

Credentialing College Writing Teachers: WPAs and Labor Reform

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ABSTRACT

This article contends that WPAs who are concerned with issues of labor equity in the “research-focused academy” (RFA) should work alongside college writing teachers to develop and implement a national credential for college writing instruction. Credentialing can help us collectively to define and promote what college writing teachers know and do as professionals in ways that underscore the value of the teaching mission to the RFA. It can also contribute significantly to promoting professional equality for college writing teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Those of us who are presently WPAs know all too well that the work of professional non-tenure-track writing teachers in the contemporary “research-focused academy” (RFA)¹—that is, the work of those whose exclusive paid function is college-level writing instruction rather than some combination of teaching and research typically associated with the tenure track²—is increasingly devalued even as it is increasingly common. In her 1999 book *Composition in the University*, Sharon Crowley summarizes the plight of many college writing teachers:

Today, many people become interested in composition because they want to teach, and they enjoy the one-on-one encounters with students. . . . Many people who choose composition instruction as their life’s work also do so in part because they desire to serve the university community by helping students to write better. . . . Once they are embarked on this career, however, they discover that teachers of the universally required [first-year] course are underpaid, overworked, and treated with disdain. (120)

Since Crowley's assertion more than a decade ago, the denigration of college writing teachers and their work has clearly continued. Much college writing instruction, and as much as 93% of all first-year writing instruction (Scott 46), continues to be performed by non-tenure track faculty hired into "casualized" positions undermined by low pay, low levels of job security, and low job satisfaction (see Schell and Stock; Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola). This instruction also tends to be "feminized"—that is, both performed disproportionately by women (as well as by people of color and members of other marginalized groups) and disregarded as excessively "emotional" in comparison to the "scientific" work assumed to be performed by researchers (see Worsham; Trachsel; Schell; Micciche).

In light of the marginalization of college writing teachers, those of us who are WPAs face a profoundly important question: how do we act carefully and critically within our roles as middle managers to advocate for the fair treatment of both teaching work and of professional writing teachers? Or, to put the question in terms articulated by WPAs, how do we consider what Joseph Harris calls "the issue of good teaching for fair pay" (45) in a way that, as Donna Strickland argues, "privileges teaching *along with teachers*, making visible rather than concealing [teachers'] labor" (55)?³ I argue here that WPAs can begin to answer this important question by developing and implementing a national apparatus for "credentialing" college writing teachers. If thoughtfully conceived and implemented, credentialing can help WPAs to define a national set of knowledge and skills essential to professional college writing instruction. Credentialing can also help WPAs to promote significantly improved material and professional conditions for college writing teachers themselves.

I realize, of course, that WPAs must work in concert with college writing teachers and their allies (especially their collective bargaining agents and unions) if credentialing is to have any substantive impact on the pursuit of fair pay, benefits, significant job security, and the like. However, contrary to Marc Bousquet's assertion that what we really need is a "university without a WPA" (185), I believe that WPAs can and must utilize the particular power that we possess as middle managers in the RFA to help shape the terms and conditions of college writing teacher employment. I further believe that credentialing constitutes one centrally important expression of this power—a means for WPAs to generate what Tom Fox characterizes as "the multiple points of pressure" (26) that are needed in order to effect any substantive institutional change within the RFA.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF CREDENTIALING WITHIN THE RFA

Scholars in sociology who study the growth and evolution of professions have long been interested in how credentialing mechanisms aid the work of practitioners within a given profession. According to Elliot Freidson, credentialing processes operate in two main ways: first, by helping practitioners to define and articulate the specific body of knowledge and skill that they possess, thereby offering an “official acknowledgement of . . . a candidate’s qualifications to perform a particular kind of work competently and reliably . . . [in ways admitting them] to membership in [a] special association” (63); second, by establishing the terms and conditions under which professionals labor by creating a kind of “occupational cartel, which gains and preserves monopolistic control over the supply of a good or service in order to enhance the income of its members by protecting them from competition by others” (63). Kim Weeden terms this second function of credentialing “occupational closure,” defining it as the process whereby groups use credentialing as a means to “monopolize advantages and maximize their rewards by closing off opportunities to outsiders they define as inferior or ineligible” (58).⁴ In these ways, credentialing functions to describe *what* it is that practitioners in a given field should know as well as to influence *how* this knowing and doing should shape the material contexts and conditions in which practitioners work.⁵

To be sure, those of us who work in the RFA, whether on or off the tenure track, already possess a range of professional credentials: the PhD, MA, MFA, and many others. We also use these various credentials to perform work in our academic world. For instance, our credentials serve as proof that we possess a particular level of expertise in our subject matter: a PhD holder is assumed to have both mastered his or her field of study and to be able to produce new independent research within this field. At the same time, these credentials also help us to differentiate ourselves professionally, academically, and materially from one another: a PhD holder is typically assumed to possess more expertise in the discipline than an MA holder and is therefore perceived to be more qualified for certain kinds of jobs (for example, a traditionally defined tenure-track position) or to deserve higher pay.

It is also clear, however, that contemporary RFA credentials are granted as proof of individual ability to understand, produce, and/or utilize new *research*, most often through traditional publication within a discipline, rather than as proof of the ability to *teach* first and foremost.⁶ Embedded in this current RFA credentialing arrangement is a number of highly problematic attitudes towards teaching: for instance, the belief identified

by Margaret Marshall that “teaching is a simple activity, merely the job to be done in the bureaucracy that is higher education” (143) or the belief described by Stephen North that “the teaching of first-year composition . . . the teaching of writing in general . . . and to a lesser but still considerable extent, lower-division teaching of all kinds . . . [can] be turned over to the less-than-fully-compensated and/or less-than-fully-qualified” (235). In turn, these problematic attitudes both justify and promote unequal working conditions for college writing teachers. In other words, because these teachers are perceived as doing “simple” work reserved for the “less-than-fully-qualified,” they are also especially likely to be “less-than-fully-compensated,” especially within a contemporary higher education context where institutional appropriations per FTE from 2009–2010 are nearly 20% lower than 1999–2000 levels after being adjusted for inflation (College Board 3). Making matters still worse is the current oversupply of potential college writing teacher candidates considered for this (purportedly) non-professional and non-important college writing work. There are tremendous numbers of PhDs, MAs, and MFAs from across many (mostly Humanities) disciplines who have had the experience of teaching freshman composition in some form or another as graduate students: their presence in the pool of potential applicants for college writing teacher jobs serves to drive down pay, curtail benefits, and otherwise negatively impact working conditions. Problematic attitudes toward teaching and problematic treatment of teachers thus go hand-in-hand.⁷

CREDENTIALING COLLEGE WRITING TEACHERS IN THE RFA: KEY OBJECTIVES

Given the problematic attitudes and circumstances that have long faced college writing teachers within the RFA, it is unsurprising that neither college teaching in general nor the teaching of college writing in particular has been credentialed as a professional activity, at least not in any nationally recognized way. Nonetheless, it seems clear that a thoughtful credentialing program could help us to achieve a number of worthwhile national objectives,⁸ including the development of

1. an explicit set of guidelines articulating what college writing teachers know and do as professionals;
2. new graduate-level educational programs designed to provide focused training with respect to these professional bodies of knowledge and skill;

3. robust assessment mechanisms, each grounded in peer review, that can be used to certify whether individuals possess these required professional bodies of teaching knowledge and skill;
4. credential-based hiring, assessment, and retention practices that can be used by WPAs to promote occupational closure for teachers (especially by stressing these teachers' value to and relative scarcity within the contemporary RFA);
5. credential-based collective bargaining and unionization strategies that can be used by professional college writing teachers to pursue occupational closure further (especially by arguing for improved salaries, working conditions, and job security on the basis of teachers' professional value to and relative scarcity in the contemporary RFA).

The first two of these objectives—the development of a nationally recognized body of knowledge and skill along with the creation of nationally recognized graduate programs providing access to this body—should help us to articulate and publicize the things that professional college writing teachers routinely know and do. In this sense, these objectives should establish college writing instruction as important professional work that is distinct from yet complementary to other traditional positions in the RFA, including tenure-track professor, graduate student teaching assistant, and “free-flyer” adjunct teacher. The third of these objectives—the creation and implementation of assessment mechanisms for determining who does and does not possess this professional knowledge and skill—should allow us to begin offering “proof” of individual teachers’ professionalism and expertise as supplied by their peers. Finally, the fourth and fifth of these objectives—the implementation of credential-based hiring, assessment, and retention guidelines to be used by WPAs and the creation of credential-focused collective bargaining and unionization strategies to be used by teachers themselves—should help to promote occupational closure by changing both the demand for and supply of professional college writing teachers. Indeed, WPAs should begin identifying, hiring, and reappointing teachers on the basis of their professionalism, affording these professional teachers increased value within the RFA even as their overall supply is decreased (at least in comparison to the current oversupply of non-credentialed teachers); meanwhile, WPAs should support college writing teachers as these teachers demand better working conditions on the basis of their nationally valued knowledge and skill set coupled with their relatively scarce supply.

Ultimately, I see all five of these objectives reflecting Bruce Horner's recent recommendations about how best to promote contemporary labor equity for college writing teachers. Horner worries that, at present, too many well-intentioned efforts to promote labor equity within the RFA—especially efforts to unionize college writing teachers (see Bousquet, Schell, Scott)—assume that teaching labor is really no different from any other kind of labor. These efforts assume, in other words, “an hour's work for an hour's pay, no matter the worker or the material social specificities of that hour's activities” (81), thereby advocating stances that “deny, ironically, the very conditions” (81) needed to reward the specific work of teaching within the RFA environment. Horner insists, rather, that all efforts to improve teachers' working lives must focus directly on the unique and situated nature of teaching work and its connection to the overall health of the RFA:

Redefining the work of composition in a way that acknowledge[s] that work as an activity that involves all its participants—students as well as teachers, WPAs, and untold others—working both within and on the social through what and how they write, reflect on their writing, and revise—would be a step toward a more accurate, just, and intellectually honest assessment of its real and potential value. (85)

Taken together, the five objectives of credentialing can help us both to achieve the kind of “accurate, just, and intellectually honest” understanding of teaching work that Horner advocates as well as to push for labor equality on the basis of this understanding.

I also see these five objectives of credentialing as resonating strongly with the positive ways that professional credentialing has operated for K-12 public school teachers.⁹ These teachers are currently credentialed through state-issued teaching licenses that provide proof of their professional knowledge and skill. In turn, these licenses are supported by a number of nationally recognized credentialing bodies, including both the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC)—an organization comprised of teachers, administrators, principals, and other educators which aims to help standardize new teacher licensing processes across states—and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)—a group of teachers, administrators, principals, and other educators which strives to assess the advanced teaching skills of already-licensed teachers. I mention these latter two groups by name because both explicitly attempt to define K-12 pedagogical knowledge and skills and to aid teachers in their collective bargaining activities in ways that are instructive to those of us in the RFA.

Specifically, the INTASC's "Test of Teaching Knowledge" articulates an explicit body of pedagogical knowledge for use in teacher licensing examinations, including knowledge of pedagogical strategies, student learning and development, assessment practices, language acquisition, and linguistic difference and diversity (Council of Chief State School Officers, "Test of Teaching Knowledge" par. 1). The INTASC also promotes a number of peer-review-based portfolio assessments of new teachers' praxis that are reviewed by "experienced teachers who are trained as scorers" (Council of Chief State School Officers, "INTASC Portfolio Development" par. 6). Along similar lines, the NBPTS's extensive discipline-specific portfolio assessment focuses on the actual teaching practices of experienced K-12 teachers by requiring context-specific analysis of students' work, of teachers' own work with both small and large groups, and of teachers' work with parents and others in the community (NBPTS, "Adolescence and Young Adulthood" 2-1 and 2-2). NBPTS portfolio assessment further relies on extensive peer review, with each teaching portfolio that it receives reviewed by at least twelve already-credentialed NBPTS teachers (NBPTS, "Assessment Practices" par. 4). And, finally, credentials from both of these groups serve as important nodes around which teachers' collective bargaining agents and unions, particularly the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), can organize. Scholars of K-12 education point out that these credentials are routinely wielded by both the NEA and AFT as part of efforts to "solidify broader control over education policy and practice and the conditions and incentives under which teachers work" (Rotherham and Mead 31) as well as part of efforts to "restrict the supply" of teachers and "put upward pressure on salaries" for those who are credentialed (Ballou and Podgursky 77).

I mention these contemporary K-12 credentialing processes from the INTASC and NBPTS here for two reasons. First, they demonstrate that administrators, teachers, and their allies can work together successfully to characterize professional teaching work, to develop worthwhile assessments rooted squarely in peer review, and to advocate for labor equality on the basis of this characterization. Second, as I will describe in more detail later, these K-12 credentialing processes can serve as models for at least some of the types of credentialing that we might imagine within the RFA. Even though credentialing has not solved all K-12 teachers' contemporary problems,¹⁰ it has managed to influence positively these teachers' professional lives in ways that we in the RFA should consider emulating.

WHY NOW? CREDENTIALING AND CONTEMPORARY PRESSURES FACING THE RFA

The potentially positive outcomes of credentialing outlined above are certainly worth exploring. But it is also clear that those of us interested in pursuing the idea of credentialing must be prepared to grapple with an extremely difficult question: namely, if the RFA has long dismissed teaching activity of all kinds, and if the RFA is under present-day pressure to cut costs, then how can WPAs possibly convince other cost-minded RFA administrators to adopt a credential that is designed both to professionalize teaching activity and promote occupational closure (read: raise salaries)? Answering this question is not easy, but it is possible, especially if we consider this credential in light of the unprecedented pressures that the RFA currently faces to attend to undergraduate education.

One important pressure emerging in the wake of skyrocketing undergraduate tuition costs is that of “accountability” regarding the quality of undergraduate instruction within the RFA. As the price of public four-year tuition has increased an average of 5.6% beyond the general rate of inflation for each of the last ten years (College Board 1), and with tuition at four-year public institutions having risen on average 7.9% for in-state students and 6.0% for out-of-state students from 2009–2010 to 2010–2011 alone (1), the RFA is feeling more and more pressure to prove that the public is getting what it is paying for with its undergraduate tuition dollars. Higher education accreditation expert John Bardo characterizes this pressure as a public demand for “accountability for student learning outcomes and cost containment” (49) that is emanating from “across the political spectrum” (48). He further argues that this demand is “much more outcomes based than in the past” (48), explaining that “many outcomes of learning that have been held up by higher education as paramount, but are rarely fully defined or evaluated, will need to be operationalized and linked to the specific structure of the curriculum” (56). Bardo even highlights the particular accountability pressures being placed on writing instruction, arguing that “collegiate-level writing and communication skills, and the ability to apply them, are often incorporated in specific courses, but most institutions make little effort to ensure that these skills can be used effectively in a variety of settings” (56). Such demand for accountability, both for undergraduate education in general and for undergraduate writing instruction in particular, is forcing the contemporary RFA to think carefully about its teaching mission in new ways.¹¹

The RFA is also facing increasing competition for undergraduates and their tuition dollars, especially from the for-profit education market. This

market is growing faster than any other sector within higher education during the last decade, now serving roughly 10% of the entire US undergraduate population as of 2010 (Wilson par. 2).¹² And, as many scholars of for-profit education suggest, one crucial factor accounting for this growth is for-profit institutions' direct focus on students and their learning. Education scholar Vincente Lechuga asserts that for-profit institutions cultivate an ethos that is "centered equally on the ideas of teaching *and* learning" in ways that make "faculty partially responsible for ensuring that students learn the course material" (300). He also argues that these institutions promote an explicit customer-service mentality that stresses ease of scheduling for students, availability of on-line instruction, and other kinds of on-demand educational services (303).¹³ In contrast, the type of undergraduate education offered by many RFA institutions—for example, one featuring large lectures and/or a lack of personal attention from faculty—may seem especially unattractive to prospective undergraduates.¹⁴ Clearly, then, the RFA is facing considerable competitive pressure to demonstrate its explicit commitment to undergraduates and their needs.

The RFA is further expected to demonstrate its connection with and value to the immediate communities in which it operates. Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser describe this as specific pressure on RFA institutions to demonstrate "engagement with their stakeholder communities" and "the contributions their work makes to the public good" (2). They add that such engagement is increasingly expected to ensure that "both sides of the engagement partnership [that is, university and community] . . . not only will contribute expertise and other resources but also will garner new knowledge and develop new resources" (7).¹⁵ In this sense, RFA institutions are expected to begin replacing their purported ivory tower isolation with activities resulting in communal construction of knowledge, skill, and expertise—all requiring effective, dedicated, and professional undergraduate teachers.

Finally, the RFA is feeling considerable internal pressure to understand the short-term and long-term implications of its own overwhelming reliance on non-tenure-track teaching labor. Higher education scholars Jack H. Schuster and Martin J. Finklestein report that many faculty and administrators within the RFA believe that there has been a "revolution in academic appointments" (192) resulting from an overwhelming reliance on non-tenure track teaching, especially in composition (192). They also assert that this shift is "remarkable—we would say astonishing" (195) in terms of its effect on higher education hiring practices in ways that raise a host of profoundly important questions for RFA faculty and administrators, including

1. How might these practices threaten to reinstall “a discredited old European model [of higher education] featuring an imminent central figure in an academic program, surrounded by concentric circles of lesser beings whose professional status is marginalized” (354)?
2. How might these practices threaten to disrupt further basic relationships between teaching and research in the RFA (357)?
3. How else will these practices shape the overall “direction and effectiveness of the academic profession” (363)?

These questions challenge RFA faculty and administration to think carefully about how their RFA work environment has changed as a function of casualized teaching labor. They also challenge faculty and administration to consider what these changes might mean for our collective future in academe.

Each of these contemporary pressures being placed on the RFA stresses issues that are directly related to undergraduate teaching. Each also helps to create a contemporary context in which the credentialing of college writing teachers, a tool whose primary goal is to promote successful undergraduate writing instruction, becomes increasingly viable. I will have much more to say in a later section of this essay about exactly how WPAs might begin addressing these specific pressures as they advocate for credentialing. For now, though, I want to stress that these pressures are creating a *kairotic* moment for credentialing to which we ought to respond.

CREDENTIALING IN THE RFA: KEY ISSUES

Having outlined briefly the potential value of credentialing in the RFA and having described some of the contemporary pressures that might help us to pursue credentialing in the immediate future, I now want to explore some of the issues (each related to the aforementioned five objectives) that WPAs will need to discuss if we are to imagine the parameters of and possibilities for a national teaching credential for college writing teachers. Of course, these issues constitute a beginning point, not an ending point, for careful discussion that will likely be ongoing for some time.

Issue 1: What kinds of knowledge and skill ought to be included in a national credential for college writing teachers and why?

If WPAs are to initiate a worthwhile credentialing plan, then we will need to discuss how best to define the professional teaching of writing

within the knowledge-making environment of the RFA. Developing such a definition is made difficult by the many ways in which teaching has long been discounted within the RFA. However, in his 1990 book *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Ernest Boyer offers us a potentially useful starting point for positively defining teaching within the RFA, especially as he discusses two concepts: the “scholarship of integration,” which Boyer describes as a combination of “serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research” (19); and the “scholarship of teaching,” which he describes as “stimulating active, and not passive, learning and encouraging students to be critical, creative thinkers” in ways that involve “not only transmitting knowledge, but *transforming* it and *extending* it as well” (24). We WPAs should articulate the ways in which professional college writing teachers within the RFA enact these two kinds of crucial knowledge-making work on a regular basis: for instance, by trying to “integrate” the latest knowledge and information being produced within composition and rhetoric into teaching practice and/or by trying to “transform” and “extend” this knowledge through public teaching work such as service learning and community engagement. We should also articulate carefully how such teaching-based knowledge-making work remains integral to the mission of the RFA yet distinct from the kind of “scholarship of discovery” work that the RFA has long privileged, work that Boyer describes as “fostering the commitment to knowledge for its own sake . . . and to following, in a disciplined fashion, an investigation wherever it may lead” (17). By defining teaching as an important knowledge-making activity, we can move toward clearly articulating both the value of and distinctiveness of professional college writing instruction within the RFA.

WPAs also need to discuss the specific bodies of knowledge and skill that professional college writing instructors should possess. Although doing so in a way that balances the needs of a national credential with the needs of local institutions will certainly be a challenge, we might begin by discussing teacher knowledge and skill in terms of

1. writing and literacy theory;
2. education and learning theory (especially work with second-language, second-dialect, and special-needs learners);
3. writing pedagogy techniques and practices relevant to traditional classroom, one-on-one, and digital settings across a range of humanities, social science, and natural science disciplines (for example, through relevant work in FYC programs, WAC/WID programs, residential life programs, and others);

4. curriculum-building across a range of modalities;
5. institutional and programmatic assessment, especially of actual student learning;
6. various means through which to make teaching activity explicitly public through mechanisms including (but not limited to) service learning and community engagement.

Considering the first four of these should help us to delineate key components of effective professional writing instruction as discussed within a range of contemporary teacher-training literature (for example, Gottschalk and Hjortshoj; Glenn, Goldthwaite, and Connors; Pytlik and Liggett; Ward and Carpenter). In turn, considering the fifth and sixth of these should help us to imagine worthwhile ways to prepare college writing teachers to respond to the aforementioned pressures facing the RFA. Specifically, substantive work with programmatic and institutional assessment (for example, Huot; Huot and O'Neill; Broad) should help credentialed teachers contribute immediately to institutional, regional, and national efforts to document the learning promoted by effective writing programs. In turn, substantive work with community engagement and service learning (for example, Parks; Flower; Kinloch; Rose and Weiser; Grabill) should help to ensure that credentialed teachers are well prepared to engage in the kinds of community-based activity that the RFA is under pressure to produce.

Issue 2: How might we develop graduate programs that offer training directly relevant to this credential?

WPAs will also need to discuss the types of graduate training that we will offer in order to educate credentialed college writing teachers most effectively. These discussions will need to account for the fact that some of us will prefer stand-alone credentialing coursework whereas others will prefer to offer such coursework as part of a larger advanced certificate or degree program. These discussions will also need to account for the fact that our programs need to offer nationally recognized training and education in ways that are simultaneously compatible with local institutional contexts and cultures. We will, therefore, want to entertain a variety of options.

In some institutional contexts, shorter versions of programs like those described by Irene Ward and Merry Perry might make the most sense:

1. one graduate-level pedagogy seminar and one graduate-level composition theory seminar focused specifically on the areas of knowledge needed for this credential;

2. a formal observation program offering credentialing candidates access to the work of both peer and expert writing teachers;
3. a formal faculty mentoring program overseen by an experienced writing teacher that offers detailed, honest, and critical feedback concerning a credentialing candidate's teaching methods and techniques; and
4. development of a professional teaching portfolio and/or collection of professional work demonstrating a candidate's requisite knowledge and skills. (126–130)¹⁶

In other institutional contexts, longer programs of the sort characterized by Judith Glazer as she describes the typical format of the late 1960s and early 1970s “Doctor of Arts in Teaching” degree¹⁷ might be more desirable:

1. multiple semesters of graduate coursework in a “major” subject (here, writing instruction);
2. multiple semesters of graduate coursework in a “minor” subject matter related to effective college teaching;
3. one or more official teaching internships and/or externships (that is, teaching experiences outside of a candidate's home institution) designed to offer a candidate detailed, honest, and critical feedback concerning her or his teaching methods and techniques;
4. comprehensive oral and written exams; and
5. a final major research project focused directly on college teaching (here, again, the teaching of writing). (14–16)

Finally, regardless of whether we want our institutions to develop shorter or longer programs, we should imagine ways to offer educational experiences that extend across multiple courses and multiple semesters (as opposed to the single one-semester semester TA training course offered by many RFA institutions as their sole introduction to college writing instruction); to offer chances for formal self-reflection on teaching activity (see Rose and Finders; Bamberg; Burnham and Jackson); and to offer explicit opportunities for professional development and job market training (see Carpenter).

Issue 3: How—and by whom—should this credential be granted?

Once issues of knowledge, skill, and training have been discussed at length, WPAs will also want to consider (in especially close consultation with teachers and their allies) the assessment mechanisms that we can use to

grant this credential. In particular, we will want to weigh the relative merits of instituting some sort of standardized assessment, of instituting a more portfolio-based assessment approach, and of instituting some combination of the two—deciding which of these has the greatest chance of balancing national needs with local concerns. We will also want to determine the degree to which we might use K-12 credentials like those offered by the INTASC and NBPTS as models for our work. For instance, we might emulate aspects of the INTASC’s “Test of Teaching Knowledge” as we imagine our assessment, especially its direct focus on “theories of teaching and learning, cognitive, social, and physical development, diagnostic and evaluative assessments, language acquisition, the role of student background in the learning process, and other foundational knowledge and skills essential to the profession of teaching” (Council of Chief State School Officers, “Test of Teaching Knowledge” par. 1). We might similarly emulate aspects of the NBPTS’ elaborate portfolio assessment system, especially its requirements that credentialing candidates

1. “analyze students’ growth and development as readers/interpreters of text and as writers” (2–1) using actual examples of student work as evidence;
2. illustrate “teaching strategies . . . for whole-class discussion in which the students engage with [their teachers] and with each other in meaningful discourse about a topic, concept, or text related to English language arts” (2–1) using videotaped examples of actual teaching; and
3. demonstrate “partnerships with students’ families and community, and [their own] development as a learner and collaborator with other professionals, by submitting descriptions and documentation of [their] activities and accomplishments in those areas.” (2–2)

Although our assessments of college writing teachers will ultimately need to stress RFA-situated knowledge creation in ways that these K-12 credentials do not, WPAs nonetheless stand to learn a good deal from carefully considering these key aspects of INTASC and NBPTS activity.

We will also need to discuss the role of teacher-led peer review within any assessments that we develop for our credential: after all, national peer review has long been central to assessment of research activity within the RFA as well as to successful K-12 credentialing mechanisms for teaching. Given that WPAs need to implement this credential from scratch so to speak, initial peer review might be best achieved by assembling teams

composed of WPAs, seasoned college writing teachers, tenure-track faculty, and credentialed K-12 teachers: these teams will represent a variety of stakeholders while offering at least some measure of explicit peer review performed by college writing teachers themselves. However, once this credentialing process has been operating successfully for several years, fuller peer review might be best achieved by assessment teams composed mostly of other already-credentialed college writing teachers (perhaps still accompanied by a small number of WPAs and other stakeholders). Employing already-credentialed teachers as the majority of peer reviewers for this credential will ensure that teachers exert direct control over entry into their own professional ranks.

Issue 4: How can this credential best be used by WPAs to promote occupational closure?

At the same time that assessment mechanisms are being discussed, WPAs will also need to determine (again, in especially close consultation with college writing teachers and their allies) how this credential can be used as part of efforts to promote occupational closure for teachers, keeping in mind that these closure efforts will be complicated given that teaching has been perceived as decidedly unprofessional for so long. For instance, WPAs will want to imagine various approaches to hiring, evaluation, and retention for college writing teachers that are rooted in this credential. We might begin to write job ads for new college writing teacher positions that include specific references to this credential and the bodies of knowledge that it privileges: this would allow us to begin hiring from among a pool of job candidates who possess professional knowledge and skill as we have defined them. We might also begin hiring a certain percentage of credentialed college writing teachers for our teaching positions, slowly increasing this percentage over time, so that we can eventually make this credential a prerequisite for new employment. Both of these steps would help us to create a stronger demand for credentialed professional teachers even as their overall supply shrinks.

WPAs will also need to establish teacher evaluation and reappointment processes at our home institutions that reflect the basic tenets of this national credential. We might consider, for instance, how our local institutional evaluation and reappointment criteria can be immediately revised so that they better reflect the areas of knowledge and skill included within this credential. We might further imagine how, once these evaluation and reappointment criteria have been in place for a reasonable period, we can require that teachers seeking reappointment at our home institutions pos-

sess this credential as a prerequisite for their reappointment. These criteria should further increase demand for credentialed college writing teachers within the RFA even as their supply is limited.

Finally, in the spirit of fostering true peer review conducted by college writing teachers themselves, WPAs should also imagine how best to incorporate already-credentialed college writing instructors from outside of our home institutions into our home evaluation and reappointment processes. We should also have our own credentialed instructors serve other campuses in this capacity. By doing so, we would begin to offer a decidedly national dimension to teaching evaluation that complements the national focus of our credential. We would also begin to move past the kinds of routine problems with teaching evaluation that Boyer points out: namely, that in many RFA contexts,

The question of how to evaluate *teaching* remains a mare's nest of controversy. The problem relates not only to procedures but also to the weight assigned to the endeavor. Teaching, as presently viewed, is like a currency that has value in its own country but can't be converted into other currencies. It may be highly regarded on a sizeable campus, and yet not be a particularly marketable skill. . . . For teaching to be considered equal to research, it must be vigorously assessed, using criteria that we recognized [sic] within the academy, not just in a single institution. (37)

Using this credential as a centerpiece of our evaluation practices should help us to begin transforming the "currency" of teaching from a purely local one into one with more clearly defined national components.

Issue 5: How can this credential best be used by college writing teachers themselves to promote occupational closure?

At the same time that WPAs are imagining some of their own actions with respect to this credential, we should also be encouraging college writing teachers and their allies to imagine this credential as the basis for their various efforts to promote occupational closure, again mindful that these efforts will be complex ones within which credentialing plays just one part. WPAs might encourage college writing teachers, for instance, to develop credential-based collective bargaining and/or unionization strategies anchored in the idea that, as Tony Scott argues, "those who teach writing are legitimate professionals with advanced education in composition and rhetoric" (53). WPAs might also work alongside teachers to imagine how teachers can emulate some of the successes of K-12 credentialing and organization as outlined earlier. And, especially important (at least

in my view), WPAs might also work with teachers to stress the possibilities for teaching tenure within the RFA. If college writing instruction can be successfully characterized as an important strain of knowledge-making work, and if this characterization can lead to rigorous evaluation of teaching in ways that truly recognize and reward excellence, then college writing teachers ought to be able to pursue the option of tenure for their best and brightest. As Mary Webb and Kathleen A. Boardman argue, failing to allow for the possibility of teaching tenure can make even “good” contemporary college writing teacher jobs—that is, those jobs which feature multi-year contracts, strong working conditions, and other advantages—seem only “sort of equal” (38).¹⁸ Of course, making arguments about teaching tenure and true professional equality will be difficult, especially given the overall shrinking of tenure possibilities within our current climate of RFA cost-cutting. Nonetheless, we can and should try to make these arguments on the basis of teachers’ newly credentialed knowledge and skill, as well as on the basis of teachers’ newly articulated value to the knowledge-making enterprise of the RFA.¹⁹

CONCERNS ABOUT THE “COST” OF CREDENTIALING WITHIN THE RFA: POSSIBILITIES FOR STORY-CHANGING

There is one crucially important final concern that WPAs will need to grapple with directly if credentialing is to be successful: namely, the problem of its perceived cost. As I have already suggested, any attempt to credential college writing instruction within the RFA is likely to encounter significant resistance from cost-conscious administrators, especially since one of the explicit goals of this credential is to improve teachers’ working conditions. However, WPAs can think strategically about specific ways to overcome such cost-based resistance to credentialing with the help of Linda Adler-Kassner’s strategy of “story-changing.” This strategy aims to “change the dominant story about the work of writing instruction” (2) in order to “have some voice in the frames that surround our work and the tropes that emanate from those frames regarding our classes and students” (37). It also aims to help WPAs to think systematically and strategically about

where we have the most influence and the loudest voices—at our local levels. We can think about who we can reach out to, learn from, and enlist as allies. And with them, we can develop a communication plan that helps all of us shape and communicate messages about writers and writing to audiences who might just attend to those messages—and change the stories that they tell. (163)

With the help of story-changing, WPAs can begin to transform existing institutional narratives about the potential “costs” of credentialing into narratives that highlight credentialing as a kind of “investment” in the future of undergraduate instruction within the RFA, especially if we focus on the contemporary pressures that the RFA faces.

WPAs should focus explicitly, for instance, on the connection between credentialing and accountability. We can stress that this credential will ensure that college writing teachers have received rigorous pedagogical training and experience before walking into the RFA classroom—proof of our willingness to be more accountable for the quality of our undergraduate instruction. We can also stress that, with the aid of this credential, college writing teachers will have both been trained in assessment theory and practice and prepared to participate in national peer review of other teachers’ work—all skills enabling them to further demonstrate accountability for undergraduate instruction. We might even argue that, through these benefits, credentialing will help us to promote what Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Herrington describe as joint “responsibility” for undergraduate education to be shared between the RFA and its various stakeholders. Such responsibility, Adler-Kassner and Herrington insist, is best achieved by “talk[ing] with external stakeholders about how we and they understand learning processes, find[ing] common ground among these ideas, and work[ing] together to develop shared projects that investigate whether and how students are developing and not—in ways that we consider significant” (91). We can stress, in other words, that credentialing should allow the RFA not only to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders but also to request stakeholders’ direct participation in and joint responsibility for undergraduate education in ways that can help ensure long-term public investment in RFA undergraduate education.

WPAs should likewise pursue story-changing that focuses on how the RFA can use credentialing to compete for undergraduate tuition dollars. Here, we can underscore the fact that our national credential will focus squarely on improving undergraduate writing instruction in ways that make the RFA more attractive to tuition-payers. We can also highlight the fact that credentialing fits especially well with arguments for the “branding” of writing instruction as articulated by scholars like Keith Rhodes. Rhodes contends that branding “elite composition” as a type of theoretically grounded and student-focused writing instruction can help us to distinguish our work from the usual “Brand X composition,” which he describes as little more than a “weak hodgepodge of leftover grammar correcting and hackneyed process stages . . . that has come to be the public image of composition among even relatively savvy audiences” (62). WPAs

can stress that credentialing aims to cultivate elite composition instruction that is dedicated to developing undergraduate writing abilities through rigorous coursework, community engagement, and the like. We can also emphasize that this resulting elite composition will move beyond the kind of hackneyed hodgepodge of which Rhodes is rightly critical and toward an RFA-specific brand of writing instruction recognized for its integral ties to effective knowledge-making activity.

WPAs should also conduct story-changing activities that underscore the other key contemporary pressures being placed on the RFA. With respect to pressures for community engagement, for instance, WPAs can highlight the fact that credentialed teachers will already have moved past the initial steep learning curve that successful community engagement work requires. Credentialed teachers should thus be more likely than other non-credentialed teachers to forge successful long-term partnerships with the communities in which they work. They should also be well prepared to contribute to what Michael Norton and Eli Goldblatt describe as the “confluence of faculty involvement and institutional support [which] contributes to sustaining an ongoing partnership” (38) between the RFA and its surrounding communities. With respect to pressures on RFA faculty and administration to understand recent shifts higher education employment patterns, WPAs can stress that the future ability of tenure track research faculty to do their work within the RFA depends, at least in part, on their embrace of professional RFA teachers as doing legitimate and valuable work. Or, to use Boyer’s terminology, WPAs can stress that the future of the “scholarship of discovery” within the RFA depends in part on a thoughtful embrace of the “scholarship of integration” and the “scholarship of teaching” as well.

Each of these story-changing activities tries to address concerns about the cost of credentialing in ways that emphasize its potential as an investment in the future of the RFA. Each focuses, that is, on an issue of considerable concern to the RFA, highlights the relationship between credentialing and that particular issue, and stresses the ways in which credentialing can help to address that issue directly and forcefully. And, in so doing, each of these story-changing activities aims to identify and capitalize upon contexts “where we have the most influence and the loudest voices” in the pursuit of labor equality.

NEXT STEPS: NATIONAL AND LOCAL

Although the labor situation faced by many college writing instructors has long been a problematic one, my hope is that the credentialing processes proposed here can help WPAs to begin advocating for labor equality more

effectively. We should propose such a credential, we should discuss carefully the various issues related to its development and implementation, and we should consider various story-changing strategies designed to overcome concerns about the costs of credentialing. We should also, however, create and sustain both national and local venues where these issues can be discussed openly. By focusing on both the national and the local, we can successfully acknowledge Adler-Kassner's caution that

It's easy to become concerned about actions that have the potential to substantially affect WPA work at the national level. . . . But an individual WPA, or even a group of WPAs collaborating together, is but a fly on the windscreen of this approaching steamroller [of anti-education sentiment]. On the other hand, working at the local level, we can develop assessment strategies within our own programs that reflect what *we* value, that ask questions and implement procedures that reflect what we know about best practices within our own courses and discipline. We can then use these assessments as bases for conversations beyond our programs. . . . (184)

Combining national and local plans for action should help us to avoid the fate of the "fly on the windscreen": we can dream big in terms of national credentialing, but we should complement our big dreaming with smaller actions that begin to enact effective change on a more local level.

As one important national step, we should establish a CWPA-led task force dedicated to talking about and through the many issues related to credentialing. This task-force might work in direct consultation with some of the other central professional organizations already advocating for college writing teachers' needs: for example, the CCCC's Committee on Part-Time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor; collective bargaining agents and labor unions such as the AFT, NEA, and AAUP; and K-12 groups such as INTASC and NBPTS. This taskforce might also be charged with developing a mission statement or written outline for a national credentialing activity, perhaps equivalent in importance to the WPA's "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Administration" or its "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing." This type of written statement would help us to develop a concrete blueprint for national action relevant to credentialing. Meanwhile, we should also try enacting ideas relevant to credentialing on a more local level. For instance, we might try to develop localized credentialing and education mechanisms to be used by a smaller number of schools (for example, by all schools within one specific system or one specific region). At the same time, we should also work toward building local and regional review and reappointment processes designed to promote localized

peer review of teaching activity even before our national credential begins operating. This kind of simultaneous national and local action will give us the best chance of pursuing credentialing—and thus the best chance of pursuing a fuller sense of labor equality for college writing teachers within the RFA environment.²⁰

NOTES

1. Lance Massey and I have begun using the term “research-focused academy” (RFA) in other publications in order to reflect the fact that all institutional types, spanning from two-year community colleges through Research I universities, are demanding increased traditional research productivity from their tenure-track faculty—especially in an age where this research productivity is central to institutional prestige and “ranking.” (see Hazelkorn). Education researchers Jack H. Schuster and Martin J. Finklestein describe this shift toward research across these institutions as part of “an overall pattern . . . of increasingly widespread publication extending well beyond the research university sector. . . . the data clearly suggest a system that expects research and publication almost across the board [that is, across institutional types]—even as it is imposing a return to heavier teaching loads” (103). For other discussions of increased research pressures across the RFA, see also Glazer; Gappa, Austin, and Trice.

2. Given my purposes here, college writing teachers can be defined as those individuals in the RFA who are hired first and foremost to provide teaching services off the tenure-track rather than to engage in the usual teaching/research/service split of the traditional tenure track. See Gappa, Austin, and Trice for a more detailed characterization of the work of these individuals.

3. For other articulations of these questions, see also Snyder; Scott.

4. The idea that credentialing deliberately attempts to create a professional monopoly aimed at “closing off opportunities to outsiders” may sound a bit off-putting, even troubling, to some readers who are concerned with labor equity. However, this exclusivity is actually fundamental to the power of credentialing and the benefit that it affords. Freidson argues, for instance, that the exclusivity afforded by credentialing, while capable of being abused or otherwise used in a “defective” fashion (64), ultimately acts as the means whereby an individual practitioner within a profession “establishes the possibility of gaining a living” (87). Similarly, Weeden insists that, although such exclusivity might sometimes be “based on any convenient or visible characteristic, including race, social background, language, religion, and gender” (58), it reflects in general the more benign principle that “social groups can and do act to further their collective economic interests” (59). So, while credentialing and its occupational closure functions are admittedly exclusive, this exclusivity is important to improving the working lives of individuals possessing the credential.

5. For other discussions of credentialing and its professional effects, see various contributors to Hatch; Brown.

6. I recognize, of course, that there are many individual institutions that do require proof of a teaching job candidate's teaching ability and experience—whether a teaching portfolio, a teaching demonstration, teaching-related publications, a graduate-level “teaching certificate,” or some combination of these. I also recognize that a number of individual writing programs have been certified by groups such as the CWPA and the CCCC. But, at present, individual college writing teachers are not systematically credentialed as individuals in any national sense.

7. For other discussions of the problematic treatment of teaching in the RFA, see Glazer; Boyer; Gappa, Austin, and Trice.

8. I use the term “national” provisionally at this time: as one of the reviewers of this piece has rightly noted, such a credential might ultimately be easier to implement at a regional or state level. I still believe, however, that given the need to make this credential seem as legitimate and as widely accepted as possible, a truly national credential for professional writing teachers should be our ultimate goal.

9. When I refer to K-12 public school teachers, I mean those individuals who are teaching in traditional public school contexts rather than in public charter schools or in other schools that rely on “emergency” certification of one type or another.

10. K-12 public school teachers obviously face many contemporary hurdles: No Child Left Behind and other similar legislation designed to force problematic notions of “accountability” upon them; politically motivated attacks on their day-to-day work environments, systems of tenure, and collective bargaining organizations—especially evident in the very recent attacks on teachers' unions waged in Wisconsin, New Jersey, and elsewhere; shrinking public budgets that increasingly force them to do more in their classrooms with less; and the rise of charter schools and programs such as Teach for America that reject outright the notion of formal teacher credentialing. Nonetheless, it also seems clear that K-12 public school teachers and their organizations are continuing to fight against each of these attacks—and that their professional credentials help them to do so.

11. See also Eaton; Brittingham; Murray.

12. Enrollment at for-profits is currently declining slightly, likely as a function of recent government investigation into faulty admissions practices and misuse of federal aid money (see Blumenstyk; Kutz).

13. See also Breneman; Floyd; Turner.

14. Of course, the actions of for-profit institutions deserve critical scrutiny: these institutions rely on an entirely non-tenured teaching force, with 90% or more of this force permanently part-time (Lechuga 291); they offer little or no

academic freedom in terms of course design, implementation, or assessment (294); and they typically deny faculty the formal opportunity to pursue research (295).

15. See also Grabill; Norton and Goldblatt.

16. For other shorter programs designed to train college writing teachers, see Lattrell; Bamberg; Martin and Paine; Lingren; Liggett.

17. The Doctor of Arts in Teaching degree was developed at about 40 institutions across the United States, primarily during the late-1960s and early-1970s, as part of a larger Carnegie Commission on Higher Education effort to educate college teachers for work within newly emerging two-year and four-year institutional contexts. For a discussion of the history of the DA, see Glazer; Salmon.

18. Webb and Boardman discuss the split between college writing teachers and tenure-track faculty:

In our experience, status issues gain importance after instructors have been in lectureship positions for some time, perhaps after sixth-year review, when the differences between tenure-track and lecturer faculty members with the same number of years of service become more marked—differences in working conditions, security, expectations, status, and scope of opportunity. . . . lecturers begin to see that, although they have invested similar amounts of time (and a similar proportion of their working years) in college-level teaching, service, and professional development, they are only “sort of equal” [to tenure-track faculty]. (43)

Webb and Boardman are quite clear here: professional college writing teacher positions in the RFA, even if they are “good” jobs in many ways, will never seem more than “sort of equal” unless those teachers in them have the chance to stand for tenure.

19. The direction in which I would like to see teaching tenure taken is in some ways a different one from that recently advocated by the AAUP. I am not personally in favor of either the AAUP’s recent proposal that all teachers in the RFA who have been at an institution for a specific period of time be granted automatic tenure (“Tenure and Teaching-Intensive Appointments” sec. 3), nor am I in favor of the specific version of this proposal that was recently circulated at my home institution of CU-Boulder (sec. 4). In my opinion, such blanket advocacy for tenure largely ignores the RFA’s own concerns regarding the rigorous hiring, review, and assessment of teachers—not to mention issues of cost—in ways that make tenure even less likely to be granted to college writing teachers than it is now. Instead, I believe that teaching tenure is a workable proposition only if it is rooted in a careful definition of what professional teachers know and do, rigorous national hiring processes based on these definitions, rigorous reappointment processes based on these definitions, and a great deal of the kind of story-changing work that I will discuss later in this essay. I do ultimately agree with the AAUP, however, that we need to work hard to make teaching labor matter enough to deserve tenure in the eyes of skeptical administrators.

20. I would like to thank all those who have helped me to write this article, especially Alice Horning, two anonymous *WPA* reviewers, Lance Massey, and Pete Kratzke. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric at CU-Boulder for raising many important questions about what it means to be a professional college writing teacher in the RFA.

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