positions, health benefits, and other markers of professional privilege is critical for those instructors and for the future of composition as a field of study. Any improvements in our labor practices are tied to further improvements in teacher quality: with better working conditions, we can also foster better teaching.

Marc Bosquet, Tony Scott and Leo Parascondola’s Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers: Writing Instruction in the Managed University presents a complex set of arguments about the state of what Bosquet calls “academic managerialism,” the tendency of those holding PhDs in rhetoric and composition to move (or be moved) into positions of supervision over other, less-remunerated instructors of composition (5). Taking an historical approach, Margaret J. Marshall considers the development of some of these same labor and cultural conditions in Response to Reform: Composition and the Professionalization of Teaching, but asks that we reject the terminology that has become so closely associated with composition’s most pressing concern. Marshall builds a carefully constructed case, rich with historical evidence to show that composition studies must “resist dichotomies and discourse patterns we know have been historically unsuccessful. And one of the most unsuccessful to date—at least in terms of gaining the status, independence, and the control associated with professionals—has been the turn to the language of labor to argue for better material conditions for teaching” (142). These studies, and others like them, point to serious and even seismic shifts in the academic landscape.

Once we manage to hire instructors in decently paying, full-time positions with benefits (once we can say to instructors that, yes, our workplace is equitable), we need measurements of teacher quality—reliable, fair and consistent ways of knowing that our classrooms are led with confidence and competence. While our classes are taught by an assemblage that changes radically each semester, we cannot pretend to make many claims about the consistency of the quality of our teachers. This is not to say that we do not have wonderful and dedicated teachers; it would seem from all of the available, anecdotal evidence that the contrary is true. The problem here is clear: we can have only anecdotal evidence to rely upon while we depend
A Symposium on Fostering Teacher Quality

on a heavily contingent workforce. Improvements in labor practices should go hand-in-hand with improvements in our understanding and assessment of teacher quality.

Since the 1960s, postsecondary institutions have increasingly relied upon student evaluations of teaching as a primary indicator of teacher quality, even in the face of evidence suggesting the shortcomings of this method—and without convincing evidence of the method’s validity. The title alone of Bob Algozzine, et al.’s 2004 study in *College Teaching* reveals the heart of the problem: “Student Evaluation of College Teaching: A Practice in Search of Principles.” Algozzine, et al. also remind us in passing that “there is no single definition of what makes an effective teacher” (135).

Two hot-off-the-press publications offer some insight into the complexity of the teacher quality problem. Neither study comes from composition, so neither matches our unique circumstances. However, each is being debated in wider academic circles, and each invites us to reexamine the procedures we use to evaluate our teachers. These are among the newest and the most talked-about considerations of teacher quality from any quarter. The first, from June 2010’s *Journal of Political Economy*, asks “Does Professor Quality Matter?” Taking advantage of the structure of the United States Air Force Academy, Scott Carrell and James West examine student evaluation data in relation to the course for which the evaluation was given, and in relation to compulsory “follow-on” courses, or those in a higher sequence in the same subject area. Their conclusions, among others, include the fact that “students appear to reward higher grades in the introductory course but punish professors who increase deep learning” (412). Students in their sample tend to give lower scores to professors whose teaching would actually help the students to succeed in higher-level courses in the subject area. “Since many U.S. colleges and universities use student evaluations as a measurement of teaching quality for academic promotion and tenure decisions,” Carrell and West continue, “this latter finding draws into question the value and accuracy of this practice” (412).

While Carrell and West’s research is interesting and may offer some solace to those faculty who give lower grades and get lower students evaluations as what they believe to be the result of those grades, I am interested in a different angle: the notion that students might “punish professors who increase deep learning” (412). Indeed, Carrell and West conclude, after an analysis of data that I cannot pretend to comprehend: “We find that less experienced and less qualified professors produce students who perform significantly better in the contemporaneous course being taught, whereas more experienced and highly qualified professors produce students who perform better in the follow-on related curriculum” (429). Could this study
undermine my faith in those freshly minted instructors we put in the classrooms each semester, even when their training and classroom observations give me some measure of confidence? It could, except that it simply does not translate into writing program operations. Upon examining Carrell and West’s study more closely, I find precious little in their case study that could easily transfer for most of us. First and most important, not only are none of the course sequences and instructors they studied in writing, none are even in the humanities. It is simply too far to stretch these results into a generalization about students, teachers, and courses in writing. Second but not to be ignored, the student population at the United States Air Force Academy simply does not translate well to my midsized state university, or many other types of institutions.

What this study does offer—an idea that translates very well—is that our measures of teacher quality and student learning ideally should cover not just a moment at the end of each semester, but the trajectory of the teacher’s career and the students’ learning careers as well. That is, our evaluations of ourselves and our students’ learning should be diachronic rather than synchronic whenever we can devise and support such measures. The very fact that Carrell and West noted statistically significant increases in what they called “deep learning” (412), or learning that students carry on to later and more challenging courses, among more experienced and more “qualified” teachers indicates that some kinds of teaching may encourage knowledge transfer more than others. What does that look like, and how can we understand it, encourage it, and—it has to be said—assess it?

Carrell and West’s study also serves to remind us that even the most sophisticated models (or perhaps especially the most sophisticated models) may fail to capture the essence of the teaching and learning interaction that occurs in writing courses. While their analysis of the exam scores and student data for a significant number of students and sections in biology, chemistry, engineering, and such courses is impressive and may provide a window into the operations of teacher evaluations in relation to locally standardized tests, it cannot touch the web of relationships that comprises the development of a whole class full of individual student writers. By looking at this study external to the field of composition, we can be assured that we must continue to rely primarily upon our own studies within the field to capture the kind of teaching and learning that are taking place in our classrooms.

Writing program administrators also benefit from a new book by Steven Farr of Teach for America: *Teaching as Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher’s Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap*. According to Amanda Ripley of *The Atlantic*, “almost half a million American children are being
taught by Teach for America teachers this year, and the organization tracks test-score data, linked to each teacher, for 85 percent to 90 percent of those kids.” In conducting research on successful teachers, Teach for America has collected nationwide data on a scale no school system can replicate.

In *Teaching as Leadership*, Farr identifies six patterns of “superstar” teachers uncovered in this data: they “set big goals that are ambitious, measurable, and meaningful for their students”; “invest students and their families” in learning; “plan purposefully,” usually from desired outcomes; “execute effectively,” making sure “every action contributes to student learning”; “continually increase effectiveness by reflecting critically on their progress”; and “work relentlessly” (5). Farr’s characteristics, though they emerge from K-12 schools, offer reassurance that we are getting things right as a field: what is the WPA Outcomes Statement, for example, if not a mechanism for helping instructors of first-year composition set measurable goals and plan according to desired outcomes? We can also point to this study and similar ones to demonstrate that gathering and testing evidence of the soundness of our teaching practices—assessment—is not merely an exercise to please administrators or accrediting bodies—it is what good teachers do. We might also share and interrogate such patterns with our instructors as a part of workshops or other professional development activities; new full-time positions bring new opportunities for professional development and sustained efforts at defining, as an individual department, what quality teaching means to us.

The findings in *Teaching as Leadership* encourage us to think about how our departments and programs can influence and encourage the habits that create “superstar” teachers, and our evaluative documents are among the first places we should look. These documents, after all, officially define the expectations for the job. The annual report, for example, may be a mere formality or an Inquisition, depending upon local tradition. My own department, one that values teaching very highly, asks each faculty member to identify which courses were taught in the year under review, then which were new to the university, and which were new to the faculty member. This struck me as wonderful at first, as I taught so many new courses and felt credited for that work. Now that I read Farr’s research, though, I see that we may be misplacing our emphasis: why not also ask what new approaches, readings, assignments, etc., each faculty member has integrated in existing courses during the year under review? What software or applications have we learned to deliver material to students in a new way?

The difference is immense: by asking only about new courses, we value only the newly hatched; we disadvantage thoughtful tweaking. Perhaps more importantly, an increasingly significant proportion of our teachers—
those not in tenurable positions—may never teach a course that is new to the university, and will teach courses that are new to them only rarely. By opening up the form to the reinvention of segments of courses, rather than only the invention of courses from whole cloth, we can encourage and honor that enterprise—and honor their significant contributions to our students’ learning. In the process, we also open up the evaluation process to the intellectual work behind teaching, rather than just recording what teaching occurred. Margaret J. Marshall reminds us that “[i]gnoring the intellectual features of teaching, especially the teaching of contingent faculty, cedes a ground many of us in composition do not wish to relinquish so easily: teaching can be a site of intellectual work and ought to be evaluated in those terms regardless of one’s rank within the bureaucracy” (139). There are other mechanisms for reporting these activities, of course, but changing the forms shifts the emphasis from the activities available only to those in tenure-track positions to everyone who completes the annual report form, while reinforcing the value of “continually increasing effectiveness” (Farr 5).

These new studies reinforce what we already know: that multiple points of evaluation are better than singular ones; that reinforcing efforts at improvement and informed innovation develops our teachers and strengthens teaching. For writing programs, this reinforcement can and does happen during the evaluation of teachers. While we cannot always evaluate each of our teachers based upon an ideally developed teaching portfolio, due to contractual and other constraints upon our teachers (see Farr’s “work relentlessly,” above), we can seek out more thoughtful procedures for evaluation. With every added full-time position we procure, the stability of our teaching improves, and with it, we improve teaching quality as well. The more equitable our workplaces, and the closer the match between what we value as teachers and the ways we evaluate our teachers, the better our chances of fostering cultures of great teaching.

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Performance Evaluation as Faculty Development

Clyde Moneyhun

The annual performance evaluation can be an uneasy transaction between writing instructors and their WPA evaluators. Stakes may be as high as employment itself: Will a teaching assistantship be extended for another year? Will a contingent faculty member be offered sections to teach the next semester? Other outcomes of an annual performance evaluation may include assignment of desirable courses (such as, for some teachers, advanced or honors composition), calculation of merit pay raises, and a paper trail of one’s teaching accomplishments, either positive or negative, often required for job applications. No wonder there is high anxiety in this situation, particularly in view of the power differences often present between a tenured WPA and an instructional staff of teaching assistants and/or part-time teachers. To complicate matters, well-meaning WPAs may feel torn between two loyalties. On the one hand, we are dedicated to delivering the best possible instruction to students. On the other hand, in the uncertain and often exploitative labor market that defines much of writing instruction, we are mindful that the measures we may feel compelled to take to ensure good instruction can threaten a teacher’s livelihood. However, as Peter Smagorinsky says in his “2009 Report on the NCTE Research Forum,” “Establishing quality criteria and monitoring and assessing teachers’ performances are just as critical in that setting as they are in any other area of formal education” (3).

Even under these conditions, difficult at best, I’d like to believe that in addition to helping a WPA monitor and assess teachers’ performances and thus address quality of instruction, the annual evaluation can also be an important faculty development effort that benefits teachers in a writing program, especially if certain conditions are met:

- Writing instructors should be actively involved in creating the evaluation process, from establishing criteria to deciding the form feedback should take.
- The evaluation process, including the setting of job expectations, the nature of information gathered, the evaluative criteria applied to job
performances, and the paperwork completed by all parties, should be derived from documents such as university-wide faculty handbooks and departmental guidelines, which tend to be vetted by chairs, deans, department promotion and tenure committees, affirmative action officers, and AAUP reviewers.

- The process should encourage dialog between writing instructors and the WPA with the goals of clarifying supervisor expectations and satisfying instructors’ desire for appreciation and support of their work.
- While playing the role of teacher advocate across this process, WPAs shouldn’t be coy about communicating to instructors that we also play the sometimes conflicting role of student advocate, and that we must fulfill that duty as well.

Some years ago, I was a new WPA at a university where no annual evaluation procedure was in place for the teaching staff I supervised. After a moment of panic when I learned that university policy required me to perform this function, I decided to treat the task as an opportunity to open a discussion with the (nervous) composition teachers about program philosophy, writing pedagogy, the support I could offer, and their professional development. “Professional development” I defined as a chance to join the national conversation on writing instruction, which meant not only providing material support for (for example) travel to conferences, but also fostering teachers’ sense of themselves as members of a community that valued their contributions.

I got things started by collecting all the information I could find in the online Faculty Handbook and English Department documents on annual evaluation requirements and common practices, and I shared it all with a committee I recruited of instructors interested in creating our procedure. Together, we used this information to generate a procedure that was in line with university and English Department policies but that was also adapted to the specific work conditions of our composition teachers. We presented all our thinking to the staff as a whole and revised it according to their feedback.

The first document we produced was a job description adapted from the Faculty Handbook “Guidelines on Workload and Evaluation,” which read (in part):

Writing faculty are defined mainly as teachers, and the teaching role characterizes their primary responsibility. That role is defined as teaching Writing Program classes as well as developing instructional materials for use by other Writing Pro-
gram faculty. Faculty may also choose, as part of their teaching duties, to facilitate faculty development workshops on writing across the campus and to participate in outreach to secondary schools. There are also modest expectations of service to the program, the University, the profession, and the community as need and opportunity arise. Expectations of scholarly activity apply mainly to maintaining professional currency in the field through workshop and conference attendance at the campus, local, regional, or national level, though conference participation (as a presenter) and research for publication are encouraged.

We wanted to create a process that rewarded instructors for the main job expectation—teaching—but also built in rewards (and support) for university or community service and possible scholarly activity. Across the years that followed, the service and scholarship expectations were instrumental in fostering a sense of professionalism among many teachers, giving them connections to larger conversations about writing instruction across the country.

We created a faculty appraisal form that instructors could use to generate a self-evaluation and that I could use to give specific feedback. It was based on the English Department “Faculty Appraisal and Planning Form” used by tenured and tenure-track faculty and asked both teachers and evaluators to assign numerical values to performance in the areas of teaching, service and scholarship. (Inexplicably, the values used by the English Department ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 9; the committee of writing teachers decided to retain this famously eccentric scale.) We wanted to make the criteria as specific as possible, so we generated a separate sheet of guidelines for using the appraisal form that gave instructions for developing a self-report in each category, such as (in part):

**Teaching**

- Describe the writing classes you’ve taught, especially any innovations you’ve introduced, and include syllabi.
- Describe work you’ve done on curriculum to benefit others in the Writing Program; include materials if relevant.
- Describe work you’ve done on Writing Program “publications” (brochures, newsletter, website, etc.); attach copies of work done.
Service

• Describe service you’ve done for the Writing Program (especially “administrative” work with placement, scheduling, registration of students, etc.).
• Describe service you’ve done for the University (attending meetings, sitting on committees, advising on non-pedagogical matters, etc.).
• Describe service you’ve done to the community (such as volunteer work, especially teaching, etc.); include materials if relevant.

Research/Scholarly/Creative Activities

• Describe Writing Program, English Department, or university-wide faculty development events you’ve attended; attach relevant materials, such as event publicity and brochures.
• Describe professional meetings or conferences you’ve attended, whether campus, local, regional or national; attach relevant materials, such as flyers or programs.
• Describe research you’ve done, published or not, conference presentations you have made, and writing you have published.

The resulting self-reports, as well as my own reviews of submitted materials and end-of-semester student evaluations, enabled me to write what I considered responsible letters to instructors, specifying where they were doing excellent work and what I hoped they might improve on the following year. I was able to praise one teacher’s contributions to the revision of our developmental writing course, another’s leadership in mentoring other teachers to teach ESL students, another’s volunteer teaching at a local center for mentally impaired adults, and still another’s service on our small college town’s citywide Ethics Committee. Expectations for improvement were couched in positive terms as plans for the future, as when I encouraged one teacher who was having trouble with grading to join an ad hoc Writing Program committee on assessment, and when I urged another who (in my estimation) needed to join the conversation about writing pedagogy to attend the following year’s CCCC, which was meeting only 30 minutes away.

After delivering my letters to all the teachers, I scheduled follow-up conversations in locations of their choice (and most chose my office). The first year, this was the most awkward moment in the process for all of us. Most of them were meeting with a supervisor for the first time, a natural time to be apprehensive, and I was delivering evaluations (a few of them not glowing) to people whose goodwill I valued and whose trust I needed in order to do my job well. We were nervous.
They were, to a person, amazingly patient and generous, mostly because they were pretty wonderful people, though I hope it was partly because I had scrupulously included them at every stage of creating the process, explained where I found the requirements we needed to meet, solicited their opinions, and used their ideas. In addressing prickly disagreements, I tried to be frank about my dual roles in supporting them as colleagues but also delivering good instruction to students. When one teacher insisted on more release time from teaching than I was willing to give to develop a writing faculty newsletter (a very worthy project), I explained that, given the scarce resources I managed on behalf of the students, her excellent teaching was more valuable than the hours she would spend on the newsletter.

In the years that followed that first round of evaluations, the process became a natural part of the rhythm of our year, and I looked forward to our conversations very much, while even the most anxious among them testified to me that at least they didn’t dread evaluation as much as they had in the beginning. As many of the teachers began to take advantage of the opportunities I offered to professionalize with reflective teaching practices, service to the program and the profession, and participation in the national conversation about writing pedagogy, I hoped it was at least partly a result of our collaborate work on the annual evaluation procedure.

A final word of advice: As should be obvious by now, I want to emphasize that evaluation procedures need to be developed in response to very local conditions. The one I’ve described worked well (with revisions across the years) for the instructors who helped create it. If this is done, I believe that the often intimidating annual evaluation procedure can be a valuable opportunity for fostering faculty development among a writing program’s teaching staff.

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Review Essay

The Promises and Perils of Writing Partnerships

Lorelei Blackburn and Ellen Cushman


In their introduction to *Writing and Community Engagement: A Critical Sourcebook*, Deans, Rosswell, and Wurr find the field of composition and rhetoric once again asking itself, “What does it mean to teach college writing?” (1). The deepening realization that teaching college writing is meaningful not just for our students, but for community members, organizations, prisoners, and K–12 school-aged children, has effected a sea change in the purposes and structures of writing programs. In this exciting era of institutional revisioning, community engagement classes have offered the opportunity for college students to write with, for, and in communities (Deans 2000). They’ve also offered writing program administrators a fresh set of questions from which to reimagine the scope and purpose of writing programs: “What kinds of relationships [with communities] should we be developing? And what ways of writing, knowing, teaching, public dialogue,
The five books reviewed here offer answers to these questions—as they raise more. The contexts of the books range from research and teaching in specific curricula developed at Temple University and in Philadelphia (Parks, Goldblatt); to a research project at Michigan State University and in the Chicagoland area (Grabill); to comprehensive overviews of public engagement projects across the nation (Mathieu, Long). Along the way, each provides WPAs qualified hope and realistic visions for large-scale programs that serve local communities as well as university students. Each book is also linked in terms of the themes that emerge as relevant and useful to the everyday work of WPAs. In this review, we examine the location of writing programs, the landscape of institutional change, and the situatedness of writing programs within universities and local communities. To provide a map of sorts for the reader, we begin with a review of the writer who surveys community literacy scholarship.

An expert ranger of this intellectual geography, Elenore Long is uniquely positioned to provide a succinct and comprehensive synthesis of research and scholarship for busy WPAs. Through comparative analysis of community literacy research and programs, Long’s *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics* maps well the landscape of community literacy projects. Her purpose is to describe the complexity of relationships between local publics and formal institutions that have emerged in the last fifteen years of scholarship on institutional work in public engagement. In chapter two of her survey, “Definitions and Distinctions,” Long provides a heuristic with which she charts the metaphors, contexts, tenor of the discourse, literacies, and rhetorical interventions of eight community literacy research and writing program initiatives (23). Chapter three, “Locating Community Literacy Studies,” situates the disciplinary homes of community literacy initiatives, while chapters four through eight profile several community literacy initiatives in terms of the heuristic outlined in the first chapter.

The implications sections at the end of each of these chapters provide WPAs vista points from which snapshots can be taken of important lessons, caveats, and tips for developing and maintaining programs. For instance, Long draws one implication among others in chapter five: “The Cultural Womb and the Garden: Local Publics that Depend on Institutions to Sponsor Them”: “the capacity for a local public to sustain its discourse depends, in part, on the viability of its sponsoring institution” (84). From this implication, WPAs would note “that it’s not always appropriate to assess a local public’s merit in terms of sustainability (though strategies for sustainability are one of the first concerns a funding officer will raise to a community
group [or program] that seeks funding)” (84). Insights like these provided at key places throughout the text make this book more than simply a map of the landscape of this research and scholarship; it also serves as a comprehensive guidebook for building successful initiatives that develop the literate capacities of students and community groups alike.

No guidebook to community literacy programs for WPAs would be complete without a chapter on pedagogical practices, and Long’s doesn’t disappoint. Her previous analysis of this research leads to an analysis presented in chapter nine that categorizes the interpretive, institutional, tactical, inquiry-driven, and performative pedagogical approaches. Students take action in these classes by producing literacies informed by those found in the public engagement projects reviewed in previous chapters. Students might go into communities to build new relationships, learn professional and local methods of negotiating workplaces and institutions, deliver and circulate their public writing, deliberate with community members and decision makers, or engage in disciplinary knowledge-making practices (154–57). Each one of these pedagogical approaches is then systematically described in terms of the roles of students and teachers, the resources they need, and types of assignments best suited to the location and communities. The last two chapters of this book also provide a richly detailed and comprehensive glossary and annotated bibliography. This rich taxonomy will prove invaluable in the training materials created and outcome measures developed in writing programs that integrate community literacy pedagogies. Long’s book serves as a richly detailed, carefully crafted, well-organized resource for WPAs. However, because it develops a rhetoric of local publics across many community engagement research trajectories and programs, the book may not have the sustained first-year composition focus for which some WPAs might hope.

With the terrain of community literacy and public engagement initiatives mapped this way, it’s worthwhile to see how metaphors of place, space, location, and engagement trace throughout the other books in this review before moving on to describe the qualified hopes and realistic visions presented in each. In Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition, Paula Mathieu argues that, because the field of composition has taken a public turn—“a turn to the streets”—a tactical orientation rather than a strategic one must be adopted. For Mathieu, who spent seven years working with the international grassroots movement of street newspapers, the word “street” serves as a “metonymic reference point for those places outside of universities and schools that have become sites of research, outreach, service, or local learning” (xii). The metonym also conjures a greater emphasis on spatial politics, which is apropos, since she maintains that academics
must consider both place and time in order to use all available approaches for engaging in effective public writing. Mathieu uses the streets as a metaphor for equalizing knowledge making, for bringing the ivory tower to street level and making “the streets” part of academe.

It is worth mentioning that the scope of Mathieu’s book does not cover assessment or evaluating student writing, nor does it focus on first-year composition. However, an important question she does raise that will be of particular interest to WPAs is how we as academics can get off our good intentions and assess how our work affects those in the streets (xi). Moreover, Mathieu insists that the landscape of institutional change could be improved upon by taking a more engaged look at street life: instead of advocating merely bringing the university to the streets—which, while sometimes challenging, still allows academe to maintain its safety by remaining ideologically and infrastructurally separate from the streets—Mathieu suggests we go one step further and situate the streets within the university. The implications of this could be, as Mathieu acknowledges and many WPAs might agree, both dangerous and incredibly exciting. While it may seem radical and unsettling, this type of change in relationship with communities has the potential for inspiring a more open public dialogue.

In chapter one, “Composition in the Streets,” Mathieu unpacks the difference between strategy and tactics. She maintains that, because universities are strategically organized by “academic calendars, disciplinary rules and methods of assessment,” when university work moves into the community, it is often encumbered with these same infrastructures, even though the university no longer controls or defines the space (16). Tactics, she believes, are more useful in helping scholars and students reimagine the types of community work possible.

The author explores public writing on the streets in chapter two, and discusses ways in which teachers can adapt tactics of hope in their own writing classrooms, thus assisting both themselves and their students in realizing more successful approaches to civic engagement. Chapter three offers more practical advice for WPAs as it considers the ethical issues of designing courses that broaden sites of pedagogy by incorporating subject matter from the streets. Chapter four explores some of the challenges of institutional service learning and suggests an alternative model for creating collaborative community-university relationships. Chapter five will be of special interest to WPAs as the author calls for professionals to examine their roles and motivations as teacher-scholars and public intellectuals. A more cynical reader may initially judge Mathieu’s book idealistic; however, throughout, she approaches complicated issues with an attitude of defiant optimism and she ends the book with a practical “Meditation on Hope:
“Tactical projects are limited by, yet given life and specificity by, spatial and temporal demands and a self-reflexive rhetorical nature; they aren’t likely to be easily replicable or generalizable; they may be unpopular or risky [. . .] but [they are] an act of hope” (134).

Hope and the politics of location are central themes of Eli Goldblatt’s work as well. In *Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*, Goldblatt calls for a vision of writing beyond the curriculum in order to “make writing and reading instruction more responsive to the complex needs that arise in urban circumstances” (2). This subtle shift in perspective and location for the work of WPAs addresses a real strength and limitation of the WAC emphasis taken by many WPAs—this emphasis privileges “the campus as the unit of measure” (12). To address this problem, Steve Parks and Eli Goldblatt argue for a paradigm shift away from WAC to a perspective of “writing beyond the curriculum,” the title of an article they coauthored in 2000.

Location, or more precisely the local community in which universities are situated, means everything to Goldblatt. During more than a dozen years working as a WPA at Temple University in Philadelphia, Goldblatt developed relationships between community residents, high school and college students, teachers and professors, and community leaders and administrators, all of whom are invested in literacy education. The local sites of this work include schools, neighborhood centers, two- and four-year colleges, and universities—and an implicit assumption across these sites is that “literacy learning is local” (9). These mutually sustaining, though sometimes antagonistic sites of WPA work unfold across the chapters as Goldblatt chronicles the connections and gaps between several institutional sites: in chapter two, he examines the distances between the 12th grade curriculum from a variety of high schools in Philadelphia and the first-year-writing curriculum at Temple; in chapter three, he presents data from the shared first-year course at community colleges in the Philadelphia area and at Temple to illustrate the very real impact that resource differentials have on the quality of education students receive; chapter four presents public engagement projects and philosophies from the perspective of community organizers, particularly Saul Alinsky; and chapters five and six widen the lens to scan across programmatic initiatives, institutions, and social boundaries that influence the development of social networks.

In prose richly detailed and well paced, Goldblatt paints a portrait of what is possible in these settings, presenting guideposts for the WPA hoping to develop such collaborations. The tone of possibility should not be understood as naïve or overly optimistic, for the final chapters also provide a sensible and sobering consideration of the many obstacles WPAs
encounter. He is especially mindful of the ways in which WPAs will be disappointed: funding and resources in non-profits can be inconsistent; programs can be derailed by administrators and colleagues bent on establishing their own research agendas or trademark programs; and the work that was once respected as a benchmark for teaching and as a hallmark of research can eventually become categorized as merely service. Despite these frustrations and uncertainties, WPAs will find in these pages several curricular, pedagogical, and institutional guides for developing relationships across institutional and community settings to sponsor literacy beyond the college curriculum. WPAs who seek an ultimate answer to the question “are community literacy initiatives worthwhile?” could be frustrated by Goldblatt’s rather short response: “it depends.” Evaluation of final project outcomes is always locally rooted in the specific exigencies these classes respond to, though students’ writing can show improvement across time.

Writing beyond the curriculum at Temple University, Steve Parks also developed an institutional initiative that recognized that “writing programs now existed within a larger framework that also included public-school partnerships, community writing groups, literacy research projects, and service learning courses (Parks 10). In Gravyland: Writing Beyond the Curriculum in the City of Brotherly Love, Parks discusses two projects: the Institute for the Study of Literature, Literacy, and Culture and the New City Community Press. In incisive, lucid prose, Parks illustrates his attempts to build “community and university partnerships, infused with cultural and composition/rhetoric theories,” all in an effort to, following Mathieu, “help organize a local progressive politics that transcends the actual for a hoped-for future” (xxix).

Careful always to reveal the intricate connection between critical and cultural studies’ theories and practice, Parks traces the humble beginnings of a multi-school community writing project in chapter one as it challenges conceptions of hegemony. The remainder of the book provides ample selections of students’ and community members’ writing that demonstrate the complex notions of value attached to these literacies that were developed by citizens who held a stake in the New City Community Press. Offering a firsthand account of the types of powerful, moving, personal and intellectual work of community writers, chapters four and five present WPAs with the political and social justifications they might see resulting from public engagement initiatives. The final chapter presents a sobering assessment and evaluation of the New City Writing project that is now directed by Eli Goldblatt. Parks takes great care to present a balanced evaluation of the success of the program as it morphed away from university-driven disciplinary questions and alignments and into a truly community-based, stake-
holder-run program. As happens with programs that truly involve a group of stakeholders interested in maintaining and sustaining the work outside of a university and with continued university presence, the New City Writing project grew wings of its own.

Here Parks reveals a crucial insight into the real promise of WPA work within Writing Beyond the Curriculum movements: “Continuing New City Writing within the confines of the disciplinary models being placed into the college and university did not seem sustainable over the long term” (201). While institutionalizing a project like this might be one marker of sustainability, better earmarks of sustainability might be found in the extent to which initiatives like these are taken up and fought for by all the stakeholders in the program. While it may seem that much of the work for designing, creating, and sustaining community engagement initiatives must rest on the faculty member or WPA, in actuality the work must be distributed to interested stakeholders who can marshal resources and intellectual energies to carry the work forward when institutional structures, infrastructures, and alliances shift as they inevitably do. Again, WPAs considering whether work such as this is worthwhile may be disappointed with Parks’ discussion and evaluation of the students’ writing from the program. Specific indicators of growth and development across specific genres, or even longitudinal examinations of students’ preparedness for subsequent college writing, will not be found in these pages. The specific details of student improvement, chronicled though they are in rich detail, may not provide the kinds of evidence of effectiveness WPAs need to see.

In Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action, Jeffery T. Grabill explores the politics of often unseen and tacitly powerful spaces that WPAs, faculty members, students, and community members occupy. Throughout the book, he looks at infrastructures—the rules, procedures, hardware and software, buildings and systems—that only become visible to their inhabitants when they present problems. He explores how infrastructures contribute to solving—or causing—local problems and builds a rhetorical theory that examines the “practices of the powerful” as well as the common rhetorical practices of everyday people (15). In other words, Grabill believes that to increase the capacity of citizens writing community change we must not only understand the work of citizenship, but we must consider infrastructures—“the boring things that support mundane work—as terribly important and exciting” (41). In order to fully appreciate Grabill’s argument, it is important to understand that he believes infrastructures do not consist simply of information, interfaces, and computers and wires. Rather, he claims, infrastructures are imbued with much more power: “Infrastructures enact standards, they are activity systems, and
they are also people themselves” (40). As such, Grabill asserts that information infrastructures are an essential part of civic rhetoric, and, because people engage with these infrastructures to participate in civic actions, scholars must consider infrastructure when considering community literacy (38).

If we apply this same logic, we may discover that taking a careful look at writing program infrastructures could be beneficial. And if WPAs take the time to delve into Grabill’s rich analysis of infrastructures, they may discover a goldmine of information that could inspire the revisioning of university infrastructures. While his book does contain thought provoking research capable of instigating programmatic change, with the exception of the final chapter, Grabill admittedly does not focus on the writing classroom. Instead he looks at a much broader picture—that of infrastructures. And, while infrastructures are an essential component of writing programs, WPAs who are interested in practical and targeted curricular information might not find what they are looking for in this book.

Chapter six, “Writing Programs and Public Life,” will likely be of the most interest to WPAs because here Grabill directly applies the implications of his work to the writing classroom. He insists that people in writing classes are students and citizens, and it is our responsibility to teach the rhetoric necessary for them to engage in knowledge work (114). He further suggests that because of the positionality of writing courses (in English programs), the infrastructure cannot support the kinds of writing necessary in public life (117). Grabill maintains that, as scholars and teachers, we must begin creating—or reinventing—infrastructures to support writing that enables citizen action in communities (117).

Though each of the books reviewed here deals with different landscapes of institutional engagement with community members, all share the same belief that publics beyond the academy have knowledge bases and do knowledge work. They share a respect for the public as a place and reason for education and appreciation of knowledge-making citizens. As with the publications produced by the contributors to New City Press who were featured in Steve Parks book, all of the books reviewed here argue for a more inclusive concept of who is an intellectual.

Parks claims: “For although the academy has certainly broadened its most restrictive definitions of this category, it is still the case that the store owner across the street or the electrician fixing a plug in a faculty member’s office is not innately understood as an intellectual with a voice that carries wisdom and importance” (130). When understood as having knowledge bases, strategies for problem solving, and voices needing to be heard, publics beyond the academy present opportunities for engaging with our students in situated knowledge making efforts that help address local ques-
tions and problems. “Historically, the kinds of problems that have brought universities and communities together,” Elenore Long writes, “are the tenacious, structural issues of poverty, illiteracy, and social fragmentation” (49). When local community members are understood as having knowledge valuable for addressing society’s most pressing troubles, then university representatives position themselves to work more carefully with community members.

However, community members are not typically viewed as having valuable knowledge from which they work, an assumption that has proven detrimental to university-community relations. Presuming that the storekeeper across the street knows little underscores the privileged stance of noblesse oblige that universities often take: “In response to problems [of large scale] magnitude, universities have often assumed their expertise, research agendas, and curricula could be readily exported to the community. Not so. History is rife with examples of failed experiments and disappointed working relationships” (Long 49). WPAs are in unique positions of being able to develop initiatives that redress this problem, and the books presented here offer many suggestions for developing, sustaining, and teaching within such programs in ways that sometimes ameliorate social ills as they rebuild troubled town-gown relationships.

Yet, it is also important to note that community members may sometimes work from positions of misinformation, limited rhetorical strategy, and underdeveloped systems of inquiry. As Long reminds us, “community practices have their own limits that can shut down active inquiry into complex problems. One of the central challenges of designing local publics is figuring out ways to encourage participants to suspend default strategies that have thwarted community-university partnerships in the past so that participants may put their differences into generative dialogue and productive working relationships that support rhetorical action” (49). So while it’s important for WPAs to keep in mind the knowledge making potentials in communities, it’s also important to remain realistic about the breadth and depth of these potentials.

Displaying characteristically pragmatic realism, Grabill also acknowledges: “there are two fundamental problems facing ‘nonexpert’ participants in public deliberations—a problem of knowledge and a problem of performance” (14). In other words, the local public may not understand how to access the materials necessary to make new knowledge, and they may not know how to act in a public forum. Interestingly, these are the same challenges many university students face upon entering the academy. To remEDIATE this problem, Grabill suggests that, if we want our writing programs to produce “thoughtful and effective citizens” we will allow the study of
effective “day-to-day rhetorical practices of ‘everyday people’” to inform our pedagogical decisions (15). Grabill also states: “rhetoric is no longer the terrain of the individual rhetor speaking or writing to ‘the public,’” but, rather, that “community action requires the collaboration of large numbers of people (and tools and infrastructures)” (16). This raises the stakes a bit by reminding us that the responsibility and potential of meaning making rests not only on individuals, but also on communities. If we believe that rhetorical practice is the function of organizations and not just individuals, it would behoove us to study, and even teach, writing as collaborative. However this would necessitate, as both Parks and Long might agree, a change in institutional thinking about what is recognized—and valued—as legitimate knowledge.

But how can we begin seeing community members as citizens occupying equally important publics with whom we might develop large-scale writing program initiatives? Mathieu acknowledges that our field may rely too much upon the commonly used strategic orientation to communities, which she claims privileges the university as the controlling agent working with “others” in the community. She also maintains that such an approach “seek[s] objective calculations of success and thus rely[es] on spatial markers like sustainability and measurable student outcomes as guidelines of success” (xiv). Instead, Mathieu suggests a tactical approach, which she believes is more rhetorically responsive and humane. She maintains that a tactical orientation “needs to be grounded in hope […] as a critical, active, dialectical engagement between the insufficient present and possible, alternative futures—a dialogue composed of many voices” (xv). Rather than a naïve approach to hope as an unrealistic vision of some far off future, unattainable and untenable, Mathieu offers a definition of hope that is grounded in realistic assessments of the exigencies and purposes needed to reach a desired outcome.

As Mathieu defines it, to hope is to “look critically at one’s present condition, assess what is missing, and then long for and work for a not-yet reality, a future anticipated [and] it is grounded in imaginative acts and projects, including art and writing, as vehicles for invoking a better future” (19). Grabill’s book offers a look at some of the practical challenges that community members encounter while working toward that anticipated future, that “not-yet reality,” that hope. Whereas Mathieu argues against a strategic orientation that “seeks to control spaces and create institutional relationships with an ‘other’ in the community,” Grabill calls for us to examine those spaces and institutional relationships in order to reinvent infrastructures that value citizens’ rhetorical strategies and expertise (91). Grabill suggests that if, instead of focusing on the concept of information, we focus on the
concept of infrastructure, our attention will shift “to what is indeed useful for individuals and communities as they seek to generate persuasive discourse about what is good, true, and possible” (40). What Grabill discusses in his book is practical hope that is both tactical and strategic in that he recognizes the importance of strategy (infrastructures), but encourages readers to adapt a hopeful stance to reinvent those infrastructures, thus, effectively changing their approach to public writing.

The tensions between hoped for and actualized reality emerge too in Parks’ *Gravyland* as he describes in chapter 4 the outcomes of his initial attempts to develop a community literacy initiative. His hope was that the New City Writing Project, coupled with students’ own developing writing, might “connect with efforts to create a revitalized new city” (98). He finds that instead of seeking immediate change in short-term accomplishments evidenced by one semester’s worth of study, scholars must re-envision change as something that emerges across time, from multiple forms of texts, and across institutions: “In this alternative, the faculty and students are positioned within a local community’s long-term struggle for political recognition, understanding that the university’s work is only one element within this effort” (99). As but one element of this work, the students’ individual, emergent writing should be taken as a piece of a larger constellation of outcomes that might better reveal the sustained efforts of communities and universities to create change together and at a larger scale. Students in his program moved from a “personal engagement with the contact zone to a sense of collaborative action in the public sphere” (99). Parks identifies the larger problem that WPAs around the country may have with engaging in tactics of hope: demonstrable outcomes. Parks would argue that outcomes should be measured in terms of the ways in which the student papers work rhetorically to position them within multiple publics. He also insists “we must teach our students to understand that all writing is a negotiation of voice participating in the publicly negotiated civic culture” (122). Hope actualized must be demonstrable, in other words, and Parks offers one way for WPAs to begin charting the evidence necessary to demonstrate this: the concrete analysis of students’ writing will show that they not only employed the technical and rhetorical moves of successfully integrating sources into a research paper, but it will also show how students challenged the notion of what counts as intellectual work and the importance of scholarship.

Where Parks presents options for assessing actualized hope, Goldblatt challenges the usefulness of tactics of hope that include creating student and citizen presses as the vehicle for disseminating community literacy writing. Gratifying and celebrated though they may be, the publications of student and community members’ writing he’s produced have languished.
Hundreds of copies of these publications sit in storage—with no interested new readers. Goldblatt firmly believes that “A press needs to bring its writers to the public [. . .] and we won’t stay in business long if we can’t sell at least enough books to prove to funders that we’ve got a viable plan to put our books to work for the authors and the communities” (200). Students’ buy-in to these projects can often end with the last day of class, and it’s up to the ongoing contributors and community members to publicize and distribute these works in consistent fashion. Goldblatt cautions as well that the faculty involved are required to undertake at least “two sustained investments”: the first involves ensuring quality instruction and the well-being of students on campus; the second requires professors to pay attention to “their own research and learning,” to continue publishing, and to ensure that the community literacy projects contribute to the professors’ research (203). Because they unflinchingly detail the ugly pragmatics of running community literacy programs, the failings, difficulties, tensions, and realities of enacting hope provide a useful check to what might otherwise be dismissed as Pollyannaish narratives.

Adding to the chorus of qualifiers regarding the programmatic and pragmatic details of developing community literacy initiatives, Long’s chapter nine, focused on pedagogical practices, offers more sobering advice to the would-be community literacy WPA: as educators we must “create with community partners and students at once tangible and poetic interpretive schemas to guide our participation in local public life” (199). With pedagogical intervention and development from the local to curricular, WPAs might be better positioned to “construct with others compelling, tangible interpretive schemes that are capable of describing and responding to articulate the working theories that support these interpretative schemes” (199). When hope is tempered with reality, WPAs interested in developing community literacy projects will have grounded vision based on the last 10 years of research and curricular development in the field. The books presented here offer initial answers to the questions with which we opened this essay: “What kinds of relationships [with communities] should we be developing? And what ways of writing, knowing, teaching, public dialogue, and social change do those relationships make possible?” (4). We think many and all. If we are to take any one concept from the various programmatic perspectives that these books offer, it might very well be hope—that is, a critical, realistic, and assessment-driven visioning of the future. And, while each of these authors provides models for future visioning and revisioning, their re/visioning is but a sliver of the conversation in which WPAs need to engage. Evidence-based approaches, deeper analyses of student writing (across genre, across media), thorough evaluation of student development,
and community collaboration—this is the call, we feel, that WPAs must take up as they contribute to the realization of this hope.

Works Cited

I’ve directed writing programs for sixteen of twenty-four years since my PhD, a stretch that included ostensibly “higher” administrative positions from which I returned. Clearly, then, I’ve found something rewarding in this work—though I might just be a dull recidivist. Yet I never refer to myself as a WPA (as in “I’m a/the WPA at DU”), because the label seems to make “writing” merely the penultimate adjective to the mightier noun
“administrator.” I may be deluded that leading or directing or running (all are vexed verbs) a writing program is fine work but not the real point, just something to which a “heroic, self-sacrificing father figure,” as Jonathan Alexander and Will Banks have fairly characterized me, might resign myself (92).

So, despite having roles in the Council of Writing Program Administrators, despite liking and respecting people who do this work, despite believing that good WPAs are good for teaching and learning, I’m oddly discomforted whenever I hear a graduate student aspire to be one, when programs offer sequences in writing administration, when so many of us foreground identities as administrators over those as teachers and scholars. For a couple of decades, people have rightly worried about the conflation/reduction of composition studies with first-year composition. I’m starting to worry if we might be similarly collapsing “teaching writing” into “managing writing programs,” as if it’s all really about the staffing, the scheduling, the placing, the planning, the assessing, and so on.

When I consider my dis-ease, its sources seem dubious. Latent 1970’s working class suspicions of anyone too happy to be boss? A subconscious presumption, born of naïve Midwestern diffidence, that one ought to be tapped for this work rather than pursue it outright? A sense that “being in composition studies” centrally means teaching, writing, and studying writing, so that “running a writing program” is ancillary in the way that “management” is to medicine? Perhaps I simply possess “enlightened false consciousness[,] . . . the diagnosis of a tragic loss of righteousness . . . that creates a melancholy affliction in the subject,” who is aware of his or her complicity in something unseemly but rationalizes it nonetheless (Hardin 141). In naming my reticence, I’m not claiming it’s right.

And so I’ve been ambivalent about the professionalization of writing programs and their leaders/directors/administrators/chiefs. Lest I seem hypocritical or disingenuously privileged, please know that I favor formally organizing best knowledges and practices, especially against so much reductive nonsense about writing. I just think we need to ponder our work and identities, our motives and professional trajectories. Some recent books help frame what’s at stake.

In his compact and modest The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University, Louis Menand asks four questions: “Why is it so hard to institute a general education curriculum? Why did the humanities disciplines undergo a crisis of legitimation? Why has ‘interdisciplinarity’ become a magic word? And why do professors all tend to have the same politics” (16)? While at least the first and, arguably, the second and third questions, directly resonate for American writing programs, com-
position studies is notably absent from the book, beyond a gratuitous jab that English PhD programs are now really designed to generate ABDs as adjuncts (146). Largely we’re absent because Menand narrowly focuses on “elite” institutions with venerable liberal arts traditions. His defense: “the elites have had the resources to innovate and the visibility to set standards for the system as a whole” (18). I’ll point out that having resources to innovate and actually doing so are quite different, especially when it comes to general education or writing, where many “elite” schools have been late adopters. I give you writing centers. Any number of solid, if modest, public universities (Illinois State comes quickly to mind) have not only had little difficulty instituting but also reforming general education.

Why, then, include this book in a review essay centrally concerned with books on writing programs? As a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, Menand represents higher education to a large trade audience, and his analyses provide interesting harmony and counterpoint to the issues of professionalization.

Menand characterizes the legitimation crisis in the humanities as having occurred in three stages. First was a shift of scholarly approaches “from formalist and universalist to historicist and hermeneutical” (83); as a result, any “merely” professional or vocational field, say accounting, could be appropriated by the humanities through a focus on “the history of accounting” (or, I’ll suggest, “the rhetoric of accounting”). Second were antidisciplinary moves to accommodate areas (Women’s studies, postcolonial studies and so on) that had been absent from traditional disciplines. Third came a move toward postdisciplinarity, toward “methodological eclecticism, boundary-crossing (a literature professor writing on music or fashion), post-professionalism (writing for a non-academic audience), and the role of the public intellectual” (87).

With tributaries in rhetorical theory and history, linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, journalism, and many other fields, composition studies has ridden all three waves, leading to long debates on whether we constitute a discipline, a field, an enterprise, or something else. “Program” has thus struck me as a conveniently ambiguous phrase to lasso some of this work, as has “center” for other rump academic enterprises. And yet in terms of campus economic, political, and economic respect, we’re convinced (not without justification) that we need departmental status, with majors and tenurable faculties. I’ll simply note that composition studies’ expansionary moves come as relationships between disciplines and departments, between intellectual and administrative formations, are fluid and the humanities are vulnerable. It’s a fertile time to grow writing. Composition studies has its own legitimation crisis, but at least the field has practical
catchet and comparatively less internal fractiousness, perhaps owing to its unifying narrative of marginalization, than, say, literary studies.

Menand’s discussion of professionalism illuminates the complexity of our moment and motive. “Society” grants qualified professionals the power to regulate themselves in exchange for the promise of their disinterested quality in performing specific work. On the one hand, this creates an open meritocracy through credentialing. On the other hand, obviously, it makes professionals gatekeepers. In the academy, Menand suggests, “the most important function of the system is not the production of knowledge. It is the reproduction of the system” (105). This is a provocative lens through which to perceive the emergence of professional WPAs.

**Putting it to the WPA**

What fascinates me is the potential for the profession of “writing teacher” or “writing scholar” or “writer” to be redefined as the profession of “writing administrator,” a point that Donna Strickland and others suggested already a few years ago (49). On the surface, this seems silly; after all, there are many times more teachers than administrators, and isn’t the point to ensure good teaching, good research, and the best allocation of resources? And yet it might be that we’re nearing the fulcrum where that’s not the point. Perhaps most people with permanent positions in composition studies will manage some aspect of writing at some point: creating and maintaining programmatic features, hiring and organizing teachers, securing and extending budgets and a place in the institutional order. Richard Miller (in)famously argued a decade ago that composition should foreground this administrative imperative, recasting graduate education explicitly as administrative training. In the face of these trends, how might we avoid letting our pursuit of professional status swamp our mission of doing good by students and stakeholders?

That is one of several urgent questions addressed in Donna Strickland and Jeanne Gunner’s collection of sixteen essays, introduction, and foreword, *The Writing Program Interrupted: Making Space for Critical Discourse*. Strickland and Gunner have edited a provocative, often polemic, book that confronts us with tough critical analyses. At various points, nearly all touchstones of WPA work come under scrutiny, from the Portland Resolution, the Outcomes Statement, and the Intellectual Work document; to grand narratives (or the “totemic topics” as Strickland and Gunner put it (xv)) about the marginalization of writing programs and the victimization of their gendered leaders; to the very assumptions that WPAs benefit teachers, students, and writing. I expect these critiques will make lots of WPAs
uncomfortable. But this is an important volume that comes at a pivotal time.

The book’s premise is that “the discourse that circulates about writing program administration rarely takes a ‘big picture’ look at its own premises” (xi). (Interrupted’s main forebear, Bosquet, Scott, and Parascondola’s 2004 Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers, less directly—and less ably— took on the construct of writing program administration per se.) The heaviest volleys come in chapters from Jeff Rice, Sid Dobrin, Bruce Horner, and from Laura Bartlett Snyder, who astutely articulates how “‘feminist’ styles of administration might actually be complicit in maintaining inequitable labor relations” (29). Rice critiques the WPA Outcomes statement as promoting “scientific management” (9-10) and emblemizing the general conservatism of WPAs. Dobrin characterizes the Council of Writing Program Administrations as “an attempt to create a master narrative of meaning under which administrators nationally operate with little or no open critique of what it means to administer or why administration has become such a central (and powerful) position within the ranks of composition studies” (61). He ultimately calls for “a type of un-administering of the administrators, in which wpas’s work toward a more critical position . . . that specifically questions its own positionality, its own place” (68). I generally think Rice and Dobrin are enough right that we ought to pay attention to the points they raise.

However, some characterizations are over-extended. For example, I have never foregrounded the Outcomes Statement in any writing programs in which I’ve taught or which I’ve reviewed. (While I agree with its emphases and spirit, the statement strikes me as so broad as to be unwieldy.) Sure, this is an n of 1, but my point is that, for all the visibility of the outcomes statement and its proponents, it’s hardly universal to all WPAs and programs, and hardly an oath to which allegiance must be sworn. Visibility ≠ universality. Dobrin’s concern about totalizing makes some sense in large programs where contingent faculty do most teaching, but by his own acknowledgment, it doesn’t typify colleges where staffing happens differently, including places that have no WPA. Furthermore, the apparent lack of critique in scholarly discourses doesn’t prove the absence of critique by WPAs themselves. Many spend our scholarly energies on projects other than meditations on the state of a profession that defies grand narratives. Suellen Duffey effectively raises this point in her chapter when she wonders, “Is the WPA position alike enough across institutional settings to be theorized monolithically, as it currently is” (187). Her complex answer is “not yet” (193), though I’d go further and caution against the desire implied in her answer.
Bruce Horner’s chapter offers a smart critique that commodifying the intellectual work of writing program administration, privileging what is visible and reviewable, strips away other elements of effort and effect, including those derived socially. I think Horner is largely right, though the goal of the Intellectual Work statement is not to name all WPA activity as intellectual work, then claim that only intellectual work matters. Horner worries that valuing writing programs for the tuition they generate and the skills they produce confuses exchange value (which is rewarded in capitalist societies) and use value (which is not) (78-9). He uses this analysis to temper Marc Bosquet’s concerns about managerial discourses. Even if one recognizes the problematic ethics of “paternalistic” management, Horner cites pragmatic constraints on glib solutions: “Arguments that otherwise show great awareness of the limitations imposed by current working conditions on composition teachers, which then advocate assigning those working under such conditions tasks like curriculum design, deny, ironically, the conditions necessary to carry out such tasks” (81). The irony is compounded by advocacy and bargaining efforts that focus on wages and security. Horner concludes, “By focusing almost exclusively on questions of hours and pay, they leave unquestioned, and contribute to, the commodification of their work” (81).

Other chapters in The Writing Program Interrupted, such as Joe Harдин’s, offer similarly cogent analyses. Still others swim more in the WPA scholarly mainstream: Tom Fox’s analysis of “expert” limitations in removing a bad writing test; Tom Miller and Jillian Skeffington’s apology for philosophical pragmatism; Wendy Hesford, Edgar Singleton, and Ivonne García’s case study of a globalization initiative. Some few chapters less obviously contribute to the book’s purpose and theme.

Tony Scott’s chapter does, but for the purpose of this review, I’d like to concentrate rather on his book Dangerous Writing: Understand the Political Economy of Composition, which develops similar issues at greater length. Scott braids two threads: a challenge to teach in ways commensurate with the service-working lives of students, and a sharp critique of institutions, programs, and WPAs (Scott openly implicates himself), that treat faculty in ways that parallel their students’ economic lives. He focuses on “the sometimes directly contradictory relationship between a scholarly profession that seeks full status as a legitimate academic discipline and a bureaucratic practice that has a legacy grounded in labor exploitation and oppressive conceptions of literacy and higher education” (33, though he uses exactly the same wording on 43). Strong words, and yet it’s fair to have us confront a cleft between the “upstairs” work of graduate research and theory and the “downstairs” work of teaching. Of course, I’d contend, it’s not necessarily
bad to wield “a bureaucratic tool that can be effectively used to instrumentalize a particular view of literacy and learning” (47), provided that the “view” is sound. Some bureaucracies actually instrumentalize good, as have courts that overturn bad laws.

In a chapter subtitled “The Genre Function of the Writing Textbook,” Scott reports a qualitative study of how 20 contingent faculty choose and use writing textbooks. The interesting, if not entirely surprising, finding is that teacher “identification is centered on teaching writing according to the explicit and implicit norms established in this program, rather than on the ability to recursively theorize and thus critique particular pedagogies” (106). While I’d be very concerned if those teachers lacked the knowledge and ability to do the kinds of theorizing and critique Scott desires (and so do I), I don’t see this discovery as necessarily troubling, especially if the program has developed theoretically defensible “norms.” That is, I hope that faculty teaching the same course in the same environment would reach some common ground on local goals and practices, and I don’t think this view simply represents a longing to make curricular trains run on time. The implication is that imperious WPAs would inflict norms on subjugated faculties who have no recourse or means to exercise strong disciplinary knowledge in creating better curricula and pedagogies. If that happens, I worry, too.

A stronger issue is the disjunction between student job prospects and purportedly elitist readings and writing practices. Hoping to revive the agency and identity that were, ironically, lost when political pedagogies effaced expressivism for postmodernism, Scott wants students to write about, analyze, and contextualize their own experiences as workers, making “the material conditions of students’ lives. . . . a common starting point for inquiry and writing at the university” (156). Scott portrays this pedagogy, providing eloquent student writings and portraits. The book is well-written. Still, “dangerous writing” hardly seems dangerous at all; it’s not far from a Ways of Reading pedagogy but with “students as workers” at the topical center. Scott’s call to turn “more of the intellectual energy of our profession toward understanding how the economics of higher education are shaping writing pedagogy” is reasonable (187), but we’ve actually done a fair amount of that work already, and Scott’s done even more here. What’s really needed are clear portraits of desirable futures and thoughtful plans to achieve them.
Practices, Not Programs

It’s hard to imagine a book further from the political economy of writing programs than *Writing-Based Teaching: Essential Practices and Enduring Questions*, edited by Teresa Vilardi and Mary Chang, which hearkens if not to a bygone era than to a parallel reality. Vilardi and Chang compile eight essays and a historical postscript written by participants in/leaders of the Bard College Workshop on Writing and Thinking (a three-week course for Bard students begun in the early 1980s) and the Institute for Writing and Thinking (a faculty development effort that promotes writing to learn). It consciously self-references these institutions, to the extent the book seems nearly a festschrift to Bard. Most chapters share anecdotes of the Institute’s early days, citing key handouts and practices from the early 1990s, and celebrating the influences of founding director Paul Connolly and of Peter Elbow, whose impressive original consulting continues to mark the program.

Chapters focus on a tenet most famously articulated by Anne Berthoff, John Bean, and others: personal engagement with subjects, fostered by various assignments and techniques, will create a broad writerly sense, ability, and identity. These are familiar practices: personal freewriting, focused freewriting, reflection on process, collaborative learning and writing communities, dialectical notebooks, and radical revision strategies. Notably absent are discussions of how they relate to matters that have occupied composition studies for the past decade: genre, writing transfer, the social construction and constraints of discursive formations, writing with and for new media. Most notably absent are rhetorical considerations. Many citations are classics from the 1980s and 1990s, with such philosophers and theorists as Wittgenstein and Vygotsky figuring prominently, along with more belletristic figures. (A passage from Norman McLean’s *A River Runs Through It* shows up in at least four chapters.) The book is an interesting historical document archiving a particular place, time, and orientation toward writing to learn.

Several chapters provide ideas new to some teachers looking for strategies and practices. For example, Margaret Raney Bledsoe’s “Dialectical Notebooks” goes beyond “draw a line down the center of a page” to provide a well-articulated set of options. Carley Moore offers several prompts for deep revision. Alfred Guy outlines “process writing,” what most of us would call “reflection” or writing about one’s own processes. Ray Peterson discusses all these practices in a climate of standardized testing. I can still imagine faculty across the disciplines finding several techniques fresh, and
I can still imagine many colleges and situations in which this orientation plays well. After all, it invests considerable agency in students themselves.

As I read this book, then, the word that I keep fighting is “quaint.” Although quaint has largely a pejorative cast, it also embodies the sense of old charm and attractiveness, something appealing both because of and despite being out of step with its times or surroundings. Part of this may be due to the book’s embracing a view of writing from our field’s adolescence. Part might be that, despite the influence of “the Bard school,” what comes persistently through are teachers, classrooms, and students, in a space oddly free of writing programs, administrators, and their trappings. I’m not longing for program-less writing, for John Galt or Howard Roarke-like teachers. Indeed, the striking thing about Bard is its collaborative development and persistent—even programmatized—structures.

Beyond Mere Programs

*What We Are Becoming: Developments in Undergraduate Writing Majors*, edited by Gregory A. Giberson and Thomas A. Moriarty, explores practices and principles that characterize some of the 60+ undergraduate writing majors that have emerged especially—but not only—in the past fifteen years. Surprisingly scant are references to *A Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies*, the most important ancestor of the current movement. Another backdrop is *Composition Studies* 35.1 (spring 2007), an issue on writing majors introduced by Heidi Estrem and featuring several of the authors in Giberson and Moriarty’s book.

An opening chapter by Rebecca de Wind Mattingly and Patricia Har-kin argues that a “post-disciplinary major in rhetoric and composition is a particularly good idea for research intensive universities in the current technological and fiscal states of affairs” (13), benefiting students, their faculty, universities themselves, and multinational capital. These rationales are persuasive mostly to compositionists already in the choir, though even some choristers might be put off by the assertions that such programs will be “lucrative” (20).

It’s striking that the next fourteen chapters mostly ignore the “research intensive university setting.” These chapters sort and resort into several categories. Several are histories and explanations of majors at specific schools, including Millikin, Colorado State, Mt. Union, Oakland, Southwest Minnesota, and Rowan. They’re interesting not only for their detailed depictions and, in the case of an engaging chapter by Kelly Lowe and William Macauly, frank analyses of what can go wrong, but also for presenting less familiar schools. Other chapters focus on issues within majors. Dominic
Delli Carpini and Michael Zerbe use the curriculum at York to make a case for style and memory. Moriarty and Giberson advocate for civic rhetoric, Joddy Murray for multimodal writing, and Celest Martin for creative nonfiction. Swimming against the current, David Beard ultimately argues against an undergraduate rhetoric major. His argument is particularly curious given the explicit place of “writing” (not rhetoric and not composition) in the volume’s title. Would he be “for” a writing major but “against” a rhetoric major, and what would be the difference?

Indeed, the rhetoric/writing relationship is only one of many issues these authors consider, some explicitly, others tacitly. To what extent (or perhaps better, under what conditions), should these majors foreground consumption/reading/theoretical knowledge and to what extent production/writing/practical knowledge? To what extent should they feature “professional” writing versus “academic” versus “civic” versus “creative?” Liberal arts or humanistic education versus vocational? And how should these questions get addressed in local situations? Those situations include the positions of creative, technical, and first-year writing at a given school; the dispositions of literature faculty; the configuration and strength of the traditional English major; and the numbers and interests of writing faculty.

These several essays are interesting at the levels of particle and even wave, but ultimately unfinished at the level of field. One sees cases made for specific elements or orientations but little over-arching analysis. That’s maybe consistent with the point of the book and the historical spirit and charm of our field/terrain/post discipline, for which there is no innocent encompassing term. Neither “rhetoric” nor “composition studies” nor “writing” is big or neutral enough.

Sanford Tweedie, Jennifer Courtney, and William Wolff, in “Toward a Description of Undergraduate Writing Majors,” do offer Cartesian coordinates for sorting things out. Their horizontal axis ranges from “Liberal” to “Technical,” from courses in writing as a “literary” act per se to courses in writing for specific purposes, professions, fields, or genres (282). The vertical axis ranges from “general” to “specific,” from purely theoretical or broad courses to ones focusing on narrow genres or situations. This matrix is easily deconstructed, as Tweedie, Courtney, and Wolff anticipate, but it’s a useful heuristic.

But given plentiful options, which are “the best?” Sue McLeod takes up this issue in a brief afterword that suggests starting a “national conversation about shared outcomes [for writing majors], a conversation that might result in a document not unlike the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” (288). I imagine many authors in The Writing Program Interrupted expressing dismay at
the very prospect. Codifying the writing major or, even tracks within it, may have a colonizing function that effaces local features, and I caution us to live a good while with multiplicity and diversity in configuring departments and majors.

Mark McGurl’s The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing explores writing of a different sort, the emergence since the 1930s of hundreds of graduate and undergraduate programs, many (but crucially not all) federated under Associated Writing Programs (AWP). Writing less a critical history per se (in the vein of D.G. Myer’s masterful The Elephants Teach), and surprisingly familiar with composition studies, McGurl mostly ignores the hoary question “are creative writing programs good for writers and writers?” Instead he wonders “how, why, and to what end has the writing program period reorganized U.S. literary production” and “how might this fact be brought to bear on a reading of postwar literature itself?” (27). He proceeds mainly through extended readings of authors against their times and institutions, from Flannery O’Connor through Ken Kesey, Toni Morrison, Raymond Carver, Joyce Carol Oates, and many others, in a lucid 400+ page account.

McGurl examines specific programs and their directors, most notably Iowa’s and Stanford’s, with Paul Engle and Wallace Stegner their respective WPA-like figures. But creative writing directors are decidedly not WPAs. Creative writing exerts influence less through single heroes than through “social atmospheres” constituted by writer/teachers and students (322). So, while compositionists may agree that programs are both “a social technology, a way of mobilizing human and other resources to achieve external ends” and “an embodiment of tradition, a place where the authority of past practices is contained and conserved” (151), composition and creative writing programs are configured quite differently. Partly this is due to the difference between providing universal coverage and offering selective access. Creative writing teachers are credentialed through publication and featured in alumni magazines, rather than hidden in schedules as “faculty TBA.”

Creative writing programs may be most appropriately contrasted, then, with nascent undergraduate writing majors. McGurl cites four growth factors for creative writing programs. These include “the student’s desire to be a writer, the writer’s desire for a steady paycheck, the institution’s desire to be responsive to the desires of its inmates” (221), all magnified by the floating signifier “excellence.” McGurl maintains that “creative writing in the university will exist as long as it seems too excellent to resist. . . . [A]n impressive creative writing program can be had for what amounts, as against particle accelerators and the like, to chump change” (407). Undergraduate “writing-but-not-creative-writing-but-maybe-creative-writing majors” or,
more aptly, “writing-majors-as-some-composition-studies-professors-might-imagine-them” have the interests and desires of their professors. They may attract students (and my money is on programs that foreground production and practice rather the philosophical relationship between Quintillian and Linda Flower). But what about these major will convey “excellence” to administrators?

Space precludes characterizing many aspects of this fascinating book, but I want to point out that McGurl’s method does something that most WPA research doesn’t: analyze programs’ effects on writing and writers in the culture at large. Other books I’ve been discussing have focused rather on what’s “good” for teachers and what’s “good” for composition studies. We’ve almost completely ignored the effect of writing programs on writing per se, by which I mean something larger than program outcomes. How do students in the “program era of composition” write compared to those in the pre-program era? How do students at schools with “strong” writing programs write compared to students at schools without? Note, the question is “how,” not “how well.” McGurl’s point is not to judge the fiction produced but to characterize and understand it. Obviously, it’s a question more easily asked of a few hundred authors than of several hundred thousand writers. Still, it’s a pressing research issue.

The Program-Professional Complex

What strikes me about these last three books is how the figure of the WPA recedes compared to the earlier. The latter focus on teaching courses and writers rather than administrative practices, and even in Giberson and Moriarty, majors invoke a curricular array and distributed faculty expertise. Together these disparate books suggest that WPAs should consider motives for making and sustaining programs and majors. At heart, most of us imagine programs serving their respective students. We believe ourselves enlightened disciplinary experts helping to manage those enterprises in often inconsiderate, even hostile, environments. Still our inclination is to consolidate and extend program-ness with features and activities that affiliate it—and us—with national, professionalized writing program administration. We cite “best practices,” yes, but we long, too, for status. When pundits complain that we ought to focus on “the basics,” like fixing student’s grammar through drills or teaching the obviously universal “rules” of good writing, we’re indignant certainly because our research and theory makes us know the futility. Would you have us release evil spirits through skull holes? But we’re also affronted personally, our credentials dismissed, along with our selves.
Now, I won’t condemn self- or professional-interest. No discipline or department operates with utter disinterest in status, and even pastors and rabbis watch congregational bottom lines. Still, the danger, to channel Dwight Eisenhower, is that we may unthinkingly be creating a kind of Program-Professional Complex. When a preoccupation with administrative means occludes writerly ends, we should pause. I concede that I’m invoking a nonmanagerial intellectual center to our field. I acknowledge that structures inscribe and circumscribe learning, that the very existence of this essay in this journal deconstructs my desire to constitute our profession as teaching and writing rather than as administration. Perhaps the American and global economy is now so fraught that we can best but fret about professionally insuring our enterprises and selves against reductions in force or importance. That I get. But let’s not get so enmeshed in those concerns that bureaucracy-making—even good and useful and noble and true bureaucracy—becomes our aspiration and delight.

I expect another fifteen years in my career, at least some directing writing programs, though I figure not most. As I peer at those years through the lens of these books, I see that creating conditions and opportunities for colleagues and students is an important but, at least for me, not singular or defining part of what it means to be in composition. Directing includes managing and strategizing, unapologetically so; beyond, it includes understanding not only “the program” and “the profession” but also its subject matter, to sound old fashioned, more as professor than as administrator. No doubt I read and write from a position of privilege, though that and how I got here continually surprise me even as I’m reminded that I’m white and I’m male, albeit rooted in the rural working class. When I recall my own graduate education, I’m struck that maybe only one of these six books is something like we’d have read in the 1980s. It’s a sign of our field’s maturity and health that they exist now, and we’re better off for the historicizing, analysis, reflection, and critique they enact. I only hope they complement rather than displace knowledge about texts, text-making, text-makers, and teaching, which I perceive still as the heart of our profession.

Works Cited


Conflicted Brokers: The Local, Historical, and Political of Basic Writing

Kelly Ritter


Nearly twenty-five years have passed since David Bartholomae first published “The Tidy House,” in which he voiced observations about the institutional discourse that sutures together in a crazy quilt underprepared writers, the stigma of failure, and the faraway promise of socioeconomic advancement through literacy. Scores of pieces of writing have been published that build upon Bartholomae’s concerns, including those that focus on access and literacy, and contest the core definition of “basic” writing (and writers) in broader ways (Horner and Lu, Fox, Mutnick, Gray-Rosendale, among others). Yet, we still use the stratified terminology describing basic writers—at all levels and in myriad locations, I would argue—to justify, segregate, and often malign them in the service of what James Conant Bryant, President of Harvard University from the mid-1930s through the early 1950s, unashamedly called the necessities of “academic sorting” in higher education.

Academia continues to be rooted in a system by which nomenclature rules the day, in which the “other” is named against the norm—even though as Sullivan and Tinberg have pointed out, in What is College Level Writing?, we do not necessarily know what the “norm” (i.e., “standard” first-year writing) really is. In other collections, such as Hansen and Farris’
College Credit for Writing in High School: The “Taking Care” of Business, college and high school teachers alike agree that there exist numerous troubled and slippery definitions of “college-level” and “preparedness” within the efficiency-structured paradigms of dual-credit, AP, and CLEP programs. These slippery terms and up-ending of the location of first-year writing, in turn, make it difficult to locate the proper place and populace for *basic* writing—if, indeed, students are taking college-level courses, sometimes without proving their ability through placement or other means, when they are 14, 15, and 16 years old, in order to “take care” of the (pesky) composition requirement. Basic writing only “means” when set against what it is *not*. This definition-by-lack, in turn, has consequences for the scholarly study of basic writing, which “has always seemed unusually new, exposed, and challenged to justify itself” (Mlynarczyk and Otte xv). Perhaps Gail Stygall said it best when she observed, in 1994, that the mere definition of “basic” was itself contested, noting that it is “shot through as the term is with local contexts, different approaches, and standardized grammar tests.” Stygall argues that “‘basic writers’ are equally elusive” given that their demarcation may be based on perceived intellectual deficiencies, economic lack, or even psychological problems (320). In short, our own terms betray and befuddle us; as such, scholars such as Stygall have argued that we should be highly judicious in their application(s).

But are we in any real position to even *make* high-stakes judgments about what writers are called—judgments that mark these writers and carry with them an identity that is sometimes hard to outrun, despite later accomplishments? Those of us teaching writing at all levels in academia are sometimes-reluctant gatekeepers, and are reliant subsequently on a structure of expectations, including standardized outcomes and exams—both at the undergraduate and graduate levels—that sets up particular types of writing, particular types of discourse, as the mainstream, the acceptable, and that necessitates a sounding of the alarm when those expectations are not met. This system, and we as purveyors of it, can provide little cushion for the shock students feel when entering it for the first time—when experiencing new types of writing and discourse conventions and feeling the sting that comes with comments like *What do you mean here, exactly?* and *Proofread better next time, please.* Faculty need only recall their first rejected article submission, or poorly received book proposal, or conference presentation—in sum, recall their own initial entry into the discourse community of academic publishing—to understand how this shock feels.

As authors Jane Stanley, Shannon Carter, and Rebecca Mlynarczyk and George Otte argue, this shock faced by new writers cuts across all economic classes, geographical spaces, and modern American historical periods, and
deeply affects the ways in which we approach “remedial” writing instruction as an enterprise differing sharply from, for example, remedial math or introductory foreign language instruction (other areas of academe with their own General Education-assigned gatekeepers in place). These four authors elegantly illustrate, through three distinctly different books, how our lack of consensus concerning “preparedness” makes for an impossible, elusive standard to meet for writers in disparate locations and academic settings. In these books on the identity, history, and positionality of the Basic Writer (and, by extension, of Basic Writing), I see compelling arguments for a field-wide rethinking of what “basic” means in historical and local/geographical contexts. Basic writing has been affected by institutional standards, governmental testing and oversight, and community action; advocacy and representation in and for basic writing has come to shape this field, still articulated as “sub-” but growing in strength and volume with each significant study such as these.

To organize my discussion in the context of research and inquiry in Basic Writing studies, I consider three emergent issues that seem to loom over, or emerge from, these three individual books: First, the rhetorical agency (or lack thereof) of the basic writing instructor and basic writing student; second, the locale/geography of the basic writing student, as defined both socially and geographically; and finally, the institutional methodologies and rationales guiding (or hindering) literacy instruction. Each of these concerns, addressed in some way by the authors whose works are under review here, plays a critical part in further defining—and refining—what basic writing means to composition studies, and further, to the much broader pursuit of literacy in higher education.

The Basic Writing Instructor: Troubled Positionalities

We in composition studies have no problem, in general, asking what role basic writing students play in their own education. We recognize that once a student is labeled a “basic writer,” he or she faces a litany of hoops and hurdles in the pursuit of his or her college degree—regardless of where that degree is taken. We also accept the fact that students’ confidence and self-worth is often affected when they are placed in remedial or “pre-college” courses (even when these courses are located, ever-ironically, at a college). In short, we see students as the classified rather than the classifiers, an acceptance that has created programs such as directed self-placement, which grow and prosper at various institutions nationwide. But we also seem to agree that the teacher of basic writing can be different: he (or very often, she) can provide a true help for students in the way teachers of other sub-
jects (perhaps even standard first-year composition) cannot. The teacher of basic writing can “save” students who cannot, for various reasons, save themselves.

Thus, a question we ask far less frequently, but one that I find reasonable to posit in response to Rebecca Mlynarczyk and George Otte’s *Basic Writing*, is this: What role do basic writing instructors actually play in transitioning writers of any educational status from one discourse setting to another? Put another way, how much power do the teachers of basic writing actually have to affect any kind of change? This, perhaps, is the most uncomfortable question facing a field that prides itself on the transformational powers of its faculty, who operate against steep odds in providing students with the golden ticket of literacy.

*Basic Writing* does not attempt to answer this question to any definite end, though it explores with great precision the various factors since the 1960s that have both created basic writing as a field and have stigmatized and ostracized basic writers (and teachers) as a community. *Basic Writing* is a thoroughly researched reference guide that details the history and theory of basic writing in the United States and that will be an invaluable resource for graduate students and other scholars new to the study of basic writing, as well as those interested in issues of access, placement, and ability grouping in composition in general. In these authors’ soup-to-nuts study, however, I find the lingering question of teacher agency below the surface as I read, as teacher selection, training, and institutional authority seems to be significant within each of the sections of the book. How and where do basic writing teachers defend, stand up for, even protect their students from institutional and social harm, Mlynarczyk and Otte ask? And can these teachers reasonably expect that they will be able to be these protectors, given the material conditions of the basic writing classroom and its faculty—especially as we enter a significantly for-profit, and outcomes-centered, era in higher education?

Deborah Brandt, in “Sponsors of Literacy,” raised this question of agency for the teaching of writing in general when she observed that, in socioeconomic terms,

[teachers] haul a lot of freight for the opportunity to teach writing. Neither rich nor powerful enough to sponsor literacy on our own terms, we serve instead as conflicted brokers between literacy’s buyers and sellers. At our most worthy, perhaps, we show the sellers how to beware and try to make sure these exchanges will be a little fairer, maybe, potentially, a little more mutually rewarding. (183)
Certainly in all three of these recent books, we can see the notion of “hauling freight” enacted by teachers who themselves are positioned as “brokers”—intermediaries beholden to both “sides” of the basic writer’s quest for postsecondary validation. For Carter, the freight-hauling comes courtesy of a subject position she holds in relation to standardized tests in her home state of Texas, and the ways in which these tests—and state laws—threaten to undermine attempts at meaningful writing instruction. For Stanley, the freight that basic writing teachers haul is historically-specific, an external charge presented by reluctant administrators at Berkeley who sought to maintain a monopoly on public education—and superior post-secondary intellectual training—in California in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For Mlynarczyk and Otte, however, this freight-hauling is the unquestioned, normative working condition for teachers of basic writing in America. Mlynarczyk and Otte recapitulate the birth of modern basic writing with a significant—and certainly logical—focus on Mina Shaughnessy and her legendary contributions to basic writing (including her coinage of the term, in contrast to other labels such as “remedial,” “dummy,” “hospital,” “bonehead,” or “zero” English). Whereas Stanley’s book demonstrates the relative helplessness of instructors at Berkeley to change, or even manage, external mandates regarding student selectivity and social stratification, Mlynarczyk and Otte provide a rich historical—and disciplinary—context for where and how power has been granted to (or taken by) instructors of basic writing, particularly in their lengthy discussion of the various players at CUNY who hauled more than a little freight in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But as I read through Mlynarczyk and Otte’s in-depth recounting of the origins and subsequent positions of basic writing—admittedly as, perhaps, a reader more familiar with this narrative than might be their intended and eventual audience for this book—I keep waiting for the miraculous ending in which something changes, wherein the authors suggest a coming change, a transformation that talks back to the disappointments and setbacks and struggles faced by these early teachers of basic writing, and their inheritors today. While it is not within these authors’ ability to change history—would that it were so—I am left with a sense of both pride and defeat after reading this comprehensive history of the work of basic writing teachers and students, wondering if this extremely comprehensive and thoughtful recounting of the sub-discipline gives us any places from which we might move forward and effect continued change. In other words, now that we know our history, are we, in fact, doomed to repeat it? Put another way,
does this narrative, inclusive and fine-grained as it is, move us forward, or simply articulate more clearly where we now sit?

Readers should not take my specific lament as an indication that *Basic Writing* is anything other than a heroic and worthwhile book for readers both inside and outside composition studies. It will be a life-saving reference for emerging scholars in the field, who not only can benefit from the extensive bibliography and list of resources at the end of the book (in combination with something like the *Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing*), but also from the nuanced discussion of how basic writing has evolved in postsecondary instruction since the middle of the twentieth century. Indeed, excluding the in-progress work being done in basic writing at this very moment, it is hard to imagine what, if anything, these authors have left out. Add to the quality of the book the fact that it is not only available through Parlor Press as a print publication, but also available for free download through the WAC clearinghouse (http://wac.colostate.edu/books/basicwriting/) and you have an accessible, substantial text that should be on all writing teachers’ bookshelves.

This almost unbelievable comprehensiveness and coverage may in fact be what nags at me as I read *Basic Writing*, as I feel a certain frustration that despite the massive amount of research and scholarship on this subject, we still look at basic writing and, particularly, teachers of basic writing as marginalized, long-suffering, and residing at the bottom of the academic food chain. As the authors point out, as much as first-year composition is frequently relegated to underpaid, overworked contingent faculty, basic writing is almost guaranteed to be taught by this same pool—and perhaps the least-qualified, lowest-paid among them. What we seem to be lacking here, and in a lot of work on the subject, is a comprehensive education plan for teachers of basic writing, separate from the first-year composition seminar/practicum and cognizant of the course’s historical standing that reaches beyond CUNY et al., and beyond the community college setting. We are more than willing to glorify (rightly) our basic writing faculty ancestors, but we seem less willing or able to set paths for our future basic writing faculty cohort, one already overwhelmed by the social ramifications embedded in the teaching of writing, ramifications that now begin to trickle down rapidly to the secondary level.

As such, I leave this book wondering, a little forlorn, now that we know nearly everything about basic writing (at least since the 1960s), what should we do? The final chapter of the book, “The Future of Basic Writing,” (like a good deal of literature on basic writing in general) contextualizes this future in terms of politics. But curiously absent in this look to the future is the previously-central figure of the teacher him or herself, a figure so very
important in the construction of this field. I find this an interesting shift in both the book’s perspective and perhaps our field’s perspective on the teaching of writing more broadly. Has the “freight” become so difficult to haul that we have recast the struggle of teaching underprepared students (of all classes, social groups, and academic levels) as a more global war, with students rather than teachers on the frontlines, being the test-takers, and the consumers of an increasingly mandatory college education? If so, Mlynarczyk and Otte’s final words are somewhat sobering:

Of course, a society never really decides to do anything. That falls to individuals, to their resolve and their initiative. The future of basic writing, like its past, will depend on how external forces combine with initiative from within, often resulting in moments of extraordinary leadership and fragile consensus as well as incremental progress and stunning setbacks. There are lessons to be learned from that history, some hard and some inspiring. Some may have lost their relevance with the passage of time. But some may make the past of basic writing a guide to building its future. (188)

Narratives of Place: The Locations of Basic Writing

Unlike Mlynarczyk and Otte’s Basic Writing, which takes us all over the United States and into classrooms at all types of postsecondary institutions, Jane Stanley’s The Rhetoric of Remediation is stubbornly—and bravely—situated in the geography of northern California, from the harrowing Gold Rush through the present day economic collapse of this state of arguably mythic proportions. Stanley works as a kind of historical paleontologist more than a scholar of basic writing; indeed, her complete lack of references to either composition scholarship generally, or basic writing scholarship specifically, troubled me deeply on my first read. And as I see this book being reviewed in a variety of our field journals, I do wonder whether Stanley’s study owes it to other basic writing scholars to acknowledge their work in some way (there is only one mention of Mina Shaughnessy, for example). In its structure and selection of references, Stanley’s book is an almost-antithesis to Mlynarczyk and Otte’s work, presenting UC-Berkeley in a disciplinary vacuum isolated almost completely from the (historical) scholarship of the field.

But what ultimately makes Stanley’s book a valuable addition to the skillful compilation of Mlynarczyk and Otte—or even a counterstatement, in its aim to bring basic writing to a larger readership, ideally, outside of composition studies—is its attention to the literal geography of basic writ-
ing, and the way in which social and topographic spaces of the West coast in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries affected the rise and maintenance of “Subject A,” or remedial writing, at this prestigious public institution. I, for one, was delighted to read about educational practices on the other coast, as so many institutional histories and narratives of higher education start and end in the eastern seaboard. Stanley continues to disrupt the accepted narrative of basic writing and remedial instruction by locating her study at a public, but prestigious, university (UC-Berkeley) and by historicizing the basic writer as a campus figure, or student-type, dating back to the nineteenth century, very specifically defined by factors beyond and external to the student him or herself, but important to the local conditions of the institution. Because Stanley’s narrative relies so heavily on the place of northern California, as well as the environs of Berkeley specifically, I came to read her book as a historian’s look at a social practice within the university, rather than a study of basic writing per se, from the point of view of a scholar of composition and rhetoric. The geographical emphasis in Stanley’s book, and its love of the curious history of higher education in California, is what I think readers will find sets it apart from other books in and about this field.

Stanley’s book is brief (142 pages, plus notes and references) and is divided up into eleven chapters—almost mini-chapters, given their quick punch and focus—that take the reader chronologically through the development of Subject A at Berkeley, in the explicit context of the growth of California as a state, as an educational superpower (one might note that California’s community college system is one of the largest and most heavily patronized in the nation, for example), and as an economic paradox of sorts. Stanley makes it clear that the financial promise of UC-Berkeley was only as strong as its admissions base, a claim I find quite familiar in my own research on basic writing in the Ivy League. Stanley describes this as the “curious academic accommodation that allowed the cash-strapped young University of California to accept nearly all applicants, but at the same time to identify half of them as illiterate” (6). As she so deftly notes later in the book, at Berkeley—and elsewhere in the country—“the welfare of the university depends in no slight way upon the remedial student” (33).

Readers interested in the history of higher education will find equally fascinating in Stanley’s book the discussion of how both world wars affected enrollments; how the university strongly resisted the advent of community colleges—called by one administrator a “dangerous expansion” of the educational system (qtd. in 68); and the general conflation of state politics and general education, particularly as California’s economic power began to dwindle. Readers should also find interest in the role that well-known
figures such as Ronald Reagan played in Berkeley’s development and identity in relation to California state politics, and also be intrigued by the discussions of campus culture that inevitably shifted how “literate” and even “student” were defined, as Stanley carefully details the ways in which ethnic majorities and minorities were and were not accommodated by the evolution of Subject A.

What did surprise me, however, in Stanley’s historical coverage was her willingness to sometimes back away from issues of place that would seem to deeply affect how literacy was defined at Berkeley. As one small example, in her chapter “The Tides of the Semi-Literate,” Stanley brings up the free speech movement and student activism on campus in the 1960s, yet remarks that this movement “is not central to my story of the rhetoric of remediation at Berkeley” because, she claims, the protestors active in this movement were those with “above-average GPAs” who “likely passed their Subject A exam” (102). This seems like an odd demarcation to make, since the notion of free speech would seem central to issues of access and literacy on a campus such as Berkeley (or anywhere); plus, the reputation of Berkeley as a site for social activism would seem quite germane to the study of a contested subject such as basic writing. Finally, it seems odd to argue that those who passed the Subject A exam, but were protesting limitations on students’ speech rights, would have no place in a history of remediation. I can imagine some fascinating oral histories from these students that might have given even more dimension to Stanley’s tale.

But here I am writing the book that I want, or would have written, and not the book that Stanley has penned, a sin especially easy to commit when discussing a field whose history is filled with untold stories and local scenes, and archives, yet to be tapped and ripe for controversy. Stanley’s book, though not squarely one within the tradition of composition studies scholarship as we typically view it (despite the book’s publication in the Pitt Series on Composition, Literacy, and Culture) is an important eye-opener in regards to the local, the meaning of space/s, and the forgotten histories of basic writing and its community players beyond the classroom.

**Keeping House: Basic Writing and Institutional Vision(s)**

If Stanley’s book demonstrates how powerless students, teachers, and even local administrators can be in the face of a state board of regents’ quest to make its flagship university a national exemplar, come hell or high (economic, social, racial) water, Shannon Carter’s study, *The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and Basic Writing Instruction*, in somewhat striking contrast, not only presents itself as an argument about power—specifically
“rhetorical dexterity”—but thereafter parses out the components of rhetorical power in building and sustaining a basic writing program that faces, rather than backs away from, the uncomfortable position of the teacher and student in the larger machinery that is basic writing—the machinery that Bartholomae so deftly articulated in “The Tidy House.”

Readers will first notice, and be affected by, Carter’s bold chapter titles, each of which build upon her book’s title in sometimes unexpected ways. These chapters are “The Way Literacy Tests,” “The Way Literacy Oppresses,” “The Way Literacy Liberates,” “The Way Literacy Stratifies,” “The Way Literacy (Re)Produces,” and finally, “The Way Literacy Lives.” In each of these chapters, Carter shows readers both the promises and pitfalls of marking individuals as “acceptable” or deficient” or even “extraordinary” in both academic and non-academic settings. Carter explains rhetorical dexterity as a positionality that asks literacy learners to examine the similarities and differences among a variety of communities of practice, making explicit comparisons among the behaviors that mark one as literate in communities of practice beyond school and those more traditionally associated with the academy. . . A pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity demands that the learner identify contexts in which she is already highly literate, mapping similarities between the two spaces and developing an understanding of and (at some level) acceptance of those systems of logic incongruous with the systems of logic that shape other contexts in which she finds relevance, agency, and competency. (114)

In setting out this ambitious agenda for revising the way we look at basic writing, Carter’s book is certainly the most theoretical of the three profiled here, and perhaps also the most “political”—despite Stanley’s explicit attention to the politics of the state of California and the University of California at Berkeley, and Mlynarczyk and Otte’s historical recounting of the struggles basic writing has faced when set against various lawmakers and institutional authorities. I make this claim because Carter begins her book with a discussion of the laws and educational mandates in her own home state, Texas (and thus deserves a nod here as also profiling the local/geographical), and thereafter sets about dismantling some of the very tenets that underscore those tests and the state’s various legislative moves as aimed at students at her own university, Texas A &M Commerce, many of which target non-native speakers and all of which objectify and highlight socioeconomic and class differences endemic to this border state.
Despite the very smart and engaging discussion of these tests, which have been variously labeled with the acronyms TABS, TEAMS, TAAS, and TAKS (3), in the first chapter of Carter’s book, I was most struck ultimately by her discussion of her brother Eric’s own struggle with being defined-by-lack, in “The Way Literacy Stratifies.” Building upon other literacy narratives in chapters two and three, Carter paints a picture of her brother as a highly intelligent computer programmer who was raised in a 1970s household containing some of the earliest technological apparatuses we now take for granted (for example, the personal computer). A combination of dyslexia and early negative educational experiences leads Eric to be unsuccessful at school-based literacies but completely adept at technological literacies; this is exemplified early in his story by his pre-K teacher insisting that he could not possibly, at this young age, sign his own name—and so thereafter he could not, defeated and, importantly, delineated by her assumptions. Eric’s story is the type we need to hear more often, the otherwise anonymous student whom legislators find populating our classrooms and defiling our academic standards; Stanley’s book does this from a historical standpoint, with her persistent digging into well-known figures who controlled Subject A at Berkeley. This makes the human element of writing instruction all the more compelling to know. Indeed, basic writing scholarship has often succeeded by its dogged connection to the real living persons behind it; as Otte explains in the foreword to Basic Writing, “I actually know most of the people named in the stories that follow. . . Seeing (if only with the mind’s eye) the faces of people I am writing about. . . has made me want all the more to give them their due” (xvii).

Clearly, in her attention to literacy narratives such as Eric’s, Carter is heavily influenced by Deborah Brandt’s work (and says as much), as she takes on the stories of real people and real situations to illustrate the consequences of literacy acquisition and practice, both good and bad, in our larger culture. Readers who are not only interested in basic writing, therefore, but also interested in larger culture-based discussions of reading, writing, and, significantly, testing and assessment will find a great deal to admire in Carter’s book. While it focuses on achieving a “dexterity” for basic writing and basic writers—and proves this to be achievable by including Carter’s own assignment sequences rubric for evaluating the projects following the aforementioned chapters—this book also puts into larger political context the deeply troubled views of literacy that get bandied about at both the state and national level, and that affect—but ironically, do not seem to be affected by—the life and school experiences of those labeled “basic” writers. Carter’s book is at once personal and analytical without becoming polemical, and it theorizes writing instruction beyond error, and
into self-awareness, without promoting a return to expressivist pedagogies or essentializing students’ experiences. As Carter notes, “Overturning the institutional, political, social, and economic infrastructure invested in the autonomous model of literacy requires time, patience, and—above all—diplomacy” (145). Some readers will respond to this charge by claiming they have little time, energy, or inclination to wait for this failed model that Carter critiques to fall apart. Other readers, perhaps after having read Stanley and Mlynarczyk and Otte’s books, will declare that all we have, ultimately, is time.

Each of these books illustrates how scholars and readers (and these are overlapping sets, of course) are becoming increasingly invested in the theories, case studies, and histories of basic writing, and also exemplifies how current trends in these investigations concern themselves with local, historical accounts of practice, both successful and failed. Through detailed theoretical and considered historical paradigms, basic writing as a sub-field of composition and rhetoric is no longer confined to classroom-based studies rooted in error—or general lack. Basic writing need not be seen as a “problem” solvable by a good, sturdy workbook and a worn-out but plucky teacher who loves her students, and language, unconditionally. Basic writing research has come of age as an enterprise that moves underprepared writers of all shapes and sizes (and levels, and origins) into the mainstream composition studies view, by virtue of both new and experienced field scholars examining and questioning these writers’ very constructed existence, as well as their parameters—those both culturally and self-imposed. No longer is basic writing a sub-field limited to the margins of scholarship; it is a fully realized enterprise, seeking equal time in our journals, monograph series, and edited collections. I say, let us encourage more graduate work in rhetoric and composition studies, and perhaps in allied fields, on this subject—in conference presentations, articles, and dissertations—so as to pass the investigative baton to the next generation and keep us from forgetting how far from “standard” we as writers really are.

Works Cited


Contributors to WPA 34.1

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Peter Jones is Senior Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies and Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Temple University in Philadelphia. He is co-author of the book *Personal Liberty and Community Safety: Pretrial Release in the Criminal Courts* (Plenum), has published more than fifty articles in peer reviewed journals and over one hundred research monographs. His most recent work has appeared in *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, Criminology and Public Policy*, and the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*

Clyde Moneyhun is Director of the Writing Center and Director of Writing Across the Curriculum at Boise State University, where he also teaches writing, pedagogy, and rhetorical theory. He has directed writing programs and writing centers at schools ranging from small private colleges to large state universities. His research focuses mainly on the teaching of writing, including most recently “Literary Texts as Primers in Meaning-Making” (in *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction in First-Year English*, MLA, 2008) and “Believing, Doubting, Deciding, Acting” (in the *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, Winter, 2010).

Keith Rhodes is an assistant professor and the Director of Writing 150 in the Department of Writing at Grand Valley State University. He has previously held similar positions in English Departments at Missouri Western
State University and Northwest Missouri State University, and he has spent several years in an alternate career as a business lawyer. His publication and research interests include composition pedagogy, style, empirical research on writing, and the applications of pragmatist philosophy and market concepts to composition teaching and composition program administration.

**Kelly Ritter** is an Associate Professor of English and Director of First-Year Composition at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. Her articles have appeared in *CCC*, *College English, WPA: Writing Program Administration*, and *Rhetoric Review*, among others. Kelly’s first book, *Before Shaughnessy: Basic Writing at Yale and Harvard, 1920-1960* (SIU Press, 2009) received Honorable Mention for the CWPA Best Book Award in 2010. Her second book is *Who Owns School? Students, Authority, and Online Discourse* (Hampton Press, 2010). Kelly’s current book manuscript is *To Know Her Own History: Writing at the Woman’s College 1943-1963*.

**Duane Roen** is Professor of English at Arizona State University (ASU), where he also serves as Assistant Vice Provost for University Academic Success Programs, Head of Interdisciplinary and Liberal Studies, and Head of Technical Communication. In 2008, he received ASU’s Graduate Mentoring Award. In addition to more than 230 articles, chapters, and conference presentations, he has published eight books in diverse areas of rhetoric and composition. He serves as secretary of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and vice president of the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

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Announcements

**WPA/CompPile Research Bibliographies: Call for Annotators**

Respondents to the *WPA Directions* survey at the 2009 CWPA conference in Minneapolis concurred that WPA program decisions and research agendas need to be better informed by an understanding of the current state of knowledge in relevant subareas of composition studies. In response, the CWPA Executive Committee initiated a partnership with CompPile.org to develop a series of annotated research bibliographies. The first 12 bibliographies in the series are now available at comppile.org/wpa/bibliographies/index.

- No. 1 Junior Faculty and Graduate Student Administration Issues (Anthony Edgington & Robin Gallaher).
- No. 2 Stretch Courses (Gregory Glau).
- No. 3 Distributive Evaluation (Carl Whithaus).
- No. 4 Second Language Writing and Writing Program Administration (Tanita Saenkhum & Paul Kei Matsuda).
- No. 5 Dual Enrollment Issues (Keith Rhodes).
- No. 6 Supporting Undergraduate Writers Beyond the First Year (A. Patricia Burnes).
- No. 7 Campus Celebrations of Student Writing (Jeanne Marie Rose).
- No. 8 WAC-WID and Second Language Writers (Michelle Cox).
- No. 9 Chronology of Published Descriptions of Writing Laboratories/Clinics, 1894-1977 (Neal Lerner).
- No. 10 Instructional Effects of Service-Learning Components (Karen Johnson).
- No. 11 Studies on Textbooks for Writing Instruction (Eliot F. Rendleman).
- No. 12 Contemporary Writing about Writing Curricula: Historical Origins and Research Implications (Doug Downs).

Visitors to the index can also see which subject areas are currently being annotated as well as a list of subject areas that urgently need a dispositive, up-to-date bibliography. To volunteer for one of these subject areas or to suggest others, please write the co-editors: Richard Haswell [rhaswell@grandecom.net] and Dylan Dryer [dylan.dryer@maine.edu].

The Executive Committee of the Kenneth Burke Society is pleased to announce that the **Eighth Triennial Conference of the Kenneth Burke Society** will be hosted by Clemson University at its Madren Conference Center in Clemson, South Carolina, from May 26 to May 29, 2011. The theme of the conference is “Burke, Rhetoric, and Social Change.” The call for papers, slate of activities, speakers, and special guests, and additional conference highlights can be found at the **KB Journal** site: http://kbjournal.org. The conference chair is David Blakesley (dblakes@clemson.edu).
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