

One of the most difficult tasks faced by any writing program administrator is developing an assessment mechanism that fairly and accurately rates the writing of students in a college or university's writing courses. Increasingly, the mechanism of choice has become some form of portfolio evaluation—an assessment practice that has been both widely praised and, recently, critically questioned in the pages of this and other journals and books in our field.¹ Despite an ongoing critical stance towards portfolio assessment in our field, however, Susan Callahan has noted the degree to which some teachers (and writing program administrators) still possess utopian expectations about the “power of the portfolio”:

Portfolios are currently being offered as the solution to a startling array of educational problems: Apathetic students? Try portfolios. Students obsessed with grades? Use portfolios. Inconsistent departmental grading practices? Require portfolios. Culturally biased tests? Replace them with portfolios. Want to stimulate creativity? Process instruction? Reflective teaching and learning? Portfolios, portfolios, portfolios. (118)

This enthusiasm for portfolios is

*Lean, Mean
Grading
Machines?
A Bourdieuan
Reading of
Novice
Instructors in a
Portfolio-Based
Writing
Program*

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also apparent in communal portfolio evaluation, a form of evaluation in which portfolios are viewed not just by a student's own teacher, but by other instructors as well who read and score the portfolios in teams. This particular type of portfolio evaluation has been commonly portrayed as a useful way to build community among teachers. For example, Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow, who designed the first widely imitated portfolio assessment program for first-year writing students at SUNY-Stonybrook, have routinely characterized their assessment program as one that draws teachers together (Belanoff and Elbow 17). Though they acknowledge some conflicts in the portfolio evaluation process, writing program administrators at the University of Cincinnati have also described the interactions of teaching teams, which are made up of novice and experienced teaching assistants, adjuncts, and administrators, as ultimately beneficial to all participants (Durst, et al.).

Trouble in Portfolio Paradise

But there's trouble in portfolio paradise. Compositionists are beginning to acknowledge that conflict, sometimes profound dissent, does occur within these scoring teams. As Bob Broad has put it bluntly, "Disagreement is a fly buzzing crazily around the clean white room of communal writing assessment, and we seem bent on exterminating the insect no matter what precious objects we break and no matter whom we bruise in the process" (263-4). Like Broad, Russell Durst, Marjorie Roemer, and Lucille Schultz have also called for more acknowledgment of dissensus and conflict within communal portfolio evaluation, but they do so ultimately to reaffirm the value of such dissensus for the teachers in scoring groups. Particularly for new teaching assistants, they suggest, "portfolio negotiations can serve as an important means of faculty development, can help ease anxieties about grading and passing judgment on students' work, and can provide a forum for teachers and administrators to re-think the goals of a freshman English program" (Durst et al. 287).

I agree with Durst and his colleagues that it certainly *can* have these benefits, but in the rest of this essay I present research that demonstrates how local institutional practices can preclude such benefits.² This research comes from data I collected during an ethnographic dissertation study of new teaching assistants at a state university, all of whom were teaching writing for the first time. The focus of the larger study grew out of my interest in writing program administration, for I was examining how new teaching

assistants construct authority for themselves as *writing* teachers when they have entered graduate school with a desire to learn to profess *literature*. In particular, I was looking at the ways institutional practices helped to shape these new teachers' sense of being authoritative and competent writing instructors. Obviously, the practice of evaluation and assigning grades is deeply entrenched in authority issues between a new teacher and his or her students. What I discovered in this program, however, was that communal portfolio assessment as it was practiced on that campus shifted the primary site of authority negotiation for new composition teachers from their relationships with students to their relationships with their more experienced peers and with the writing program itself.

Pierre Bourdieu and Portfolios

The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers an especially fruitful interpretive framework for the vast amounts of data I gathered, for his understanding of how power and authority work in society supports the idea that new teachers are agents in their own enculturation rather than simply subjects of a vast educational machine. Unlike the work of popular reproduction theorists such as Henry Giroux and Michael Apple, Bourdieu's social theories insist on a balance between human agency and the influence of cultural and societal factors.

Bourdieu's notion of "capital" plays a central role in my analysis of the writing program I studied, so I want to take a few moments to review briefly the way he uses the term. Although the term "capital" has Marxist connotations, it is important to recognize how Bourdieu's use of the term differs from that of Marx. Bourdieu has used the metaphor of aces in a game of cards to explain his concept of "capital" as any kind of resource that once possessed, gives its owner the ability to maintain and improve one's status within a given social arena. His key insight is that there are *immaterial* forms of capital—cultural, symbolic, and social, he calls them—in addition to material or economic capital. He theorizes that, with varying degrees of difficulty, it is possible to convert one of these forms into another. Most importantly for my study, Bourdieu sees capital as a resource which yields power (and the authority and respect that often accompanies power), thus allowing holders of this capital to exercise some control over their own future and that of others. Cultural capital, or "informational capital" as Bourdieu has also called it (*Invitation* 119), is the linguistic, stylistic, and knowledge attributes, including formal educational credentials, that can

enhance one's standing in a given social domain or arena. Because cultural capital also includes the *kind* of expertise that is valued in a field, it has particular relevance when thinking about the new teaching assistants in my study, for they were literature students asked to take on the less enviable role of writing teachers.

A second Bourdieuan concept worth reviewing is his notion of "field," for as he explains, "capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field" (Invitation 101). Explaining a field as a site of constant struggle over capital, Bourdieu writes:

In a field, agents and institutions constantly struggle, according to the regularities and the rules constitutive of this space of play (and, in given conjunctures, over those rules themselves), with various degrees of strength and therefore diverse probabilities of success, to appropriate the specific products at stake in the game. Those who dominate in a given field are in a position to make it function to their advantage but they must always contend with the resistance, the claims, the contention, "political" or otherwise, of the dominated. (Invitation 102)

Within these "fields," these functionally differentiated domains of social interaction, actors compete for social positions relative to each other according to the overall amounts of capital available to them. In the larger field of English studies, for example, literature specialists typically have more cultural capital than those who work in composition studies.

In this essay, I want to take a more detailed look at a university's writing program as a *field*, and in particular examine the practice of communal portfolio assessment as a site of what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence"—the ability of dominant members of a field to wield their cultural capital as a kind of weapon over a less dominant member of the field. As my title suggests, I'll be focusing on novice instructors as less dominant members of the field, though I must write about them in relation to their more experienced teaching assistant peers. While communal portfolio assessment can take many forms, in the program I studied it works as follows: At the end of the semester, all student portfolios from 100-level courses are scored first by the instructor of record according to a 3, 2, or 1 (highest to lowest) rubric, and then by two outside readers in order to corroborate each instructor's evaluation of her own students' portfolios.

Each scoring group includes about five or six experienced instructors and one to three novice instructors. A disagreement among evaluators is intended as a “reality check” for the instructor, who is then obligated to reconsider her original evaluation. Often, portfolio scoring takes place in the group leader’s home, an act that attempts to lessen the drudgery associated with this task. This form of portfolio assessment was put in place to help alleviate problems with grade inflation; the theory went that the outside readers could help the teacher of record see a portfolio with more objective eyes and thus give it a more accurate (and often lower) grade.

That’s what is supposed to happen, anyway. What follows is my reading of the dynamics of those assessment interactions. Ultimately, using the data I gathered in that Bourdieuan field, I argue against a common assumption of writing assessment literature and suggest that this kind of communal portfolio evaluation frustrates efforts to help new graduate instructors feel authoritative about teaching writing.

One Writing Program as a Bourdieuan Field

A major part of my participant observation included taking part in the pedagogy seminar required of all new graduate instructors. That seminar’s discussions about the group grading environment often revolved around confessions of anxiety and dread the new teachers felt about having some responsibility for grading another teacher’s students and in turn, having their students’ work, and by extension their own accomplishments as teachers, judged by more experienced instructors. Immediately before the mid-term scoring sessions, the new instructors wrestled with the possibility that they might have misinformed their students about the quality of their essays. For some, this self-doubt was so disconcerting as to cause them to question their ability to teach writing at all. As one new teacher poignantly asked, “How much of the sins of the father will be visited upon the sons?” She went on to explain that “I’m afraid it’s my fault if students don’t do well.”

The new TAs’ self-doubt was confirmed at a norming session held just prior to the mid-term portfolio evaluation sessions. In this session led by the director of the writing program, all TAs—new and experienced—were given the assessment rubric for portfolios that new TAs had been working with all semester in their pedagogy seminar. During the session, there was a clear split between the ways the new TAs judged sample essays and the values placed on those same pieces of writing by experienced TAs. The new TAs followed the rubrics very closely, while the experienced TAs by and large

judged the writing against more internalized and tacit “felt senses” (Perl)³ about what good writing looks like. Noting this discrepancy, the writing director admonished all TAs to stick to the rubrics carefully, and when the papers were rated again, the whole group of teachers grudgingly came to some consensus on the numerical score for each. But clearly, new and experienced TAs were using different criteria to judge the students’ writing.

After the mid-term scoring session, morale was particularly low among the new teachers, for many, sometimes a majority, of their students’ papers had indeed failed. The new instructors were not only feeling guilty for judging their students’ writing more favorably than the veteran scorers had done, and thus leading them to the evaluation slaughterhouse. They were also feeling distrusted by the veteran instructors in their grading groups and betrayed by the system, for in their minds, they had done exactly what had been asked of them. As one participant wrote in his journal immediately after participating in a group grading session at mid-term, “At times I feel like I would rather be held accountable for grade inflation and face some sort of TA probation than to go through group grading.”

And no wonder. The atmosphere at the group grading sessions I observed and participated in, while not hostile, was far from supportive to the new instructors. In some groups, veterans and novices segregated themselves within the host’s home. In other cases, new teachers and veterans mixed freely, but in each case the novices seemed more alarmed when readers chuckled to themselves or laughed out loud while reading their students’ work and either insisted on knowing what was funny or sat uncomfortably, looking in the general direction of the laughing reader, then trying to put those self-doubts out of their minds and go back to scoring the stack at hand. In fact, it was this lackadaisical atmosphere of the scoring sessions that the new instructors found to be the most disturbing component of group grading. Experienced readers moved very quickly through the essays, and then sometimes literally stood over the new instructors’ shoulders to encourage them to finish up quickly so they could all go home. In some groups, veteran readers simply walked out after a couple of hours without a word to anyone.

By mid-term, the new TAs had heard experienced TAs routinely belittle the program’s portfolio assessment practice. As focused and committed literature students, English department TAs had virtually no theoretical grounding in writing assessment, and thus as a community had grown to see “group grading” simply as busywork, a time-consuming chore

whose main purpose was to alleviate grade inflation and as such, keep the writing program director in the dean's good graces. In hallways and offices, backyards and neighborhood bars, seasoned TAs regularly held self-described impromptu "bitch sessions" to bemoan "group grading" and to appeal to the new TAs to adopt their mechanical and quick reading style.

Thus, by the time the TAs gathered in their group leaders' homes at mid-term to read and score portfolios, the new TAs were predisposed to think of themselves as less competent and more prone to feel intimidated by the seasoned instructors' authority of experience. Bourdieu notes that this kind of intimidation is "a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is" and "can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus) [culturally and socially-influenced state of being] to feel it, whereas others will ignore it" (*Language and Symbolic Power* 51). Some of the new TAs experienced this as *conscious* intimidation, though the experienced TAs seemed not to intend it as such. Though the seasoned instructors were wielding their authority of experience as symbolic violence, these actions appeared to them to be yet another form of the advice they had been giving new TAs all along: "Trust me, I've done this before. Forget the rubrics. Listen to my experience—it's a better judge of these portfolios." Here, experienced TAs were using what Bourdieu has called in another context "magisterial discourse"—"the professorial ideology of student incapacity . . . which inherently implies poor reception of the best messages by the worst receivers" (Bourdieu and Passeron 111). Dominant members of a field can use such magisterial language as a status attribute and cultural code to enhance their authority and legitimacy in the university.

The meeting of the pedagogy seminar immediately following mid-term grading was easily the most vocal class of the semester, for students were eager to talk about their concerns with the group grading process. The primary focus of that class was the discovery new instructors had made through the grading process: despite the myriad criteria they were supposed to be scoring papers against, what veteran TAs really valued in student writing was something that did not appear on any rubric—creativity and imagination in both topic and execution. Several new instructors that day expressed feelings of guilt for assigning paper topics that might have invited "boring" responses and thus insured students a failing grade from the anonymous raters.

Following the mid-term scoring session, the new teachers returned to their classes faced with the daunting task of explaining to more students

than they would have thought why the paper for which their own teacher had praised them had been failed by the outside readers. In an attempt to recapture authority in the eyes of their students, most new instructors resorted to creating an “us vs. them” scenario in which they could present themselves as teachers with reasonable expectations, but also align themselves with the students against what one new instructor called the “mean ole group graders.” Another teacher explained to the pedagogy seminar that “I do the big, bad group grader thing and it does work.” While these teachers were genuinely interested in helping their students do well in the course, they were also concerned about the impact of the group grading process on their own credibility as teachers, for as Herbert Kalthoff has observed, “In doing grading, teachers construct their own achievements” (109). One teacher, in the interest of trying to convince her students that this mid-term grading process was indeed fair and useful, resorted to filling out checklists for each failing essay and represented those slips to students as documents the graders had marked.

This teacher, in fact, was so concerned about the group grading process that for her seminar project, she surveyed both graduate instructors and first-year writers to determine how both groups view the program’s portfolio evaluation method. In doing so, this participant, whom I will call “Michelle,” took action to change the rules of the game and increase her own capital within this field. Bourdieu writes:

Players can play to increase or to conserve their capital...in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisites of the reproduction of the game and its stakes; but they can also get in it to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game. They can, for instance, work to change the relative value of tokens of different colors, the exchange rate between various species of capital upon which the force of their opponents rests and to valorize the species of capital they preferentially possess. (Invitation 99)

By conducting this survey, Michelle did increase her cultural capital within the field. The scholarly knowledge she gained while preparing the survey positioned her as a kind of expert on portfolio assessment within the group of new graduate instructors. And in a field where scholarly endeavors matter, her new “book learning” about portfolios gave her a more valuable

and appreciated species of capital in relation to those seasoned TAs who had used only their experience reading portfolios as capital within the field. Michelle's action here illustrates Bourdieu's point that

social agents are not "particles" that are mechanically pushed and pulled about by external forces. They are, rather, bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution. (Invitation 108-109)

Michelle reported her results to the pedagogy seminar exactly one month before final portfolios were due, and the information she presented had a major impact on the way new instructors prepared their students, and themselves, for final portfolio evaluation. Her poll indicated that during final portfolio scoring, most graduate instructors read only one essay in these three-essay portfolios, or the first and third essays only, or only the first page of each essay. Experienced raters know that skimming essays is a necessary skill to develop in holistic scoring if one is to get through the process in a reasonable amount of time, but for these novice raters, this news was astounding. Much discussion ensued, for this information confirmed for the new teachers that their students' portfolios were being given short shrift by the readers. Michelle's survey also indicated that the only piece raters did seem to read carefully was the reflective cover letter, if for no other reason than that it was the most interesting and readable component of the portfolios. Another new instructor I studied, in response to an earlier draft of this essay, also reminded me that the cover letter was the shortest item in each portfolio.

In her 1994 essay "Portfolio Cover Letters, Students' Self-Presentation, and Teachers' Ethics," Glenda Conway observed that teacher/evaluators make judgments about students' selves from their cover letters. Likewise, many of the new graduate instructors in my study experienced portfolio evaluation as an evaluation of their teaching selves by their more experienced colleagues. Conway argues that the cover letter is a performance piece for students, a mask through which to present the best possible student self (89). In much the same way, the new instructors saw their students' cover letters as vehicles with which to present *their* best

possible teaching selves. Their students' letters became performance pieces for themselves as well, but ironically ones that they had little control over, for the quality of the new TAs' performances were determined solely—at least as they perceived it—by the success of others, their student writers.

Michelle's findings had revealed the impact cover letters might have on readers, so armed with that knowledge, the new instructors tried to exert more control over the way their students crafted the cover letter than they tried to exert with any other assignment. In the last days of the semester, these new teachers began talking with students about what the letter of introduction was, what should go in it, and how it should look. Unlike their approaches to the essay assignments, which had been largely mode-oriented and decontextualized, the rookie teachers each took a decidedly rhetorical approach to this writing task. As one teacher put it, "I feel obligated to give them some inside tracks on 'How to Win the Portfolio Game.'" That fact alone tells us something about the power they felt these letters had over the students' (and perhaps their own) fates in the course.

Within an environment of portfolio scoring that many teachers, veteran and new, labeled "arbitrary," "intimidating," "inadequate," and "subjective," these new teachers looked for some way to gain control over the evaluative process not only for their students' sakes, but for their own reputations as well. One way they did that was to encourage students to write a ritualized letter, for to be "different" in their letters of introduction put students—and in the minds of these new, still somewhat unsure instructors, *put themselves*—at risk of falling short of the veteran readers' expectations and ideals. While there were no formal programmatic guidelines for these letters of introduction, the new teachers had heard enough veterans talk about the problems of reading so many portfolios quickly that they discussed the letters of introduction in amazingly similar terms. For each participant in my study, their instructions to students broke down into a few primary categories.

Teachers spent the most time focusing on four areas: physical presentation, content of the letters, the importance of writing a "unique" letter, and doling out cautionary advice. Letters, like essays they said, should be double-spaced, laser-printed if possible, and "professional looking." They cautioned students to avoid "fancy fonts" and "fancy-dancy title pages and stuff," saying "that ain't gonna help you." Their bits of advice about the letter's content were variations on the same themes: what they had gotten out of the course, reflections on themselves as writers, and how their writing

had changed or improved. Without exception, new teachers admonished students *never* to summarize their papers in the letter of introduction, explaining that summary in a cover letter is the “kiss of death.” Ironically, in the midst of trying to formalize this process for students (one teacher even provided a boilerplate which outlined a four-paragraph letter and specified the purpose of each paragraph), the advice teachers doled out most passionately was to find a way to set one’s letter apart from the pack. They encouraged students to “sell your papers, your product” and to “have your own voice and style.” One new instructor even climbed on top of his desk *a la* Robin Williams’ character in *Dead Poet’s Society* to demonstrate the point he had written in all caps on the blackboard: “STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD.” Like other new teachers, he reminded his students that “you’re trying to sell yourself.” And in the frank words of another new teacher to her students, “Trust me, you do *not* want to write a plain old letter.”

It is interesting that new instructors spent the majority of their instruction time giving students lists of “don’ts” for the letters, and all of these alerts were presented as ways to avoid offending the evaluators. The new teachers warned their students against using the wrong kind of humor, or addressing the letter “Dear Friends,” for as one teacher explained somewhat lightheartedly, “we are not your friends; we are your judges.” Others warned them away from asking for A’s, saying sincerely, “this will alienate the readers, and your grade is at stake.” They warned them against using the hackneyed phrases so common in first-year writing that they become the butt of jokes for evaluators. Avoid at all costs, they warned them, such lines as “welcome to my portfolio,” “I hope you enjoy my portfolio,” and “sit back and relax as you read my portfolio.” One teacher explained very carefully the death knell for a student’s portfolio that last phrase rings in the minds of readers. When readers are faced with eight or more hours of portfolio reading, he said, the last thing they want to hear is to sit back and enjoy it. Though he acknowledged that students use this phrase in an attempt to connect with the evaluators, and hopefully win some bonus points in the portfolio game, he leveled with them that “It’s not cute to the readers.”

It was the detail with which these new instructors attended to the matter of writing the letter of introduction that seemed most important to understanding their perception of how grading occurred in this Bourdieuan field. This detail was particularly noteworthy in their instructions about

writing the salutation, the first connection students would make with their judges. When a student asked his teacher, for example, whether to open with the plural “Dear Graders” or the singular “Dear Grader,” the teacher suggested that he not use any form of the word “grader.” “It would be softer,” he explained, to use “Dear Evaluators.” Likewise another teacher spent several minutes in class one day explaining why a comma, rather than a colon, would be a better punctuation choice after “Dear Reader,” since it would “soften it up a bit.” I mention these examples not to suggest that the teachers were too concerned with surface matters; in fact, it’s just the opposite. These new instructors recognized the powerful rhetorical situation these letters represented, and they wanted to be responsible advisors for their students.

The degree to which these teachers experienced portfolio evaluation as something out of their control is also indicated by their consistent use of the term “portfolio system.” From my first contact with them in entrance interviews, the new teachers referred to the local assessment method as a portfolio “system.” They had already heard from their veteran peers that it was an unruly, difficult-to-manage behemoth that drove their process pedagogies rather than existed as a more reasonable way to assess the writing created when attention is placed on drafting, revising, and re-drafting. Michelle, who investigated portfolios on her own, was the only new instructor ever to use the terms “portfolio assessment” or “portfolio evaluation,” even as she wrote about possible ways to revise the “system.”

As my research progressed, I realized that at times the new teachers also used the phrase “the system” to refer to the entire writing program, especially when they were talking about its use of portfolio evaluation. When they were content, or describing some component of the writing program from a detached perspective, they called it “the writing program.” But when they were frustrated with its policies or philosophy, they inevitably described the sources of this frustration as “the system.” Their sense of being “in the system” resonates with the ways prisoners talk about incarceration, for the new teachers described feeling trapped, perceived themselves as having little autonomy, and complained of working in an atmosphere of distrust by their veteran peers. I should add that veteran instructors did not generally refer to the evaluation method with the word “system.” Often they shortened it to “group grading” and left the word “portfolio” out completely.

Conclusion

The slice of ethnographic data I have presented here paints a substantially different picture of the ways new graduate instructors experience portfolio evaluation from those presented in much of the literature on communal portfolio evaluation. For example, while they admit that new TAs often feel anxious about participating in communal evaluation, Elbow and Belanoff argue that this kind of portfolio evaluation “draws teachers together.” They further suggest that such an evaluation practice gives TAs added power, for it allows the teacher to “remove herself from the role of enemy and decreases the chances of a student’s getting mad at her for all the work he has to do.” Instead, they argue, the student can focus her anger on what my participants called “the mean ole group graders.”

The data from my study, though, suggests that this good cop/bad cop scenario may actually be far less empowering for new graduate instructors than we might have previously thought and hoped. Ultimately, all instructors in the program I studied are responsible for assigning their own students’ grades, and while they might have resorted to the good cop/bad cop strategy to ally themselves with students during class and to deflect their students’ anger, the final result was that “group grading” contributed significantly to these new instructors’ diminished sense of authority.

From a Bourdieuan perspective, there are at least two explanations for this phenomenon. First, in this field, pure experience rather than theoretically-informed practice was the more highly valued species of capital. By virtue of years in the program, then, veteran TAs continued to monopolize the evaluation method, helped in part by Michelle’s findings that the portfolio evaluation method was indeed flawed. Thus, they maintained their dominant position and their valuable capital—the ability to read quickly and efficiently, to become “lean, mean grading machines” as one study participant noted. As far as the experienced TAs were concerned, new TAs could gain equal status only by becoming such mechanical readers as well.

A second Bourdieuan explanation of the new TAs’ diminished ability to increase their capital and thus their authority as writing instructors in that program lies ironically in Michelle’s scholarly attempt to question their portfolio practice. In any Bourdieuan field, the “rules of the game” established by dominant players work as symbolic violence to maintain their positions of power and prevent less dominant players from accumulating significantly more capital. Applied to the writing program I

studied, Bourdieu's theory would suggest that despite her initiative and research efforts, the nature of the local portfolio practice limited the ways that Michelle could see the evaluation method and change the distribution of authority among new TAs, veteran TAs, and the writing program itself. For example, rather than beginning with the assumption that communal portfolio evaluation has merit and exploring ways to revise their troubled local practice, Michelle was predisposed to believe that communal portfolio assessment was an irredeemably flawed evaluation method. Thus, her research turned up only those sources that confirmed the experienced TAs' disregard for the "system." As a result, while her perceived increase in academic knowledge allowed her to nominally increase her own capital within the field, other new TAs remained in the same dominated position relative to their more experienced peers.

Given the arbitrary and dissatisfying nature of the portfolio evaluation practice I have discussed here, one might reasonably ask what would have to happen in order for a better practice to emerge? After all, no credible writing program can simply toss out its assessment method without replacing it with *something*. Writing assessment specialists might point to a number of practical changes that would be crucial to make an alternative portfolio assessment method more effective. First, teachers must be accountable for their readings and behavior during scoring sessions. In an effective program, graduate instructors would not be able to walk out of a scoring session early, for example, without facing real consequences concerning their teaching assignments or graduate careers. Second, portfolio evaluation criteria must be made public. Students, teachers, and administrators may not always agree that the criteria are fair, but they must all have access to it, and raters must apply it consistently to all student writing. These kinds of changes would certainly increase the credibility of a writing program and those who teach in it.

But the improvements brought on by these practical changes belie a more unsettling question: is it really possible to sustain a highly effective writing program with instructors who have committed themselves to studying literature and devaluing composition studies? To attempt to do so, I think, one must find a way to help new graduate instructors in literature-based programs re-imagine themselves professionally in a way that encourages the co-existence and even symbiosis of literature and composition. In short, one must work to create within these departments a "composition culture" in which the teaching of writing and the study of

rhetorical theory is intrinsically connected to the work graduate teachers probably *do* value when they enter the program—the reading, interpretation, and appreciation of texts and their impacts on audiences.

Such a culture would also forefront an ongoing discussion of labor issues, forcing graduate instructors to reckon with uncomfortable questions regarding their personal choices, assumptions, and aspirations and requiring faculty to examine their use of literature graduate students to teach writing. Why, for example, are graduate students studying for years to do a job that may not be there when they finish? To what degree are graduate students' expectations about the job market realistic? To what degree might faculty be more concerned more about staffing undergraduate writing courses than providing graduate students with sufficient professional development and allowing them to complete their degrees in a timely fashion? And how are graduate students in programs like these, if they become faculty someday, likely to mentor their own graduate students? Infusing a writing program with an atmosphere that encourages these kinds of questions is a crucial ethical move. Rather than encouraging graduate students to see themselves as “grading machines” who grow more and more to resent their own teaching of writing and to devalue composition studies as a whole, such a move would promote a professional development program that invites students and faculty to be more concerned with issues of professionalism and students' futures in English studies.

Notes

1. Several scholars have cast a critical eye on the use of portfolio evaluation. See especially journal articles by Elbow; Yancey “Looking Back”; Broad; Durst et al.; Sommers et al.; and several pieces in Yancey and Weiser's edited collection *Situating Portfolios*.
2. This research was funded by a grant from the Council of Writing Program Administrators. I am grateful for their support.
3. Perl credits philosopher Eugene Gendlin with coining the term “felt sense,” but I cite her here to acknowledge her particular use of the term in composition studies.

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