

# Letter From the Editor

In *Roughing It*, Mark Twain takes a job as city editor of the *Virginia Enterprise* and immediately has to confront the curse of many editors: the lack of news. At one point, though, he celebrates, "Presently, when things began to look dismal again, a desperado killed a man in a saloon and joy returned once more."

As editor of *WPA*, I've never lacked good submissions. Nonetheless, something of a desperado has strode into the pages of this issue in the form of challenges to traditional composition offerings and administrative structures. The results are some lively reports on directions in several writing programs. Betty Bamberg reviews several models of first-year composition in the light of abolitionist movements. Margaret Graham, Elizabeth Birmingham, and Mark Zachry provide a rich case study of one university's restructuring of first-year composition. Judith Kearns and Brian Turner discuss why the University of Winnipeg formed a Centre for Academic Writing and how the process tested various collaborative efforts. Whereas Kearns and Turner's program moved toward more autonomy for instructors, Geoffrey Chase uses three principles to argue for greater consistency and commonality among sections. Sherrie Gradin reports and analyzes the consequences of a university's abolishing any required writing course. Susan McLeod uses the case of one writing program's administrative transformation to speculate on the future of writing across the curriculum. Jane Cogie's article takes a different turn, presenting a case study of the effects of tutoring experience on composition teachers. Finally, Lynn Bloom offers a number of "laws" that several of us may find fit our own experiences.

It's a matter of passionate debate whether the desperado of abolitionism or radical programmatic reform is wearing a black hat or a white one. Many within composition studies and many *WPAs* themselves welcome these changes, for compelling intellectual and political reasons. As for me, I feel rather like I did at the end of *The Unforgiven*. Clint Eastwood rides slowly out of town in the rain, at night. Behind are lots of dead men, and maybe some deserved to die. There is no cheering. Maybe the town will be better.



Two things have changed in my professional life this fall. As I noted last issue, I've become Director of Graduate Studies in English. Given the teaching responsibilities of our graduate students and my continued professional interests, I'm still closely involved with the writing program but not as *WPA*. There are lots of frying pans and fires in the academy. Second, after four years as editor of *WPA*, I'm "retiring" to life as Vice President of its parent organization. I'm pleased to announce that Marguerite Helters (University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh) and Dennis Lynch (Michigan Technological University) are the new co-editors. I envy the fine work they have ahead of them.

Doug Hesse