

## 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](mailto: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-

ing gig will be, if anywhere. 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.

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## 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 they 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-

efits 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

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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