

## Taking the Long View: Investigating the History of a Writing Program's Teacher Evaluation System

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### ABSTRACT

*This historical study illustrates the effects of implementing a merit-based, peer-evaluated teacher portfolio evaluation system. I constructed a 25-year history of the Syracuse University Writing Program's teacher evaluation committee through both the collection and analysis of archived administrative documents and retrospective oral histories conducted with members of this independent writing program. I argue that there are significant consequences of reflective, comprehensive evaluation for both writing programs and their members, effects that sometimes cannot be detected for years. Ultimately, my essay urges writing program administrators to take a long-range perspective when they assess the effectiveness of administrative systems and design administrative structures that can evolve within changing contexts.*

So much of our work as writing program administrators involves the process of design: we design as we draft curricular outcomes, make staffing decisions, create campus initiatives, and implement systems for assessment, development, and evaluation. Design requires a balance between the global and the local, an adaptation of general principles to fit specific constraints. As graphic designer Edward Tufte succinctly noted, "Design is choice" (191). The goal of design is not perfection. Instead, designing is about making smart choices to create structures and systems that best fit a particular time and place.

An important step in the design process is determining the potential positive and negative effects of particular design choices. This attention to context and consequences is defined by Matthew Heard as cultivating an "ethos of sensibility" (43). Heard argues that writing program administrators who develop this sensibility can be more constantly aware of both how

their local material and political situations affect their decisions and the larger implications of their administrative choices. One of the challenges, though, of figuring out the consequences of administrative decisions is that the implications of our choices as administrators take time to realize in systems as complex as writing programs. The important, lasting effects of our choices aren't always apparent when we sit down to write our annual report. Writing program administrators need to be cognizant of the long-term implications of the decisions they make for their writing programs, have data and methods through which to analyze the effects of their choices, and use their analyses to argue for structures and programs that will benefit their students and teachers.

Yet much of our scholarship in writing program administration about designing programs and structures ends after the initial implementation stage. For example, we learn about the institutional challenges of creating a writing major and the early successes of it, but we don't learn what happens five or ten years later, those long-term benefits and consequences associated with choosing that particular curricular philosophy or requirements. It is true that creation stories are valuable to writing program administrators for philosophical and practical reasons. They document our goals and values and serve as advisory models for other writing program administrators, who find themselves in similar circumstances. However, most of these narratives end prematurely. One reason they end too hastily is because our profession emphasizes building: constructing new curriculum, programs, departments, and initiatives. Our attention to creation is due in part, I believe, to the can-do, practical attitude many of us bring to the job—we like to imagine possibilities and then make them realities—but it also reflects how we are evaluated as writing program administrators. As Shirley K Rose and Irwin Weiser contend, “writing program administration is very much a job dealing with the immediate” (275). In fact, this predilection towards non-stop action is cause for concern, as Laura R. Micciche pointed out in her call to writing program administrators to slow down and build in time for reflection and conversation while making administrative decisions (87). Another reason why the narratives we write end before we get to the second chapter include the lack of time and support administrators have to conduct a longitudinal or historical studies of the programs they inherit, re-design and implement. Finally, there is often recurrent turnover of people filling administrative positions, caused by a variety of forces, including institutional regulations, departmental politics, overworked burnout, and personal preferences and choices. This cycle of turnover can lead to disruption and abandonment of administrative initiatives and system.

## METHODS

In this article, I investigate the long-term impact of a writing program's administrative choices through a historical study of the Syracuse University Writing Program's teacher evaluation system. The study relies on two complementary methods of research. First, I constructed a 15-year history of the Syracuse Writing Program's teacher evaluation committee through an archive of saved administrative documents. The documents I used to make this archive came from the Syracuse Writing Program's own programmatic archives, housed online and in the Syracuse University library's archive collection, and from the personal archives of three long-time members of the Syracuse Writing Program, who participated in the founding of the program in 1986 and its subsequent development: Louise Wetherbee Phelps, Faith Plvan, and Henry Jankiewicz. In total, I collected and then selected over 500 print documents, which I then scanned, named, and categorized into a working digital archive of searchable PDF files. As I created this archive, I applied the principles of archival research described by Katherine E. Tirabassi: I selected documents that could help tell a multi-voiced history of the first fifteen years of the Syracuse Writing Program; I cross-referenced documents that had no clear author to determine identifying features with contextual clues; and I developed keywords, categories, and a labeling system for the scanned PDF files of the documents (172–75). The documents in the archive include annual reports, descriptions of administrative procedures and decisions, in-house newsletters, teaching contracts, memos, meeting minutes and agendas, printed emails, letters, and correspondence with university administration. Though the documents contained in this archive are extensive, the archive is in no way exhaustive. The archive I created draws heavily on administrator and full-time faculty perspectives, as the documents corresponding to those viewpoints were the ones most likely to be saved and archived. Many of the instructors who participated in the early years of the Syracuse Writing Program moved on to other positions or careers, and the absence of the documents that they most likely created—their teaching philosophies, syllabi, assignment plans, meeting notes, correspondence—is a significant gap in this archive.

To complement my document-based history of the Writing Program's teacher evaluation committee, which included documents written and/or published from when the program was founded as an independent writing program in 1986 through 2001, I conducted hour-long oral history interviews in 2011 and 2012 with 13 former and current instructors, faculty, and administrators who worked in the Syracuse Writing Program during that same time period. Syracuse University's institutional review board

determined in 2011 that these interviews constituted oral histories and thus did not require IRB review and approval at Syracuse University. The oral histories were valuable because they helped to expand the perspective of my history, as the documents primarily derived from an administrative point of view. I was able to use the oral histories as an opportunity to ask former and current instructors, administrators, and faculty questions that could “reveal inconsistencies, gaps, and silences to produce a more candid view than some written records can supply” (Lucas and Strain 261). My methodology for this study is similar to that used by Robin Varnum in her 28-year history of the Amherst College writing program under the direction of Theodore Baird. In her study, which serves as a counter-narrative to claims of a universal “current-traditional” pedagogy at American colleges and universities in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, she both analyzes documents (student papers and assignment prompts and sequences written by Baird) and interviews Baird, former members of his faculty, and alumni from the Amherst College program in order to get a fuller picture of the kind of writing instruction and writing program administration happening at Amherst College from 1938–1966 (Varnum). Mark McBeth’s study of Mina Shaughnessy is also methodologically similar, as he too relies on both saved administrative documents and interviews with Shaughnessy’s former colleagues to construct his argument about how her administrative work informed her ideas about basic writing and literacy education.

One challenge of researching the history of writing programs is having access to both administrative records and the people involved in the administration of the writing program. Keeping good programmatic archives is one of the many responsibilities of writing program administrators, as Rose and Weiser argue, yet it can be difficult, given the onslaught of documents and data writing program administrators sift through on a daily basis, to adopt a “different orientation to information” in order to identify those documents that not only ask for immediate practical attention but also are of intellectual value for future researchers (277). It is also a challenge to implement a specific, rhetorical documentation strategy for creating and maintaining an archive in programs with a large degree of administrative turnover (281).

Fortunately, there had been some continuity in the administration of Syracuse’s Writing Program from its founding in 1986 through 2010, when I began my research project. Still, though, I quickly became aware that, as Kelly Ritter argues, “composition scholars cannot do archival work alone. . . . We need help from the inside” (184). Though I was familiar with some of the specific language the Writing Program had developed in its 20-plus years of functioning as a quasi-independent writing department,

the structure of the Writing Program I understood as a doctoral student was markedly different than the early systems of professional development, curriculum development, and teacher evaluation that had been established beginning in 1986. I needed what Ritter calls an “interpreter,” and for this project, I had many interpreters, both those people who were still working as faculty members, administrators, or instructors in the Writing Program and those who had moved on to other institutions and careers (184). My archives, though they were essentially a collection of administrative documents, were animated by the conversations I had with those intimately familiar with the foundation of the Syracuse Writing Program. Archival work depends on access, and in my case, I had access on a variety of levels: access to both institutional and personal archives of early Syracuse Writing Program history, access to former and current members of the Writing Program, whom I interviewed to learn more about the program’s history, and access to individuals who assisted me in my interpretation of the oral histories and documents I collected.

I focused my research of the history of the Syracuse Writing Program on the creation, implementation, and evolution of its teacher portfolio evaluation system. The combination of archival research and oral histories allowed me to describe how this teacher evaluation system was developed and the subsequent practical, programmatic, and personal effects of this program’s evaluation system over twenty-five years (1986–2011). Though this study is primarily historical, it does contain elements of a longitudinal approach to writing program research: the oral histories give qualitative data about the impact of the Syracuse Writing Program’s teacher evaluation system, which can be compared to the Syracuse Writing Program’s goals and objectives for teacher evaluation and professional development written during the program’s first few years. Through this study, I argue that there are long-term effects of merit-based peer evaluation for both a writing program and its non-tenure-track instructors, effects that need to be considered when designing administrative systems. This argument is valuable to writing program administrators, who are often charged with the responsibility of evaluating teachers, making staffing decisions, and justifying the costs of professional development and evaluation systems, those studying the history of writing programs and specifically independent writing programs, and finally K-12 education scholars, as the issue of teacher evaluation, accountability and merit-based pay is now an important national political debate.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This history is particularly interesting for three reasons. First, it is one of few in-depth, historical studies of writing program administrative practices at a single writing program, and so provides other writing program administrators with a detailed picture of how shifting local constraints over a twenty-five year period (1986–2011) affected administrative decisions. This history adds to our understanding of the history of writing program administration, and thus it fits in with the historical studies conducted by Varnum, McBeth, and many of the chapters included in the 2004 edited collection *Historical Studies of Writing Program Administration*. The histories written by Varnum, McBeth, Gaillet, Popken, Rudy, and Rose focus primarily on single faculty or administrators who assumed writing program administrator roles at particular institutions. Although the first six years of Syracuse's Writing Program was considerably defined by the leadership of its first director, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, this history of the Syracuse Writing Program's teacher evaluation committee is not a profile of her. Instead, this history looks at the writing program as a larger system. It includes not just the perspectives of faculty administrators, but also the viewpoints of the instructors who participated in the creation of the teacher evaluation system and those who were evaluated yearly through this administrative structure. This history, instead of focusing on individuals, is interested in tracing how administrative decisions and structures affect a writing program's culture and the individuals teaching and working in that program. Additionally, the design of the study, which uses both archived administrative documents and interviews with current and former members of the Syracuse Writing Program to construct a 25-year history of the writing program, can be used as a model by other historians, researchers, and writing program administrators who want to uncover the long-term effects of curricular or administrative structures on the people who work in a writing program.

Second, the period of study (1986–2011) coincides with an explosion of research and policy statements in rhetoric and composition concerning non-tenure-track writing instructors, who were the primary participants and architects of this portfolio evaluation system. The 1986 Wyoming Resolution and the 1987 CCCC Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, two statements that addressed the working conditions of non-tenure-track contingent faculty, led to a flurry of research on contingent labor in the field, including conference panels and presentations, articles, a special symposium in *College Composition and Communication* in 1991, and the establishment of *Forum*, a newsletter dedicated to contingent faculty issues and voices that is published twice a

year at supported by CCCC. One of the most important collections in the field that addresses contingent labor, the 2000 edited collection, *Moving a Mountain*, was co-edited Eileen E. Schell and Patricia Lambert Stock, who worked together as faculty members in the Syracuse Writing Program beginning in 1996. It is possible to trace the impact of this national activity surrounding issues about contingent faculty labor on the choices made in the construction of the Syracuse Writing Program's teacher evaluation system.

Third, Syracuse University's stand-alone writing program was one of the first modern independent writing programs. It has been the focus of some previously-published research in writing program administration, and it was one of the two independent writing programs analyzed by Peggy O'Neill and Ellen Schendel in their chapter in the 2002 edited collection *A Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies*. Scholarship in independent writing programs, such as the rest of the *Field of Dreams* collection and other research by Cushman, Bishop, Maid, Anson, and others, explains how stand-alone writing departments, writing and rhetoric departments established outside traditional English departments, began to be established in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in response to a variety of issues: local faculty or administrative tensions; a desire to assert disciplinary independence from English departments and programs defined by literature; a way to create vertical rather than horizontal writing programs; and, in some cases, an attempt to address labor problems related to the high number of non-tenure-track instructors teaching first-year writing courses. Though "breaking our bonds" from traditional English departments, to use Maxine Hairston's phrase, has been liberating for many of these independent writing departments and programs, the freedom inherent in designing independent writing programs does come with costs (272). Both Angela Crow and Barry Maid explain how tenure-track faculty in independent writing programs can have difficulty securing tenure, and Faye Halpern describes how the intellectual foundations of certain independent writing programs like the Harvard Expos program she taught in, which emphasizes the "transdisciplinary" nature of academic writing, alters how non-tenure-track instructors conceive of disciplinarity, which may affect their success in subsequent academic positions (Halpern 11, 18).

During the time period of my study, the Syracuse Writing Program faced the pragmatic and cultural issues associated with independent writing programs Crow, Maid, Halpern, and others discuss. However, even though the Syracuse Writing Program, like other independent writing programs, had to negotiate these issues, it is important to emphasize that the Syracuse Writing Program was able to experiment with how it designed its teacher

evaluation system in large part because of the freedom it had administratively and intellectually as an independent writing program. My historical study of the Syracuse Writing Program's teacher evaluation system adds a new layer to the scholarship on independent writing programs because instead of focusing on just the founding moment or first few years of an independent writing program, this study traces over time how an independent writing program, fueled by its ability to experiment outside a traditional English department, design its own curriculum, and organize its own administration, created a distinct teaching culture through administrative structures like the teacher evaluation system.

This history isn't a fairytale, and even now, current and former instructors I interviewed, who worked at Syracuse University and participated in this teacher evaluation system had widely conflicting retrospective impressions on how the teacher evaluation committee affected the culture of the Syracuse Writing Program and their own professional identities as teachers of writing. I aim not to provide an exact model of evaluation for other writing programs. Instead, this study's value is in how it illustrates, using both the archived documents and the oral histories, the long-term, complicated effects of evaluation systems designed for non-tenure-track writing instructors. In the end, I believe this case study demonstrates the need for writing programs to invest long-term in ongoing, reflective, and appropriate evaluation for their writing instructors.

#### A HISTORY OF TEACHER EVALUATION AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

The Syracuse Writing Program was founded in 1986 as an independent writing program. The separation of first-year writing instruction from the university's larger English department was prompted by the recommendations of both an internal university faculty committee and a 1984 CWPA external review conducted by Donald McQuade and James Slevin. Carol Lipson, one of the founding faculty directors of the Syracuse Writing Program, recalled in a 2011 interview that the Freshman English program at Syracuse under the direction of the English Department was "advertised as a 'teacher-proof curriculum'" that was both "ossified" and "impoverished," lacking insights from contemporary composition theory (Lipson). Not only did McQuade and Slevin's twenty-page 1984 external evaluation report criticize the Freshman English curriculum, but it also lambasted the English Department at Syracuse for its lack of professional, intellectual, or collegial contact with the Freshman English instructors (McQuade and Slevin 17–18).



The Freshman English program was not physically located in the same building as the rest of the English Department; instead, the teaching assistants and part-time instructors who taught first-year writing were housed in an adjacent building, HB Crouse Hall, where they were crammed into small, windowless basement offices. The Freshman English program had no secretary, no central office space, and the part-time instructors shared desks and conferencing spaces (McQuade and Slevin 7–9). This structural separation from the English Department full-time faculty led to “a physical and intellectual isolation” of the Freshman English program from the rest of the department (7). Only a few full-time faculty members taught the occasional Freshman English course; the course sequence was primarily taught by English graduate teaching assistants and part-time instructors: in the fall of 1983, the 168 sections of Freshman English were taught by 39 teaching assistants and 40 part-time instructors (Brune 1).

In their evaluation report, McQuade and Slevin recommended improving the professional working conditions of the instructors by raising their salaries, instituting three-year contracts, putting instructors on 3/2 loads so they could get university benefits, putting the instructor’s name on course listings instead of “Staff,” and creating a fund for instructor professional development, which could be used for conference and workshop attendance (McQuade and Slevin 19). Furthermore, McQuade and Slevin noted that the majority of the part-time instructors they spoke to on their evaluation visit “complained strenuously of the lack of professional confidence afforded them by the Program and its Director” (12). The teacher evaluation process for these instructors mirrored the Freshman English curriculum they had to teach: it was restrictive, reductive, and outdated. The final CWPA evaluation report recommended renovating the Freshman English curriculum and teacher evaluation procedures and providing professional development that would allow the instructors to develop new, innovative writing curriculum (4–6).

Based on both the recommendations included in the CWPA external evaluation report and their own institutional survey and interview data, the university’s own internal committee issued their final report, known as the Gates Report, to the Syracuse University Senate in April 1985. The Gates Report proposed a radical change to the writing curriculum at Syracuse University: replacing the Freshman English curriculum with a Writing Program consisting of a four-year required writing sequence that would emphasize process pedagogy, critical reading, analysis, and argument. Because of the proposed new writing program’s “complexity and scope,” the report recommended that the new director of the program answer not to the English Department chair but rather to the Dean of the College of

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Arts and Sciences or the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (Gates 17). This report created a de facto independent writing program at Syracuse University.

The Gates Report states that one of its key recommendations is to improve “the working conditions, professional status, and morale” of the part-time writing instructors “consonant with their contribution to the teaching of writing at Syracuse,” but the only concrete suggestions the report gives is to encourage and fund part-time writing instructors to attend workshops and conferences (iv; 14). The report recognizes that Syracuse University “cannot, either morally or intellectually, defend building such an ambitious program on the backs of grossly underpaid part-timers,” acknowledging that the part-time writing instructors would be responsible for the majority of the writing instruction in the new writing program (18).

The top-down administrative separation of the Writing Program’s administration, faculty, and curriculum from the English Department gave the new Writing Program latitude to experiment. One of the reasons the separation of the Writing Program from the English Department was key to the development of the program’s new writing curriculum is due to the toxic professional environment in the English Department at the time. Not only was the faculty largely uninterested in teaching or designing required writing courses, as made evident through the 1984 CWPA external evaluation, but also, beginning in the mid-1980s, the Syracuse University English Department became embroiled in what became known as the “culture wars,” intense intellectual arguments among the department’s faculty and graduate students who subscribed to different literary theories (Mailloux 170). Faculty and graduate students organized into camps drawn along theoretical lines, and at times, philosophical differences grew into personal attacks. “It was like the Wild West. Duck for cover,” remembered Anne Fitzsimmons, who was a teaching assistant in the English Department at the time. Separating the Writing Program administratively from the English Department removed the new program from this corrosive atmosphere and gave the Writing Program’s faculty and instructors fertile ground—a somewhat insulated space in which to freely think about, discuss, and design a new curriculum.

The excitement of this inventive freedom was tempered, though, by the pressing need to develop new courses and prepare instructors to teach in the new program. In its first year from 1986–1987, the Writing Program had only three full-time faculty, 87 part-time instructors, and over 50 graduate teaching assistants from the English Department, all responsible for teaching over 3,000 first-year undergraduate students (“Suggestions for PTI Evaluation”).

Important to note, then, the administrative structures created for part-time instructors in the Writing Program (namely, comprehensive professional development and evaluation systems) did not emerge solely out of a philosophical desire to give part-time instructors a voice in the Writing Program. The work of recreating a writing program was too large for three full-time faculty members to do alone. The Writing Program needed the part-time instructors in order to create a viable program: the instructors knew the local Syracuse context and Syracuse students, and they were the ones who would interpret the new writing curriculum in their classrooms. The part-time instructors had to be on board if the new writing curriculum was to be more than a grand vision on paper. In this way, the professional development structures in the Syracuse Writing Program were a design solution: using the available resources of the part-time instructors and the teaching assistants, a limited budget, and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards within the constraints of a university system that relied on adjunct labor.<sup>1</sup>

#### PEER EVALUATION IN AN INDEPENDENT WRITING PROGRAM

One of the signature administrative structures created during the first 15 years of the new Syracuse Writing Program was a comprehensive teacher portfolio evaluation system, called the Teacher Evaluation Committee (the TEC). Teacher evaluation was one of most hotly debated and contested attributes of the old Freshman English program. The 1984 CWPA external evaluation and Gates' own internal questionnaire noted that part-time instructor evaluation protocols seemed arbitrary, dismissive, and unfair to the instructors themselves, whose evaluations, called "file reviews," mostly consisted of appraising the instructors' marginal comments on student papers and of impressions the Freshman English director and his staff garnered through classroom observations. The part-time instructors complained that the file reviews were "demeaning and useless": they did not know what exactly they were being evaluated on, and some explained that their evaluations were docked for things not central to their pedagogical effectiveness, like their personal dress or whether or not they erased the chalkboard (McQuade and Slevin 13; Gates "Questionnaire" 4).

These ostensibly trite evaluations, coupled with the Freshman English curriculum "that had so many guidelines that a monkey could teach the course," as one instructor reported, led to sudden firings and re-hirings based on the semester-by-semester staffing needs of the program (Gates "Questionnaire" 3). George Rhinehart, who worked as an instructor in the Freshman English program, remembered getting a letter in 1980 stating he wouldn't be rehired in the Freshman English Program. "No explanation,

nothing,” Rhinehart said. “I thought, ‘What? Do my socks not match or something?’ No explanation whatsoever. So I was out of work for a year. And the following year, they sent me a letter that said they’d like to hire me again. No explanation, no nothing” (Rhinehart). Rhinehart’s experience—“no explanation, no nothing”—seems symptomatic of the lack of professional regard for instructors in the old Freshman English Program.

In the first year of the new Writing Program, from 1986–1987, it was clear to Margaret Himley, Carol Lipson, and Louise Phelps, the three full-time faculty members directing the Writing Program, that part-time instructor evaluation needed to be defined and readdressed, especially given the new curriculum that relied on inventive, interpretative work by teachers, teachers who could not so easily be let go or hired (Soper; Phelps, Himley, and Lipson).

The instructors were suspicious of any top-down evaluation, and in the fall of 1986, Lipson held a meeting with the instructors, calling on them to “forget the past, forget the file review, forget the constraints” in regards to their teaching and evaluation (Soper). One of the problems with the past evaluation was that its primary purpose was obscured: were the assessments formative (with the primary aim of staff development) or culminative (with the primary aim of making rehiring decisions) in nature? The conversation at this meeting aimed to “dispel some of [the instructors’] past paranoia” about evaluation and to begin working on a transparent evaluation process that would give the instructors an opportunity for formative development and, if necessary, provide the Writing Program with a system to determine contracts and make rehiring decisions (Soper). Lipson outlined an evaluation procedure, which included peer classroom evaluation, student evaluations, and reflective teaching portfolios in which each instructor would include their syllabi, sample graded student papers, and classroom assignments. The Writing Program also asked instructors to evaluate their own teaching portfolios by writing a short reflection about how these documents, collected together, reflected their pedagogical philosophies. Instead of just having the Writing Program director read and assess the portfolios (a monumental task, given the 137 part-time instructors and teaching assistants in the Program that year), Lipson suggested that in the future, there could be a committee, comprised of paid, appointed part-time instructors, which would put forth contract renewal recommendations to the Writing Program administration (“Suggestions for PTI Evaluation”). The director could then just approve the committee’s recommendations for renewing instructor contracts.

The first teaching portfolios were collected in April 1987 (Phelps, Himley, and Lipson). Importantly, for the first time, these writing instructors

were asked to reflect holistically on their teaching practices and present their work to an outside audience in portfolio form. Many instructors in the old Freshman English program had never been asked to think about themselves as professionals, who had an underlying purpose and philosophy for what they did in the classroom. In their memo explaining the portfolio, Phelps, Himley, and Lipson clarified the purpose of the evaluation, yet another point never clearly articulated by the old Freshman English program. The portfolios, they wrote, would be used to identify three groups of teachers: those teachers who would be offered three-year contracts, those who were experiencing problems in their teaching, and all other teachers (Phelps, Himley, and Lipson).

Phelps, Himley, and Lipson held two meetings in early March 1987 to listen to concerns about the new evaluation process. The English Department teaching assistants were especially concerned about the time required to construct the portfolio and were suspicious about the purpose of the evaluation. Thirty-seven English department graduate teaching assistants signed a memo which asked for further clarification about the evaluation, cited their workload concerns, and accused the Writing Program for soliciting the portfolios as a way to “screen” those teaching assistants who did not endorse the theories endorsed by the Program (Phelps “Petition from TA’s”; Franke). The memo stated that proposal to require teaching assistants to create portfolios was “unacceptable” and reminded Phelps and the other faculty administrators that the English Department assistantships “[were] not granted through the Writing Program, and they should not be held hostage to the Writing Program’s notion of acceptable teaching practices” (DiRenzo et al). In response, Phelps reiterated that the primary purposes of the portfolio evaluations were for individual teachers’ own professional development and to determine who would be appointed to leadership positions in the Program (Phelps “Staffing Plan for Writing Program Faculty”; Phelps “Talk to Writing Program Staff”; Temes “Summary Meeting on Evaluation”).

This dispute raises an issue that many independent writing programs face. Though these stand-alone programs may be given a certain degree of freedom over curriculum and administration, that latitude is tempered by the writing program’s built-in structural relationships with other departments and parts of the institution. Here, although the Syracuse Writing Program had the authority to design its own curriculum and had control over the hiring and development of its own part-time writing instructors, the Syracuse Writing Program’s administration was required to use a large number of English Department teaching assistants as instructors, even though the Syracuse Writing Program was considered a separate entity

from the English Department. The inclusion of the English Department teaching assistants as part of the Syracuse Writing Program's instructor pool led to this and other conflicts during the Writing Program's first few years.

This revised teacher portfolio evaluation system did do a better job than the file review of the old Freshman English Program of clarifying the components of the teacher evaluation process. The new system also gave the teachers space for critical self-reflection. However, the portfolios were a still much-debated topic in the new Writing Program. One instructor in the Writing Program, Bobbi Kirby-Werner, remembered how the discussion of teacher evaluation catapulted to the forefront of Writing Program conversations. Kirby-Werner was one of several instructors who received funding to attend the 1987 CCCC meeting in Atlanta. At that conference, Writing Program instructors met with other part-time faculty and discussed contingent faculty working conditions and the idea of instructor professionalization (Kirby-Werner). This CCCC conference was the one in which the 1986 Wyoming Resolution was unanimously endorsed at the CCCC business meeting. Contingent faculty issues, therefore, were widely discussed at this particular conference, serendipitous timing for the Syracuse Writing Program instructors who attended.

Kirby-Werner, in a 2011 interview, remembered the effects of this particular CCCC on teacher evaluation in the Syracuse Writing Program:

It was there at CCCC that I first encountered the part-time faculty organization. I began to think about issues that I didn't recognize were issues before. . . . I came back home, and somewhere along the line, whether it was from Louise [Phelps] or a combination of our conversations and conversations at CCCC, there developed this notion that if you are really professional, you evaluate yourselves. That's what the tenure system does. You are evaluated by peers. Louise was really championing this professionalization, and it just made sense that Louise should then explore the possibility of us evaluating ourselves.

In the fall of 1989, Phelps commissioned a special task force for teacher evaluation, advised by new Writing Program full-time faculty member, Patricia Lambert Stock. This task force was chaired by part-time instructor Rhinehart, and five of its eight members were current part-time instructors in the Writing Program (Rhinehart et al; *Writing Words*, Fall 1989). The task force was charged with studying assessment practices and developing a merit-based evaluation system (Stock "Report on Work-in-Progress"; *Writing Words*, Fall 1989).

Assessments have layered purposes, and the task force wrestled with how a teacher evaluation system could be of use to the teachers and the Program on multiple levels: the evaluation could be used by the teachers as a reflective professional development opportunity, by the Program as a snapshot of the kind of teaching that was happening in the writing courses, and by the administration as a way to determine future teaching contracts (Stock "Report on Work-in-Progress"; Rhinehart et al 1). Through all their work, the task force was keenly aware that the evaluation needed to be flexible in order to accommodate a variety of teaching styles and also that the criteria for evaluation the committee set were not arbitrary; they were "statements of values" (Rhinehart et al 1).

The task force's finished proposal, which included a four-step plan for evaluating the Program's teachers, was approved for teacher evaluation in the spring of 1990. The first stage of the evaluation process asked teachers to assemble portfolios that highlighted their teaching from a number of different perspectives: through reflection statements, sample syllabi and course materials, a write-up from a classroom observation conducted by a member of the Writing Program's administration, and the instructor's student evaluations (Rhinehart et al 2-4).

The portfolios, collected toward the end of the spring semester, were then read by the Teacher Evaluation Committee (TEC), the second stage of the evaluation. In order to conduct a true "criterion-referenced, holistic assessment," all members of the committee read all the portfolios, which numbered, depending on the year, between approximately 85 and 120 instructor and teaching assistant portfolios (Rhinehart et al 4). The published evaluation plan listed the fifteen proposed questions the committee would ask as they read the portfolios, questions that point to the shared local values about what good teaching in the Syracuse Writing Program looked like. The questions were far-ranging, looking both broadly and closely at a teacher's pedagogy, from asking how well a teacher's curriculum reflects the goals of the Writing Program's curricular theory to asking how they teach rhetorical principles and inquiry in their courses (Rhinehart et al 4-5). After reading all the portfolios, the TEC ranked the portfolios into five categories: inadequate, weak, sound, strong, and excellent. In addition to assigning a rank to each instructor and teaching assistant portfolio, the TEC wrote a detailed summative report that explained the reasoning behind the ranking, including references to each individual teacher's portfolio materials. The committee also used this holistic assessment to recommend instructors for leadership positions in the Writing Program (Rhinehart et al 6).

The committee's rankings and recommendations then were forwarded to an administrative advisory group, the third stage in the assessment. The administrative advisory group, including the Writing Program director and other full-time faculty and administrators, reviewed the committee's findings (Rhinehart et al 6–7). Since these administrators might have sensitive or confidential information about instructors that could have impacted their evaluation by the committee, the administrative advisory group had the authority to alter the rankings. The administrative advisory group's main task was to take the committee's findings and make merit, contract, and hiring recommendations for the director of the Syracuse Writing Program, done in consultation with the TEC's rankings and reviews (Rhinehart et al 7).

The fourth and last stage of the teacher evaluation was communicating the merit, contract, and hiring recommendations to the instructors, including explaining to them the rationale behind the decisions (Rhinehart et al 7). Instructors were sent letters in the early summer that informed them of their status in the Program, subject to final budget approval.

Four important elements weave through the 1990 teacher evaluation plan. The first is transparency. All instructors were given access to the report written by the task force on teacher evaluation, which outlined the guidelines for the teaching portfolio and the four-step review process, before they submitted their first portfolios to the TEC in April 1990. Instructors were also afforded full disclosure of the reasoning behind their ranking by the committee and also given the opportunity to appeal their ranking. This transparency of both the conditions of evaluation and the exact procedure of assessment, down to the very questions the committee would be asking when reading through the portfolios, was completely absent in the old Freshman English file review system and, to some extent, the portfolio review system put into place in the 1986–1987 school year. Transparency was crucial to regaining instructor trust in evaluation. Molly Voorheis, an instructor in the Writing Program, remembered that “The idea that everything [the evaluation system] was new was to some people totally freeing, and to others it was totally terrifying” (Voorheis). The teacher evaluation committee didn't completely dispel that fear, but the knowing the steps of the teacher evaluation process helped alleviate some of the suspicion.

Another important feature of the teacher evaluation plan is the move towards a holistic portfolio assessment process. Teachers had the opportunity to present their teaching from a variety of perspectives: student evaluations, teaching materials, classroom observations, and their own narrative, critical reflection statements. The committee, in reading all the portfolios, had the opportunity not just to review these items but to talk to each other



about each instructor's portfolio in order to construct a multifaceted portrait of that teacher's pedagogy and how it reflected the principles in the Writing Program curriculum. The portfolios were large and complex, not simple, singular snapshots. It's interesting to position the Writing Program's adoption of a holistically-scored teacher portfolio evaluation system historically with the concurrent "wave," to borrow Kathleen Blake Yancey's term, of evaluating student writing through portfolios, which was rising during this time period (483). As Edward White noted, "Writing must be seen as a whole, and that the evaluating of writing cannot be split into a sequence of objective activities" (409). It seems like the TEC was based on the same principle—teaching must be seen as a whole.

A third element that ties together the evaluation process is the value placed on critical reflection. Critical reflection was one of the foremost practices emphasized in the Writing Program's studio curriculum, and the reflective teaching statements that framed each portfolio illustrate how the Writing Program valued reflection as not just a skill their students needed to develop but one that was crucially important to effective, dynamic studio teaching. Reflection in the teacher evaluation process did not just happen inside the portfolios: in the conversations on the committee, as committee members read, analyzed, and discussed each teacher's portfolio, the committee members had the opportunity to reflect more broadly on the kinds of teaching happening in the Program and through that, construct a picture of what good pedagogical practice is. That large-scale reflection was translated into the rankings and recommendations, and since many part-time instructors served on the TEC over the years, the experience of reading teacher reflections and reflecting on them together as a group infused the Program with an underlying understanding of the central place and "community practice" of inquiry and critical reflection in teaching (Rhinehart et al 1).

A final significant element of the teacher evaluation committee was its promotion and recognition of teaching as an intellectual activity. This open acknowledgement of teaching (and administration) as scholarship was in part possible because of the freedom the Syracuse Writing Program had as an independent writing program. As argued by Stock and three other Writing Program instructors in their chapter from the 2000 *Moving a Mountain* collection, the teaching portfolios "demonstrate that the scholarship of teaching is not one among several overlapping scholarships but a holistic scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching, all at once, together" (Stock et al 292). The teachers' written reflections in the portfolios, the authors contend, can be read "as evidence of the integration of new and familiar understandings of teaching and the subjects taught as

well as scholarly applications of what is known about teaching particular subjects to particular students in particular times and places” (291). The TEC not only evaluated teachers; it promoted a program-wide philosophy of teaching.

#### CHALLENGES TO TEACHER EVALUATION

The TEC was a tremendous financial investment for the Syracuse Writing Program. In the fall of 1989, the Program instituted a new full-time administrative position of Coordinator for Evaluation and Academic Support (*Writing Words*, Fall 1989). In addition to paying for this new position, the Writing Program also paid stipends to instructors and teaching assistants serving on the TEC, a commitment that involved dozens of hours, since all members of the committee had to read, discuss, rank, and write a summative commentary on each teacher’s portfolio.

This investment in the TEC did benefit the Writing Program in a few ways. First, it provided both the teachers constructing portfolios and those teachers reading and ranking the portfolios a professional development opportunity through which they reflected on their own teaching and saw their teaching in comparison to their peers. Bron Adam explained in 2011 the value she saw in the TEC:

The collecting of all those documents and the reading them and putting them together, trying to contextualize them: that’s professional development. Anybody can go in and go through a bunch of classes, and assign some papers, and make some comments, and send them back, and do some grades, and then go away. . . .

The whole teacher evaluation thing, while it became politically problematic, it did serve to professionalize us. It served to create a language in which we could talk about our teaching that had some common features so we weren’t using different languages to talk about teaching. . . .

Adam emphasizes that it was the activity, not the actual documents in the portfolios, which mattered. The activity, according to Adam, helped to build a teaching culture through shared language. The Writing Program became a distinct discourse community, one that held common values about teaching and writing. Adam’s observation of the professionalizing nature of the TEC was also described by Lipson and Voorheis, in their co-written 2000 essay. Lipson and Voorheis argue that “the force of the new teaching culture [in the Writing Program] was to emphasize the professional status of part-time faculty, and to underline their value to the program and to the profession” (121). The TEC, and the merit awards that

accompanied the tiered evaluation system, helped create this professional teaching culture.

A second important benefit of the TEC was that it streamlined the teacher evaluation process. Instead of asking the full-time faculty directors of the Writing Program to evaluate each instructor, the Writing Program handed that responsibility over to the instructors through the TEC. A final advantage of the TEC was that those instructors who chose to participate in it became even more integrated in the community of the Writing Program, which translated into greater part-time instructor investment in the Program, an investment and energy that was invaluable to the Program's development and was often only nominally compensated.

The first test of the TEC came immediately. The summer after the teacher portfolios were first read and ranked in April 1990, Syracuse University, due to decreased student enrollment and an economic recession, cut budgets by at least 20% (Phelps "Writing Program Annual Report 1990–1991"). The budget cuts suddenly and severely affected the Writing Program, partly because the Program's budget had never fully been put on base (Lipson and Gerace). The Writing Program had to cut its largely non-tenure-track instructional staff because of the decreased budget and the decrease in student enrollment (Phelps "Writing Program Annual Report 1990–1991; Lipson and Gerace; "Proposed Cost-Savings Measured for 1990–1991").

Faced with having to decide which instructors to let go, the Writing Program chose to use the rankings from the TEC, completed just months prior. All the instructors and teaching assistants in the Program had been evaluated and ranked, so it was, the Writing Program administration decided, the best way to decide who should stay and who should go (Stock "Writing Program Annual Report 1990–1991"). Though the language in the April 1990 "Evaluating Professional Writing Instructors" charter cast the rankings as a formative assessment, using the rankings to determine which instructors' contracts to end changed the purpose of the rankings to assessment for continued or terminated employment. .

Using the committee's rankings in this way the first time the teacher evaluation committee was implemented, in the summer of 1990, had far-reaching effects on how the evaluation process was perceived in later years. On one hand, relying on the rankings to determine whose contracts were terminated justified and strengthened the TEC. The instructors were ranked holistically in a multi-step procedure that Associate Director and full-time faculty member Stock called "a fair, rigorous, and systematic process" (Stock "Annual Report (1989–1990)"). As the administration pointed out, there was no other system for determining which instructors' positions

would be cut that was better or more transparent (Phelps “Writing Program Annual Report 1990–1991”; Stock “An Annual Report: The 1990–1991 Academic Year”). However, cutting instructor positions was not easy. Lipson remembered in her 2011 interview, “There was a mess. Threats of lawsuits. People going around complaining that we were getting rid of ‘beloved teachers’” (Lipson). Coupling the first teacher evaluations with the cuts in positions led to feelings of “paranoia” surrounding teacher evaluation, perhaps permanently undercutting the goals of formative reflective assessment (Rhinehart).

The vulnerability of the Syracuse Writing Program to large-scale university budget cuts was also a feature of its status as an independent writing program primarily focused on teaching required undergraduate writing courses. Unlike more traditional academic departments that had undergraduate majors and graduate programs and a large number of full-time, tenure-track faculty, the Syracuse Writing Program at the time had no graduate program or undergraduate major of its own, and its faculty were primarily composed of non-tenure-track writing instructors.

#### CHANGES TO TEACHER EVALUATION

The Writing Program’s strained budget also affected the long-term fate of the TEC. Over time, the TEC became difficult to sustain, both in terms of how much it cost and how much time it took. In the 1995–1996 academic year, then-chair of the Syracuse Writing Program Keith Gilyard asked Donna Marsh, a former part-time instructor serving as the Program’s assessment coordinator, to develop a proposal to amend the TEC, given the changing needs of the part-time instructors in the Writing Program and tightening economic constraints (Marsh “Policy Debates”).

Modifying the TEC was necessary not only for budget reasons—Lipson remembered that “the dean hit the roof” when he heard of the TEC’s \$20,000 budget—but also because “growing tensions emerged when peers became evaluators and competition between peers escalated” (Lipson; Marsh “Policy Debates” 3). Even though the TEC was meant to serve as a foundation for the Writing Program’s teaching community, a place to talk about and reaffirm the Program’s values and theories, to some part-time instructors, it became both “dysfunctional,” a source of “tension and fear,” and contributed to a “severe morale problem” in the Writing Program (Marsh “Policy Debates” 2, 4). Part-time instructors felt uncomfortable in their role as a peer evaluator, responsible for assessing their colleagues’ performance while often not fully trained nor compensated for that responsibility (O’Connor; Rhinehart). In addition, many part-time instructors felt

that the Writing Program administration played too large of a role in the assessment procedure, turning what was thought to be an evaluation by peers into one that had the trappings of a peer evaluation system but was really scripted by the full-time administration (Marsh “Policy Debates” 4–6; Lipson and Voorheis 121).

To some instructors, administrators, and faculty members, the TEC had suffered from a case of diminishing returns by 1996. Henry Jankiewicz, an instructor in the Writing Program who served on the TEC, said the instructors’ written reflections in their portfolios became so scripted that eventually, “they all seemed the same” (Jankiewicz). Also, except for the unforeseen university budget cuts in 1990 that led to some instructors losing their jobs, the Writing Program instructors weren’t in real danger of having their contracts terminated through the TEC. Writing Program instructor, Molly Voorheis, remembered the attitude many instructors had towards the TEC: “We’re doing all this work to distinguish between a 5 and a 1 [the merit-based rankings], and the reality is, whether you get a 5, 4, 3, 2, or a 1, you’re going to get hired again next year. Why are we doing this?” And finally, many people began to question if the time and money that went into the TEC were worth it. Anne Fitzsimmons, another instructor, said in 2011, “I don’t think the short or long-term benefits were worth that output on the part of the [Writing Program.]”

The revised procedure for evaluating instructors adopted in April 1996 exempted veteran instructors (those with five years of teaching in the Writing Program) from submitting yearly portfolios: they only needed to submit portfolios at the end of their multi-year teaching contracts. In addition, TEC membership was changed from a heterogeneous group of administration, full-time tenure-track faculty, and part-time instructors to an all-peer group made up of part-time instructors. The work of drafting the summative evaluation letters fell to one person, the full-time assessment coordinator (“Evaluating Professional Writing Instructors”). The TEC’s recommendations were forwarded to the program’s administration, as they were in the original TEC system, for final review and approval. Faith Plvan, one of the full-time administrators, explained in 2011 that the changes helped the Writing Program better define “what part the teachers were playing in the process and what part the administration played in the process. That helped us corral it a little more” (Plvan).

Dialing down the scope of the TEC had costs, some perceived only years later. One of the strengths of the TEC was the construction of a shared culture and language surrounding teaching, as Adam, Rhinehart, and other former and current Writing Program instructors noted in their 2011 and 2012 interviews. Fitzsimmons, who served on the TEC for several

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years, recalled that through her work on the TEC, “I saw people’s teaching materials all the time. I learned immensely by getting the chance to read their reflections. I knew who to go talk to because I saw their teaching materials, and I admired what they were doing” (Fitzsimmons). Without the TEC, which was scaled back in 1996 and completely disbanded in 2008, that sense of community Fitzsimmons describes diminished. Donna Marsh O’Connor noted that the absence of the TEC, along with the reduction of other professional development structures in the Syracuse Writing Program by the late 2000s, created, for her, “this great vacuum . . . Yes, there’s no meeting that I have to go to each week, but on the other hand, there’s very little sharing of teacher work.” Although the primary purpose of the TEC was teacher evaluation, equally important corollary and long-term benefits of the committee was how it facilitated teacher development and the creation of a professional teaching community in the Writing Program.

Finally, the campus-wide unionization of part-time faculty at Syracuse University in May 2008 permanently changed teacher evaluation. Due to the sharp distinction between the roles of labor and management in a union system, the management—the administrative staff of the Writing Program in this situation—is in charge of evaluation. Professional peer evaluation, teachers evaluating teachers, what the TEC was based on in its inception in 1990, was not possible through the contract, and neither was the tiered merit system developed by the Writing Program (Plvan, Rhinehart).

It is not that the union contract destroyed a perfect peer evaluation system. After the TEC was streamlined in 1996, the Writing Program allowed instructors to choose who they wanted to observe their teaching, and many instructors asked their friends to evaluate them. As Fitzsimmons pointed out, “There’s a big difference between having a committee evaluate your work and having your office mate evaluate your class. The teacher evaluation committee wasn’t arbitrary. It was genuine, meaningful evaluation. The committee had a chance to see not just one class in isolation but 25, 30 portfolios together. You knew what a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 was.” The abridged peer evaluation plan, Fitzsimmons argued, “was totally meaningless. Everybody got ‘strongly agree,’ ‘strongly agree,’ ‘strongly agree.’”

By the 2000s, the Writing Program’s peer evaluation system wasn’t functioning as it had been conceived in 1990. In addition, the Writing Program itself had changed—by 2008, this independent writing program had grown from directing required writing courses at Syracuse University to housing a PhD program in composition and cultural rhetoric and an undergraduate major and minor in writing and rhetoric. The part-time faculty union contract forced an immediate change in the structure of teacher

evaluation, a structure that needed revision given the different context of the Syracuse Writing Program.

#### CONCLUSION: TOWARD LONG-TERM INVESTMENT IN REFLECTIVE EVALUATION

This historical study of the Syracuse Writing Program's teacher evaluation committee adds to current conversations in the discipline about the history of writing program administration, independent writing programs, and writing teacher pedagogy and evaluation.

The drafts and revisions to the TEC charter show the dynamic nature of writing programs: the design of the TEC that was adopted in 1990 did not fit the program six years later, and the revised TEC no longer was appropriate after another decade. Faculty and administrative turnover, the instructors' union contract, and the Syracuse Writing Program's growing graduate program and undergraduate major in writing and rhetoric changed the culture and altered the administrative responsibilities of this independent writing program. This 25-year study of the Syracuse Writing Program's TEC, from the situations and conversations that predated the TEC's inception, to its drafting and original implementation, rounds of revision, and eventual dissolution, traces the history of an administrative structure inside a single writing program. Understanding how structures within writing programs change over time—taking the long view instead of short snapshots—gives the field a more nuanced understanding of how administrators work and how the administrative systems within writing programs respond to shifting internal and external constraints.

The history of the TEC also shows some of the advantages of independent writing programs, especially those afforded a large amount of administrative freedom. The Syracuse University administration gave the Syracuse Writing Program a substantial degree of intellectual freedom, even when that was coupled and restrained by budgetary cuts, and this intellectual freedom helped foster task forces and initiatives like the one formed in 1989 that eventually created the TEC. Writing program administrators within larger, more traditional English departments or even those within independent writing programs not charged top-down with designing a new writing curriculum, like the Syracuse Writing Program was in 1986, may not be given the same resources, freedom, or flexibility to experiment with administrative structures such as the TEC.

This historical study also shows the advantages of combining archival methodologies with other qualitative and historical methodologies like oral histories. The oral histories I conducted in 2011 and 2012 with current and

former members of the Syracuse Writing Program, all who worked in the program during the time the TEC was first established and used to evaluate the program's writing instructors, gave me another data point through which to read and interpret the administrative documents I had collected about the TEC. The oral histories added a reflective dimension to the history of the TEC, and many of the people I interviewed noted that they only realized now, more than two decades after the TEC was first implemented, how much this particular administrative structure affected how their philosophy of teaching and their professional identity as a writing instructor. Not every historical study of a writing program has access to the people who either wrote administrative procedures and documents or were affected by administrative systems. Yet, this study of the Syracuse Writing Program's TEC shows the value of making the effort to seek out and record oral histories. The recent wave of historical writing program administration research highlights the importance of maintaining good administrative archives in writing programs, but not much has been written about collecting other forms of data through which to study how writing program administrative decisions affect people: the teachers, faculty, staff, and administrators in a writing program. Collected together, oral histories add an important affective and personal element to how we evaluate and understand what we do as writing program administrators.

The TEC is far from a perfect model of teacher evaluation: the people I interviewed were as quick to criticize aspects of the system as they were to cite what they thought was vital about it to their own growth as teachers. The TEC cannot be transplanted to other writing programs, but the principles it was built upon—including the writing instructors in the conversations about their own evaluation, encouraging the growth of a professional teaching community that shared a language and pedagogical values, inviting instructors to participate in the administrative systems of a writing program, building an assessment model that emphasizes the reflective nature of teaching, staying dynamic and responsive to changes within and outside the program—are ones that could serve useful to other writing programs.

This historical study also reiterates what we know already about teaching. Teaching, like writing, is a practice that is dynamic, evolving, personal, and time-consuming. Educational philosopher, Donald Schön, called good teaching “artistry” and “reflection-in-action,” two phrases that could aptly describe writing (Schön). Though it is a possible to break down the work of teaching into concrete steps and describe abstract principles of effective teaching, every teacher enacts curriculum through her own personality and perspective.



The difficulty that emerges for those who are charged with the responsibility of teaching, evaluating, and supporting teachers is how to fit together this understanding of teaching, which is experimental, contextual, and recursive, with the demands of accountability and assessment. My study here of how the Syracuse Writing Program's teacher evaluation committee worked and developed over time mirrors the observations Clyde Moneyhun made about the layered purposes of teacher evaluation. Moneyhun, a WPA who implemented a teacher evaluation system for instructors at his institution, argued that the evaluation process should spark a two-way dialogue between instructors and administrators and could be designed as both a way for administrators to assess the teaching happening in their program and as an opportunity for professional development for instructors (161–162). This history of the Syracuse University Writing Program's teacher evaluation committee is an important piece of current conversations in the field that address teacher preparation, evaluation, credentialing, and development in the context of both TA training and the support of contingent faculty (Lamos; Reid; Alsup et al; Dobrin). The history of the Syracuse Writing Program's TEC demonstrates the effects the decision to make the evaluation of teachers an integral part of a writing program's administration has on both a writing program and its instructors. This research also answers in part Shelley Reid's call to "move beyond conversation and description of 'what worked for us'" and pursue "longitudinal" studies of writing pedagogy education, which includes teacher evaluation (692). In fact, because of the design of this study—seeing the evolution of the TEC through both the lens of the archived documents and the oral histories collected of the people who either authored those documents or were otherwise affected by them—it's possible to make serious claims about the long-term effects of a peer evaluation system for teachers on both the instructors themselves and the culture and identity of a writing program. Though the study is more historical than longitudinal in nature, the data collected from the oral histories in 2011 and 2012 does give insight into how the TEC, created in 1990 and finally disbanded in 2008, affected the identity of Syracuse's writing instructors and the teaching culture of the Syracuse Writing Program. In this way, this study responds to Chris Anson's appeal to move beyond intuition and belief and instead, develop research projects that produce quantitative and qualitative evidence, data that we can use to make curricular and administrative decisions (12).

The Syracuse University Writing Program developed the TEC with the premise that reflective evaluation is not only essential for *all* practitioners, but that the evaluation process itself, on all its levels, can serve as a rhetorical act that builds a teaching culture and argues for a particular vision of

teaching. Through their evaluation, teachers develop a sense of who they are as professionals and, by sharing the products of evaluation (like the portfolios in the TEC), teachers can develop a shared language to talk about teaching and writing. In order to develop their craft of teaching, teachers need *meaningful* opportunities to reflect on and assess their pedagogy. Consequently, there must be systems designed meet the teacher evaluation needs in writing programs, and these structures must be considered a long-term, continual investment of a writing program. Many of effects of the TEC could not be measured or understood until years after the committee was first implemented in 1990. Administrators need to take a long-range perspective when designing evaluation systems, because the results can be slow and subtle.

The history of the TEC shows how powerful evaluation can be, both positively and negatively. Its particular design had drawbacks: perhaps a less ambitious system from the get-go would have reduced the strain on the Writing Program's instructors and budget, or maybe a different merit ranking could have dispelled the paranoia and skepticism that so many instructors talked about in their interviews. But TEC also had beneficial effects that outlasted its own existence: instructors spoke to how the TEC helped them become better teachers and, in some cases, move on to other careers that are daily informed by the pedagogical principles they learned through the TEC (Adam; Fitzsimmons).

I don't believe the story of the TEC is a failure, even though it was radically changed and then finally disbanded after almost 20 years. Instead, I think the history of the TEC sheds light on the nature of human systems. No administrative system is perfect: structures are designed for certain contexts, and once that context changes (and our contexts, as sociologist Bruno Latour argues, are in a constant state of flux), that structure no longer fits the people or the circumstances or the goals as well. The almost-guaranteed scheduled obsolescence of administrative systems doesn't mean that writing program administrators should shy away from creating complex and innovative programs and procedures. It means, rather, those who create administrative systems should be conscientious to the long-term effects of their choices and work to design structures that are meaningful, adapted to local contexts, and responsive to change.

#### NOTE

1. This orientation to thinking of administration as design is a central concept in much of Louise Wetherbee Phelps's writing about the Syracuse Writing Program and writing program administration (see Phelps "Fitting the Institution That's There"; "Mobilizing Human Resources"; "A Different Ideal"; "Telling a

Writing Program”). Phelps served as the Syracuse Writing Program’s first director and participated in the program’s administration for over 20 years.

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