

Because Composition takes student writing as its central object of study, our discipline has emerged as the only place in the academy—outside Schools of Education, of course—where teaching is valued both as an activity in itself and as an area worthy of scholarly investigation. Indeed, it is safe to say that Composition understands itself to be and would like to be understood by others as *the* institutional preserve of sound pedagogical practice. We are the ones who are interested in process, not product. We are the ones who have student-centered rather than content-driven courses. And we are the ones who are committed to thinking and learning, equal access, group work, collaboration, and all the other pillars that support the democratic ideal.

It is easy enough to understand why those of us who teach composition have been so taken by this image of ourselves and the work we do; toiling away in obscurity, teaching on the margins of the academy, we have all had the experience of helping non-performing students succeed, and we have all heard tales about how those same students have been willfully neglected by other teachers in other disciplines. We have the evidence of our experience and, because of this, we know in our bones that the heavy demands placed on those of us who must read, assess, and respond to so much student writing differ considerably from the demands placed on our colleagues elsewhere in the system. About this, we are not wrong.

But it is also true that this familiar, reassuring image of the diligent, noble composition instructor haunts much of our scholarship, influencing both what we do and how we discuss what we do. It is there,

*From
Intellectual
Wasteland to
Resource-Rich
Colony:
Capitalizing on
the Role of
Writing
Instruction in
Higher
Education*

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lurking behind all those conference papers and research projects that describe how a pedagogical intervention—a class discussion, a sequence of assignments, a passing comment, a face-to-face meeting—helped release a student into language. This image of the benevolent instructor is there as well when we put together our research projects and when we set about the task of constructing the history of our field. And so, it is with relative ease that we find ourselves moving through the archive to recover our field's great teachers and central figures (Aspasia, Fred Newton Scott, Mina Shaughnessy, Theodore Baird, and Richard Young, say) and then tracing out the steady evolution in thought that the work of these individuals has made possible. This way of telling our story is both comfortable and comforting; it organizes the fractured, chaotic past into a comprehensible whole, and it lends to that past a shape, a direction, and, *a fortiori*, a drama.

It's hard to resist the structuring power of this way of narrating history, where the evolution of our discipline is cast as a story about how, against considerable odds, dedicated individuals managed to work together to battle faceless bureaucrats, an indifferent institution, smug, lethargic colleagues. But, as pleasurable as it would be to tell such "veterans' stories on the porch," as Lester Faigley terms the activity of trading favorable interpretations of the past, in what follows I want to argue for the value of looking at Composition from the perspective of that other central player in the drama of higher education—not the teacher or the student, but the administrator. If in this drama it is the role of the students to resist and of the teachers to liberate, what is the administrator's function? When the administrator surveys the work of composition, what is it that he or she sees? By learning to look at the business of writing instruction from the administrator's point of view, it is possible that, in addition to finding ways both to rewrite the history of the discipline and to redefine the focus of classroom research, we might just uncover ways to materially change the working conditions of those who teach writing. Consider this, then, a thought experiment, an exercise in a different kind of boundary crossing, one that sets out to blur the distinctions between those who teach and those who manage.

Composition as the Perpetual Training of Novices and Newcomers

In Rhetoric and Composition graduate programs, the discipline of Composition appears as a set of engaged and conflicting theoretical positions, a place to foster the ability to read and assess student work, and a profession occupied by an array of thoughtful writers, theorists, and

practitioners; this, at least, is what it looks like to those of us who see the work of writing instruction as a scholarly, intellectually engaging venture. However, from the administrator's point of view, Composition is not its central figures or a reading list comprised of the groundbreaking articles and monographs in the field. It is, rather, composition with a small "c" and it is defined as the business of managing an instructional workforce whose very labor is made necessary by the requirements for graduation and credentialization. In other words, from the administrator's point of view, being in the business of composition comes means being in the business of gatekeeping—of regulating the flow of students into, around, and out of the university. Because the first-year writing course provides one way for the university's central administration to sort through all those entering students, the requirement also produces a staffing problem that the administration must confront: who will teach all those students to write? The most frequent solution to this problem at all institutions with graduate programs—including those with programs in Rhetoric and Composition—is to appoint a tenured or tenure-track faculty member to oversee the temporary employees whose job it is to provide the bulk of writing instruction to the entering students; that is, a faculty member or a handful of faculty members is assigned to manage the labor of the part-timers, the teaching assistants, and the instructors on non-renewable contracts.¹

When looked at in this way, composition begins to lend itself quite readily to numerical description. For example, when I served as the acting director of the writing program at Rutgers University in the spring of 1998, composition was 206 sections of writing courses offered at four different levels of instruction; it required one hundred and twelve teachers, including TAs (who receive health benefits and teach two courses a year) from English and other disciplines, instructors (who teach a 4/3 load, with health benefits, on annual contracts renewable up to four years), part-time lecturers (who teach whatever is left unstaffed for a flat fee, without benefits); it required the administrative support of seven assistant directors, four of whom were charged with coordinating work in the different writing courses and three of whom had primary responsibility for managing a writing center on one of our three campuses; it involved folder review with each teacher at midterm and at the end of the semester to ensure parity of evaluation between courses, relative pedagogical alignment, and the delivery of an acceptable level of instruction; it required a support staff that includes an administrative assistant, three full-time secretaries, a part time secretary, a handful of work study students, and countless undergraduate writing tutors. At the end of the semester, once the 112 teachers had finished teaching the 206 courses and the seven directors and

I had reviewed the student folders, all this instructional and supervisory work ended up generating some 6,000 grades, 81 of which were appealed (a process that involves an additional day of folder review, commenting, judging, adjudicating split decisions, and resolutions), 12 of which were granted.

When looking at composition as something immersed in all these layers of instruction, administration, oversight, and review, one can't help but realize that the pedagogical project blinking atop the tower at command central is not necessarily the one received in the outer provinces. That is, for all the excellent, dedicated teachers who diligently do their jobs, one inevitably finds the persistence of less competent instruction: there are those who teach for a semester or two and then disappear from the system; there are those who disagree with the program's pedagogical approach and consistently hand in performances that are just above mediocre; there are the last minute hires who have been inadequately trained; and there are those who, for whatever complex set of reasons and/or circumstances, prove unequal to the task in any given semester. No amount of supervision or mentoring will change the fact that, at a large university such as ours, the composition classroom underwrites the work of graduate students, many of whom, reasonably enough, see their teaching responsibilities as detracting from their scholarly endeavors. No amount of enthusiasm or collegiality—often the only capital a writing program administrator has to expend—will guarantee that either full-time instructors or part-time lecturers will feel included in the program's larger pedagogical mission. However hard one may work to eradicate these problems—and the director, the associate director, and all the assistant directors work hard indeed to do so—the variable commitments of the teachers in any given semester to the task of providing writing instruction of the highest quality means that students inevitably find themselves in the hands of a labor force composed almost exclusively of temporary workers on their way to other destinations. Most of these teachers do a good job. Some don't.

From the administrator's point of view, then, composition is not simply the theories that prevail about how best to teach others to write or the disagreements that preoccupy the field, nor is it best captured by narratives describing triumphs in individual classrooms, where an isolated instructor introduced an innovation that enabled a handful of students to respond in a more lively, engaged way to a challenging assignment. Composition is also an unevenly trained, unevenly committed workforce; it is the litigious labor of pursuing plagiarism cases; it is an ongoing series of meetings with disgruntled students and protective parents; it is plaintive

memos to chairs and deans seeking additional support to handle the ever-growing entering classes; it is X number of students and Y number of teachers and Z number of grades. Composition as a specific pedagogical approach does not disappear in this view, but the preeminent status accorded to pedagogy as *the* organizing force behind what occurs in the classroom is rescinded in order to bring into view the other forces that structure the work of writing instruction. Obviously, one would hope that an administrator would have pedagogical commitments of some kind (though this, we must all concede, is not necessarily a requirement for the job), but whether the administrator does or does not possess such interests, taking the administrator's view of composition allows one to acknowledge that what happens in the classroom is as dependent upon local admission standards, the available labor force, and the prevailing salary structure as it is, say, on what texts happen to be assigned in a given section or which version of the writing process a given teacher holds in the highest esteem.

By taking these larger forces into consideration, it becomes possible to recast composition's master narrative so that it includes the discipline's actual labor force, one that is, by and large, oblivious to all but the most local forms of composition studies, one that sees itself, like so many of the students who pass through the required composition courses, as on its way to something bigger, better, more important.² Along with this inescapable aspect of what it means to work in composition, there is, as well, the ready evidence that such work is not particularly valued by all of the students who are compelled to attend these courses. There are the hallways at the end of the semester, littered with graded folders, unclaimed and then eventually disposed of. There is the abiding belief among teachers that there is, somewhere, a frat file filled with re-usable papers, a persistent sense that there is a place out there, like www.schoolsucks.com, where students meet to undermine the business of learning how to write. There are the conferences with the parents of the students who have failed—the parents who speak of their child's high SAT scores, their sense that composition is just a requirement, a hoop to move through, an impediment to a successful career in pharmacology. There is the flattening of the writing process into the writing regime: prewrite, write, revise, move towards clarity, the unifying theme, the iron clad thesis. There is, in short, the sense from the students and many of their teachers that composition instruction ought to be more instrumentalist and less exploratory, on the one hand, and, more personal and less academic, on the other.

The prevalence of these working conditions helps to explain why our field has, of late, been preoccupied with "resistance"—ours is a field

where many who are present would prefer to be somewhere else doing something else, some place where they might reasonably hope to receive something more than the prospect of additional part-time work as a reward for a job well done. There are many ways to respond to this fact of life in composition: one can ignore it, bemoan it, insist against all evidence to the contrary that it isn't true—or at least that it *shouldn't* be true. While I am sure that each of these responses has its virtues, I am equally convinced that official accounts of the theory and practice of composition would be significantly altered *and* improved if they commenced with the admission that there is considerable play between whatever one might mean by an ideal pedagogical practice and the actual modes of instruction available to a given teacher, at a given institution, at a given time. In a program as large as ours, for example, we have had to concede that not all of our teachers are terribly interested in either composition or pedagogy as areas of possible research. And this, in turn, has meant shifting the supervisory emphasis away from a fine grained analysis of what happens in the classroom to a careful consideration of the quality of the writing the teachers are able to elicit from their students. So, when assessing the teaching that our instructors have provided, we don't go into the classrooms and we don't demand loyalty oaths either. Instead, twice a semester, we meet with the teachers and look over the work their students have produced. We pay particular attention to the failing students, the teacher's comments, the assignments. And what we learn over and over again during the labor-intensive process is that the presence of the same textbook in the various classrooms does not guarantee a homogeneous experience of Expository Writing 101 for students across the university, nor does the mandatory orientation for new teachers, nor does the required seminar for first time TAs. Inevitably the program fragments into heterogeneous sections, where work of variable quality and interest is generated. All students in the required course use the same reader; they all write and revise six papers; they all are subject to the same grading criteria. And yet, upon inspection, it is clear that not all of the students have taken the same course. Even in a program with a relatively coherent pedagogical mission and a well-trained and committed staff eager to disseminate that mission, composition resists reification and becomes, instead, compositions.

It is not hard to imagine a preferable situation, one where teachers felt such a sense of community that they regularly convened to discuss recent work in the field and to assess a range of innovative pedagogical practices, one where it was possible to retain and promote good teachers, one where working with first-year students was understood to be a

privilege rather than a chore to be abandoned at the first opportunity. But the truth about our program is the truth about composition studies more generally: one does the best one can with the materials at one's disposal. Or, to put it another way, work in composition is inevitably pragmatic and thus, like all good teaching, the administration and dissemination of writing instruction necessarily involves a series of compromises and concessions. While this inescapable aspect of our working conditions is typically cast as lamentable—i.e., in a better system, one wouldn't have to deal with an unwilling workforce, low wages, and a disengaged student clientele—it is also true that the discipline's abiding interest in pedagogy emerges out of these same working conditions. That is, composition has become the preeminent site for thinking about the theory and practice of teaching precisely because of its high turnover rate: to be *in* composition is to be endlessly involved in providing instruction to beginning students and/or the training of new teachers. Thus, since composition's labor force and its clientele are always predominantly novices, the field is forever faced with the task of introducing newcomers on both sides of the lectern to the idea of the writing process, sequenced assignments, group work, journals, revision, peer review. In such an environment, when the conversation veers too far afield from the daily business of moving teachers and students through the course, someone's bound to say, "This is all very interesting, but what am I supposed to do on Monday morning when the papers are due and no one will talk?" To work in composition—to read its journals, to go to its conferences, to train its teachers—is to work in an atmosphere saturated with such practical concerns; to work in composition is to be endlessly harassed by the mundane problem of learning how to makes one's words do things in the world.

Who Should Teach Writing? Survival Strategies in the New Service-Oriented University

I must admit that I, too, tire of the "what do I do on Monday" question and am keenly aware of its potentially conservative effects. (It's not hard for me to imagine, for instance, the reader who finds little of value in the project of re-assessing the role that the bureaucrat plays in the master narrative of the classroom.) Nevertheless, I think the reliable question about Monday morning has considerable heuristic value, because it helps to keep composition mired in the real: while elsewhere in the academy, the desire to know the practical implications of any given piece of research is often met with derision, research in composition is driven, in large part, by an interest in determining what is to be gained by the adoption of any given approach to writing instruction. Thus, whenever

research and scholarship is pursued in the field, it is implicitly understood to be done in the service of some overarching pedagogical mission. Consequently, no matter how lofty the aspirations of any given project in the field—linking postcolonial theory with the basic writing classroom, say, or postmodern theories of the visual with computer-assisted instruction, or liberatory pedagogy with the fight against globalism—ultimately, to be in composition, the project in question must include an obligatory bow towards the practical. And this is because, at some point, we all want to know what difference all this word-shedding is going to make in our daily lives as teachers of entry-level students, of beginning graduate students, of degreed individuals new to the field.

With the ongoing professionalization of composition, some have come to see the persistence of this commitment to serving the needs of novices as more and more of a burden. Sharon Crowley, one of the most vocal advocates of the “Abolitionist” position, insists that composition must sever its ties to the first year required course if it is ever to have a chance of escaping from the basement of the academy. The problem, as Crowley defines it, rests squarely with composition’s commitment to the “instrumental service ethic of the required composition course,” which has “kept the traditional goals of disciplinarity—the pursuit of knowledge and the professional advancement of practitioners—beyond the reach of composition studies until very recently” (253). This commitment to serving the university’s need to sift and sort through the entering class has not only severely hampered the growth of composition as a discipline in its own right, it has also forever linked work in composition to the exploitation of the vast majority of its teaching force. The first-year requirement, Crowley’s argument goes, not only makes *everyone* who teaches composition appear intellectually inferior to their colleagues in the other disciplines, it also makes all writing programs into dens of the worst sorts of inequities, where “rhetoric slaves” are forced to do degrading work under appalling conditions (118ff.). If composition could only sever its ties to the albatross of the first-year course, it would then rise to a more enviable level of intellectual rigor and disciplinary purity: no longer would valuable time be spent, for instance, on “one of the more appalling surveillance functions of Freshman English—the placement exam,” functions which Crowley elsewhere terms, “discursive gangbangs” (244). Rather, freed of the burden and the stigma of the required course, armed with their PhDs in rhetoric and composition, writing specialists could begin both to generate advanced, respectable research and to develop an “elective vertical curriculum” capable of meeting the needs of those students who wish, voluntarily, to receive extensive undergraduate training in “public discourse” (263).

Whatever the limits of Crowley's vision for composition may be, who but an utter beast could resist the attraction of eliminating one's involvement with the business of exploiting others? And this, surely, is the primary appeal of Crowley's latest proposal: it promises those who work in composition greater prestige and less guilt, more research and less service work. But, however attractive it may be to think that washing our hands of the first-year requirement will prove beneficial to those who survive this academic version of corporate downsizing, I think embracing this narrow model of professionalism will only serve to guarantee that those who remain in composition after the purge will be returned to the furthest margins of the academy. The "rhetoric slaves" will have been liberated, the "discursive gangbangers" will have come to an end, and the disciplinary machinery will have been freed—all to produce what exactly? What would the work of composition be if it were not centrally concerned with the issues I've raised here—the training of novices and newcomers, the pragmatic business of finding practical applications for theoretical insights?

Obviously, in the rhetorical situation that Crowley sets up in her collection of polemical essays, where all nonbelievers are, ipso facto, supporters of slavery, the most prudent response is to remain silent. (And, for those who study the dynamics of educational reform, there's another reason for remaining silent as well: it's clear enough that historically polemics generate a good deal of talk but end up changing very little, so why bother responding?) In this case, though, I believe it is worthwhile to engage with Crowley's argument because I share her desire to think through what it might take both to improve the working conditions of writing instructors and to extend the intellectual scope of work in the field. But, whereas Crowley believes our best bet is to abandon the ethic of service that binds us to the first-year course and to pursue advanced research to bolster our disciplinary status, I've come to think the discussion of what composition might become would be greatly enriched if we began by questioning the very assumption of specialization that has made our professionalization possible. That is, I think we would do well to ask the kind of question an administrator might ask about composition: does one really need to have an advanced degree in the field to be a good writing teacher? Aside from conferring credentials, what is it that graduate programs in Rhetoric and Composition actually provide? Or, to put this another way, exactly how many graduate courses does one need to take in order to become a proficient writing teacher?

Posing these questions helps to flush out the central assumption shared by all members of the profession: namely, that the training provided

by the discipline is valuable and necessary. And yet, in the case of writing instruction, there are many reasons to withhold one's assent to this credo. First, there's ample evidence that one need not have a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition to do a good job teaching entry-level writing courses: much of the burden of writing instruction is currently handled by those who lack a doctorate in writing—first-year graduate students, part-time teachers with masters degrees, and teachers from other disciplines. Second, there's ample cause to doubt the notion that the acquisition of the PhD in Rhetoric and Composition establishes either the ability or the commitment to do a good job of teaching; indeed, it's safe to say that the professionalization of composition has produced its fair share of degree-holders who are every bit as committed to teaching graduate students and to staying out of the first-year classroom as are their counterparts from the other disciplines. And finally, there's the pesky historical fact that composition was created by people who came from other disciplines—English, of course, but also linguistics, communications, anthropology, and creative writing, to name the most obvious examples.³ Any discipline must at some point face the logical antinomy of its moment of origin—that time when it was brought into being if not out of nothingness, then out of a concatenation of contingent forces and chance encounters between seemingly and/or suddenly like-minded individuals. The older a discipline gets, the easier it is to efface the randomness of these events and to superimpose on the past a narrative involving necessity or destiny or foresighted individuals. But, in the case of composition, our field's moment of origin is still too close at hand to manage such a collective feat of forgetfulness. Indeed, many of the senior members in our field came from the time Before Composition. Ann Berthoff, Peter Elbow, Andrea Lunsford, Donald McQuade, David Bartholomae, Nancy Sommers, Patricia Bizzell, Mike Rose, Linda Flower, Joseph Harris, Kurt Spellmeyer, Louise Smith, John Brereton, Shirley Brice Heath—not one of these folks has a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, and yet each one has exercised considerable influence over the shape and direction of the field.

My feeling is that composition has been very well served by this eclecticism and that it will be ill-served by buying into the logic of credentialization that informs the other disciplines. While it may seem reasonable to restrict work in composition to those holding advanced degrees in the field, think for a moment about what would be made possible if the first-year writing course were reconfigured as one staffed by interested teachers from a wide range of disciplines. What would happen, in other words, if the work of composition were not understood to belong exclusively either to departments of English or to graduate programs in

Rhetoric and Composition? From the administrative point of view, this would mean that teaching in the writing program would cease to be work largely reserved for English TAs or Rhetoric and Composition TAs and instead would become work that was available to any graduate student from any discipline who applied and agreed to receive training in the field. This in turn would mean that work in composition and rhetoric could become truly interdisciplinary—that is, interdisciplinary not just through the texts assigned in its courses but also by virtue of the labor force it trains and employs.

The benefits of going in this direction are, I believe, unmistakable: a writing program that sought to employ an interdisciplinary work force could begin to generate a curriculum that was more fully responsive to the needs and concerns of all students in the required course and in the advanced, elective courses. That is, a writing program of this kind could cease trafficking in texts and assignments that appeal almost exclusively to those training for careers in English Studies or in Rhetoric and Composition and turn its attention, instead, to developing curricular materials that capitalize on the remarkable pedagogical possibilities that are made available by the first-year course's uniquely heterogeneous population. And by rethinking who could or might be qualified to do the work of teaching composition, it becomes possible to reconsider where this work should be done (should composition be housed in English departments or not?) and what the content of this work should be (should *all* students be taught the persuasive essay? close reading? cultural critique?). In sum, then, looking at composition from the administrator's point of view allows one to ask a question that must be of central concern to anyone who is committed to teaching: whose interests are served by the current dominant practices for organizing the labor of writing instruction?

In raising this question, I mean to draw attention to the fact that, by and large, the curriculum for the first-year writing course has been designed—reasonably enough—to serve the needs and reflect the interests of the course's labor force. And, broadly speaking, this has meant that the first-year course has tended to fetishize the power of language, fostering the belief that the key to social change rests with effective argumentation or the mastery of academic discourse or the voyage to one's inner sanctum. But, if we re-imagine composition not as a set of texts, a series of important figures, or a prescribed position on the writing process, and recognize, instead, that the field's sole claim to coherence comes from its institutional position as *the place* where first-year students, regardless of disciplinary interest or political leanings, are collected together, it becomes easier to entertain the possibility that the best way to re-invigorate the field, both

intellectually and professionally, may be to make it more responsive to the students it serves. And, one way to make this happen is to open up the teaching of the course to people outside the disciplines of English, and Rhetoric and Composition.

I realize that this suggestion is bound to seem like a breach of disciplinary solidarity, but I think we need to ask what is gained by restricting the instruction of undergraduate writing to those who have received advanced training in English, Rhetoric, or Composition. While I readily understand the benefits of reserving this work for people who have earned advanced degrees in these disciplines, I believe these hiring practices ignore the fact that writing plays a central role in the advanced work of nearly every discipline: like graduate students who have been trained by programs in English, Composition, or Rhetoric, graduate students from other disciplines have the experience of pulling together a mass of evidence, organizing and shaping that material, and putting it into a form that is recognized and valued by those who work in their disciplines. I believe that anyone who has had a writing experience of this kind who also possesses *the desire* to work with entry-level students on their writing has the potential to do a good job in the composition classroom. All such a person needs to succeed is some additional training in writing process pedagogy and ready access to an experienced and helpful support staff—and these are services that *any* writing program should be well positioned to supply.

I didn't always think this way. Indeed, when I came to Rutgers seven years ago and learned that the writing program offered teaching assistantships to graduate students from history, philosophy, economics, sociology, anthropology, art history, comparative literature, and political science, I was as surprised as anyone trained in composition would be. And yet, over time, I came to see the benefits to this arrangement. First, and foremost, the presence of these graduate students in our program upset our assumptions about what constitutes "good writing." Faced with an audience of eager, but skeptical, beginning teachers, we had to acquire new ways of describing and justifying the content and the requirements of expository writing. The ensuing discussions generated a wealth of pedagogical materials, a range of new research courses, a number of textbook projects. All of this new work became necessary because, as we began to listen to the teachers from the other disciplines, we came to understand that their frustrations were not with the course, per se, or with the goal of introducing students to academic discourse. Rather, what troubled these teachers was the required textbook's overriding commitment to discourse analysis and our program's abiding interest in close reading.

There are other ways to read and other ways to argue, these teachers told us again and again, ways that are highly valued elsewhere in the academy and that ought to be available for inspection and evaluation to students in the introductory course.

The presence of these teachers helped us to realize something else that had utterly escaped our attention. While what I have referred to here as composition's master narrative serves to highlight the low-status of our work, it also manages to conceal the fact that writing programs actually possess resources that may well be highly-valued elsewhere in the university—namely, teaching assistantships. The critique of English that is usually mounted by those who work in composition is that English thrives off of the required course, using it as a place to warehouse all its graduate students while it goes about the merry business of generating trenchant analyses of post-colonial relations, the master-slave relationship, and economies of exploitation. And the truth is, historically, composition *has* been a colony of the English department. But, what may have escaped our attention as a result of our field's determination to keep our embattled status uppermost in our minds at all times is the fact that we are a *resource-rich* colony: all the work that is created by the first-year requirement and that is performed by teaching assistants is work that is of considerable interest to other, resource-starved departments looking to fund students in their graduate programs.⁴

It's certainly entertaining to imagine scenarios where composition stages its own Boston Tea Party and breaks free from the tyranny of the past. But, as long as that hoped for event remains unrealized, I think it more fruitful to focus on how those who administer writing programs might use their control over these valued resources to assume a more central role in the university. That is, the question that most interests me as I consider where composition has been and where it might go is this: what would happen to work in the field if composition understood its role to be better serving both the students and the entire university community? What we are just beginning to discover at my institution is that composition has much more to bargain with than it might at first seem. It has all those teaching assistantships. It has access to all those entering students. And it has its commitment to pedagogy. These are considerable assets, ones that, if managed correctly, could establish composition as *the* preeminent site for training undergraduates and their teachers how to master the business of writing within and across the disciplines.

But what of graduate work? What role would it play in this new, service-oriented writing program that employs not only teachers from English, and Rhetoric and Composition, but also teachers from other

disciplines? For my part, I would like to see advanced training in Rhetoric and Composition come to incorporate sustained work in acquiring what I have called here “the administrator’s point of view”; that is, to complement the intensive study of language and pedagogy, I would like to see the addition of courses that focus on management theory, historical and ethnographic work on how institutions change, labor studies, and unionization, for starters.⁵ It is not difficult to anticipate the critiques that will rise up in response to such a proposal. To go in this direction will surely mean reducing a purely intellectual endeavor to mere job training. To encourage teachers to learn the ways of administrators will necessarily result in a corruption of the labor force, saturating the field with the kind of repugnant managerial ethos that thinks of students as consumers and education as info-tainment. If there’s anything the academy is good at, it’s producing people who are horrified at the very notion that education might be treated as a business.

While our shared revulsion at the idea that market forces might be allowed to impinge on the world of ideas dependably binds us together as a community, it also prevents us from effectively responding to the changes that are going on all around us. The corporate bulldozers arrive and we retaliate with heartfelt, but clichéd, proclamations about the power of literacy, the importance of reading, the joys of a good book. If those of us committed to providing high quality instruction by teachers fairly rewarded for their labor don’t learn to respond to the changes the academy is undergoing in other, more compelling ways—that is, if we don’t learn how to make ourselves vitally useful in this shifting environment—we are willfully consigning ourselves and the discipline itself to oblivion.

Although I have deep reservations about the current tendency to grant extraordinary powers to the act of representation (change the signifier, change the world), I do believe that the future of composition studies will be shaped, in large part, by the ways that we decide to represent the work of composition to ourselves. This is not to say that learning to look at composition in the ways I’ve suggested here will *guarantee* the survival of the discipline, for no one can say with any certainty whether or not, over the next twenty years, the increased use of the World Wide Web and proliferation of distance education institutions will do away with the composition classroom as we have known it. However, looking at composition from the administrator’s point of view can enhance our sense of what role composition might play in the evolving university, opening up new areas for research and pedagogical innovation, thereby allowing the discipline to change as the form, function, and mode of delivering higher education changes. Learning how to think like an administrator also

enhances one's ability to fight more effectively to preserve what one values about the work that is or might be done in the composition classroom. There is much to be gained, in other words, by thinking about composition as something other than a course taught by a large congregation of like-minded individuals, equally committed to the task of delivering the highest level of instruction. For, from the administrator's point of view, "composition" is not the research that shows up in our journals or the talks given by our most eminent figures. It is, rather, a locally-incarnated entity, whose course content and intellectual goals are almost entirely shaped by a host of utterly contingent forces and issues—administrative styles, institutional expectations, the residential pedagogical culture, the available work force, and the perceived ability of entering students. In this realm, where pragmatism reigns supreme, the future may well belong to those who can tell the best stories about what their discipline has to offer—to the students, who need to be attracted and retained; to the teachers, who need to be intellectually engaged and justly remunerated; and to the administrators, who increasingly find themselves in need of palpable, credible evidence that their students are being well served.

Notes

¹ And, of course, at institutions without graduate programs, the work of providing writing instruction falls most heavily on teachers of English and then on others whose specialties reside in the humanities, a situation that tends to promote programmatic incoherence. As I discuss, composition's general reliance on a labor force trained in English has profoundly shaped the discipline's sense of what could or should be accomplished in the first-year writing course.

² At my institution for example, very few of our nearly 200 teachers have received additional training in composition beyond a week-long orientation and the one-semester graduate course offered by my department; many of our teachers have had less training than this. This is not necessarily a bad thing; it would only appear so if one felt that extensive reading in the research on composition and rhetoric was necessary to become an adequate teacher of the first-year course.

³ See Patrick Bizzaro's recent essay, "What I Learned in Grad School, or Literary Training and the Theorizing of Composition," for a discussion of the literary dissertations written by scholars who have subsequently gone on to play a central role in composition's disciplinary success.

⁴ And, as the Boyer Commission's report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education*, makes clear, access to first-year students is an increasingly important commodity in the evolving university: "research universities need to be able to give to their students a dimension of experience and capability they cannot get in any other setting, a research experience that is genuine and meaningful" (38). Composition, which is central to nearly all undergraduates' first-year experience, can provide the place where such invaluable experiences are fostered: we have the students, we have the small classes, and we have long exposure to service work.

⁵ "The Portland Resolution," the Council of Writing Program Administrators' response to the Wyoming Resolution, stipulates in its discussion of what constitutes adequate preparation for the job of managing a writing program that familiarity with business practices is a "desirable supplemental preparation" for the job.

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