

On the Crossroads and at the Heart: A Conversation with the 2012 WPA Summer Conference Local Host about the Place of the Writing Program at the University of New Mexico

Shirley K Rose and Chuck Paine

The following interview is the second in a series featuring the writing programs of our local hosts for the WPA Summer Conferences. In this interview with Chuck Paine, the English Department's Associate Chair for Core Writing at the University of New Mexico, we explore the ways the writing program and the university reflect their geographical context in Albuquerque and the American Southwest.

SKR: Thanks for talking with me this morning, Chuck. This project started with the *WPA: Writing Program Administration* Editorial Board wanting to do something in the journal connected with the WPA summer conference locations. Doing profiles of the writing programs with which our conference local hosts work seemed like the perfect thing. With the 2012 WPA Summer Conference coming up in July, for which you are serving as Local Host, the writing program at the University of New Mexico is our featured program for this year's profile.

CP: Being a host is hard work, and it has some nice benefits.

SKR: Being Local Host is a huge amount of work and we thank you for it in advance! This conversation is intended to help people understand what's going on in your place. I'm very interested in looking at the ways writing programs are shaped by where they are organizationally placed within their institutions, by the types of institutions they're in, and by their institutions' geographical and cultural locations.

CP: When I was reading the questions you sent in advance, it just made me remember what I love about our field, which is as a scholar, as an individual, as an administrator, there is an interaction between oneself and the place. It's like Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis that

there is a dialectic between the place and the person: the place changes the person, and the person changes the place. Ideally, each transforms the other. I don't think that's always true, say, for a Shakespearian, who is probably going to do his or her research agenda regardless of where he or she goes, right? As a WPA, I just think about how profoundly shaped I've been by coming to New Mexico and to UNM. When I left Duke University in 1994, I came here thinking I was a hot shot, you know. I was going to show these yokels what it was all about. Right? I figure a lot of newly minted PhDs sort of do that, and I was quickly humbled and realized the people here who may not have had the same background I did knew a lot, and I found myself being shaped by them. Rick Johnson-Sheehan, by the way, will say the same thing. He was shaped by UNM when he was here, from 1995 to 2004, when he went to Purdue. He'll tell you he was very much shaped by who we are, and I think that's really interesting. And what Michelle Kells is doing is shaped by place, but I'm jumping ahead.

SKR: That's ok. Say what you want to say we can back track!

CP: What Michelle Kells is doing here with her National Consortium on Writing Across Communities really is not just about the university community but the broader community. It's like Eli Goldblatt says in his book *Because We Live Here*. At that Baton Rouge WPA Conference, after a panel where we talked about writing programs going outside their traditional confines, Eli said, "Good things happen when writing programs get outside of English departments and get outside the universities. Exciting things happen." And we think so too. Right now, with our faculty shortage, we're just treading water more than we'd like to. But I think it is amazing we're sustaining things as well as we are, making so many of those community outreach things happen. And I should point out that it's our graduate students who are taking the lead on many of these projects.

SKR: But you have some things in place that can be picked up again when the human resources are there.

CP: Yes. I absolutely think so, and we have a dean who really who thinks that programs and departments should be responsive to where they are. At the University of New Mexico we are not a rich school. We cannot be a full service department. We've got to decide what we're going to specialize in. We all feel it should be defined by the interests of the taxpayers who fund us, by the students who come to us: 90% New Mexicans, well over half from Bernalillo County. We're a commuter school, although there are about 5000 on-campus students. So you asked a little about the demographics of New Mexico. What

people often say about New Mexico and UNM is that we already look like what America will look like in the coming decades. That's a very good argument for getting grants and other resources. We are a minority majority state. UNM is the only minority majority flagship university. We used to be, we may not be any more, the only minority majority university with a medical school. We are a Hispanic-serving institution. I believe we are the only flagship Hispanic-serving institution.

SKR: I was going to ask about that. There must not be very many HSIs that are also Research I—or what used to be called Research I institutions. I don't think that is the category anymore but that is the profile.

CP: Yes, that's right, and we are; so, former dean and provost Reed Dasenbrock used to say we need to pioneer access *and* excellence. Sometimes you think you're either doing one or the other. And the question is, can we do both? Can we be excellent and maintain Research I and the funding that brings, the kind of prestige that brings; but can we also serve the students? I'm talking about undergraduates here, that we need to serve and give them what they need to succeed, to persist, to be engaged. And can we develop? Sometimes, as you can imagine, there are conflicts. There are some professors in some places who say—not in the writing program, of course—who say “we just need to get better students.” To which I say, “Where are you going to get them?” It's like what [former Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld said about going to war with the army you've got, not the one you'd like to have. You have to respond to and serve and teach the students you have, not the students you'd like to have.

SKR: It just seems wrong for university administrators to say “Let's raise our admissions criteria. We can. We can maintain our size, not grow but just become more selective.” I can't sign on to that. That's just not what I want to do.

CP: I agree. We all hear a lot of people saying, let the community colleges deal with our underprepared students, but kicking things over to the two-year schools, I think, ends up hurting the most vulnerable people—first-generation students and, in a place like New Mexico, students from rural high schools with very small graduating classes who come to our big university and have a really tough time. Look, my kids, your kids, your grandchildren—students who come from language-rich and privileged backgrounds—they're going to succeed anywhere. Anyway, access and excellence is what we're trying to achieve. I'm not sure it has really been achieved anywhere; but because

of that, because we're Research I and have pretty liberal admissions standards, we have to try to do both, and that's not always easy.

SKR: I think that pretty much characterizes what we're trying to do here at ASU, too: access and excellence. Could I get a brief characterization of what your writing programs are?

CP: Right now my official title is Associate Chair of English for Core Writing. But, of course the part of our Rhetoric and Writing program that takes the most care and feeding is first year writing. By "rhetoric and writing" here, I mean everything from first-year writing to the Rhetoric and Writing MA and PhD. Again, I see the connections across Rhetoric and Writing as healthy for everybody. It makes the core writing stronger because you have teaching assistants and adjuncts who are invested in writing instruction. It also helps the person writing that dissertation and about to go on the job market because they can talk about what they've done in this program. They've put their shoulder to the wheel and they've participated—and they really *do* participate, maybe a little bit too much. Maybe we give our graduate students a little too much responsibility or too much work.

We do have a professional writing program right now and sometimes we have had a Director of Professional Writing—we don't right now. About a third of our English majors get a transcribed concentration in Professional Writing, which means they take a certain number of courses at the 400-level, from visual rhetoric to proposal writing, documentation, medical and scientific writing, writing for the Web, information design. Right now, I am really confident, even though we don't have a Director.

What I haven't told you about is a truly remarkable group of Lecturers we've had, long time Lecturers. Most of them are doing some kind of administrative or program-building work. I'm really confident that those courses are taught well by our Lecturers. Students really value their courses. We look at students' exit statements and they talk about these teachers and how important they were.

SKR: That's impressive—and affirming.

CP: We have five Lecturers who devote most of their time to helping us with professional writing concentration courses, with English 219 which is the professional/technical writing course in the writing and speaking core, and with intermediate composition. We also have incredible, wonderful adjuncts who teach some of those courses for us, people who are in fact professional writers, who are out there doing professional writing. One of our lecturers, Jim Burbank, runs the very

successful internship program in professional writing, and does a great job. It was handled for a long time by Scott Sanders, who had been in professional writing forever and was well respected in the field, and who retired just last year. I think that we're going to get a lot of help in this regard from two tenure-track and five lecturer hires we're searching for in Spring 2012. But, you know how job searches go, right, you sort of figure out *during* the search process, "Wow, this is going to be a really good fit" as you meet everyone.

SKR: You realize "that person can do something that we really need..."

CP: Or, "Gee, there really is nobody in the world..."

SKR: Or, "there's nobody doing what we're looking for . . ."

CP: Yes, exactly. . . .

SKR: ". . . so maybe we need to produce that." I think I've got a general idea of what the parts are for your writing program from your website. You talked a little bit already about the demographics of the students at UNM and how they reflect New Mexico. What about the teachers? How do the teachers' demographics reflect the geographical and cultural location of the writing program?

CP: I'm confident that the University of New Mexico is truly, sincerely dedicated to increasing the number of faculty-teachers from underrepresented groups in New Mexico. As you know it's not always that easy to find those placements, so currently while our student body roughly mirrors the state's demographics, that's unfortunately not true for faculty. Our president and our provost have set aside quite a lot of money for "targeted hires," if we can identify them, which is terrific. We're dedicated to getting a more diverse faculty. Frankly, we're like a lot of institutions. We're having a tough time attracting faculty from underrepresented groups.

SKR: It's hard to compete.

CP: Yeah, it is hard to compete. But New Mexicans spend more money per dollar earned on higher education than any other state in the country. We're not a wealthy state. We're always around 49th; Mississippi keeps us from being 50th. So my point is, New Mexican taxpayers are doing all they can to help us out, but we need to make do with what we have.

SKR: Let me ask another kind of question about the culture. We've been equating culture, that is the culture of New Mexico, with how that might be reflected in the student demographic and teacher demographic. But, let me ask about a different kind of culture. How does the fact that you're in the West show up? What makes your students and faculty Westerners?

CP: Well, you know, I was trying to be sort of politic about that because it made me think that there are lots of opportunities that we have begun to seize upon, that we need to keep pursuing. One of the things about the West is how much space there is here. New Mexico is the 5th largest state in the country. There's just a lot of space where nobody lives and so there is a lot that's rural. We have literally hundreds of high schools graduating classes under twenty.

SKR: That's what I grew up on.

CP: We have a large Native population, and we very much want to serve rural New Mexico, but it's not that easy to reach our rural areas. Through efforts like online education and branch campuses, we are ramping that up. But there's also other opportunities in terms of scholarship; Writing *the* West, nature writing. Again, this would be people who have interest in those things. It's not something we set out to find. But it presents wonderful opportunities that I hope we can take advantage of.

SKR: As its website announces, UNM is "New Mexico's Flagship University." Is there any way that you would say that this research university identity shows up in the writing program—in first year composition or in professional writing or in any other area?

CP: Public higher education in New Mexico is handled in a way that is I think unique—and also problematic. For instance, unlike higher education in Arizona, here every community college, and all seven of our universities are independent, each with its own board or regents and its own funding priorities. We have a higher education governmental department in the state government, but all these schools *compete* with one another for finances. We could do a better job of coordinating with one another. I'm talking about an opportunity here—we have an opportunity to work with New Mexico Tech, New Mexico State especially, and also our many community colleges. We're scattered all over the state. It is a four-hour drive to New Mexico State from Albuquerque, and we're in the center of the state. Then there's San Juan College at the other end, which is another three hours away. And so we have the opportunity to bring the writing faculties together and that's one of the ways that we can at least play a leadership role as a flagship university.

Through my work with the Council of Writing Program Administrators I've come to appreciate how important the two year schools are for writing instruction not only in New Mexico but across the country. The CWPA is doing some terrific things to be more inclusive of two-year schools. For instance, we've decided that at least one member

of the executive board should teach at a community college. TYCA Southwest is going to be in Las Cruces (near New Mexico State) next year. We plan to take a big contingent of faculty and graduate students down there and learn more about our community colleges. So I see any leadership role less a matter of leading the way for others to follow, and more a matter of working together, aligning, learning from each other, mutually benefitting each other and our communities.

SKR: I know Michelle Kells is maybe more involved in the National Consortium on Writing Across Communities than you are, but what can you tell me about it? I don't know much about this group and it sounds like a truly great thing. I'm especially struck by the statement from your website: "Seeks to guide curriculum development, stimulate resource sharing, cultivate networking and promote research in language practices in literacy education throughout the nation" and this last part, "Support local colleges and universities working to serve vulnerable communities within their spheres of influence." This group is really zeroing in on how writing across communities is very much directed at an outreach. That's how I'm reading it, as a statement of an outreach and an engagement mission.

CP: Right. But there's a key point to make about how Michelle Kells has conceived WAC and "outreach," which she's tried to convey in her term "writing across *communities*." "Outreach" has connotations of the university imparting its expert knowledge on the community as a kind of charity, whereas we want to emphasize the importance of learning from the community and having it influence what we do here. That's the vision, but we're of course trying to make that vision materialize here in a way that does justice to the loftier ambitions of the initiative.

And it's not just here at UNM. I don't know if you know this, but in 2012, in the days before the WPA Summer Conference (July 12 through 15), there is going to be the first ever Higher Education Literacy Summer in Santa Fe (50 miles from Albuquerque). It's a "summit" that Consortium members are invited to, not a conference per se. The summit takes place July 12 through 15th, so that when they finish the summit they can do some sightseeing of Northern New Mexico and then . . .

SKR: . . . they can come over to Albuquerque. That sounds great. Who are some of the people who are involved? That might help readers understand better what this work is about.

CP: Some of the people I know you will know are Eli Goldblatt, Linda Adler-Kassner, Linda Flower, David Jolliffe, Michelle Eodice, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Elenore Long, Anis Bawarshi, Juan Guerra, Chuck Schuster, Tiffany Rousculp (at Salt Lake Community College). And by the way, speaking of Salt Lake Community College, one of the more exciting projects coming out of UNM's Writing Across the Communities is a new community writing center at the main branch of the library downtown. It is modeled, in large part anyway, after the Salt Lake Community Writing Center. Tiffany came down and gave a workshop about that and that's going very well. It's being headed up by one of our fabulous graduate students, Brian Hendrickson, who has led the way with this. We always say, what we lack in faculty is more than made up for in energetic and dedicated graduate students.

SKR: Oh, that sounds terrific!

CP: It is. The list of people I remembered are just some of the national leaders. The complete list of affiliates is on the website (unm.edu/~wac/). But, you know, Michelle has been so great. It is because of the Writing Across Communities Initiative and its intellectual impetus that we are bringing really interesting people to UNM to speak. This April at the 2012 Writing the World Conference, keynote speakers will be Michelle Eodice and Paul Matsuda, who by the way is also keynoting at the 2012 WPA Summer Conference. Our graduate students think up and actualize some very interesting mini conferences where they invite people to speak about everything from sustainability to literacy issues to civil rights to working with writers. What Michelle Kells is so good at—and she's good at a lot of things—is energizing the graduate students to go out there and work their tails off and put something really great together under her intellectual leadership; and that's why I say what an amazing team of graduate students and faculty we have. I've never seen graduate students with such a sense of empowerment who are doing fabulous things. Again, this is terrific not just because it's important work to do but also because they can say when they're on the job market "this is what I did." So, that's another thing that's been absolutely fabulous about Writing Across Communities. We hope to have this intellectual pursuit manifest in more concrete, actual outreach programs here in New Mexico, which, because of the resource issues I've been telling you about, have been hard to materialize.

SKR: It sounds as though meanwhile you're building some infrastructure for it and developing the culture of the program.

CP: Yes. And we have graduate students who want to come here specifically to do that. So they get very involved.

SKR: Tell me about the Celebration of Student Writing. I saw the website devoted to it—really a blog that is devoted to the celebration of student writing (celebrationunm.wordpress.com/)—and that you’ve now had three or four celebrations.

CP: It’s three. Each one gets better, more exciting, more interesting, and more fun. This year I got there at the very beginning, and I was so engaged. It went on for three hours, and I didn’t make it to every booth because I was having fabulous conversations with our first-year writing students. And then 1 o’clock came, it was time to close down, and I was like, “Oh, my god, I am exhausted.”

SKR: How many student participants did you have?

CP: We started with 600 English 101 students the first year, then in 2010 we had nearly 750 English 101 and 102 students and in 2011 we have nearly 900 students from English 101 and 102. As a matter of fact, the celebration of student writing is the brain child of a single graduate student, who made this happen on her own. Her name is Genesea Carter. It was her idea and her project from the start. I remember the first time I met her. I was working as associate dean for assessment, so I wasn’t as involved in our writing program. It was Genesea’s first year here, so this was like four years ago. She had to interview a faculty member for her introduction to graduate studies class. I hadn’t met her. We started talking about stuff, and I showed her Linda Adler-Kassner’s YouTube video of their celebration of student writing at Eastern Michigan. And Genesea’s like “Wow,” and by the next year, on her own, she made it happen, and it came off really well. The next year was better, and more people started getting excited. This year was even better. Genesea and another graduate student—Erin Penner, who got her Masters and is going to be in the Peace Corps for a while—are doing some interesting qualitative research on it to find out “are these celebrations doing students any good?” I don’t think we really know that answer.

SKR: I think I would want to make the argument that...

CP: Yes, we want to argue that, but we need some data to make the argument compelling.

SKR: Yes. But I’m very interested in these kinds of events as—I want to be careful about this—as doing the work that assessment does in terms of showing people, assuring our stakeholders and constituencies, that the right thing is going on in our programs. And viewed that way, that, yes, it’s good for the students to get something out of it and to learn

some skills, develop confidence and all that, but if all it did was make the work of the classes visible to people who have a stake in what's going on, presumably, that would be valuable.

CP: If you want to be totally cynical about it, you could say, "Yeah, the celebration does the writing program a lot of good, but does it do the *students* any good?" I mean, that's actually a really good question: is this just the writing program showing off? I think we need to interrogate that and find out. I don't know what they'll find, but I wonder whether we can make the case that celebrations lead to some hard-to-measure but very important outcomes, those things that go beyond the usual sort of writing course learning outcomes, perhaps the outcomes we tend to stuff under that big umbrella called "student engagement." We know that students who get involved, who collaborate with other students, are more engaged and tend to succeed better. My work with the National Survey of Student Engagement has convinced me of that. As you probably know, student engagement is about the total student experience, not just academics but also the kind of things usually handled by the student-affairs side of the university. So it's very exciting that one of our celebration partners has been UNM Student Affairs, making it become part of *the* Freshman Experience. Also, we're thinking about ways of expanding our celebration. For example, at this year's TYCA-Southwest in Houston, I met Kate Mangelsdorf, who told me about their version at the University of Texas El Paso. Their WPA, Beth Brunk-Chavez, has combined the celebration with their new media and multimodal composing initiatives, so their celebration is a film festival of short films. [Note: UTEP's First Year Composition showcases some of the films at filmfestival.uglc.utep.edu/]

SKR: That's awesome.

CP: From what I've seen and heard, it is. I hope we can do some swiping of their ideas, bringing multimedia more programmatically to our own writing curriculum and beyond. More good work for our energetic and dedicated graduate students.

[Note from SKR and CP: At our request, Genesea Carter supplied the following additional information about the Celebration of Student Writing: "Our vision for the Celebration of Student Writing is that civic literacy is fostered through the event's two goals: 1) To help build community between the university and first-year students by offering a public forum for those students to display, discuss, and celebrate the work they are accomplishing in their core writing classes. 2) To give first-year students voice, agency, and authorship at UNM, which helps improve student involvement, retention, and graduation rates. Our vision

for the future of the Celebration of Student Writing is to expand the event to include all first-year students and showcase their writing from across disciplines. We're figuring out how we might partner with CNM or non-English departments to expand the event because, really, this event is about celebrating all kinds of student writing. According to the anonymous survey distributed to all the CSW participants post-event, 97.6% of respondents said yes to the question "Was the Celebration a success?" and 74.4% agreed that "After the Celebration I learned more about my peers."]

SKR: Let me ask you a place related question about that: There are other schools that have their versions of your Celebration of Student Writing. We did what we called a "Showcase" when I was at Purdue and we're in the development process for one at ASU. If someone were to be just plopped down in the middle of the space, the room where you are having your Celebration of Student Writing, how would they know that they were at the University of New Mexico rather than, say, Eastern Michigan University or ASU? What would be going on at UNM that would immediately signal that these are things these UNM students are involved in, or engaged in or care about?

CP: Well, in each class, students come up with their own ideas for "how are we going to exhibit what we're doing?" Exhibiting what you do to passers-by is different than putting things in an 8-1/2-by-11 piece of paper, so classes usually examine the ideas they're exploring. For instance, there was one exhibit from a freshman learning community section that linked first-year writing with an Earth Sciences 101 class. We have the beautiful Sandia Mountains here, 10,678 feet high, which are really a geological marvel. Anyway, these students created this exhibit where they showed the Sandia Tramway going up the mountain and they had a lot of fun with it. They used the metaphor of the writing process as going up to the peak, and they also associated those processes with the different ecological zones of the Sandia Mountains. Apparently there are seven zones in the world, and the Sandia Mountains have five of them or something like that. And the students also wrote brochures about the ecology and the flora and fauna of the Sandia Mountains. So they were doing a different kind of writing, writing for the public and things. By the way, I'm hoping to arrange an activity for the Sunday after the WPA conference—a hike up the Sandia Mountains, or along the crest ridge, led by a geologist-professor friend, Gary Smith, who also happens to run our teaching enhancement office. The Sandia foothills border the city limits. Our bookmark promoting the conference has a shot of the Sandia Moun-

tains. There are very few places in Albuquerque that you can't look up and see these amazing mountains.

SKR: That sounds wonderful. Now, I have a question about your own career. You were an undergraduate at UNM.

CP: Yes, I lived in Albuquerque from the age of one up through graduating UNM, and then I was lucky enough to return as a professor. I feel incredibly fortunate.

SKR: Do you think your experiences at other institutions help you to see things about UNM that are maybe unique to that institution and that might reflect its location?

CP: I was an undergraduate here. Some of my current colleagues were my undergraduate professors. It was really nice to come back. I mean, my family was here. I got here in 1994. But yes: getting away was important. It was really important to have that experience at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, which is a lot like UNM in terms of being a commuter campus and just a little bit smaller. As you know, UMASS-Boston ... Anne Berthoff was there, but I was doing pure lit. It is funny—I had to go to Duke, which nobody associates with rhet/comp, to realize that rhet/comp is really what I wanted to do. I had to fashion for myself a curriculum, working with Erica Lindeman, for instance, at UNC and Van Hillard (now the WPA at Davidson) and the people who were at Duke to become a rhet/comp specialist, and frankly, I've learned a lot on the job. I had to go to Duke to understand. I was at Duke with these really smart people. That was the Stanley Fish era. The speakers who used to come to Duke when I was there—we used to joke, "Oh, it's just Jacques Derrida, I don't know if I have time for that." It was just a very exciting time to be there. Very theory driven and my professors were of course really, really talented and impressive. I went there expecting to study poetry and literary theory, but I realized that the way that I could have an impact was through teaching, and therefore, I went into the rhet/comp side of English studies, which, as Joe Harris has called it, is a teaching subject, right? So I came out of Duke a historian of composition, but since 2004 when I started going to WPA conferences, I've become much more associated with the Writing Program Administrators Council. And I really feel like, by the way, I've come home—my people, by god, you know, these are my people! This is what I want to do, that this is how I can make an impact. But it took going to Duke with its kind of snobbishness and high theory to make me realize that that's not what I wanted to do.

SKR: Do you think that the way has been more open for you there at UNM to pursue that? If you had pursued the poetry would you have returned to New Mexico? Could you have seen yourself returning to UNM? I guess I'm asking, "what's the connection that you would make between your knowledge of place and your place in that place, so to speak?"

CP: I'm in the writing program, which is grounded in the students you have and the place you are and the nitty gritty of the institution; I don't think I would have changed as much, had I been hired in American poetry or whatever. I'm really glad I went this route. I love language and I love teaching writing, and it's fun. The other thing is that I love collaboration, and we're such a collaborative discipline, right?

SKR: Yes, very much so.

CP: And that actually was a big turning point for me in my career when I realized I need to collaborate. I don't like to work by myself. I like being a colleague. At UNM, we're a very collegial place.

SKR: Let me pick up on a metaphor you used when you're talking about your journey, the route you've taken. I'm very interested in Route 66, so I know that the University of New Mexico is along U. S. Route 66. Does the university's relationship to the Mother Road show up in the writing program at all? I'm not talking about the touristy Route 66 but the road as the thoroughfare, the way people got from one place to the next, the crossing with Jack Kerouac, the movement east to west and the movement back east again. Is there any connection between the University and that movement?

CP: That's a really interesting metaphor and maybe could be a guiding metaphor, for instance, for *Writing Across Communities*. Albuquerque is close to the heart of Route 66. When people are here for the conference this summer, they can take a five-minute walk to the heart of the heart of Albuquerque's Route 66, Central Avenue at Old Town. They can see some of those great old motels, that are all on the historical registry and can't be torn down, which is terrific. I hadn't really thought about Route 66 as a metaphor, but it's kind of interesting to remember that Route 66 and the old Santa Fe Railroad were really outsider projects, a way for people to move *through* the state and kind of gawk at the—quote—"primitive and mysterious" Navajos, Hopis, and various Pueblo Indians. Remember those art deco Santa Fe Railroad posters and their portrayal of the wide-open land and the indigenous cultures? [Note: Examples of these can be seen in the PBS's *Antiques Roadshow Archive*: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/archive/200302A37.html>] But maybe the real "mother road" for New

Mexico runs perpendicular to Route 66, the Rio Grande. That's the route of El Camino Real, and it's what has held New Mexico together culturally and politically. I recently did a teacher observation of a senior "geography of New Mexico" class, and she was explaining how New Mexico's geography, specifically the Rio Grande, allowed the Native and Hispanic cultures to resist the post-1848 European invasion, especially in the northern part of the state, because there were so many population concentrations along the river. It still defines us politically and culturally today. So I hadn't thought of that before. Come to think of it, maybe it's the idea of the Route-66/Rio Grande *crossroads*, about four miles from UNM's doorstep, that would make an apt metaphor for the university and for Writing Across Communities. Here's what I mean: The University and its faculty are kind of transplants to New Mexico, but rather than just travelling down Route 66 and gawking at the cultures, we travel along the Rio Grande and El Camino Real into the heart of New Mexico communities. It's kind of like that Bugs Bunny motif where he says "I knew I should have turned left at Albuquerque." Do you know that Bugs Bunny motif? [Note: See a montage of Bugs Bunny cartoons with this motif at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8TUwHTfOOU>] That's what we're trying to do—engage with our communities for mutual benefit.

SKR: That's an interesting point about moving through New Mexico. The fastest passenger train on the Santa Fe Railroad is "The Chief," which takes just over 48 hours for its run from Chicago to San Diego. I've taken that train, and it does stop for a while in Albuquerque...

CP: Another metaphor for UNM vis-à-vis the surrounding communities is captured in a 1890 photograph of the university showing its single building sitting on a lone mesa with nothing anywhere near it for miles and miles. [See a photo in the Albuquerque Museum Collection at <http://www.cabq.gov/city-store/images/hodginhall.jpg/view>] It is all by itself, separate from the rest of the city—that old idea of a college as a world apart from society, right? My former graduate student Beth Leahy (now at University of Arizona earning her PhD) did some terrific archival work here that included some great narrations of 1890s UNM life. It cost a nickel to take the three-mile donkey-cart ride from Old Town to UNM. But here's where I think it gets interesting, when you compare that image and idea with the university and its surroundings today. We are right in the thick of Albuquerque, with Route 66, Central Avenue, literally at our building doorsteps. We're not at all that world apart anymore. The city and the community have grown all around us. We simply cannot remain inside our buildings.

The Mother Road went right by the university, still does. The Rio Grande is a few miles away. So, we started out like a lot of universities: we were going to be separate, and we now find ourselves right in the middle.

SKR: At the heart.

CP: Yes, at the heart of the community, which again gets back to the Writing Across Communities. We realize we're a part of this large community. We don't have a giant wall around us; we're not separated anymore by miles and miles of nobody being there. And you know, we've been shaped by our past and by our geography. Native and Hispanic influences are still very important culturally and politically. Route 66 may have brought in lots of Anglos, like my family, but maybe it's the power of the geography that keeps New Mexico New Mexico. For instance, and I learned this from Beth Leahy's work, New Mexico's original constitution recognized Spanish as the second official language. We wanted to be a bilingual state. The only reason we became monolingual is because some Indiana senator was *not* going to let us be a state unless we became English only. There are all these incredibly offensive documents about how primitive we are. We finally became a state a few days after Arizona did, in 1912—100 years ago exactly.

SKR: In 1912? Gosh . . .

CP: Yeah . . . but I really like that metaphor of the Mother Road, getting from one place to the other, and the University being sort of at the heart of the heart of that, the Mother Road. That's a great idea; we need to seize on that.

SKR: Get back in touch with your Jack Kerouac. I also wanted to ask about the Pueblo Revival style of architecture because I have been looking at some pictures of places around campus, and it is clear that that style is an influence on the physical space of the campus, and I wondered, to what extent is there a strong design influence in the writing program or other aspects of the institution?

CP: It's a theme we've talked about before. Architectural historians will tell you the Pueblo Revival style is actually a fake thing.

SKR: It's a made up genre. But still, if you compare it to, let's say, trying to imitate the architecture of Tuscany, what are your choices? If you're going to imitate something why not imitate something indigenous?

CP: Yes, you're right. It was an early University president, William Tight, who in the early 1900s, after a big controversy, officially adopted the Pueblo Revival style, which as I understand it kind of blends the architecture of the Pueblos and of Spanish missions. And again, I grew up in Albuquerque, I was an undergraduate here, I didn't realize New

Mexico was beautiful until I'd been away. I sometimes forget how beautiful and unusual our campus is. I forget because it is the water I swim in. When people come to campus, they remind me with their "God, what a beautiful campus." You know what I mean? As a kid, I thought those long stretches of road where you can see forever were the most boring landscapes, and then I moved away and now, I'm thinking, "Oh my god. This is gorgeous."

SKR: I grew up on a landscape, in Southeast Colorado, that is very much like New Mexico. I find when I go back there, I mean literally I feel like my heart is opening up, to be able to see those long distances and see where the sky meets the horizon.

CP: I remember. After I graduated UNM and spent my first year living in Boston, I came back and I was like, "Oh my! What happened? I don't remember this!" It was a different place. I mean, I couldn't believe the space. It was a different place. I had never *seen* it until I left and came back.

But you know, getting back to one of your questions. One asked about plant or animal metaphors to describe our program. I don't know of any. I think maybe the Pueblo Revival and Route 66/Rio Grande crossroads would make pretty good metaphors. Like New Mexico, like UNM's architecture, what we are has *not* been created by a chief architect or a single vision. Is there any one person who is responsible for who we are? No. It really has been a collaboration—people working things out together—that has defined us. There has been no grand plan saying, "This is what we're going to do" or "These are the rhet/comp specialists we're going to hire, and in this order." In fact, when I think of my current and past colleagues, I think we have all been hybrids—syntheses of where we came from and this place, of the cultures that have been brought into New Mexico on Route 66 and the cultures that have been living on the Rio Grande for thousands and thousands of years. Kind of like Pueblo Revival architecture.

But back to this idea of hybridity. Maybe if we were in a more wealthy state, we'd be more structured along lines of expertise. So again, part of that hybridity comes from the fact that we just haven't had the funding and resources to say, "This is what we're going to do" and bee-line towards it. It just doesn't work that way here. We get very strong people, I think, very dedicated people—faculty, graduate students, lecturers, undergraduates, our staff—and we let them help us define what we're doing. Maybe that's a stretch of a metaphor, but I actually think it's quite apt.

SKR: As you were talking about the space and also the issues about the lack of resources and making do, I was thinking about my own ranch upbringing in the West, where you're dependent on the weather, your resources are the natural resources and you're trying to husband those resources that are actually pretty scarce. Rain is pretty scarce.

CP: Yep, can't depend on it.

SKR: Sunshine is not scarce; but just trying to keep things going, making a go of it—making use of everything—is a challenge.

CP: Yeah, I really like that. That's the way it is here. And we have our lean and our not so lean times. Right now we're in a lean time, but again, I'm brimming with optimism. Maybe, I'm not sure it is based in rationality, but still I'm very optimistic about the hiring plan our new dean has implemented.

SKR: Sounds to me as though you're at an important juncture for the program.

CP: Right.

SKR: I want to close with a couple more questions. You said a little bit about this already, but when we come to Albuquerque for the conference, what place on campus should we visit so that we understand how the institutional context shapes the writing program?

CP: I'm not sure I want to point you to any one spot on the campus, but to the main campus generally. It's a five minute walk from the hotel to Central Avenue (Route 66), where you can take the bus to campus—a straight shot. Or you can stop at the Rail Runner train (45 minutes) to Santa Fe. But if you're on campus, just go to the heart of the heart of the campus, you'll see, there are some really gorgeous views of the mountains, and I mean, it really is a lovely, lovely campus. There are lots of places to sit, and it is held together by this common, unusual architecture, again, which I think is a good emblem for the way we are as a writing program.

SKR: I heard you talk about it last summer at the WPA conference. You keep talking about the natural beauty of the setting. I think it must have a profound effect on people to have that kind of easy, continuing, reliable access to just the visual stimulation of natural beauty.

CP: Yeah. We tell this joke here about what New Mexico does to you. New Mexico's nickname is the Land of Enchantment, but we joke it's the Land of Entrapment. Once you come, you don't ever want to leave. There are very few places in the city where you can't see the mountains. My house, unfortunately, happens to be one of them. But, there are very few places where you can't orient yourself to the mountains. I have a very strong sense of direction because growing up I always

knew exactly where east was and to this day, whenever I go anywhere I have to know where east is or I feel uncomfortable and sometimes it takes me 24 hours before I really get that feel for it, so yeah, there's really that strong sort of orientation of feeling anchored and centered by those mountains. And they're very unusual mountains. There's not too many of them in the United States, but you know what formed the Rio Grande Valley was not two faults pushing up against each other, but the land actually getting stretched out. That's what created the valley that the Rio Grande found several million years ago. As for what created the mountains, what happened was as the land stretched out, the mountains popped up like this. So, on the backside of the mountains it is the same geological formation. It doesn't change even though it goes from 5000 feet to 10,000 feet. On the opposite side though, then you're going through time. Very unusual mountains and they're always there to orient you and to make you feel anchored and to give you a little bit of comfort. Sounds like another metaphor brewing, but I think we have enough of those for one interview. I mean, right now they have snow on them, which is kind of unusual for November 9th. They had snow when I got back from Washington, as a matter of fact, which was unusual. And that was in, uh, early October.

SKR: What else would you want other WPAs around the country to know about your writing program?

CP: Irrational exuberance? I don't know. Hopefulness. We're trying really hard to make it a good place to be that is going to reach out to the community and grow. Anyway, one of the things we want to do in Spring 2013, is bring the WPA Consultant Evaluator Service, because we'll have two new tenure-line faculty and five new lecturers, right? It would be nice to have the consultants come this spring but I want to wait for our new faculty members to do that.

SKR: My first year at ASU, we had a Consultant-Evaluator visit and it was a really good thing. For one, it was my pre-text for doing a lot of research about the program, talking to a lot of people, getting a lot of information together. We had a time line for it; we had an excuse for it. And then, Chuck Schuster and Lil Brannon were our team, and they were excellent. They got people to talk frankly with them, and they spoke frankly back, and it made an impression on people, and we were able to basically use the report to make a map of what we need to do.

CP: I have a commitment from my dean and my chair to make that happen. That's part of what's going to make this an interesting, exciting place to come. Things are a little ill-defined right now, but the upside

is really great, and we have all these cool things happening and support from the right people.

SKR: Sounds as though UNM is a great place to be. Thanks for talking with me, Chuck. I'm looking forward to seeing you in Albuquerque this summer and thanks again for hosting the conference!

CP: It was wonderful talking to you. Thanks.

