# Understanding Why Linked Courses Can Succeed with Students but Fail with Institutions

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ABSTRACT

*Research in and outside composition suggests that when students take writing courses linked with courses in other disciplines, those students learn, engage, and persist at higher rates than others. Implementing and sustaining linked courses, however, has consistently presented writing programs with significant logistical difficulties. Looking at the intellectual background and historical development of these institutional issues reveals both the practical steps necessary for implementing linked courses and the crucial questions at stake in any curricular project: post-bureaucratic labor practices, the exchange value of educational experiences, and the tremendous social and economic pressures surrounding higher education.*

Linked courses confront composition programs with a paradox, both frustrating and revealing. Coupling composition courses with courses in other disciplines so that students form a cohort or learning community increases student engagement, retention, and learning, according to three decades of published research (for example see Cargill and Kalikoff; Collins; Craig et al.; Graham; Kasper and Weiss; Kiniry et al.; Kirsh; Luebke; Rodriguez and Buczinsky). Despite these advantages, administrators attempting linked courses frequently find that the project can epitomize everything that's stubborn, inconvenient, and inflexible in the way colleges operate: difficulty in scheduling, difficulty in staffing, difficulty in filling classes. However, it is worth returning our attention to these courses, both for their potential to improve student learning and for their potential as case studies in negotiating the complex relationships between learning and organizational structure. In considering linked courses, I will argue here, composition scholars have paid attention more to the interactive engagement within

courses and less to the institutional practices and techniques for scheduling and accounting that underwrite that engagement. A better understanding of institutionalization, its historical development, and intellectual context helps clarify the work necessary for implementing linked course projects. This understanding also illuminates the significant issues complicating all curricular work in contemporary institutions of higher education: labor, accountability, and significant economic and demographic change.

Definition and History

As a curricular innovation, linked courses date back at least to the 1980s, when programs at the University of California, Los Angeles; the University of California, San Diego; Cornell; and elsewhere in the country designed composition courses that were coupled with courses in other disciplines (Griffin 401; Kiniry et al. 31; Kirsch 48). Linked courses

> share a cohort of students and, to some degree, materials, syllabi, and assignments. Linked writing courses generally entail the coupling of a content course with a writing course, such that students draw upon the materials, heuristics, and learning opportunities of one course as they write for the other. (LaFrance 1)

Research on learning communities presents arguments in favor of linked courses. Connecting courses, residences, and co-curricular activities, learning communities are intended to "build community, enhance learning, and foster connections among students, faculty, and disciplines" (Smith et al. 20).

Numerous studies provide convincing evidence that linked courses can indeed create powerful learning and connection (see in particular Smith et al.; LaFrance; and Watts and Burnett). Teachers who have offered them discover that "writing provides [students with] a new lens of exploration into themselves as social beings and the discourses that make up their worlds, a kind of reflection that develops productive ways of knowing capable of helping them succeed in our classrooms" (Collins 42). Not only does their writing improve, this scholarship argues, but students engage more fully in the rich experiences college has to offer, conferring with others, making contacts on campus, and "working collaboratively in dual problem-solving spaces" (Watts and Burnett 229).

Researchers outside composition have also called for experiences that "integrate," "contextualize," and "converge." The American Association of Colleges and Universities sponsored a 2005 report calling for "integration" as a key outcome of a college education. The report's language echoes Collins' account of student learning in linked courses: "in a world of daunt-

ing complexity, all students need practice in integrating and applying their learning to challenging questions and real-world problems" (*College Learning* 13). Gerald Graff agreed two years later, denouncing "coursocentrism":

> a kind of tunnel vision in which our little part of the world becomes the whole. We get so used to the restricted confines of our own courses that we became oblivious to the fact—or simply uninterested in it—that students are enrolled in other courses whose teachers at any moment may be undercutting our most cherished beliefs. (Graff)

He recommends linked courses as a method to improve teaching and develop faculty understanding as well as to improve learning and students' experience.

Scholars of student engagement, retention, and success have also argued for integrative, interactive experiences. Kinzie and co-authors identify "three fundamentals to fostering student learning: involving students, increasing their time on task, and taking advantage of peer influence" (31). All are fostered by linked courses. These results hold across demographic categories, even for students who otherwise experience challenges in college: "first-generation students who report more participation in group discussion, presentations, and group projects and who more frequently discuss courses with other students have been found to have a higher probability of academic success and retention" (Kinzie et al. 32; see also Rodriguez and Buczinsky 9). At non-residential or very large institutions, linked courses make it easier for students to get to know one another. Even if students head to the parking garage after class, they have spent their hours on campus with a cohort of classmates who share the same breaks and deadlines.

The integration that appears to produce such positive educational results is not only intellectual. The affective experience of community has real power for both students and instructors, according to *Learning Communities: Reforming Undergraduate Education*:

> When students are asked to define community, they describe it as a sense of belonging and connectedness in both the academic and the social contexts of the college or university. These reflections have been repeatedly reinforced in the extensive literature on college student socialization, which underscores the power of the peer group and the value of positive relationships with peers and faculty members . . . Rendon's research on first-generation learners indicates that the 'accepted for membership' issue is especially critical: she found that newcomers to academia have a deep need for validation that their ideas are worthwhile and that, in fact, they belong in college at all. (Smith et al. 98–99)

Such research forcefully directs us toward building programs that will institutionalize integration, interaction, and community. The American Association of Colleges and Universities and the National Survey of Student Engagement advocate for integrative, engaging experiences, including linked courses (*Statement on Integrative Learning*; NSSE *Annual Results* 2013). In response, many institutions have offered linked courses and learning communities. The directory of learning communities maintained by Evergreen State College includes more than 300 institutions; many of these include linked courses as part of the experience. Publications inside and outside composition studies show that linked courses have been offered at many types of institutions: two- and four-year, public and private, selective and accessible (Cargill and Kalikoff; Watts and Burnett 209). Publications have documented their efficacy for developmental students, for multilingual students, and for first-year composition students studying a range of disciplines (Kasper and Weiss; Craig et al.; Levine).

Despite these indications of opportunity and possibility, compositionists' interest in such courses may be waning. Entries on the topic in the CompPile database suggest an intriguing pattern. Of eighty-four total entries going back to 1979, the largest number appears in the 1990s. Articles on linked courses continue to be published, but since 2004, they have been placed in WAC and Learning Community journals, not in venues devoted to first-year composition, teaching writing, or writing program administration. CompPile does not list any publications on linked courses since 2010.

Why is the field turning its attention away from a mode of teaching that research has demonstrated to be effective for students and compelling for faculty? One answer may be that these courses are fiendishly difficult to implement and sustain. Scheduling, staffing, funding, staff development, and student advising all present persistent challenges to this curricular model, challenges which require significant ongoing work from people across the institution. I argue here that these challenges are interesting and revealing in their own right. The successes and the failures of linked course projects are worth attending to because of what they can teach us about program building, about the relationships between resources and policy, and about the ways our institutions experience social and economic change. Looking at linked course projects within a historical, policy, and management framework can provide concrete, practical suggestions for WPAs considering implementing them. It can also prepare WPAs to respond to future opportunities shaped by these same forces.

Research on linked courses does not discuss institutional context as fully as it addresses learning, interaction, and teaching. In Michelle LaF-

rance's bibliography on linked courses, twenty-two articles discuss curriculum and learning while only eight discuss institutional logistics. Those that do so tend to frame their discussions narrowly, seeing logistical issues as barriers to be overcome rather than as interesting problems in their own right. In her detailed account of a linked course project at UC, San Diego, Gesa Kirsch describes the difficulties of working with teaching assistants drawn from and hired by various departments. Do the TAs see themselves as writing teachers or as philosophers or sociologists? Who decides how these TAs should allocate their time and attention? Such problems, Kirsch writes, "can be avoided if a new program is designed carefully, if the workload of TAs is monitored closely, and if the coordinator is bestowed with full autonomy in the selecting, training, and supervising of teaching assistants" (54). The passive voice is notable here: who would design, monitor, and bestow? And, more importantly, why would they do so, and how? Answering these questions requires us to address a scope broader than the individual courses themselves, including relations among full-time faculty across departments and between and among graduate programs. A linked-course project's needs would have to compete with the diverse interests of all these entities. Time and money, of course, help negotiate these sorts of contexts. Joan Graham's 1992 synthesis of the state of the field lays out the need for resources (time, money, and planning) in a variety of institutional contexts, and, tellingly, two of the programs she describes began with significant grant money (Ford Foundation and FIPSE), and all included significant training time for faculty and writing instructors (119, 122). In addition to time and money, linked course projects require attention to the interests and limitations of all the people involved: students, instructors, and staff. Using my own experience with linked courses as an example, I will argue that these interests and limitations are not simply barriers to overcome. Rather, they are indicators of the need for a specific type of administrative work, one with its own intellectual and social context.

## A Case Study in Institutional Logistics

When I began a linked course project at my own regional comprehensive university, I sensed that students and staff tended to think of the institution as one in a series of state bureaus: the post office, the unemployment office, Social Security. When I looked at my institution, I perceived fragmentation and isolation. Students, faculty, and staff seemed anonymous and, therefore, misunderstanding and misunderstood.

Setting out to increase interaction, I created linked courses. I worked closely with advising services, whose sixteen staff members register and cre-

ate schedules for a large proportion of first-year students. I recruited writing instructors interested in trying something new and identified instructors in the disciplines who were willing to have classes linked. Because our composition course focuses on academic discourse, linking with a course in a discipline made intuitive sense. Adding the richness and depth of disciplinary work, we thought, would help students meet the composition course outcomes such as "read, understand, and think critically about the ideas and language of others, including rethinking previous knowledge in light of new readings and ideas" and "make interpretive connections between separate readings" (see https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/core/College%20Writing%20Outcomes.pdf for the full list of outcomes).

The summer before the linked courses were offered, instructors developed syllabi and assignments, and advisors monitored registrations to make sure the linked sections of composition filled. Over four semesters, we offered first-year composition sections linked with engineering, nursing, American history, African-American history, jazz, quantitative decision-making, environmental science, and biology. At the end of each semester, we evaluated these sections with particular attention to the experience of the link: the university's director of assessment went to classes and administered an assessment directed particularly at the question of how the link helped students' learning and motivation.

Numerous problems arose.

First, it was very difficult to find instructors who wanted to work together, to schedule a meeting with them, and to explain the idea of linking courses. Locating home phone numbers for adjuncts, bringing faculty to meetings away from their home campuses of our multi-campus university, and creating conversations between strangers from different departments all took significant time and energy. Several people were insulted, incommoded, or irritated during this process. For biologists and nurses, the daily realities of the lab schedule are so familiar that they are almost difficult to articulate. For me, lab schedules were so unfamiliar that I didn't know I had to ask about them, and I kept scheduling meetings, and even courses, during them.

Second, we had problems filling the composition sections. Too late, we discovered that we had scheduled a writing course linked with engineering in the same time slot as calculus and had located the course linked to nursing on a different campus from the other introductory-level nursing courses. Advisors explained to me that our students see time, day, and location as so important to making a schedule that information about curriculum or content has minimal weight in their decisions, especially in the summer before their first year. For students, the modular, separate, trans-

ferable nature of credits is so fundamental that any other way of thinking about course choices has to be taught within a course. Complicating the issue is that student time is also divided by structures outside of the university: childcare hours, the shift schedule at work, welfare's work/school requirements.

The third problem we encountered grew from the second: students outside the linked program needed seats in composition courses, and we had open seats in the linked sections which needed to be filled. Bowing to these two pressures, we opened composition sections to students not in the courses from other disciplines, creating problems for writing instructors who had incorporated readings and activities from other courses into their own syllabi. Smith et al. call this a "broken cohort" and explain that it significantly dilutes the experience of community that linked courses are intended to achieve (78). Instructors who had designed a new course found that their students would have preferred the plain old composition course the instructor had been teaching the previous semester. The instructor teaching about jazz did not have a single student actually in the linked course; students in the linked African-American history section complained to instructors that they were being "forced" to write about topics they did not like.

Sometimes, there was serendipity. Many students discovered that they were very interested in African-American history; the writing instructor (a full professor in the English department) has continued to teach composition sections on this topic, even without the link. Students who were in the right place also had good experiences. Engineering students embraced the opportunity to write about the design challenges they faced in their first-year engineering course. Nursing students wrote eloquently about their sense of vocation. Instructors found the work stimulating, designed interesting new sequences of assignments, visited university archives and museums, and, in some cases, made friends with colleagues they would not otherwise have met.

But on the whole, the amount of time and effort put in by university faculty and staff was incommensurate with the benefits students received. In seven linked sections taught over four semesters, only sixty-two students actually took linked courses together as cohorts. During those four semesters, our program offered approximately 120 sections of FYC. The number of students who participated in this program constituted 3% of the total student population taking first-year composition. This number was not impressive, especially in light of the significant work done by twenty-three members of our faculty and staff to set up, organize, and teach these sec-

tions. After the fourth semester, I publicly and privately called the effort a failure and stopped planning further links.

## The Challenges of Implementing Linked Courses

The accounts of those who have tried linked courses describe many difficulties in implementing and sustaining such projects. Like me, many administrators encounter apparently insuperable institutional logistics: creating cohorts, accounting ethically for faculty/instructor time, managing misinformation and assumptions among individual faculty members and departments. The cohort problem stems from the apparently simple fact that writing courses tend to be smaller than introductory courses in other disciplines. Steven R. Luebke explains that at his institution, he found a colleague in another discipline interested in linking with his writing course. To do so, however, "my colleague had to divide his 75-student class into a 50-student and a 25-student class. This meant he had to teach an extra class, a tall order at our university, where each full-time faculty member already teaches four courses each semester" (n. pag.). This model is neither practicable, nor, on a large scale, ethical. It calls for uncompensated, uncontracted work from faculty.

The demands linked courses make on instructors are described by many scholars: instructors need "time to revise classes, to structure assignments, and to coordinate course activities. But at a small, tuition-dependent institution that emphasizes teaching, time is a luxury, and simply encouraging instructor cooperation is not enough" (Rodriguez and Buczinsky 9). Small or large, teaching- or research-intensive, all institutions place significant demands on instructors' time and energy, and linked course projects require more (Graham; Kirsch 52–53). Particularly for the composition instructors, whether they are TAs, adjuncts, or full-time faculty members, a linked program can demand significant course and teaching development. Additionally, composition faculty in linked programs often are subject to uninformed assumptions from their colleagues: that they will serve as paper editors or that they are assistants to the students and faculty in the other course. Mary Ann Hutchinson sees this tendency as related to a larger institutional misunderstanding about first-year composition: "Composition classes (as 'contentless') become dumping grounds for successive first-year initiatives" (paraphrased in LaFrance 10).

Smith et al.'s compilation of research on learning communities suggests that, perhaps because of such problems, many students do not experience a truly integrated, intensive learning community:

> At this point, learning community programs for freshman students have been created in all types of institutions, but they are most common in research-extensive universities . . . Although these institutions offer large numbers of learning communities that reach hundreds or even several thousand freshmen, both the intentions and the outcomes of these programs may be situated on the lowest steps of the 'Ascending Steps of Learning Community Goals.' (93)

Smith et al. say these lowest steps are "participation, enrollment, and satisfaction" (70). The highest steps include "increased intellectual development, cognitive complexity, academic maturity, self-confidence, and motivation" (Smith et al. 70). According to the authors, these last are currently out of reach for most students in many linked course programs.

Why does the structure of the school, an institution whose mission is to support learning, create so many barriers to learning? A historical and theoretical perspective on the institution itself, drawn from Ian Hunter's *Rethinking the School*, makes sense of this paradox. Hunter argues that histories of schooling in the West commonly treat schools as failures to meet an ideal. In his view, such accounts ignore the historical reality that schools are a hybrid form, constructed through two sets of techniques: bureaucratic and pastoral. Bureaucratic techniques were developed in early modern Europe as newly emerging nation-states developed methods for growing beyond the direct, personal power of kings and aristocrats. They developed written tax rolls, impersonal laws, and regular procedures. These activities grew over the course of the nineteenth century as states developed mechanisms for monitoring criminals and the poor, caring for children and elderly people, and eventually providing public education. This bureaucratically organized work produced, in Hunter's words, "arts of government." Practitioners could treat "political reality as a domain open to technical administration" (67). These techniques create many of the tedious and frustrating aspects of work in a contemporary institution.

It is certainly tempting to fantasize about a free educational space, an agora or plaza where students and teachers would encounter each other naturally, fall into conversation, and learn for the joy of it. FAFSA forms, immunization records, residency requirements, bus schedules, and computer passwords do not figure in such a fantasy. But they do make possible the otherwise impossible: mass education. The entire population of a large country will not, of course, happen upon a teacher downtown and fall naturally into sustained work in algebra or social studies. Large-scale public schooling is possible through the bureaucratic arts of government that divide, label, and account for time, money, and work.

But schooling has another central and constitutive element—human interaction. Hunter argues that the personal, interactive aspects of pedagogy in our schools derive historically from techniques such as confession, witnessing, and testimony, all developed during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in early modern Europe: "the practices of a spiritual discipline whose object is to create a kind of person capable of acting on principle" (67). Although most contemporary college teachers and students do not practice or understand these techniques as Christian, it makes historical sense to think about writing and revision, for instance, as developing from the testimony and self-examination that Protestants taught each other in early modern Europe.

Widespread literacy itself accompanied these techniques: generations of readers began their literacy journey with religion and literacy intertwined. Children's primers introduced the letter A with the rhyme "in Adam's fall, we sinned all." Protestants wrote spiritual autobiographies; taught each other to read their English and German and French Bibles; and trained their children in exegesis. Catholics absorbed and transformed some of these practices as their church responded to Protestantism in the Counter-Reformation. In the twenty-first century composition classroom, devoted instructors take students through recursive patterns of writing, examination, and revision, asking them to develop self-reflective rhetorical awareness, to encounter and surmount challenges, and to engage in internal and external dialogue. For many composition teachers, the ethical content of these interactions has ceased to be religious and instead become aligned with a political project: the public good, democratic participation, social justice.

In composition studies, we have perhaps focused too exclusively on the human interactions in our work, oftentimes ignoring their historical connection to the administrative, fragmenting, bureaucratic techniques that enable us to bring such experiences to large numbers of people. Hunter makes historical and theoretical sense of the fragmentation we face in large contemporary institutions. This fragmentation was a positive educational force in early modern Europe because it provided for interactive, caring relationships and bureaucratic organization at the same time. Composition, like other disciplines, does its work with first-year students through bureaucratically organized situations such as graduation requirements, credit hours, instructor contracts, scheduled classroom space, and time. Without this hybrid form, which separates a small group of people from others through bureaucratic techniques, allowing them to work closely together through pastoral techniques, academia as we know it would not

be possible. To build new programs, we need to work with the structures on both sides of the hybrid.

## Administrative Work's Intellectual Context

Hunter's hybrid model suggests that institutional logistics are not simply barriers to be overcome. Instead, they are arts of government: techniques for meeting valuable ends or balancing competing pressures. To think clearly about large-scale educational projects, it is important to consider logistical matters (scheduling, accounting, contracts) not simply as containers for the more interesting work of teaching students or as barriers to true community and unfettered experience, but as the products of others' work. Schedules and spreadsheets are content, as well as form.

As an example of the sort of context that produces institutional logistics, consider the New Public Management (NPM) approach. This approach to managing public entities attempts to borrow some of the efficiencies of private corporate entities for the use of government. Although this work is longstanding and influential, many compositionists and others in the humanities have avoided considering it. To many in composition, this work reads as depressing, consumerist, neoliberal jargon. Even the tone of a document like the movement's 1992 manifesto is off-putting:

> Entrepreneurial governments . . . measure the performance of their agencies, focusing not on inputs but on *outcomes*. They are driven by their goals—their *missions*—not by their rules and regulations. They redefine their clients as *customers* and offer them choices . . . They *decentralize* authority, embracing participatory management. They prefer *market* mechanisms to bureaucratic mechanisms. And they focus not simply on providing public services but on *catalyzing* all sectors—public, private and voluntary—into action to solve their community's problems. (Osborne and Gaebler 19–20)

To the managers, policymakers, and administrators who have embraced it over the last two decades, such language does not sound like dangerous claptrap. Instead, it has appeared as a set of exciting tools for making change in an intractable series of complex problems. New Public Management is specifically framed as a public enterprise for governments and other state entities. It derives from work in corporate management loosely grouped under the title *post-bureaucracy*. These managerial models aim to break down entrenched bureaucratic structures to make way for more flexibility, more communication, more consensus, and more work in interdisciplinary teams. The idealized model seems to be a Silicon Valley startup

where groups work together fluidly, calling on individuals' expertise when and where it's needed, and delivering value in record time.

This movement in management is intertwined with a globalized, knowledge- and service-heavy economy just as bureaucracy itself was both a cause and an effect of early modern capitalism. The flexibility and efficiency such structures enable also support outsourcing, including the way in which they require workers to manage themselves by developing their own evaluation criteria. Those managers and policymakers have written these ideas into all sorts of influential places—for instance, the accreditation standards used to evaluate our institutions.

Post-bureaucratic organizations are structured around "fluid/flexible decision making processes; network[s] of specialized functional relationships; open and visible peer review processes; open and permeable boundaries; broad public standards of performance; expectation of change" (Hodgson 84). Set out in these terms, such ideas seem allied with approaches that compositionists and other members of the faculty have critiqued as a neoliberal attack on the heart of education (Johnson; Gallagher). The longevity of these ideas suggests that our critique has been ineffective: Osborne and Gaebler's book is more than two decades old, and the framework it sets out has been carefully implemented in a variety of settings from British water utilities to the government of New Zealand. During this period, NPM has also accumulated critiques and revisions from other perspectives outside our own. Some scholars have philosophical problems with NPM's overreliance on market models (Yielder and Codling; duGay); some think the model is valuable but that it has never been implemented fully enough (Dunleavy et al.; Gray and Garsten); and some claim it has been implemented and proved to be ineffective (Christensen and Laegreid). Engaging more fully with this conversation can provide compositionists with important perspectives on the larger social context within which we operate.

What a successful linked course project does, in NPM's terms, is develop a new way to "redefine . . . clients as *customers* and offer them choices." Ironically, a Marxist interpretation would be entirely congruent with this view, seeing the work as converting an experience (intensified learning and interaction) into something solid that can be bought and sold with money: "Money is a crystal formed of necessity in the course of the exchanges, whereby different products of labour are practically equated to one another and thus by practice converted into commodities" (*Capital*, volume I, chapter 2). When a curricular project has been successful, the experience of learning for both instructors and students has been successfully abstracted into a unit that students will pay for, that instructors will show up to produce, and that transcripts will list.

It is this process of abstracting experience into exchangeable units that causes many of the practical, nitty-gritty difficulties in implementing linked courses. For instance, consider the managerial context of my own project: one of my major activities was setting up meetings. In doing so, I was asking for more and different work from everyone. Specifically, I asked instructors to show up at different times and places, to present their work to people who otherwise would have known nothing about it, and to redesign their assignments and classroom practice in relation to activities in other parts of the university. I asked staff advisors to understand and advocate for a complex curriculum designed by faculty, around subject area knowledge in which staff had not been educated. I asked administrative assistants to schedule meetings with people working on other campuses outside our usual list, to contact adjuncts who did not use the university's email system and who worked in clinicals, labs, and other instructional forms unfamiliar to those outside their own disciplines. Unlike a curricular change within the English department or the first-year composition course, this project required people to cross both departmental boundaries and physical boundaries between campuses. It required flexibility from both instructors and staff. Although a sympathetic administrator had provided course development stipends, the larger economic implications of the project were in the opposite direction. Faculty, full- and part-time, were doing not only more work but an entirely new kind of work, one that remained after the stipends were gone.

From this perspective, we might be inclined to agree with critics such as Marc Bosquet, and claim that these techniques further the exploitation and attack the solidarity of the people who actually teach students. As Rick Iedema explains in his study of the linguistic work of contemporary institutions,

> People's jobs are becoming less narrowly circumscribed, while expectations of and levels of information about what workers do are raised. Most noteworthy here is that workers no longer just *do* their work: they increasingly *talk* their work . . . Workers across all kinds of organizations no longer just have narrowly circumscribed tasks, and that they are increasingly expected to communicate with others about what they do in generalizing and abstracting terms. (7)

The discursive work that Iedema calls enunciation is required for designing linked courses, or assessing students' learning in a program, or building structures for writing in the disciplines, or the other post-bureaucratic projects WPAs undertake. In these latter projects, workers (faculty, instructors, staff) enunciate the work of their own classrooms, disciplines, and local

ecologies, for audiences beyond their traditional meetings and water coolers. These self-presentations provide the opportunity for conversations, relationships, and a different subjectivity as a worker in an institution.

Like bureaucracy, post bureaucracy is both a way of getting work done and a way of managing workers. Iedema points out that "participation in the post-bureaucratic organization transposes aspects of surveillance away from (retroactive) hierarchical control into (pro-active) team participation" (12). This is the power of learning communities, interdisciplinary teaching, and assessment. All of them actively engage instructors in the evaluation and improvement of their teaching and students in the improvement of their learning. Iedema describes workers becoming authors creating accounts of their work. Such practices make work more discursive—workers talk about parts of the work that would otherwise not be discussed at all, and they do so for audiences who, in the past, would not have needed to pay attention to matters outside their own departments and offices. My desire to create community by including adjunct instructors in the intellectual life of the university, then, can be seen as a more up-to-date sort of surveillance, one that worked through "pro-active team participation." When I unknowingly used post-bureaucratic management techniques, I wasn't aware that historical forces were speaking through me.

Looking at linked courses from this perspective helps explain why they are so difficult to implement and why WPAs should ask themselves if implementing them is even desirable. Casting a linked course implementation as heroic reorganization in the corporate mode would be extreme, in that such projects do aim to improve both students' and instructors' learning and daily experience. But casting such projects as warm, caring community building would also be extreme, ignoring important elements of the larger institutional and social context. Hunter's terms frame the problem clearly. If we think about linked courses in terms of the interactions they provide, they are caring, socially-conscious, and ethically appealing. But if we think about them as a management model, they are post-bureaucratic and exploitative, particularly for adjunct faculty. In these characteristics, they are not so very different from other college courses.

I don't want to make the facile argument that every project an upper-level administrator gets excited about is automatically opposed to the values of social justice and liberal education. At the same time, it is important to consider that when we work with (or against) the administrative techniques we have inherited from our distant and recent pasts, we are doing policy work. We are "treating political reality as a domain open to technical administration" (Hunter 67). What these new, post-bureaucratic techniques do is treat more and more realities as open to technical administra-

tion: workers' subjectivities and students' vision of their progress through courses. The success of a project such as linked courses does not just hinge on whether a particular administration at a particular institution is interested in writing or first-year students or learning; the success of a project hinges on the ability to turn more abstract forces such as labor into exchangeable units. Attempting to change the nature or value of those units without getting caught in their essential paradoxes is a big project.

Specifically, to create "pure cohorts" and "higher-level outcomes," students need to register, pay, and show up (Smith et al. 77, 70). This issue looms large throughout the research on linked courses. To solve it, advocates need a comprehensible, culturally legible technique for explaining the time and money that linked courses require. As a metaphor, *link* explains what can happen inside the classes but not the payoff, the commodity value, students get when the course is finished. This ability to explain the exchange value is the great power of student credit hours, or Carnegie Units. These units explain to instructors what they must do (show up, stand in front of this room for this amount of time, hand in grades for these students) and to students what they will get (credits). Carnegie Units are valued culturally and are part of the infrastructure of schooling, despite their historically contingent and illogical nature. Writing in *Change* magazine, Jane Wellman explains the paradoxes:

> We do not directly determine how the learning in courses offered in art studios, physics labs, or community service field trips compares. Instead we leave it to the faculty to decide what something is "worth," depending on where it fits in the curriculum, and to convert that "worth" into credits. A hard-edged regulatory standard requiring a consistent formulation of learning, time, and resource use would make no sense in a complicated academic setting. So having a "standard" that is not really a standard is probably a good thing and one reason the credit hour has persisted. (21)

Despite its paradoxical nature, the credit hour creates powerful infrastructure and cultural meaning, allowing institutions to do their work.

When first-year students choose course schedules, they do so within a historically determined set of ideas and practices about the value and meaning of time. This set of ideas includes credit hours but does not include integration, in the way learning-community advocates use the term. Students allocate their time according to cultural common sense, working with and through infrastructure. Ideas about free time, for instance, come partly from their experience as high school students and the way public education is measured and evaluated through students' physical presence in buildings.

Adolescent limit-testing takes psychological and cultural shape in response to the scheduling infrastructure developed to discipline populations in the past. Free time can also be understood through the (legislated) hours, over-times, and breaks in hourly wage work, developed together with the public school system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Working within this set of ideas, first-year students who also work hourly jobs are likely to see linked courses or block schedules as rigid structures, limiting their flexibility and control.

## Suggestions for Implementing and Sustaining Linked Courses

As we turn to considering administrative practice of linked courses, it is important to keep Hunter's hybrid model in mind. I outline below the tasks and considerations necessary for getting linked courses off the ground and for maintaining them. This is not just practical administrative knowledge, learned the hard way. It is also an example of the complex relations between a very large administrative context and very small day-to-day tasks. For example, it is important to notice that in following these implementation steps, a WPA would complete at least one calendar year of work before focusing on what students actually do in class and in their writing. The aspect of the project Hunter would call pastoral, or the inter-actions between instructors in different disciplines, between students, and between reading, writing, revision, and learning, can only be attended to once the techniques for institutionalizing such work have been successfully employed. For readers considering a linked-course project, the following paragraphs give very practical suggestions about the pacing and scope of the project. For readers considering some other program-building opportunity (WID, writing fellows, crowdsourced evaluation, eportfolios), the important aspect of these recommendations will be the (im)balance between scheduling and registration, curriculum and staffing, and implementation.

### Scheduling and Registration

At least one calendar year before you hope to offer linked courses, *meet with the registrar* to learn about the scheduling from that perspective. Ask questions: Can your registration software handle the links between classes? Are classrooms available at workable times? Would it be possible to hide the linked sections from some students, so they won't try to register for the writing class, only to be told "oh, that one is only for students in Environmental Science" and get frustrated? If so, how could the sections also be visible to the students who might want to take them?

While in the registrar's office, find out how to *mark linked-course experiences on student transcripts*. Does your institution have any already-existing unit other than credits? Are there stackables or pieces of certificates or pathways that you could use to mark students' linked-course experience on their transcripts? This would help to recruit those students who value transcript outcomes.

Next, *find allies in upper administration* who will support the retention and engagement aspects of the project. Vice-presidents or associate provosts for first-year or undergraduate education or student success are often excellent allies. It is important to publicize your project to upper administration regardless of existing support. Other allies might include the center for teaching and learning, general education, and programs of faculty development. Ask any of the people who will talk with you if there are funds available for stipends, faculty development, brochures, or technical assistance with marketing.

*Find points in the first-year registration process where linked courses can be marketed.* Discover how students at your institution register for their first semester of coursework. How many students meet with someone face-to-face for registration, and how many register online? Are there groups of students (nurses, ROTC, Upward Bound) who take different paths through registration? Does first-year orientation include registration and/or advising? Discover how students make their first-semester choices. Find a point in this process at which personnel or information from the writing program can be represented. A clear presence here will get students to register for the linked courses.

At your point of intervention in the registration process, create marketing materials for the linked courses, including a clear, recognizable name for the unit students will get on their transcript when they have completed the experience.

## Curriculum and Staffing

*Find linkable courses in other disciplines.* Focus first on the cohort problem: how will writing classes, capped at eighteen to twenty-five, be linked with courses in other disciplines which are not capped? Perhaps there is another discipline at your institution with caps such as studio art, public speaking, or acting. Perhaps a department will negotiate to lower the cap on one section as a way to improve writing in their major. Or perhaps a biology course capped at one hundred could be linked to four different sections of first-year composition. Locate several possibilities, and approach faculty or instructors with whom your program might work.

As you talk to instructors, consider their institutional situations. Prepare for their fear of student writing. Many faculty in the disciplines will worry that you want them to assign and grade more student writing. Perhaps you have an active WAC or WID program, whose faculty participants will be easier to talk to about writing pedagogy. Find out how often they teach their first-year course: is there a department rotation? If a collegial and enthusiastic colleague teaches first-year biology only once every three years, will you do your linked course only once every three years?

Go through the same process with your own staff. Do you have four people who are interested enough in biology to design a first-year writing course around it? Or perhaps two people who could do two each? Would they do this several years running? What is their motivation? What is the payoff? Is there a marker that can be included in their personnel files or graduate transcripts to credit them for the project? Is there course development money available?

*Set up the infrastructure.* Go back to the registrar to get the courses on the schedule and on transcripts; arrange with advising to help students understand the benefits of the courses and register for them; prepare copy for brochures and websites; make sure instructors (both in composition and in the disciplines) have the courses on their schedules and that other people who might make changes in their schedules are aware of this commitment. Make a backup plan, in case the linked writing sections do not fill. Will you open them to other students? Who will decide whether or when to do that?

## Implementation

*Train instructors.* Arrange faculty meetings and talk about transfer of learning and engaged writing and reading. Ask instructors in the disciplines what concepts they want students to work with most thoroughly and deeply; how they ask students to write and read; and what the most successful students get from their courses. Ask writing instructors to explain how they imagine working with the disciplinary content they've heard described. Provide models of assignments and curricula from successful projects at other institutions. Give the instructors of the linked sections opportunities to work together.

In the months preceding the courses, *monitor registration*. Are messages about linked courses getting through to students? Are staff in the offices of the registrar and advising services and the writing program supported in the work they do to fill these sections?

At the end of the semester, *assess the linked experience*, in addition to the course in general. Ask students to evaluate their experiences. Keep records

of linked sections' persistence rates and grades, as compared to those of students in other sections.

*Promote the work.* Inform the institutional community widely about the program's success, including at least one impressive statistic from your assessment and one good anecdote. Be sure to report to your allies in upper administration and among the faculty. Show this information to your tenure/promotion committee to help explain the magnitude of the task.

## Challenges and Rewards

The most interesting and difficult of the recommendations above is finding or creating some way to mark on a student's transcript that she has undergone a significant, linked, interactive experience. The current three or four-credit course model neither pays linked teachers for the extra time the project requires nor gives students a clear, transcript-ready outcome for theirs. Negotiating this relationship between learning and credits requires very careful, practical work with the registrar and advising, as well as with faculty colleagues and writing instructors. Such work is ongoing because the relationship is structured by social and economic forces far outside a particular institution. So solving a particular problem on a particular day will not resolve the more abstract difficulties from which the practical problems spring.

Linked course projects require the WPA to work against credit hours as they currently are structured, against many students' ideas about free time, and against many in our current national policy discussions who would like education to become even more fragmented. Daniel Greenstein, director of the Gates Foundation's Postsecondary Success Project, claims that "Many of today's students aren't interested in a classic college experience of dorms and all-nighters. Rather, they need college to be 'unbundled,' and to be able to integrate it selectively, sometimes a course at a time, into their busy and full lives" (n. pag.) Greenstein and other reformers would like to free students' time so that they can engage more fully and flexibly in a globalized twenty-first century economy, learning and performing "just in time" for the workplace's changing needs (Laitinen; Patrick et al.). The most prominent critics of the credit hour take this approach. Linked-course advocates, on the other hand, make a related critique in the service of freeing students from the barriers created by earlier administrative techniques such as the three-credit hour course. Students thus freed could actually spend *more* time reading, thinking, talking about ideas, and generally soaking up the academic atmosphere. It's a different freedom and a different payoff. The two projects can seem complementary since both are working to redefine

the academic credit hour, but they have very different models of the relationship between the learning experience and the exchange value of that experience.

Viewing colleges from Hunter's perspective, we see that large-scale curricular projects such as linked classes involve both sides of the hybrid: interaction and control; pastoral care and administrative management. Focusing on just one aspect creates a lopsided project, one unable to fit into the larger institutional and cultural context. Thinking exclusively about students' and teachers' experiences of integration and interaction will not create a successful effort. It is also necessary to focus on the necessity of fragmentation, anonymity, and institutional control. WPAs should consider carefully whether such a project is ethical for their staff, and possible for themselves, before beginning.

Such considerations can be highly productive, for both current and future work. They operate, after all, around all college courses. A successful linked-course program can produce outcomes for students, particularly students at risk, which all teachers and administrators values, such as engagement, deep learning, persistence, and a sense of community. The research cited earlier in this article makes a compelling case for the endeavor. My own experience as a teacher in (rather than as an administrator of) a first-year composition course designed for engineers corresponds completely with the claims made in that research—students were engaged, their writing improved, and I learned a tremendous amount.

A linked-course project, then, is worth serious consideration. To make such a project work, a WPA must educate herself about administrative techniques and use them cannily. These are "arts of government," inescapable parts of the hybrid that is Western higher education. In my own linked course project, I ignored the arts of government, caught up in what Paul duGay calls "the thoroughly romantic critique of bureaucracy" (3). This is perhaps another instance of the tendency Richard E. Miller has identified in the field, our propensity to "depict professionals [and professional activities] in a negative light" (15). My avoidance of the administrative context of the work, however, meant that administrative fashions and historical forces acted through me. To work effectively and ethically within these paradoxes, WPAs must understand and employ credit hours, schedules, and contracts in their institutional context. The crucial corollary to this claim is that learning more about the history and ethics of these techniques will cause some WPAs to decide not to employ them. By maintaining an informed perspective on both the bureaucratic and the interactive aspects of such projects, we will be better placed to understand the significant challenges facing contemporary institutions of higher education.

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