

Letter from the Editors

Often WPAs feel as though they are pulled from more sides than they knew they had by the issues facing them and demanding informed attention. The articles in this issue reaffirm such feelings: they offer advice and plans for dealing with program assessment, GTA resistance, dual-credit initiatives, the WPA mind-set, and, well, the experience of having had Ted Kaczinsky in a composition class.

In “Defining Assessment as Research: Moving from Obligations to Opportunities,” Peggy O’Neill, Ellen Schendel, and Brian Huot make a strong case for treating writing assessment as “a central concern of WPA work” for the simple reason that “assessment has material effects for us as well as our students.” Their point is that WPAs tend to think of assessment—when they do think of it—as an administrative task rather than as a “knowledge constructing” activity, which to their minds is more than just a missed opportunity, it is a potentially dangerous choice. The scope of their argument is deceptive, as it reaches beyond the technical aspects of assessment into the identity of the WPA.

In “When Graduate Students Resist,” we turn to yet another broad area of concern for some WPAs, how best to prepare graduate students for the profession. Based on ten years of “action research,” Sally Barr Ebest tests two theories about graduate student resistance to new pedagogical approaches and draws conclusions that should be useful to WPAs and graduate faculty with similar mentoring responsibilities. Theoretically grounded in recent educational theory, Ebest uses the distinction between rhetorical, pedagogical, and epistemological forms of resistance to classify specific behaviors she observed in her graduate students and to organize her approaches to dealing with such resistances.

In a move similar to the one made by O’Neil, Schendel, and Huot, Nancy Blattner and Jan Frick ask us to overcome our doubts about dual-credit composition courses and instead, when faced with such initiatives, take critical ownership of them. The authors know the arguments against such courses, but they also know—all too well—the economic and political forces driving such trends, and for those WPAs in states with similar initiatives on the table, Frick and Blattner offer a good administrative model. “Seizing the Initiative: The Missouri Model for Dual-Credit Composition Courses” provides both a local view and a state-wide view of the issue, explaining a program that joins the University of Missouri – Kansas City with West Platte High School in Weston, MO, and describing the genesis of a set of state-wide guidelines for the delivery of dual-credit composition courses.

In “Are We Having Fun Yet? Necessity, Creativity, and Writing Program Administration,” Lynn Z. Bloom asks the question, “Are We Having Fun Yet?” Based on selected email from colleagues and her reading of recent edited collections about WPA work, she concludes that, yes, we are having fun, albeit with a few qualifications. Not intended to be an answer to Laura Micciche’s discussion of WPA “disappointment” in the March 2002 issue of *College English*, Bloom’s essay weaves a number of familiar voices into an account of the joys and satisfactions that can accompany being a WPA.

“Dangerous Reading: The Unabomber as College Freshman” is, in the author’s words, more of “a short journalistic piece.” Edward M. White reveals that he taught first-year composition to Ted Kaczinsky at Harvard in 1958, and though, after 44 years, White understandably can’t remember much about the experience, he nevertheless feels compelled to ponder what role he may have played in Kaczinsky’s intellectual development and the extent of his responsibility as a teacher of composition.

We hope you find the range of WPA scholarship represented in this issue itself as engaging and provocative as the individual essays.

Dennis A. Lynch
Marguerite Helmers
David Blakesley

