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The previous list is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive, but contributions must be appropriate to the interests and concerns of those who administer writing programs. The editors welcome empirical research (quantitative as well as qualitative), historical research, and theoretical, essayistic, or reflective pieces.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Changing the First-Year Writing Curriculum . . 7
Christine Farris, Guest Editor

A Changing for the Better: Curriculum Revision as
Reflective Practice in Teaching and Administration . . . . . . . 10
E. Shelley Reid

Revisiting College Composition
within a Local “Culture of Writing” . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 28
Diana Royer, Moira Amado Miller, Meredith A. Love,
Jennie Dautermann, Mary Jean Corbett, Rhoda Cairns,
and Parag K. Budhecha

Writing Programs and Pedagogies in a
Globalized Landscape . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 49
Margaret Himley

Beyond First-Year Composition: Not Your Grandmother’s
General Education Composition Program . . . . . . . . . . . 67
Juanita Rodgers Comfort, Karen Fitts, William B. Lalicker,
Chris Teutsch, and Victoria Tischio

Language Matters:
Rhetoric and Writing I as Content Course . . . . . . . . . . . 87
Debra Frank Dew

First-Year Writing in First-Year Seminars
Writing across the Curriculum from the Start . . . . . . . . . 105
Gretchen Flesher Moon
Rethinking Research Writing: Public Literacy in the Composition Classroom . . . . . . . 119 Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem

Distance Education and the First-Year Writing Curriculum . 132 Laura Brady

From First-Year Composition to Second-Year Multiliteracies: Integrating Instruction in Oral, Written, and Visual Communication at a Technological University . . . 149 Dennis A. Lynch and Anne Frances Wysocki

Reviews

Remembering a Past—Revising the Present . . . . . . . . . 171 Suellynn Duffey

James D. Williams, ed. Visions and Revisions: Continuity and Change in Rhetoric and Composition

New Directions/Critical Reflections:
The Past, Present, and Future of Writing Center Research . . 173 Tara Pauliny

Paula Gillespie, Alice Gillam, Lady Falls Brown, and Byron Stay, eds. Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation

Announcements . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 175

Contributors . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 176
Introduction
Changing the First-Year Writing Curriculum

Christine Farris

At our professional conferences and on the WPA-L discussion list, there is seldom an opportunity to get a complete picture of the changes fellow WPAs have made in their first-year writing courses. Whether these changes are the result of shifts in disciplinary knowledge, leadership, population, or resources, or come about through assessment or other institutional initiatives, thicker descriptions of curricular revision can help us, as composition scholars and administrators, better understand change as a complex connection among material conditions, systems, theories, and practices.

What stands out for me in working with the articles in this issue are the similar ways, whatever the original impetus for change, in which WPAs worked closely with colleagues, paid attention to the experiences of students and teachers, redefined institutional aims, and renegotiated their courses and composition’s position intellectually and politically within their local cultures—in each case making curricular revision less of an imposition and more an opportunity for collaborative reflection and strengthening of claims for the value of writing. The authors in this issue address in their analysis the larger contexts for their reforms, which include revising first-year writing to incorporate cultural studies, freshman seminars, writing across the curriculum, technical communication, community outreach, and distance learning.

E. Shelley Reid calls attention to the rhetoric of curricular renovation—how we might acknowledge both the benefit as well as the difficulty of change. Ultimately, she concludes that it is possible to view course revision as a “process narrative,” focused not just on student outcomes but on the reflection that is central to praxis in our field.
Diana Royer and her colleagues at Miami University report how their self-study brought on in part by external administrative pressure, enabled them, in teaching clusters, to critique and redesign the second “writing about literature” course in their sequence to focus on textual interpretation, a better fit with the first course’s emphasis on inquiry and writing as publication. Also a reaction to the external pressures of institutional redefinition, Margaret Himley discusses how the Syracuse writing program’s response to a new vice-chancellor’s challenge to their disciplinary expertise clarified their move outward from the “domestic classroom” emphasizing students’ writing processes toward a more “globalized classroom” that acknowledges how texts (including students’) “move through production, distribution and circulation.” Juanita Comfort and a faculty team from West Chester University outline how an increase in the hiring of tenure-line composition faculty enabled them to collaborate as administrators and appropriate their school’s general education goals in the redesign of a cultural studies writing curriculum with a “ripple effect” throughout the campus. Debra Dew offers yet another way in which the transformation of the conditions for writing instruction contributes to disciplinary legitimacy in her discussion of what is involved in substituting the general writing skills course with a writing course with a “specific content”—language matters and practices. In a similar vein, Gretchen Flesher Moon discusses how first-year seminars—topical courses emphasizing writing, conversation, and critical thinking as “the intellectual work of all disciplines”—offer an alternative to the first-year composition abolition debate. Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem share how they have revised their research writing course to include more meaningful inquiry into literacy practices, thus contributing to the perception of writing as a public act involving the larger university and local communities. Also in a renegotiation of another popular higher education initiative, Laura Brady outlines the pedagogical and administrative risks and advantages of agreeing to deliver an online distance version of the first-year writing course that would meet the needs of adult learners while remaining true to curricular goals adapted from the WPA Outcomes Statement. Finally, Dennis Lynch and Anne Frances Wysocki describe how a particular “commingling of forces and concerns” of a university task force revamping general education made possible the design of a first-year course combining oral, written, and visual communication with civic participation. Their involvement in the reforms provides greater visibility for the rhetoric and technical communication program’s ongoing work and now gives graduate students opportunities to “think through in their teaching” the current theories about multiliteracy and media with which they work.
These days no one would disagree that the approaches of particular composition programs and the contents of first-year courses are determined by much more than just the visions of particular WPAs or the adoption of certain textbooks. As the authors in this issue demonstrate, new agendas and forces at work within English departments and institutions make it more necessary than ever to reexamine the means of production and delivery and renegotiate our curriculum and professional expertise. These authors make clear, however, how thought-provoking and transformative this negotiation can be.

Indiana University-Bloomington
A Changing for the Better: Curriculum Revision as Reflective Practice in Teaching and Administration

E. Shelley Reid

[I have] directed a writing program [. . .] in which all instructors picked their own texts, and [an]other in which common texts were selected by faculty for different groupings of first-year composition courses. [. . .] Conversations among instructors [. . .] about their approaches to the courses are richer and more productive when they’re working from a common text [. . . because it] facilitates their exploration of how best to achieve the expressed goals and objectives for the course.

–Christina McDonald, James Madison University

When we moved away from a common text here at Louisville, I noticed that conversations among teachers became richer and more interesting, since people were creating their own curricula. [. . .] I would never advocate that any institution adopt one method or another [. . .] but I’d be wary of assuming that conversations about teaching and collegiality of faculty are tied to using a common text.

–Brian Huot, University of Louisville

Seems to me one result [of having few extensive quantitative studies] is that we have virtually no “proof” that some [writing] classroom activities we swear by do “work” in general. Such as peer group feedback. Or having students revise papers for a new teacher response. Or using no evaluation at all until a final portfolio. The list could go on: in-class pre-
writing? having students write process memos about each paper? Directive vs. less directive feedback? Direct teaching of genres? [. . .]

I used to think I knew how to teach college writing. As I near the end of a career I sometimes wonder if all we have is lore.

−Richard Fulkerson, Texas A&M University–Commerce

As I encounter articles or conference presentations about shiny new curricula, I often react with a mixture of enthusiasm and anxiety. I alternate between excitement about the possibilities and skepticism about gift horses or trends; between admiration for the leadership, scholarship, and hard work of the writers or presenters, and worries about my own, or my colleagues’, curricular inadequacy. This mixed reaction has intensified in the last four years as I’ve become a WPA and been involved in a program-wide curriculum change. In the midst of these conflicting reactions, I’ve begun reframing my questions to reflect on composition’s rhetoric of curricular-renovation: What do we talk about when we talk about curriculum change? Do these narratives match others that are prominent in the discipline? Might there be other ways to structure the conversation to acknowledge both the difficulty and the benefit of change itself?

The quotations at the start of this article present two conversationally accepted but often-overlooked aspects of curricular change. One, as the pair of comments by Christina McDonald and Brian Huot implies, is that we have no clear way to judge whether one curriculum generally helps support writing teachers better than another. A second, as Richard Fulkerson notes, is that we have very little direct evidence to demonstrate that one writing curriculum accomplishes significantly more for student writers than another. Beyond reemphasizing the need in composition studies for more qualitative research, these two ideas also reveal problems with taking a comparative, product-oriented approach to curriculum-reform discussion. My recent experience with curricular change has suggested ways in which seeing curriculum revision as a process-narrative, a story of the changing itself, more evocatively illustrates the benefits of curriculum revision than a story that focuses on student-outcomes. Focusing on changing instead of, or at least as much as, change, may benefit teachers, administrators, and programs as a whole by encouraging the kind of reflective practice that we see as central to scholarship and practice in composition. In this essay, I draw on my experiences as a composition program administrator at Oklahoma State University (OSU)—as well as on my understanding of change-paradigms elsewhere in composition studies—to explore how changing can offer valuable opportunities to strengthen teachers through better sup-
port programs and more opportunities for reflection and leadership. If we define changing as an expectation rather than only as an imposition, and we approach it as a multifaceted process, we can provide teachers and administrators with opportunities for productive leadership, for the “richer, more interesting” conversations that McDonald and Huot praise, and for authentic collaboration. As a result, I argue, taking a process-approach to curriculum revision could benefit WPAs and writing programs strongly enough that we should engage in curriculum changing more regularly and comprehensively than our instincts, energy-levels, political-radar, and pedagogical principles generally tell us to.

**Local Changes, Multilocal Changings**

Since change is situation-specific, curriculum-revision narratives often begin with a review of local conditions. In this essay, as I address ways to alter our rhetorics and goals rather than addressing exact steps and results, I use my home institution’s experiences as examples rather than models. I thus hope it will matter rather less than usual that OSU is a land-grant institution of 26,000 students; that our Board of Regents requires all state university students to complete two semesters of college writing; that the OSU Composition Program has a tenured director, a tenure-track associate director, and four graduate-student assistant directors (ADs); that our 100 sections of composition each semester currently share common texts (something that is required by upper administration) and assignment sequences; or that classes are staffed almost entirely by about 45 TAs and adjunct instructors. It may be useful—yet I hope it will not be limiting—to know that OSU TAs take a one-semester, three-credit pedagogy course and participate in monthly composition pedagogy discussion groups throughout their TA tenure, and that all composition instructors attend three days of orientation sessions each year. It may be helpful, also, to understand that between January and July of 1999, our program gained two new faculty WPAs, director and associate director, as well as three new graduate assistant directors.

In addition, since resistance is a primary concern for people who propose change, it may be relevant that three local conditions particularly helped enable this curriculum changing. First, our writing courses are taught almost entirely by TAs, adjuncts, and visiting instructors, whose transience and—frankly—lack of institutional power can make starting a large-scale change easier. Second, the revision was initiated by a tenured faculty member in a college and department that generally support and do not micromanage the composition program. Third, due to the work of an earlier WPA, our program already had several institutional structures that
support change, including a composition curriculum that already met most of the goals of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. In an argument about change, all these resources would be crucial to deciding how and whether a curriculum could be adapted from one locality to another. Yet choosing to initiate changing is so fraught with difficulties even in the best of situations—indeed, people in the best of situations may have a particularly low motivation to begin changing—that, in an argument about re-seeing the change-process, I provide these descriptions to add local color rather than to establish necessary preconditions.

Finally, to help focus attention on the more generalizable change-process rather than the local results, in this article I do not examine the details of OSU’s curricula, revised over the summer of 1999 by a committee of graduate TAs, instructors, and WPAs. After all, as Huot’s example shows, program-wide changing can be instituted (at least once) as an opening rather than an altering of curricular options; WPAs can also initiate changing through a discussion of outcomes without designating one particular means for reaching them. Instead, then, I would ask you to help de-localize my arguments by calling to mind, as you read, one or two generally accepted approaches to teaching writing that you currently choose not to use—portfolios? computer-integrated writing classrooms? teaching multiple or different genres?—and then imagining changing a curriculum in order to use those approaches as a foundation. You should envision a curricular sea-changing as opposed to small adjustments and tinkerings, opting for revision rather than editing. I suggest only three limitations to your imagined program. First, in order to conduct a thought-experiment about the benefits of changing curriculum, we should focus on writing programs that are already providing minimally competent writing instruction. Classes or programs that do not even enter the realm of the WPA Outcomes Statement or the Portland Resolution will still need directed, goal-oriented revision. Second, I am not recommending that anyone change blindly or haphazardly or tyrannically, nor recommending change without informed belief that the new curriculum itself will serve students and teachers well—if not conclusively “better.” Third, while I argue that we should undertake change more often than we currently do, I do not recommend continual wholesale changing without adequate time for reflection and assessment. Recommending change for changing’s sake is not the same thing as undertaking “curriculum reform [as] a hollow ritual performed every 10 to 15 years for reasons that have more to do with public relations than pedagogy” (Bartlett A-12). Well-considered curriculum changing has everything to do with pedagogy, at least as much as the curriculum itself does.
And good pedagogy is one of the largest challenges that WPAs face, particularly given the likelihood that some or all of the people with whom we teach writing are new, overworked, underinformed, and/or even resistant when it comes to teaching writing. Instigating thoughtful, collaborative curriculum-changing at a program level, rather than encouraging and waiting for changes to occur at the level of individual teachers’ pedagogies, can support significant pedagogical development—by modeling changing as something that teachers can and should do, by providing collaborative support structures to minimize teachers’ risks, and by increasing opportunities for teachers and WPAs to reflect on what they are doing. Changing curriculum might thus be seen as a vital part of teacher education and program development, and perhaps even as a regular expression of thoughtful program leadership.

**Changing as “Enabling Condition”**

Changing and its benefits are hardly new ideas to writing teachers. We recommend change to our students almost as often as we breathe: “Revision is the key to good writing.” Moreover, we frequently ask students to change their writing style or approach for the sake of becoming more flexible writers: by the end of first-year composition, says the WPA Outcomes Statement, students should be able to “write in several genres.” We also help new composition teachers and new writing across the curriculum teachers change their teaching styles and adapt to their local environments.

Often in these recommendations for change we imply a *progress* model of change, wherein the purpose of change is to continually improve the product. Elsewhere, our disciplinary rhetoric remains *process*-oriented, emphasizing that we are teaching people the value of the change itself. We explain how much we respect the change-process, how much we enjoy the challenges of complexity and uncertainty, particularly when we talk about teaching. Chris Burnham and Rebecca Jackson, for instance, valorize changing by referring to John Dewey’s *Experience and Education*: “While a novice [teacher] may respond to the unexpected with confusion and fear, a professional welcomes the unexpected as an opportunity in Dewey’s sense to ‘stop and think,’ to [. . .] enter the ‘heart of reflection’ (64)” (159). Indeed, explains Thomas Recchio, uncertainty “is an enabling condition for learning and teaching” (255). Our discussions about curriculum, however, tend to circle back toward the progress model: we celebrate the endpoint of the change. We speak of “a change for the better” in ways that suggest that other programs or teachers could attain those benefits if—perhaps only if—they made the specific change(s) that we did, rather than encouraging our colleagues, as we encourage our students, simply to try chang-
ing. Simultaneously, we worry extensively about “forcing” our colleagues to change teaching practices at all. Our official program narratives thus often overlook the benefits that changing for the better has brought us. New stories about curriculum revision would better reflect and mesh with our other pedagogical and scholarly goals, allowing us to supportively involve teachers in the practices of change so that they experience changing as a requisite and rewarding part of good teaching.

In his 1999 study of writing teachers, George Hillocks concludes that the kind of changing we say we value in classroom teaching is a rare event: “[E]ach teacher substantially retains [a] teaching identity established on the basis of his or her constructed knowledge of students, goals, curricula, pedagogical content knowledge, rhetoric, and epistemological stance” (124-25). Indeed, writes Hillocks, teachers “are unlikely to change unless they see a clear need” (126, emphasis added). Betty Bamberg extends Hillocks’s argument that reflective practice is necessary to enable the insight that precedes such a need:

To move beyond lore, practitioners must engage in the kind of inquiry that characterizes [Donald] Schön’s reflective practitioner. However, [Stephen] North claims that “practice qualifies as inquiry less than ten percent of the time” (34) because the overwhelming demands of teaching a full load of composition courses leave the teacher with little time or energy for inquiry. As a result, teachers fall back on “ritual and routine” (34).

However, creating conditions that promote reflective practice among TAs is no easy task. [...] Unless a program’s practices and conditions foster reflection, little is likely to occur. [...] For a culture of reflective practice to exist, it must first be built into the TAs’ initial preparation and then sustained through programmatic structures and practices that occur after the practicum. (149-50)

In thinking of the causality this way—reflection promotes adaptation—individual WPAs would need to begin by establishing a “culture of reflective practice”: for example, by promoting such events as colloquia, peer group discussions, and teaching portfolio workshops. Presumably, the reflectively prepared teachers would then learn (and want) to change on their own. Experience tells us, though, that even well-prepared teachers with a reasonable workload and opportunities to reflect upon their teaching might still not perceive Hillocks’s “clear need” to change their curricula.

Yet surely there is a cycle at work here: reflective practice leads to change, which in turn should lead to more reflective practice, to Schön’s reflection-in-action. We can thus open up the process by seeing the causality loop-
ing back upon itself: significant pedagogical change (even, as in Huot’s case, if the new curriculum is an absence of a common curriculum) can be one “programmatic structure” that catalyzes reflective practice. Moreover, if curriculum revision is designed from the start to be collaborative rather than top-down, it embodies the kind of “social process” that Kathleen Blake Yancey sees as central to reflection, one that requires “structure, situatedness, reply, [and] engagement” (Reflection in the Writing Classroom 19, emphasis added). Broad-based curriculum changing thus offers unique opportunities to combine what we know about reflective practice with what we know about collaboration. In other words, entering the event-chain by first initiating a collaborative change-process not only provides immediate stimulus for reflection, defamiliarizing the “ritual and routine,” but allows teachers opportunities for collaborative responsibility and leadership in both the new curriculum and the changing that accompanies it.

In this model, moreover, the WPA need not be the sole fount of reflective practice; participating teachers join the WPA in reflection and conscious pedagogical decision-making. So instead of seeing program reform as a side-effect of the high-priority curriculum change, WPAs could learn to see that curriculum change doesn’t merely require, but also provides unique opportunities: teachers faced with new texts or curricula can be open to and even demanding of stronger support and guidance; making a common effort at changing allows contributions from a wide range of teachers; making visible the work of changing helps leaders negotiate for additional resources for teacher-support. Such significant changing can thus open up new leadership roles for teachers, strengthen the peer-mentoring resources of the program and revitalize professional development sessions. Finally, a WPA willing to invest in curriculum changing can help her teachers acquire habits of mind that they might not acquire on their own—habits that we frequently describe, with more certainty than we have about much that is curricular, as beneficial to writing teachers and students alike.

FLOWERS ALONG THE ROAD: ILLUSTRATIONS FOR A CURRICULUM CHANGING

Our experiences at OSU reveal several kinds of benefits to teachers, unrelated to the exact curriculum change, that may accompany a significant change-process, opportunities that taken together constitute a kind of planned Hawthorne Effect. I make these observations, of course, through relatively clear hindsight; the original reasons for changing the OSU curriculum were result-oriented and our collaborations were driven at least in part by a wish to minimize the effects of and resistances to our changes. Thus the “clear need” that motivated many of these beneficial reactions was externally imposed, and many instructors were unhappy with both the
specific curricular change and the general state of changing it. “It was very hard [for me . . .],” explains one senior instructor; “During that transition period, when all of us were learning, I think many of us were way outside our comfort zone.” In a program that had not changed overall curriculum within most instructors’ memory, the instigation of a new curriculum, even a collaboratively-generated one, was at best an uncomfortable jolt. Yet this artificially-created “need” also sparked unlooked-for opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and leadership, unexpected flowers alongside a road not originally planned as a scenic route.

Bringing People to the Table

Inviting teacher-participation in planned curriculum redesign is one fruitful way to involve a wide range of teachers, not just those who “try to improve [their] teaching every semester” anyway, as one of our senior TAs notes. One challenge is that teachers may not see their participation as authentic and worthwhile—and thus may not really be “at the table” for a significant change—unless the WPA has first committed to and made public a plan for changing. At OSU, the Director’s announcement in Spring 1999 that the composition curriculum would change brought a first round of teachers into the process, as six TAs volunteered to join the director in a summer-time curriculum-revision working group. The next opportunity for teachers to join in discussions about the new curriculum came during our fall orientation program. This program had been available as a reflection-fostering experience in previous years but had not benefited as strongly from teachers’ actual need to develop new material. Evaluations of more recent orientation sessions have been very strong, with a large majority agreeing that sessions “provided opportunities for me to reflect on my teaching.” But since no evaluations were collected before Fall 2000, we have only anecdotal support from instructors to suggest that the 1999 sessions surrounding the new curriculum seemed “more focused [than before], because the [new] curriculum demands more of students, instructors, and administrators” as one TA puts it, or that those sessions did not suffer the problems with attendance at “the ostensibly mandatory orientation sessions” that another instructor recalls from earlier orientations. Yet we do know that the curriculum was different enough in Fall 1999 that teachers at orientation needed both the structural information provided by the WPAs and TA leaders, and the opportunity to brainstorm additional assignments and adaptations during small-group breakout sessions. They were at the table.
Developing Support Structures

Initially, the OSU program administrators saw adjustments to orientation and other teacher support programs as just another requirement of curriculum change, agreeing with Yancey that “major changes in what is being taught require [. . .] different ways of preparing TAs” ("The Professionalization of TA Development Program" 71, emphasis added). However, curriculum change also provides opportunities to expand teacher-support structures beyond the obvious compensatory steps. One turning point comes when teachers, too, conclude that “Instructor support is vital [. . .] particularly with changing curriculum” or that a new curriculum “requires more support in order to make instructors comfortable [. . .] in the classroom,” because with their high interest in and need for support programs comes the participation and enthusiasm necessary to sustain such efforts.

For instance, as WPAs we could have initiated a new peer-observation program on our own, but without the 18 people (including 10 veteran teachers) who volunteered that first semester to visit and be visited by three other composition instructors, it might have gone nowhere. Teachers’ need for support in a new curriculum seemed then to be a significant motivation for overcoming fears about having observers in their classrooms: one TA indicated that the program director could be renamed “Ali Baba” for having created “the forty thieves” of new teaching strategies. Likewise, we could certainly have developed our new Website and filled it with expanded teaching resources, hoping that teachers would use it. Yet websites promoting new pedagogies can gather cyberdust as easily as hardcopy notebooks can; our Website gained its first strong reputation among our instructor population by presenting comprehensive teaching support for the new curriculum. When questioned about what would help them most if faced with another curriculum change, nearly two-thirds of our instructors recently said that they would want (and presumably use) more supporting documents made available on the Website.5 The catch in such situations, including McDonald’s and Huot’s, may be that such gains are temporary. In our current stable curriculum, our faculty and graduate student WPAs worry regularly that instructors don’t use the Website frequently enough. Likewise, the fact that the number of volunteer participants in the peer-observation program has declined in subsequent years (despite positive evaluations of the experience) suggests that necessity may be the mother of participation—and thus of improved support programs.6

Opportunities for Collaboration and Leadership

Paradoxically, the freedom to change one’s own curriculum or pedagogy—and to do so in an authentically collaborative atmosphere of reply and
engagement—may for some teachers require a direct program-wide intervention such as a new curriculum. At OSU in 1999, many opportunities for group discussion existed, from informal discussions among office-sharers to required professional development group meetings, but the passage of advice and lore tends to be one-directional and normative rather than truly collaborative and reflective. Collaboration and changing, on the other hand, feed one another in another lively cycle that can be entered at either point. Compositionists have argued at least since Kenneth Bruffee’s touchstone analysis that fostering collaboration can, if done well, help people become more open to reflection and change.

Conversely, a significant changing also stimulates—indeed, often requires—collaboration. Two senior TAs responding to our surveys note that when groups address issues relating to recent or future curriculum change, the tone of such discussions is “much more serious” or “much more energized” than at other meetings. To be sure, as one TA remarks, many of the participants are energized negatively because they would prefer to design their own curricula (if they had to change at all)—and in our survey, sixteen OSU instructors, including most of our newest TAs, indicated that they would prefer to embark on designing a new curriculum “on my own” with full autonomy. Interestingly, however, these numbers were matched equally by instructors who indicated either that they would prefer to change curriculum “working with a small group of teachers collaboratively designing a common syllabus” (thirteen respondents) or, indeed, would prefer to do so within a program “that had already developed a model syllabus” for them to follow (three respondents). Even considering the vaunted autonomy of academia, where independent curriculum control is held out as a strong benefit if not a basic right, curriculum changing may nevertheless provide one of a very few situations where collaboration is an accepted and even desired approach to pedagogy. In the case of resource-limited teachers who may need relief from the steep initial and continuing investments required by a more individualized change-process, it may be fair to say that curricular collaboration is as much a benefit as autonomy is.

A significant changing can also open up leadership roles for teachers, thus strengthening the peer-mentoring resources of the program and the professional development opportunities for teachers. At OSU, TAs and instructors who had been involved in the collaborative curriculum revision and had piloted the new courses had the best information about how to implement the new texts and assignments we were requiring. They could step into leadership positions backed directly by their experience rather than only by the WPAs’ stamp of approval. In addition, the TAs who collaborated on what is essentially a Web-based, program-specific teachers’ manual did so to meet a real curricular need: the change-process created
both audience and purpose for their leadership. Moreover, our new mentoring program, which pairs new TAs with one of our Assistant Directors for a year, in some ways grew out of an increased sensitivity to teachers’ displacement and inexpertise: three of the four ADs who helped develop our new-instructor mentoring program in Summer 2000 had informally mentored other teachers through the curriculum revision. Writes one, “discussions provided on various curricula [. . .] enabled me to articulate my own unease, [. . .] probably making me not only a better teacher but also a more sensitive mentor and colleague.” If writing teachers should be writers, then perhaps mentors who support flexibility and change should regularly participate in, and even lead, change.

Opportunities for Reflection and Continuing Adaptation

Most importantly, for those of us who focus on preparing and supporting teachers, curriculum changing promotes pedagogical reflection, perhaps more frequently than reflection promotes change or adaptation. Our survey revealed that a strong majority of responding teachers (eight of twelve) who have participated in curriculum changing can quickly articulate specific ways in which new curricula have provided them with valuable strategies they had not considered before. They also comment that “discussions [of] various curricula have enabled me to think through various approaches” to teaching, or that teaching multiple curricula has “made me stretch how I teach a particular essay/reading,” or that the “mental shift” of preparing new coursework “forces one to reevaluate past performance—successes and failures—and improves one’s teaching.” Moreover, instructors who have changed curricula strongly articulate their sense that the changing itself, regardless of the curriculum, has been a significant benefit. Six out of nine veteran instructors responding indicated in nearly identical language that, while switching curricula is stressful and time consuming, having taught with several curricula has allowed them to “broaden [their] teaching activities,” to “feel more confident,” and to confidently anticipate moving “out of OSU’s comp program and into others,” where they may be “required” to change by circumstance or student need, even if not by administrative decree.

These respondents might not be typical of the change-resistant teachers Hillocks worries about—but it is also likely that their experiences with curriculum changings have deflected some tendencies toward stasis that might otherwise have dominated their future teaching experiences. Many of these instructors acquired their adaptability by moving from one institution to another, yet a curriculum changing within a single program could produce much the same experience, provided it encompasses a broad enough shift in curriculum. And as their responses showed, experience with
changing makes further changing more palatable. In our recent program-wide survey, half of the responding instructors were willing to allow that a new, unnamed program-wide curricular change in the next year would be “perhaps a good idea, depending on exactly what changes got made”; another third, primarily the more-experienced instructors, agreed that such a change would be “a good idea in principle.” And over half indicated that they would want to participate in a curriculum-design committee. I have no doubt that a substantial number of these instructors are hoping for a particular change in the curriculum rather than just an opportunity to change something—yet the answers leave me hopeful that our changings are helping to create flexible, reflective teachers whose pedagogical competence is not tied to the exact nature of a single curriculum.

A Culture of Changing: Resentments, Risks and Rewards

Programmatic curriculum changing also offers, of course, opportunities to anger, alienate, repress, and perhaps even harm instructors. These risks are particularly high at the crucial moment when a WPA first decides to initiate coordinated motion in a community that has been stable or even entropic. It is difficult for any leader to convince her colleagues that changing itself is for the better, and unsurprising then that we as WPAs often promote new curricula primarily as constituting better products for students, as OSU’s director did in Spring 1999. The six TAs who worked over that summer to redesign the curriculum were, of course, among the most satisfied with the change; many instructors were decidedly less sanguine about either the process or the product. “I [did not] feel I had much input into the program’s shape,” remembers one former TA: “Going from significant autonomy as a senior instructor [. . .] to what seemed like a kind of lock-step was very difficult.” Others have focused their distress on the curriculum itself: “I dislike the [. . .] emphasis this change has instituted,” explains one instructor; the program should “drop the trendy nonsense [and] teach writing about lit[erature],” argues another; and a third worries that “[t]he current system creates a sense of drudgery for students.”

Our experiences make it clear that simply shifting curriculum-revision narratives will not erase either the general or the local difficulties of leading a composition program. Certainly OSU’s program of curricular changing has had no exemption from resistance or resentment: our instructors regularly criticize both the curriculum itself and the policy of requiring it in all classrooms; individual instructors decide not to participate in collaborative change or professional development meetings, or choose to disregard aspects of the required curriculum; the directors are seen (and sometimes see ourselves) as having implemented some changes too quickly and others not quickly enough, with too little input or too many cooks in the kitchen.
Our graduate student and faculty WPAs worry a lot in weekly meetings about the ethics and politics of balancing program cohesion with our respect for (and need of) individual instructors and the innovations they can contribute. The illustrations in the previous section can only illuminate opportunities that grew up alongside the uneven road we traveled, not serve as testimony that we have succeeded consistently where others have not. I do argue, though, that WPAs will face many of these challenges whether or not they lead their programs through curricular change: negotiations between writers and readers, expressions and conventions, autonomy and collaboration, individuals and institutions are of central importance in our profession even at our most stable moments.

And ironically, a substantial risk for a WPA establishing a culture of changing comes after an initial changing is “complete” or at least satisfactorily stable. At the crest of our curriculum changing, our instructors’ wide-ranging contributions gave us (perhaps undue) confidence that they had entered with us into a process of regular, collaborative, reflective changing. In Fall 2000, for instance, we asked our professional development groups to take on the task of gathering and reviewing texts that could be adopted for Composition 1 in 2001-02. While not all TAs invested the time to peruse booklists and examination copies (though many did), we found most of them contributing to the lively discussions of what we might all want in a new text. As we narrowed the field of anthologies, we also invited groups of adjunct instructors for similarly reflective discussions: the prospect of “having a say” in course design motivated a strong majority of our adjuncts to find time in their busy schedules to review texts and attend at least one meeting. Two texts, both of which were promoted by TAs from among a wide open field of alternatives, emerged as clear leaders in the final recommendations, and the faculty directors chose one of them for the required text; as important as the final outcome was our sense that collaborative changing had become normal and even energizing rather than only burdensome.

However, in our fourth year of changes at OSU, even with the continuing contributions of our teachers, there are programmatic signs that some of the benefits of the initial change are fading: unless we undertake another formal, program-wide, significant pedagogical revision, deliberately reinvigorating our culture of changing, I think we stand to lose much of what we have gained. For instance, teacher interest in and input to our process of choosing or revising textbooks has declined in energy and volume. In contrast to the dozens who wrote up reports on textbooks in 2000, we had to scour the offices in 2002 to find eight instructors willing to help us work on our next custom-published reader (even with the lure of small development-grant salaries). Meanwhile, innovative handouts created three years ago are
now standard program lore, used by dozens of teachers who might otherwise be creating their own pedagogy, and survey responses from teachers who were given the opportunity to revise an essay assignment in Spring 2003 showed that most had modified or borrowed an assignment already in use rather than designing a new one. Finally, although volunteer mentors for our class visitation program for new TAs—that is, teachers willing to be seen as experts by novices—are increasing in number, volunteer participants for our peer-visitation program—teachers interested in seeing and “stealing” new ideas—are decreasing.

Moreover, the influx of new people into OSU’s composition program is lessening the effects of the change culture. Of the six instructors who helped redesign the curriculum four years ago, only one is still teaching in the program. Fully a third of our instructors for the Fall 2002 semester did not remember the shift to our second anthology, much less the more significant curriculum changing that preceded it. They, or at least a critical mass of them, need to feel that they have had a stake in discussing and changing curricula, or we risk losing the collaborative and reflective aspects of our change culture and risk having to make our next change as much of a curricular jolt and ethical quagmire as the 1999 change was. This seems almost counterintuitive, since, like Wanda Martin and Charles Paine, WPAs often expect that the energies of new writing program personnel will generate a kind of perpetual motion, bringing change to us: “No matter how much knowledge, enthusiasm, and creativity we have [. . .] we all get stale. We get conservative, protective of our ideas and projects.[. . .] [T]here’s nothing like new people with new ideas and experiences to keep the writing program moving forward” (231). An influx of new teachers or administrators can indeed bring energy and even a sense of changing to a writing program. Martin and Paine’s scenario raises several questions for me, however: whether WPAs can and should rely on a constant flow of energies from contingent faculty; whether the efforts of a few new individuals are enough to provoke program-wide reflection as well as new routines; and whether sporadic alteration in rhythm or focus is enough to create an ongoing culture of changing and reflective practice. Our experiences at OSU suggest that there is no automatic or perpetual change agent available to relieve a WPA of the responsibility for changing. To be sure, if our only goal were to have a program running smoothly, we might be approaching it; however, if an additional goal is to continue to generate a culture of reflective, adaptive practice, we are losing the battle.

Like teachers, then, program administrators sometimes need incentives and structures in order to deliberately lead programs into additional change, and to do so often enough to make changing one of the program’s “practices and conditions.” True, sometimes change and instability can seem the
norm in our lives, even without the additional disruption of curriculum revision: in an ordinary year, TAs graduate; temporary instructors leave or cannot be funded; faculty rotate through on their composition shift; enrollments surge or wane; administrative and accreditation demands change like the tides. On good days, WPAs facing such pervasive instability can say that we not only acknowledge but enjoy the diversity of personnel or experience: Donna Qualley remarks about her “perpetual cycle of teacher preparation” that “[i]nterestingly, what might have become a Sisyphian nightmare for the WPA turns out to be the occasion that ensures our program remains dynamic” (279). Yet practicing only reactive change may leave us feeling stuck back in Sisyphus’ worn shoes, shifting into the cynical outlook that Richard Miller sees a need to caution WPAs against, in which “all that’s left to look forward to in the long walk to retirement is a life spent letting everyone else know that everything in the system works together to prevent innovation. That change isn’t possible. That hope is for the young, the naïve, the foolish” (8). Without directed, purposeful changing, change looks more and more difficult and out of our control; leading a culture of changing, reflection and innovation can make “the long walk” seem much more appealing.

Not every WPA will want to or be able to enact curriculum changing in the ways we did at OSU, but the changing is more adaptable than is any single curriculum. Earlier in this essay, I asked that readers imagine curricular scenarios to help de-emphasize the locality of OSU’s curriculum revision; in closing, I would like to return the favor, imagining a small starter-set of scenarios in which WPAs take the risk of embarking on a pathway of constant, deliberate curriculum changing:

Pairs of graduate students in a program-administration seminar are assigned to research and present on three or four curricular approaches to composition and how they meet Outcomes Statement goals, as a step toward encouraging curricular generalists who are open to changing.

A new WPA at a large university, early in her tenure, announces an impending curricular change and convenes a committee dedicated to changing the curriculum significantly—not as a power play or a step to suppress wayward teaching but as a normal leadership and program-development effort.

A continuing WPA and a plurality of his program’s adjunct instructors agree on a regular timeline for collaborative revision—not just review—of program goals, ensuring that nobody is taken by surprise or is left to teach an objectionable curriculum for an unspecified period of time.
A WPA working with TAs and/or faculty who do not follow a common curriculum decides to facilitate, support, and reward groups of teachers who agree to design and implement a new curriculum collaboratively in their classes together and share their experiences formally with others in the program.

Shirley K Rose and Margaret Finders describe one kind of teacher education as “postmodern”: “[an approach] that acknowledges the instability, provisionality, and contingent nature of what constitutes good teaching practices [. . . one] that seeks not closure and definition but a commitment to keep thinking together” (85). Their words apply equally well to the practice of program administration, particularly to the design and implementation of writing curricula. If we can refocus both administrative and scholarly attention onto the processes of changing curricula rather than only on the results, and prepare ourselves better to advocate changing as a key feature of writing program curricula, we bring one more element of writing program administration into synch with the rhythms of writing and teaching. We can also help enliven writing programs and support writing teachers, expanding the scope of reflective practice in writing education and thus improving—in addition to whatever benefits come from a specific curriculum or approach—our students’ learning experiences in our writing classrooms.

Notes

1 If it helps, you may imagine that our textbook shifts were more significant than moving from The Prentice-Hall Guide to The St. Martin’s Guide, but less of a curricular stretch than moving from The Prentice-Hall Guide to Ways of Reading; you might imagine us replacing 50-75% of common essay assignments in each semester with assignments that had different generic or rhetorical bases.

2 This is not to discount public relations opportunities altogether. At OSU we certainly informed deans and student advisers that we were adjusting the curriculum to better serve university students’ needs—statements that could truthfully be made about many kinds of curriculum changing. Moreover, large-scale program-changing can look like more work than daily program maintenance, even if the difference in time-investments is small. Given the daily challenge of representing the intensity of WPA work to program outsiders, perhaps we should do more to emphasize what Roland Barthes calls the “spectacle” of our work, using curriculum changing as one aspect of the “gestures, attitudes and mimicry which make the intention [or the workload] utterly obvious” to anyone watching (18).

3 The term Hawthorne Effect denotes any improved productivity that results not from the specific change but from the increased attention and/or enthusiasm of supervisors; the term is still often used to explain an experiment gone wrong, the sociological equivalent of an uncontrolled placebo effect. To be sure, if the
goal of implementing a new curriculum is to discover whether it, regardless of the quality of instruction, better encourages and supports student writing, then any kind of Hawthorne Effect is a problematic variable to be minimized. However, if we acknowledge that engaged, energetic teaching is crucial to improvement in student writing, then we ought to be designing change-processes that capitalize on any such effect.

4 Quotations from OSU instructors are taken from questionnaires completed by 28 of 51 current and former composition instructors during February 2003, reflecting on both the original curriculum changing in 1999 and on the idea of curriculum change in general.

5 “Add more supporting documents to the Website” (for teachers to peruse on their own time) was the most popular response to this question, outdistancing options such as “require fewer outside time commitments” and “add half a day to orientation.” This pattern of answers may indicate both a preference for support and a resistance to changing collaboratively.

6 In Spring 2002, the cross-visitation program had sixteen participants: all but four were first-year teachers, who are now required to participate. Out of eleven who returned an evaluation sheet, all but one participant listed multiple benefits gained by visiting and being visited. Seven teachers indicated that they would volunteer to participate after completing their required year; however, actual volunteer numbers have generally been much lower.

7 Professional development groups were asked to discuss four issues: How the book(s) they recommended met extant curriculum expectations, could meet instructors’ needs for flexibility, would meet students’ needs, and compared to others they had reviewed. The final recommendation sheets asked for a “list of my top 2 or 3 choices” with explanations; the intelligence and thoroughness of the qualitative remarks both indicated the intensity of pedagogical reflection and factored strongly into our final text choice (making a precise designation of “which book won the vote” nearly impossible).

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Revisiting College Composition within a Local “Culture of Writing”

Diana Royer, Moira Amado Miller, Meredith A. Love, Jennie Dautermann, Mary Jean Corbett, Rhoda Cairns, Parag K. Budhecha

For the past four years at Miami, we have been engaged in the process of rethinking and redesigning our first-year writing curriculum. As a testament to the important and complicated role writing plays across the university, we worked in response to both external and internal pressures to collaborate among our whole faculty—literature, creative writing, and composition/rhetoric teachers alike. Through these years of review, assessment, collaboration, piloting, testing and revising, we have struggled with different kinds of assumptions about what the courses should and should not be or do. We have conducted extensive focus groups to assess what our constituencies and stakeholders inside and outside the department consider essential. And we have performed several elaborate pilot projects to test the viability of the master syllabi designed by teams representing various instructor ranks and specialties.

Midway through our attempts to collect campus data, redesign curricula, and please everyone from the university president to the parents of our first-year students, we engaged David Bartholomae and Andrea Lunsford as consultants to review our focus group summaries and come to campus for discussions with the department. In response to our focus group data, Bartholomae suggested that the “culture of writing” on our campus was problematic, perhaps even absent (“Report to Miami”). His recommendation that we should define and develop a campus-wide culture of writing became a particularly helpful mantra for us all as we struggled to keep our collective minds on a common goal. We also found it to be a particularly useful metaphor to guide our thinking. Even though we were finding out quite explicitly just how different the various stakeholders’ notions might be
about what constitutes “good writing,” and what we as a department and
the university as a whole thought the composition program should provide
by way of writing instruction, we could all agree to pursue the building and
enriching of a culture of writing both within the department of English and
across the entire university. One example of the usefulness of Bartholomae’s
term surfaced when we addressed Andrea Lunsford’s recommendation that
we develop a writing center that would differ substantially from our learn-
ing assistance center, which offers tutorial services for students encoun-
tering writing difficulties in their classes. While this idea had received mixed
support in the department for years, we found our goals somewhat simpler
to articulate once we associated a center with building a culture of writ-
ing across campus and emphasized faculty development in our requests for
support. Of course, “culture of writing” also became something of a wry
inside joke in the English department itself, where our struggle with first-
year writing brought us at various times to dissent among ourselves, com-
mon indignation with outsiders, clear commitment to collaborative pro-
gram-building, and exasperation at the amount of time and energy this
effort asked of us.

This article attempts to give voice to some of the processes and the per-
sonal stories that emerged throughout the course of this multi-year proj-
ect. Certainly others can say “been there, done that”: our story is one that
many readers will recognize. Yet we hope to offer certain insights about
how teachers learn to teach and how English departments negotiate the
choppy and contested waters of defining ourselves to ourselves, as well as
to others. We intend to highlight some of our most important struggles,
give examples of valuable curricular ideas, and describe both the positive
and negative outcomes of this complex endeavor. We also want to highlight
the multiple perspectives of our design and implementation process, in the
hope that we may have learned things worth sharing.

The Lay of the Land: Some History and Context for a Journey
of Re-Vision

It’s a familiar story: discontented faculty, campus criticism (especially from
the then-new president), internal self-doubt, lack of confidence in our
results, inconsistency across sections, new instructors learning to teach on
the fly, conflicts over ownership of writing on campus, political questions
about expertise and shared responsibility for student writing, conflicting
views about the actual needs and competencies of our students, demands to
teach standard edited American academic English, and hopes to encourage
student voices and autonomy in student writing both inside and beyond
the classroom. Some people called it a PR problem, others said we were too
faddish, while one quoted us terrible student prose that had appeared in the campus newspaper. Many wondered why we didn’t seem to be teaching “writing” anymore (and when pressed, defined that term in a myriad of inconsistent ways). The issues were not unique or new. But the clamor would not be quieted easily this time. Bartholomae’s and Lunsford’s reports resonated with our situation and we took it quite seriously. We had to answer some initial and obvious questions for ourselves. What is/constitutes our campus writing culture? How can we invent/exploit/improve such a culture? Can or should curricular development influence the writing climate? Who should be responsible for envisioning, creating, and developing Miami’s writing culture? We tried to address as much of this as we could by incorporating the concerns of various stakeholders across campus and by attending closely to the most powerful scholarship in our own field.

Now, several years since we received our initial focus-group input (from faculty outside the department as well as English faculty, graduate and undergraduate students), we have piloted several versions of the ENG 111 and ENG 112 curricula and have adopted revised syllabi for both, incorporating some modest connection between the two courses. We have received internal funding for an emerging writing center that focuses exclusively on university-wide faculty development projects on using writing in content area courses. We believe some of these big ideas are beginning to work, though we are less sure about others.

The contributing authors to this article represent several of the constituencies that we knew must be involved in this project from its inception. They represent views from some of our most important internal stakeholders: both developers and instructors of the reinvented composition curriculum, the two composition directors who convened the steering committees, and individuals who come from several ranks and specialties in the department. Alphabetically, by first name they are:

DIANA—Director of College Composition for later stages of the process

JENNIE—Director of College Composition in early stages; two-time pilot instructor; current Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences

MARY JEAN—Director of Graduate Studies; member of the ENG 112 design team; pilot instructor

MEREDITH—Graduate student; two-time pilot instructor; ENG 112 pilot revision team member; ENG 111 revision team member
WPA 26.3 (Spring 2003)

Moira—Graduate student; two-time pilot instructor

Parag—Graduate student; Assistant Director of College Composition in early stages; member of the ENG 111 design team

Rhoda—Graduate student; three-time pilot instructor

**Where Do We Go From Here? Theory, Assumptions, Traditions**

In English studies, we have experience struggling to devise curricula that honor the role first-year writing courses play both in the field of composition and in the university. But members of the field have rarely agreed on the ideal focus for a curriculum. Should a composition course focus on forms—as in the modes of discourse, or specific genres invented for the course; or should it emphasize traditional literary genres—the memoir, the personal narrative, the academic essay? Should a composition course emphasize purposes—an author’s aims, an audience’s needs, persuasive occasions; or should it reflect our heritage in literary scholarship—interpreting texts as models and examples? Should it build on students’ personal experience, or highlight personal and social conflicts to inspire student-centered assignments? Since many of these approaches have proven useful to both instructors and students, and no one ideal focus seems to work for everyone, our department, like our field, tends toward eclectic methods that juxtapose the theoretical, the practical, and the experiential.

Miami’s experiments with “process models,” portfolios, sentence combining, multiculturalism, and feminist models of teaching have been visible in national discussions (even prominent at times) thanks to the work of Miami faculty such as Don Daiker and Max Morenberg on sentence combining (1985), Susan Jarratt on multicultural classrooms (1994) and feminist pedagogies (1998), Kate Ronald on reasoned inquiry and romanticism (1998), and Paul Anderson on audience-centered communication (1987). We also have long experience with the Ohio Writing Project, an early portfolio evaluation project for admitted students, and fifty years of publishing *College Composition at Miami* as a classroom supplement for all composition courses. Given the variety of backgrounds represented here and the strong opinions and experiences of our faculty, our composition group has consistently avoided doctrinaire approaches to composition in favor of experimentation, teacherly autonomy, and tolerance of widely divergent approaches. Use of a teachers’ guide containing course goals, skeletal syllabi, and suggested assignments rather than rigorously controlled daily lesson plans has offered us the ability to combine flexibility with consistency. However, the teachers’ guide system depends on adequate supervision and guidance for
new instructors as well as good faith on the part of experienced ones. We also maintain a relatively conservative program structure focused on a two-course sequence: “College Composition” (ENG 111) followed by “Composition and Literature” (ENG 112). Scheduling these courses in the fall and spring consecutively creates a two-semester track for most students.

Since writing for Miami students after the first year consists of courses in journalism, creative writing, and technical communication, our advanced writing instruction is built on particular specialty areas. This specialization has been a mixed blessing for us: we’ve claimed enough expertise to control the primary writing instruction site for all students, but we’re also held accountable for writing all over campus—a status that makes us easy targets for criticism when students write carelessly in courses outside English and complain to their instructors that writing belongs in English, not in a history or geology class. Both the department and the campus have been cautious about embracing upper-division writing requirements or WAC initiatives; our specialist ethos and our concerns about difficulties we’ve observed in curriculum-based WAC projects elsewhere have kept that option at arm’s length. The writing center idea is also late coming to Miami, thanks to the location of most developmental writing courses on our regional campuses and the excellent work with student writers by our modest academic skills center on the Oxford campus. So Miami’s internal writing culture, with its traditional form and its specialist atmosphere, was ripe for internal criticism, and Bartholomae’s and Lunsford’s assessments of our focus group data from across the three campuses were generally accurate.

The motivating goal for our curriculum revision was to revitalize the place of writing in the university, not only because writing is central to the learning practices in all disciplines, but also because we wanted to emphasize the need for more attention to writing outside the composition program and the English department itself. Thus our campus discussions examined the role first-year composition plays in the academic development of individual students across the university community. As we began this journey, the question for us, implicitly and explicitly, emerged: how could we create a larger, more inclusive sense of the importance of writing instruction and the need for university-wide involvement in students’ growth as writers? We certainly wanted to create buy-in for the revised curriculum from as many people as we could, so in addition to extensive polling of the perceptions and needs of internal and external faculty, writing instructors, and students, we consciously designed broad departmental representation into the organizing committee and the curriculum development teams. The “Ad Hoc Committee on Composition” that took on these tasks included people from different ranks and specialties: part-time instructors; graduate students and faculty; literature, creative writing, and composition/rhetoric
specialists. The curriculum design teams had similarly broad representation, even though they were much smaller for efficiency and convenience. Each of these groups would then be involved in the revision process from day one, and we hoped that this strategy of inclusion, besides helping to assure that all voices were heard and that the dialogue would be as rich as possible, would encourage wide commitment to the project.

**Developing Pilots: Recursivity and Collaboration**

During the development of the various courses we piloted during this period, in addition to maintaining the vision of building a “culture of writing” across the university, we learned to value the collaborative nature of meaning making that emerged directly from the process itself. For instance, we quickly saw that in addition to the process elements that we wanted to design into the class, we should rely upon the idea of recursivity within course design. In much the same way, we ourselves were working recursively with course content and the input of the multiple voices that we had included in our redesign conversations. As part of practicing the meaning-making that we were implementing into courses and that we were asking students to adopt as a transportable writing strategy, we also solicited students’ input about the pilot. One year, more formal surveys were completed by students of all sections of ENG 112, but individual instructors also invited student feedback and commentary, sometimes during the semester and often at the end of the course. In the following sections, we’ll highlight some of the most important recursive, call-and-response, revision-oriented moments.

Not surprisingly, faculty members outside English were concerned about how well the first-year writing courses prepared students to write in their courses. They reported student problems with syntax, clarity, succinctness, paragraphing, and the accurate restatement of arguments in reading material. Concerned with more than mere correctness, faculty from across the campus seemed to understand competence in academic argument as a primary goal as well. Learning the conventions of academic writing and of standard academic English was expected to serve students in any discipline or writing situation, and therefore should comprise the pedagogical goals of first-year writing instructors. University faculty members generally agreed that writing instruction should continue past the first-year sequence, and that first-year composition should be seen as the beginning of that four-year process. But they also tended to expect that once students received the proper instruction in the basics, they should easily assume the writing roles they were asked to perform in other courses and disciplines. Thus the external focus groups seemed to expect a high degree of transferability from writing classes to the other disciplines.
Working to integrate the concerns of these faculty, we strongly agreed that writing instruction should not end with the first-year courses; however, we also recognized that writing entails much more than basic mechanics and that syntax, clarity, and grammar cannot be separated from purpose, audience, and context. Scholarship in the field shows that writing is always situated and variable, more complicated than a study of mechanics and academic forms alone can effectively address. But we also knew that the input from faculty across the campus needed to be taken quite seriously. We certainly also believed that the first-year writing sequence does have the responsibility to help students understand the transferability of writing strategies into various disciplines and situations. In this sense, we agreed that writing instruction serves not only the rest of the university, but also the writing lives of students well beyond the university.

Our focus groups with English faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students revealed more specifically that we needed to build a stronger bridge, not only from first-year writing to students’ subsequent writing responsibilities, but also among the varied writing tasks they were assigned across the sections of the composition courses. One of our clear imperatives from the focus groups was to work toward creating greater continuity of content and approach across sections, with particular attention to concerns expressed in some quarters about the styles, strategies, and skills of relatively inexperienced teachers. Everyone understood that graduate-student instructors were not only an important internal audience for our work of curricular revision, but also those most likely to be directly affected in their teaching practices by our deliberations (and, in the worst-case scenario, to be scapegoated both within and beyond the department for not teaching Jennifer and Johnny how to write in two semesters). At Miami, new GAs (masters’ students in composition/rhetoric, creative writing, and literature) and TAs (doctoral students in composition/rhetoric and literature) are required to teach the standard syllabus for both courses in the sequence; beyond that first-year group, more seasoned graduate-student instructors have traditionally had greater latitude in determining how and what they teach. Tenure-line faculty members are free—to too free, some believe—to teach what and as they choose. Thus, persuading graduate students beyond the first year and full-time faculty to sign on to whatever new courses we designed was crucial in building consensus for change across the department. As we redesigned ENG 111, mindful of the outside consultants’ reports, we felt we needed a set of core principles and goals that all teachers would work within, though some of us also wanted teachers to retain the freedom to individualize the course with their own readings and assignments.
For the development of ENG 111 during the first pilot semester, the issue of transferability was handled by adopting the language of argument and emphasizing issues of audience. Although it was acknowledged that all disciplines have different kinds of argumentation practices, it is also true that a single discipline or school of thought will use various argumentative strategies. The first ENG 111 pilot design team (along with Parag, its members were Tim Melley, Pegeen Reichert Powell, and Kate Ronald) thus developed a syllabus in which students would practice various forms of argumentation using writing sequences as described by Bartholomae and Petrosky (1986). While placing student writing as the central component of the course’s work, this pilot group was also concerned that students encounter complex and challenging ideas in their first semester. As a vehicle for introducing such ideas, the group chose a variety of perspectives on education for the supplementary reading and court decisions on the Ohio school funding debates to stimulate student engagement in a public issue. The “course overview” for the new ENG 111 pilot read: “English 111 teaches students to write as a means of critical inquiry. It stresses the centrality of writing to intellectual life and encourages students to see writing as a powerful tool for civic action.” In later years, in response to various committee work and feedback from advisors and stakeholders, we thought long and hard about using “topics” or “themes” (or “genres” or “forms” or “argument”). Yet regardless of the principle around which we organized the courses, vital to our decisions would be keeping students’ interest by including them in decisions about the where-why-what of their writing; ensuring that the texts they analyzed would be compelling and rich; and providing them with the transferable strategies that would be most valuable to their academic, personal, and civic lives.

The ENG 111 curriculum design generated a good deal of discussion in the department, yet this phase of the project was achieved in a single calendar year. Beginning in the summer of 1999, the design team created a sample syllabus that was piloted the subsequent fall. About twelve of us taught that first ENG 111 pilot, and we split into two groups that met as regularly as possible throughout the semester, usually every other week. The pilot groups included members of the literature and composition/rhetoric faculty and graduate students in literature and composition/rhetoric, as well as a recent graduate of our creative writing masters’ program who was working in a temporary faculty position. The pilot syllabus was revised in the spring of 2000 in response to teacher and student feedback, then presented to the department in the late spring, when it was adopted as the official ENG 111 curriculum that all instructional staff were strongly encouraged to use. This language was specifically addressed to faculty and to experienced graduate students who often departed from the standard syllabus as soon as they left.
their first-year mentoring sessions. New instructional staff would use the teachers’ guide as part of the four-credit mentoring sequence required of all new graduate instructors in their first year. The course was also presented to the chairs of the college of arts and science, the president and provost, and members of the focus groups. Its focus on argument, close reading, and sequenced writing assignments received general praise from these groups.

The course presumes . . . that the best way to become more adept at writing is to write frequently. Students will write almost daily and will revise their writings throughout the semester. They should also be prepared to share their writing with others, because student writing is itself a vital “course text” in this class, one that will be analyzed and critiqued like other course readings. Above all, English 111 aims to cultivate a critical habit of mind through writing, asking students to devise and pursue meaningful questions and to position themselves in relation to important philosophical and social debates. (“ENG 111 Pilot Guide”)

As the discussion below will show, the second-semester course, “Composition and Literature” was a much more contested space than was the first-semester course.

Navigating the Terrain: Defining a Two-Semester Writing Program

The ENG 112 design team started out with a variety of imperatives, inherited from the committee deliberations of the year before, the information we’d gathered from the focus groups, and most importantly, the shape of the new ENG 111 syllabus. In trying to articulate ENG 111-112 as a two-course sequence with significant features in common, the design team for ENG 112 (along with Mary Jean, it included Susan Jarratt, Pegeen Reichert Powell, and Melisa Summy) decided to repeat some of the central principles in both courses: emphasizing student writing as the site of meaning-making; presenting writing as a recursive process by way of sequenced assignments and revision; redefining research as a negotiation between self and others; and promoting student awareness of audience as a key factor in the varied rhetorical situations of academic and public writing. All these elements of the ENG 111 pilot made their way into our first version of the new ENG 112 with a minimum of fuss. Questions about the place of literary texts were more complicated, however.

Redesigning ENG 112 to put student writing at the center of the course meant we had to reposition reading in some way. The design team needed terms that would honor ENG 112’s grounding in the expertise and interests
of literature specialists and its longstanding emphasis on critical reading and textual analysis. But the course also needed the means to emphasize the particular elements of literary and rhetorical study we perceived as transferable for reading and writing across the disciplines. Thus the design team’s first problem could be loosely termed an issue of translation. We settled on narrative, point of view, figure, and dialogue—derived from but not limited to elements of fiction, poetry, and drama—as the reading and writing practices that organized the four units of the course. We intended the units to be interchangeable, teachable in any order depending on a given teacher’s interests and pedagogical sense. In the words used at the time, “all of these rhetorical structures can be understood as elements of the central modes of written communication within the academy”: our effort here, as elsewhere, was to create a new organization for the course that would be internally persuasive to its teachers, yet readable externally as meeting university-wide needs.

A second problem, related to determining a unifying structure for these courses, centered on establishing a degree of consistency across sections. There was strong sentiment within the department that adopting a single theme or topic for ENG 112 would not help us to achieve our goal of inducing a broader range of faculty to teach from the standard syllabus, and that prescribing texts that all new graduate-student instructors had to teach would be similarly unpopular. (These sentiments were restated on an instructor survey distributed to all faculty and graduate students in fall 2001, a survey designed to help the ENG 112 subcommittee prepare a standard syllabus for full departmental review in spring 2002.) Thus instead of creating a standard syllabus, we devised a template for each unit of the course. Writing and reading assignments for each unit would be adapted to particular texts chosen by instructors so as to enable the teaching of the rhetorical structures highlighted in each template of the syllabus. Imagining that, once adopted, the syllabus would lend itself to a wide variety of literary and cultural texts, we collated a set of common readings to provide an intellectual core across sections, composed primarily of short theoretical texts on narratology and figurative language.

At the same time, and with an eye to meeting the needs of the ENG 112 first pilot group in the subsequent semester, we also created what we called “an enacted track,” a fully articulated syllabus that included particular reading and writing assignments keyed to the specific texts chosen for use in the first pilot. The design team chose Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace*, a long, complex, but engaging work of fiction that we hoped would captivate the imaginations of first-year students; *Eve*, a volume of poems by our colleague, Annie Finch; and Tom Stoppard’s *Arcadia*, an ambitious play that promised to model intertextuality even as it required careful his-
torical and intellectual contextualization for and by students and instructors alike. The dozen or so faculty and graduate students who piloted the course in the spring of 2000 and the students we surveyed from their sections provided feedback that we used to revise the pilot in the fall of 2000. For the second ENG 112 pilot, we also invited faculty and graduate-student “clusters” to enact tracks of their own, banding together in groups of four or five, each group choosing its own texts and collaborating on implementing the revised pilot. In what follows, we’d like to outline some of the challenges we faced as faculty and graduate students when teaching the enacted track and how we, in turn, revised this pilot after its first outing, as another example of the kind of recursive “composing” work which characterized this re-visualization process.

The Thick of Things: Teaching and Revising the Pilots

Teaching ENG 112 presents a challenge even without adding the significant variable of a new curriculum. The specter of ENG 111 inevitably intrudes into the second-semester classroom because many first-year students react with bewilderment, frustration, and occasionally resentment when their ENG 112 instructor has a different pedagogical style and set of expectations. Teaching an untested curriculum made this potentially disconcerting experience even more so, especially for new instructors.

**Rhoda:** When I volunteered for the first version of the ENG 112 pilot, I was relatively new to teaching, to the role of TA, and to the challenges of a required second-semester composition course. For me, piloting the “new and improved” version of ENG 112 was intimidating and often discouraging. Aware from the beginning that they were in a pilot section, students resisted in various ways. As one student noted, apologizing for the entire class in her final writer’s memo, people felt justified in complaining because of the experimental nature of the curriculum. The fact that I was “learning” the course with the students affected my already shaky confidence, in spite of the invaluable camaraderie and support of the pilot group. Yet I discovered that my “trial by fire,” so to speak, left me with a surprisingly strong commitment to the curriculum. I went on to teach two more pilot versions of ENG 112; new groups of students came and went with only a vague awareness that both the course and my teaching of it were continually evolving. Finally, during the third year of the pilot, I felt, with a certain excitement, that both the students and I were finally “getting it.”
As this and similar testimonies reflect, the new ENG 112 posed considerable intellectual challenges to students and teachers alike.

For example, one of the main goals of the ENG 112 course design was to apply what are typically regarded as “literary” elements—narrative, point of view, figure, and dialogue—to various kinds of texts beyond the discipline of English, as well as to students’ own writing. Pushing those traditional boundaries meant asking students to take on ways of thinking, analyzing, and writing that were unfamiliar to them.

**Moira**: This was complicated business for first-year students, and yet students, in my view, seemed up to the challenge. As Ann Berthoff [1981] writes, we should not expect some sort of linear progression from the simple to the complex in terms of learning, but rather we must dive into the deep end with students: real learning happens within complexity and the cognitive dissonance that always accompanies such complexity.

Classes were to spend the first seven weeks of the course reading and analyzing a “long, difficult text.” In the first four weeks, students explored how narrative was constructed and how this construction influenced interpretation. After completing several writing assignments focused on narrative, the class then continued reading the novel, looking now at the various points of view represented within the novel. However, as we taught *Alias Grace*, students seemed to find point of view and narrative so interconnected and interdependent that the formal separation laid out by the curriculum proved impossible to maintain. As students encountered multiple perspectives and genres even within the first fifty pages of the novel, we began to examine and talk about the various points of view immediately as the narrative unfolded. When it came time to revise the course, we removed the point of view sequence altogether, the most drastic of our many revisions, and we collapsed the theory and activities for the two units into one new composite sequence which we titled simply “Narrative.”

Overall, many of us found that the writing tasks described in the test curriculum (frequent short papers intended as warm-ups for the major papers) were opaque, as far as students’ understanding of them was concerned. As a pilot group we vented over the wording of some of the assignments and the choice of some texts, especially *Arcadia*. And other instructors were dissatisfied with the sequence on figure, claiming that they would never teach “five whole weeks on only metaphor again” and citing a variety of problems: the apparent irrelevance of the material to students started the course off on the wrong foot; students were bored with talking about metaphor alone; students could never quite “get” what a metaphor actually was. One instructor in a pilot cluster reported that, even at the end of the sequence, students would either “pull figures out of thin air without provid-
ing any basis in any text at all” or stretch the definition of metaphor out of all discernible shape (“when the author writes ‘at present’ he is speaking of time, not of a present like one you would open on a birthday”). Some students seemed completely unable to discern metaphors, as another instructor reported at the end of January: “My students are really struggling with the concepts of the course so far—they were unable to identify the figures in “Young Goodman Brown,” for example, and . . . they’re still listing ‘adultery’ and ‘lust’ as figures.” The sophistication and level of thought required to get it right seemed prohibitive to many students.

Other instructors persevered in their efforts to make figure matter to the course, especially when using figure to talk about writing and the political or power issues inherent in the act of writing. To think about writing as an act of “meaning making” was to engage in the powerful work of creating (writing) and interpreting (reading) not merely the style and dress of language, but language as it functions to make manifest “figures of thought.” At least one pilot instructor found the most powerful discussions of the semester centered on “figures of thought,” because these discussions necessarily combined the work of close reading with considerations of the power of language to shape reality.

Moira: At the same time that I completely empathized and even sympathized with the pedagogical struggle others were reporting about the “metaphors” unit, I was more concerned with the problem as just that, a pedagogical challenge, and not, certainly, a question of dropping the unit altogether. In the course of the pilot, I became more and more convinced, in fact, that if “figures of thought” was a, if not the, central concept in language formation and knowledge production, then this powerful idea should be teachable as the basis for second-semester composition.

Her class returned again and again in group discussions to meta-analysis of the work they were doing as students of language-as-thought, language as powerful meaning-making device, and—because reality as “figure” is necessarily constantly under construction and under scrutiny when we write—to writing as itself a learning process, a mode of inquiry.

Such student and instructor perspectives as these, anecdotal and written, proved crucial to revisions of the pilot. As a very specific example of how revision teams responded to student input, we remember that one set of answers really stood out when we read the ENG 112 surveys after the 2000 pilot year. The pilot document had specified that the “rhetorical forms” included by the design team were selected to help students “explore the ways those genres . . . organize writing and thinking across the range of intellectual subjects” and that such “language structures” and reading
practices should be transferable across the disciplines. But when we asked students if the rhetorical forms we had concentrated on that semester were useful in their other courses at Miami, an overwhelming majority claimed that these concepts were not helpful in other classes, and at least one student claimed that they were “not useful in real life.”

We took this student input seriously, though we also had to consider that the negative reaction to the figure/metaphor unit was more a function of our inexperience teaching from this perspective than it was about the actual subject matter or content. Perhaps in anticipation of students’ responses to the issue of “rhetorical forms” and transferability, the design team had included some very specific assignments for the unit that stressed interdisciplinarity and relevance by asking students to explore texts in other disciplines, in the media, within their own social, familial, religious communities, or anywhere else in the “real world.” The sequence also suggested that students research the dominant figures in the field they had chosen as a major field of study. Perhaps in our enthusiasm to move through the course, however, or as a result of our own familiarity with literary texts, some of us sacrificed the assignments dealing with the discovery and analysis of these forms outside of literary studies, inadvertently focusing more on “figure” as an issue of style than on figure as a central and necessary aspect of all meaning-making. While some pilot instructors considered dropping the figure unit, others continued to experiment with ways to teach it more effectively. One instructor restructured the pilot to make the figure sequence the foundation of her course; another mixed poetry with larger doses of popular cultural texts, as well as some examples of disciplinary writing.

Given the students’ response that they were not finding the rhetorical forms useful in their other studies, however, we made two major revisions: we reduced the amount of poetry and included revised assignments in the narrative and dialogue units. In the narrative sequence we added a short paper assignment for which instructors would bring in various accounts of the same event from different sources and perspectives. In the dialogue unit we emphasized a short writing assignment asking students to write about how their readings or discussions in other classes “spoke” to one another.

**Meredith:** I attempted to demonstrate the notion of intertextuality by examining sometimes-invisible conversation between disciplines. I did this by bringing in a flyer that I found on campus advertising an “Ex-Gay Speaker” sponsored by a Christian organization on campus. I asked students to look at the flyer and to think about how many different “disciplines” were involved when thinking about this issue, that is, how many different subject areas in the academy could be involved in such a discussion. We talked about how those
in the fields of psychology and biology might approach this issue, and we discussed the spiritual, religious, and political points of view. As we talked I made these connections on the classroom’s dry erase board to create a web of ideas, and students seemed to begin to see how ideas from supposedly “separate” fields influence and “talk” to one another.

In addition, some instructors realized that assignments designed for other sequences would also speak either directly or indirectly to issues in “metaphor” or “figure.”

**Living the Collaborative Nature of Meaning Making: Teaching in Clusters**

One important pedagogical advantage grew out of the multiple pilots of ENG 112. Since the design of this course did not emphasize a central theme for all sections, smaller clusters of instructors using a common set of texts were imagined by the design team as a way to introduce some continuity across sections without mandating a common theme, as in ENG 111. The clusters became a place where teacher conversation and shared work seemed to flourish much more effectively than it did in our floundering graduate-student mentoring system.

**Mary Jean:** Our pilot groups directly influenced the emergence of the concept of “clusters,” in which faculty, graduate students, and temporary faculty work together on a version of ENG 112 in four- or five-person modules. In practice, the cluster meets three pressing needs: it enables teachers, whatever their institutional position, to sign on to a common project, while still extending them some autonomy and flexibility in terms of what and how they teach; it requires new teachers to work together on course design in the second semester of their first year, thus providing additional support for relatively new instructors; and it also extends teacher-training beyond the program for new GAs and TAs by teaming faculty with more advanced graduate students in ongoing partnerships.

Not only did the pilot groups demonstrate how a community of “piloteers” could consist of a better mix of graduate students and faculty, but the clusters provided a “natural” site where teachers of varying levels of experience and from various backgrounds and campuses could carry on significant conversations about pedagogy.
For some instructors, teaching the ENG 112 pilot the second time was pivotal. The freedom of each cluster to choose its own set of texts seemed like a natural progression from the across-the-board mandated texts of the previous year, and the more independent nature of the clusters allowed for various adaptations of the basic course concepts.

**Meredith:** By 2001, ENG 112 was designed around “templates,” skeletal schedules laying out the theoretical underpinnings of the sequences. In the spring semester, the department suggested that the course be piloted again. This time instructors were invited to take the templates of the course and experiment with different texts. Instructors formed three “teaching clusters,” groups who were teaching the pilot with the same texts. For example, one group chose to use Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* for the narrative unit, Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles* in the dialogue unit, and used only found metaphors and theoretical readings on figure for the metaphor unit. Another group decided to use *Alias Grace* again, *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill (which was also performed at Miami that semester), and short stories and selected poems for the figure unit.

This new flexibility also provided concrete examples that helped us to address recurring questions about the desirability of department-wide consistency, instructor autonomy, and various positions between these two poles. Since some instructors now working in “clusters” had taught the previous version of the course, they had a better idea of what kinds of texts might be most effective, and also had the “enacted track” of the initial pilot to compare with this new, less text-specific one.

Naturally, there were problems with scheduling that forced the “cluster” groups to meet separately sometimes and to rely on email to a great extent, whereas the first year they met more often face-to-face and in a complete group.

**Moira:** In the Spring of 2001, when I taught the course, the cluster I joined did begin with the figure sequence, but neither placing figure first nor the content of the sequence itself was roundly embraced by teachers or students. Much of the activity on the listserv we established during the month of January . . . was taken up with the challenges of teaching metaphor as a sequence. We discussed which poetry to use, how to transport the meaning of metaphor from poetry to other texts, resources for work on metaphors in the disciplines, creating handouts to help students understand the language of comparison, and how metaphor might lead to and fit into the
next sequence (dialogue). We worked productively in these discussions: Rhoda found a very helpful Website; Jennie made connections between metaphor and dialogue, as both can be understood as conversation and as “connections among ideas” or interdisciplinarity; Christy Karnes thought picking out figurative language from a popular television series helped her students attach to the ideas; Meredith and I put together a handout of student-created metaphors about writing.

In this way, listservs turned out to provide a valuable and convenient means of communication (and a record for purposes of research at the end of the pilot period), but the nature of that interaction didn’t entirely replace or fulfill the same function of the more relaxed and free-flowing give-and-take of in-person conversations. However, as a source for the teachers’ guide, and a reference for teachers looking back at our own efforts, the listserv archives have been a valuable contribution to our collective teaching memory.

One further disappointment was that contact between the various cluster groups was minimal. While that interaction was perhaps not as crucial to the project in the view of the designers and developers, individual instructors would have undoubtedly benefited from conversations with people in other clusters who were experimenting with different texts, classroom activities, and assignment options. For clusters without listserv archives, much of that experience is likely to be lost. Nevertheless, the instructors who were teaching in conjunction with other teachers, especially those who had taught the pilot under more solitary conditions, reported growing commitment to the pilot itself, and real curiosity about how it was working itself out in its other incarnations.

Some of us believe that the cluster concept is the most important contribution of the ENG 112 pilot sequence. At last the isolation of teaching content no one else is working with could be broken without the total loss of individual choice. The collaborative atmosphere gave individual instructors a space to criticize the emerging design intelligently.

**Rhoda:** Teaching in clusters made a potentially intimidating solo venture into a collaborative community experience. The “piloteers,” as we dubbed ourselves, met biweekly in person and much more frequently on our listserv. As we wrote our episode in this narrative of curricular change, we shared frustrations along with resources and sample assignments, moving back and forth from discussing the challenges of an upcoming sequence to assessing the outcomes of the one just completed. Still, to represent ourselves as an ideal community of collaborators would be to idealize an often-episodic history as a seamless narrative. While pooled ideas and resources were
invaluable, not every idea worked for every person who tried it, however promising it had sounded. As a graduate student, I learned that even seasoned writing instructors had trouble translating a pilot syllabus assignment into a workable and effective classroom experience. And I also discovered that my tentatively offered ideas and resources were warmly welcomed, diminishing any uncertainties I had about being a full colleague in the collective.

Even if nothing else had changed from all this activity in our department, we believe the emergence of cluster teaching alone would still be well worth the significant effort and energy we expended.

**Still Traveling: Multiple Pilots, Multiple Strategies**

After two rounds of piloting a new ENG 112 syllabus, in response to pressure from upper administration, the department chair charged the new director of composition with putting a finalized version of the new syllabus in place by the end of the academic year. The administration, again, wanted to see more uniformity across sections of the course; primarily, they were tired of complaints from parents about particular texts students were being asked to read and wanted the range of text choices for instructors to be reduced.

In Fall 2001, the ENG 112 subcommittee developed a survey for instructors in order to garner information on the perceptions of what the course is and should be. Responses to the questions “What is your conceptualization of ENG 112 (regardless of whether you have taught it)?” and “What should we be doing in it, and why?” ranged widely. Some viewed it as an introduction to literature course, a misguided perception that was also held by many of that year’s new graduate instructors and therefore caused frustration when they were told otherwise. Others felt it should address equally the acts of reading and writing, pointing out the “constructed” nature of both acts, and should serve as an exposure to the cultural, political, historical and economic factors that affect both writing and reading texts (literature, advertising, film). One respondent reminded the committee of the course description published in the university catalog and pointed out that nobody seemed to be following it: “Study and practice of effective explanatory, expressive, and persuasive writing in the context of an introduction to critical study of literature.”

Since the composition committee at large had suggested that the new ENG 112 syllabus be more overtly connected to the ENG 111 syllabus, the subcommittee asked what could promote more obvious connections between the two courses. Respondents noted that the obvious connection was already in place if the classes were taught as writing courses and not
theory courses, pop culture courses, or political science courses, reminding us that we were supposed to be teaching writing, not our social or cultural values or views. Others, conversely, suggested that cultural issues should be the central thread that tied the literary texts together. A balanced response noted that although the goals are slightly different, they are complementary: ENG 111 teaches writing as a mode of inquiry and public action, while ENG 112 deals more directly with textual interpretation, a vitally important mode of inquiry. Still, we knew that this did not at all amount to a consensus for those of us who were trying to define these two courses more precisely as a two-course sequence in writing. The design of this course, naturally, has also been open to public scrutiny, and although the department has now adopted it, we recognize that this sequence is no more immune to immediate revision than any of the others we’ve described here.

**Are We There Yet? Compass Points on the Journey**

If there’s anything we’ve learned from this process, it is that as people teach, we are engaged in constant revision, and about the only thing that remains the same is the recursivity of our design process. That is the nature of culture in general and of the writing culture in our department in particular. We believe that collaborative and communal efforts help to highlight the issues and assumptions of our work and may be a primary source of collective adaptation to the diverse views we represent.

We’ve learned that collaborative design and buy-in are exceedingly valuable, but not necessarily achieved simply because you gather together representatives of different points of view.

We reinforced our understanding that transferability of writing skills is neither automatic nor easily perceived by students or by our university colleagues. With a skill as complex as writing and contexts as varied as academic disciplines, what may seem transparent to us can seem particularly useless and irrelevant to others. Perhaps the key is openness and frequent discussion—both valuable and sometimes rare commodities.

We feel that the first-year writing sequence of ENG 111 and ENG 112 has become stronger as a result of its most recent revision because the courses’ goals have been foregrounded in the syllabi. Just last spring, the composition committee adopted an ENG 111 syllabus centered on a new theme—writing—which focuses on students’ positioning themselves as writers and investigating the culture of writing at Miami, in the community, and in the broader social world. ENG 112 now more clearly builds upon and extends the skills learned in ENG 111 and more uniformity has been attained across multiple sections of the courses.
We are pretty sure that teaching in clusters is a great idea, only complicated by the time and effort it requires. Perhaps all good teaching may require this sort of effort, but when it’s done in isolation our work has little chance for useful feedback from our peers, and we are all the poorer for missing out on the pooled strategies and ideas such collaborations add to our teaching lore.

We may have learned that our own university’s writing culture probably needs larger efforts than a single department’s curricular work. Following Andrea Lunsford’s advice, we recently collaborated with colleagues in our university honors program on an internal grant proposal that garnered modest funding from campus administrators for a center for writing excellence specifically designed to address faculty development on writing instruction. We’re encouraged that the center initiatives currently underway seem to be bringing a greater visibility to writing across the campus. Several of these efforts are department-based, and we believe our own experience confirms this as a good approach.

And finally, those of us who have contributed to this article have found that writing together is almost as demanding as teaching together. We’re proud to have tried to do both.

Note

As this is a genuinely collaborative effort, the contributors are listed here in reverse alphabetical order.

Works Cited


Writing Programs and Pedagogies in a Globalized Landscape

Margaret Himley

We have entered the brave new world of globalization, the argument goes, a radical new phase in the world economy characterized by “the ascendance of information technologies, the associated increase in the mobility and liquidity of capital, and resulting decline in the regulatory capacity of nation-states over key sectors of their economies” (Sassen 195). This new economic order depends on the transmigration not only of capital and cultural forms, but also of people—both the rich (the new transnational professional workforce) and the poor (often immigrant workers, women, and people of color) (Sassen xxxii). Shaped by the broader relations and antagonisms produced within history (Ahmed), globalization raises critical questions about corporate and civic life, technology and information, media, governance, markets, the increasing disparities “between the urban glamour zone and the urban war zone” (Sassen xxxiii), and, inevitably, writing pedagogies and programs.

As educators, we are forced to address this globalized landscape in which we and the students we teach are becoming global actors—as consumers, as workers, as producers. In this essay I want to provide my account of the changes going on in the required lower-division writing sequence in the writing program at Syracuse University (SU), and then to speculate about how we might better analyze these changes by embedding them more explicitly in the processes and effects of globalization. The site for this very initial exploration is authorship, starting from this fundamental claim: as writing teachers and as a discipline, we have shifted our thinking and our tropes—from a domestic classroom, focused on the creative moment of the student composing process, to a globalized classroom, engaged in multimedia and multimodal textual production, distribution, and consumption.
The Context at Syracuse

In the fall of 2000, Rebecca Moore Howard became the new director of the writing program at Syracuse University, and she charged me (as director of undergraduate studies) and the new lower division committee with conducting a critical review of the curriculum for the WRT 105 (first-year) and WRT 205 (second-year) required sequence and proposing revisions.

A large private school in upstate New York, Syracuse University has an independent writing program and a PhD program in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric. There are about 40 part-time writing instructors on multiple year contracts, 36 external TAs (mostly MA, PhD, and MFA students from English), 15 TAs from the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program, and 10 full-time faculty members. We teach about 120 sections of WRT 105 in the fall and 100 sections of WRT 205 in the spring.

Historically all teachers in the program (except first-year TAs) have designed their own courses within the general guidelines of the spiral curriculum, a theoretical document produced by Louise Wetherbee Phelps in 1986 that provided a development trajectory for the two courses from writing-to-learn to writing-to-communicate, that encouraged an inquiry-driven approach to the teaching of writing, and that emphasized practices such as drafting, peer review, critical reading strategies, and a range of informal as well as formal writing (http://wrt.syr.edu/pub/spiral.html). Teachers became accustomed to designing their courses within these guidelines and according to their own interests and expertises. They chose topics of inquiry, put together their own course readers, picked out a handbook, designed assignments, and crafted their own grading policies.

The program’s teachers worked within a relatively insulated context, hearing complaints now and then, waging war every so often, but mostly carrying on a committed, discipline-driven, process-informed approach to teaching writing within its own terms. Teachers developed imaginative and challenging courses, talked passionately about teaching, experimented with new ideas, wrote for our in-house journal, Reflections in Writing, and enjoyed a gratifying sense of professionalism, as evidenced by the significant presence of SU full- and part-time faculty at national conferences.

But pressures punctured that insularity from many directions—from powerful shifts in the discipline as well as potent shifts in leadership and direction within the university.

Rebecca Howard’s charge to review the introductory writing sequence was a response to the shifts in disciplinary knowledge produced by the social turn in composition, by post-process theorizing, by the new technologies, and by the demands to address multiple literacies in the curriculum. With others, I too had worried that WRT 105 and WRT 205 had begun...
to overemphasize process and reflection on writing and that we were not attentive enough to the demands and rewards of finished, well-edited, carefully crafted, and developed texts. There are lots of obvious reasons for that. It’s immediately rewarding, for both students and teachers, to focus on the creative moment of textual production. It’s also very important for teachers denied the security of tenure to get the positive course evaluations that such process- and expressivist-oriented courses tend to produce. And there are all the very real political worries about imposing academic discourse onto students and about silencing or distorting the many writing talents and language skills they bring to the course and to the academy.

More locally, the new vice chancellor of academic affairs and provost, Deborah A. Freund, singled out the writing courses (and only the writing courses) as not rigorous enough in her first version of Academic Plan 2001. At the same time, she identified “elegant writing” as one of the proposed four signature experiences for Syracuse students:

“Signature Experience Four—An Emphasis on Elegant Writing

We have a strong commitment to writing and effective communication on this campus—from Newhouse to the Writing Program, Speech Communication, and the Creative Writing Program. Taken together, these constitute a potentially powerful curricular force in the University—one that should be more nationally recognized for the kind of students we produce. In terms of scholarship, professional expertise, and creative output, we have more nationally and internationally recognized areas than virtually any university—large or small. If we were to get organized—by examining our University-wide programs, identifying those courses that focus on discipline-specific writing, and forming partnerships to break down the barriers that divide us by schools and colleges—our students could come to be among the most polished communicators on average of any major research university in the country. This “signature,” in turn, could attract the world’s most famous communicators and writers to our campus to join our already distinguished faculty in key areas. [. . .] We must work across department lines to enhance the role of writing and clear expression in the Syracuse University curriculum. Foremost, we must reconceptualize our student experience to let it clearly be known that this is a university deeply committed to successful writing and communication, in college and in
the workplace. Key individuals on campus across the various 
schools and colleges will be empowered to lead us in develop-
ing the best writing program in the country (10-11 of 14).

As I know from talking with the vice chancellor, she intended this to be 
a boost to writing and to the writing program as well as a corrective to 
complaints she had heard with apparent frequency during her town meet-
ings with faculty and students. We expressed our eagerness to have writing 
across the curriculum (WAC) and the writing center and writing more 
generally valued in these ways (and hoped there would be funding to real-
ize these goals), and we raised questions: Who will be these “key individu-
als”? Why is “elegance” the main descriptor? What does this mean for our 
program’s curriculum and autonomy?

In an email response to the vice chancellor, Rebecca Howard acknowl-
 edged that there are always criticisms of writing programs “because none 
can accomplish the heartfelt goals that university faculty have for their stu-
dents’ writing” and that we ourselves have criticisms and plans for improve-
ment. But she challenged wholesale criticism based on “anecdotal or fac-
tionalized criticisms.” She also critiqued the use of “elegant” and “polished” 
writing as “belletristic ideals for writing that are not shared across the cur-
riculum and that are not endorsed as the top priorities of composition and 
rhetoric specialists today.”

Charles Watson, a professor from English, also challenged the term 
“elegant” as the “featured goal of writing instruction for our students.” 
Turning to the Oxford English Dictionary, Watson demonstrates the class-
codedness of “elegance,” as it reflects “the historical confine of high culture 
to the Anglo-American upper class (e.g., ‘Of modes of life, dwellings and 
their appointments, etc.: Characterized by refined luxury’).” He empha-
sizes too that “elegant” implies language as the mere clothing of thought, 
“the adornment of ideas,” which is of course a long-discredited view of lan-
guage use. The vice chancellor now jokes edgily about “elegance” but the 
label somehow sticks—and signifies how little influence we as composition 
teachers and scholars have in this campus-wide initiative.1

The next jolt came from a report by Undergraduates for a Better Educa-
tion which reported that students bitterly critiqued their writing courses in 
less than gratifying ways (“the course sucks,” “it’s a waste of time,” “worse 
than high school,” etc.), and in particular complained loudly about incon-
sistency across the many sections of each course—different assignments, 
different grading schemes, different work loads, different topics.

The final and perhaps most important disruption came from the col-
lege of arts and sciences. First, the college did a study of grade inflation, 
and we risked becoming its poster child. Then Dean Cathryn Newton let 
all departments know that by 2003 every course had to have measurable
learning outcomes. And lastly she convened an arts and sciences committee to advise her on writing within the college. She, too, expressed her dismay over the frequency of student complaints about their writing courses, and turned to a story about a wonderful writing experience someone somewhere had had in an intimate workshop setting with a professional writer. The committee’s charge is vague—to study and advise. So far, there has been hot debate about what teaching writing means or should mean along perhaps unsurprising lines, and speculative discussion about possible changes (a pilot assessment project to evaluate the writing skills of entering students, WAC initiatives, postdoctoral students replacing TAs, changes in the requirements). On this committee Rebecca Howard, as the only faculty member from the writing program, is an ex officio member. It’s hard to say what the final effect will be on our curriculum and staffing.

Yikes! New composition theories, university and college committees, mostly anecdotal student complaints (though serious ones), learning outcomes, major institutional reevaluation and redefinition—along with all the everyday challenges of administering a large, multi-staffed writing program!

We went to work.

Some things were declared. Rebecca Howard and I wrote a grading policy that said, among other things, that at least 70% of the final course grade was to be based on polished writing (http://wrt.syr.edu/pub/grading.html). We re-articulated the focus of the lower-division sequence to more explicitly and directly address what we hypothesized as central intellectual and literacy practices across the university: analysis and argument in WRT 105, critical inquiry and research in WRT 205. We insisted on longer and more challenging final written projects. We proposed a common handbook, and we developed our own program course reader, Critical Convergences, which we highly encouraged all teachers to adopt and required for all new TAs.

Some things were developed. The lower-division committee drafted, discussed with others, and redrafted learning outcomes for WRT 105 and WRT 205—outcomes that outlined in much more specific detail than ever before the goals, assignments, uses of theory, and technology that all teachers had to work with/in. Traces of these many program-wide discussions may (and may not) be visible in the final, densely-coded document we produced, which can be read at http://wrt.syr.edu/pub/handbook.html.

Some things continue to be energetically debated by the teachers in the program, who have taken up these new challenges with imagination and commitment. Over the year we have addressed a large number of questions: What is analysis? How does it differ from argument? What do we have to teach students about using the Internet for research? What kinds of readings work best with these new goals? To what degree should assignments
across sections share similarities—and not? What kinds of assessment works best—and for whom? How do we assess curriculum as well as individual teachers and courses? What is the value or role of student self-report? How might we use a modified portfolio system to assess student writing across sections? In all of these changes, we ask, what are we gaining and what are we losing? Teachers are hard at work in multiple sites—at weekly coordinating groups, in the new TA workshops, through professional development activities like Theory Day, on the program listserv, among teachers in the hallways, and in Reflections in Writing.

**Enlarging the Textual Economy**

Neither contemplative nor linear, neither accommodating jolts and pressures nor pursing disciplinary purity—this curricular revision process has been complex, conflictual, and very challenging. Different projects converged (and did not) with other projects. Different constituencies communicated (and did not) with others. Different documents articulated (and did not) with others. It has not always been easy to find coherence in all these activities and debates, but over time I have come to see some fundamental patterns in the work. To illustrate, I’ll focus on one of the learning outcomes for WRT 105 by the lower-division committee: *Students will develop a working understanding of contemporary theories of authorship.* I can’t recapitulate the history of the discussion on the committee (and elsewhere) that led to this outcome. I recall that we invoked the political turn in composition theory. ‘Postmodern’ was a key term. Writing as ‘social process’ was another. Thoughts about new textual possibilities produced by the new technologies also played a role.

But mostly we started from the fundamental claim that what distinguishes us from most other courses at the university is that *we teach courses in the production of texts* and that we define students as *writers or ‘authors.’* And so we staked our claim there. We asked ourselves:

- What is “contemporary” about these theories of authorship?
- What factors have produced them?
- How do they refigure the student writer and the writing classroom?

My genealogical take on the development of this particular learning goal is that in retrospect (and only in retrospect) there has been a significant tropic move in our curricular work during the last two years—from *conversation* to *circulation.*

*Critical Convergences,* for example, deploys the friendly trope of conversation to invite students into the university as newcomers with something to add, as participants and potential knowledge-makers themselves. It’s a
familiar move. Lots of writing teachers over the years have turned to Kenneth Burke’s metaphor of the academy as a kind of parlor, where there’s a conversation always already going on. We encourage students to listen for a while, pick up threads and claims, get their bearings, and make a contribution.

In this trope, the writing classroom is figured as a bounded and privatized space, even a domestic space, enacting a micro-version of the scholarly, knowledge-making practices of the university in a kinder, gentler way. The collection of course readings functions as a kind of mini-disciplinary canon, which students have to understand, analyze, and respond to in some kind of critical or original way. Sometimes students have to ‘invent’ the university (and be invented by it). Sometimes the politics of difference determine whose knowledge contributions count and why. Sometimes the conversation turns nasty or just falls apart.

There are various critiques that might be made, but I want to turn to John Trimbur. He opens his essay “Composition and the Circulation of Writing” with an anecdote about late papers. It was the end of the fall semester, and the computer cluster had closed because of a virus, and no one could print. His typical—“I don’t care, I just want the paper”—response didn’t work, and he started to rethink how much that typical response erases the materiality of writing:

To say, as I have, “I just want the paper,” suggests that the student’s words alone are what count and to identify writing with the creative moment of composing, thereby isolating an education in writing from the means of production and delivery. (189, emphasis added)

He casts this kind of writing classroom as “a middle class family drama,” where the student writes for the approval of the teacher as parental figure—the permissive father in the case of Peter Elbow, the demanding father in the case of David Bartholomae. He concludes:

It is no accident that writing teachers frequently contrast the first-year course, in which the teacher knows each student’s name and calls on everyone to speak, to the impersonality and anonymity of other courses. If anything, writing teachers like to justify composition classes as places where a kind of domestic intimacy provides some of the comforts of home, a haven in what many students find to be an otherwise alien or hostile environment. (194)

Instead Trimbur is interested in looking at the entire cycle of circulation that links production, distribution, and consumption. By focusing primarily on the student writer at the point of production, he says, we risk short-circuit-
ing that cycle and reducing the cultural value and worldly force of the writing (194; see too McComiskey).

That is, the textual economy remains within the classroom, and the larger questions of textual circulation are not always addressed. For example, what are the differences between the review and publishing processes for a university press and a tabloid? Why do some websites get hundreds of hits a day and others so few? What happens rhetorically to an academic text as it is summarized in various newspapers? How might a real live TV producer respond to a cultural critique of his or her show? What does the director of a local non-profit organization think about the written work of service learning students? How has the definition of literacy expanded?

I came to realize that in different ways many teachers in the SU program are in fact busy enlarging the textual economy in their classrooms and in their course designs.

In Henry Jankiewicz’s research course students are formed into editing boards for class magazines and learn a great deal about the publishing cycle, from selecting a topic for the issue to final editing work with writers.

In Maureen Fitzsimmon’s service learning version of WRT 307 (professional and technical writing), students produce brochures and websites for non-profits, negotiating the give and take of that process to a great extent on their own.

Molly Voorheis requires student in her WRT 301 (civic writing) class to research a topic, develop position papers, and produce information sheets and other documents directed toward actual audiences and events.

In the library module designed for the new TA version of WRT 205, students had to learn about the publishing cycle for sources of information found in databases and online, analyze the differences in texts such as the Nation and the National Review, and deconstruct the fact/bias binary.

Trimbur himself talks about the final assignment in his “Writing About Disease and Public Health” course, in which students produce public health publicity on teen or college-age sexuality in any medium they choose (e.g., brochures, pamphlets, flyers, radio announcements, skits). They have read and critically analyzed journalistic versions of the moral panic over teen pregnancy, an ethnographic study of a failed public health project in a working class neighborhood in Boston, a history of sexually transmitted diseases, etc. He notes that this is not meant to be just ‘real world’ writing:

What I am trying to do is amplify the students’ sense of what constitutes the production of writing by tracing its circulation in order to raise questions about how professional expertise is articulated to the social formation, how it undergoes rhetori-
cal transformations (or “passages of form”), and how it might produce not only individual careers but also socially useful knowledge. (214)

The examples go on and on, and reveal a fundamental shift in our thinking, if not always our language: we locate students (and our courses) within larger and more complex contexts (other courses, professional sites, civic arenas) and within more of the processes and material realities and effects of textual economies. For many teachers, as for Trimbur, what motivates this work is the possibility of a more democratic redistribution of the means of production and expertise.

I’m not simply suggesting that students write only for so-called “real world” audiences, which (along with Bruce Horner) I think demeans academic and critical work. I am suggesting, however, that our new curriculum plops students immediately into the broader complexities of the production, distribution, and circulation of texts to a greater degree than before, as a result of theory and technology—and, I will now suggest, globalization.

The Globalized Landscape

This account so far is limited by its use of theory as its main analytic, as if theory had sole or even primary currency in debates about writing, writing instruction, and writing programs in the university. As Jeanne Gunner reminds us, by their very existence, writing programs establish the value of writing and serve as ideological sites within the university in many ways “unrelated to their ‘content’—their theoretical, curricular, and pedagogical work” (11). And of course the broader meaning of writing itself is also ideological, embedded in “convulsive changes in economic and social life, educational expectations, and communication technologies” (Brandt 2). As educators, we struggle in these borderlands to make sense of these convulsive changes in order to anticipate pedagogies that will work for students in their personal, professional, and public or civic lives.

From this angle, I locate Rebecca Howard’s charge to address post-process theory in composition scholarship in our curriculum, Vice Chancellor Freund’s nineteenth-century call for elegance, Dean Newton’s romantic story about the writing teacher as creative mentor, and the demand from committee members for more instruction in writing per se as disjunctive moments within that struggle. Add to the mix the desires of upper division students, who, when they have a choice, flock to our creative non-fiction and professional and technical writing courses. There are lots of strong opinions and theoretical differences and political investments in what WRT 105 and WRT 205 should be (and why) and who gets to say so (and why).
If we turn to the discourse of globalization, we hear another set of voices—ones that frame and articulate with the others.

In the manifesto that opens *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*, for example, the New London Group lays out how globalization (or what they call “fast capitalism”) is dramatically altering our working, civic, and personal lives (10). They point to the challenges we now face in literacy pedagogy as we try to account

for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies; to account for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate [. . . and for] the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. (9)

Centralized command systems have been displaced by distributed systems with flattened hierarchies and networked teams. “New business and new schools—fit for our ‘new capitalism’—are progressively aligning themselves with each other and converging on such notions as ‘communities of practice’” (Gee 43). Management theory uses educational discourse such as “knowledge worker,” “learning organisation,” “collaboration,” “alternative assessments,” and “communities of practice,” and deploys such postmodern values as destroying hierarchies and honoring diversity. Old vertical chains of command (with written memos and supervisors’ orders) have been replaced by the horizontal relationships of teamwork (with informal written forms such as email) (11-12). The division of labor into minute, deskilled components has morphed into multiskilled workers flexible and responsible enough to be able to do complex and integrated work (11). In fact, the New London Group argues (as others do), that the old command and control structure has itself become “relationships of pedagogy: mentoring, training, and the learning organisation” (11). It’s obvious how much these discourses, values, and practices overlap with those in composition classrooms, with their attention to collaboration, process, decentered authority, difference, interdisciplinarity, and reflective practice.

Is this more informal, user-friendly discourse of management a more subtle form of enforcing assimilation to mainstream norms and hierarchy? Is it harder to enter than the older formal system? How do we understand a discourse of collaboration and shared values in a world economy driven by “the barely restrained market”(12)?

The New London Group asserts that “the twin goals of access and critical engagement” need not be incompatible—that we can teach people the skills and stances they need to succeed as well as the critical abilities they need to speak up for themselves and others, to challenge and engage critically with the conditions of their professional and public lives (13). They
conclude, with a sense of hopeful irony, that “economic efficiency may be an ally of social justice, though not always a staunch and reliable one” (13).

Jeanne Gunner, however, argues that a writing program’s theory may gain significant agency only as it aligns itself with these more powerful discourses. She describes how the proposed professional writing program in her department, carefully designed according to rhetorical theory, depended finally on its link to the values of entrepreneurship and vocationalism that dominate in the Silicon Valley where her school is located (17). “Lessening the gap between master discourses and theoretical discourses is,” she concludes, “one way to gain the power to enact theory in material ways” (15).

The only way?

As educators, what stance do we take as we struggle to understand the practices and effects of globalization on us, on our programs, on the students we teach? Do we need to understand globalization better before we can develop effective discourses of critique, as Gee contends (44)? Is it possible to approach discussions with colleagues about the development of curriculum within the dual stance of “unambitious pragmatism” and “ambitious strategic possibility” (Kalantzis and Cope 132) that the New London Group advocates? Simple oppositions won’t work, as transformations and possibilities are complexly intertwined and occur in the small and unexpected ways. Gunner offers a compelling example. Composition theory, she reminds us, has always insisted to very little avail that mechanical correctness and standard English should not be the primary goals of writing instruction. Now, ironically, current cultural pressures in high-demand fields such as engineering and technology mean that correctness often has to be demoted to a less privileged location. Email exchanges, as they cross geographical and cultural discourse, illustrate this new informality and denorming of language because it is communication, not correctness, that matters. Gunner argues for using these moments of “ideological ambivalence” opportunistically to enact our theory and to create change in values and practices as best we can (16). Her claim resonates with feminist theorist Chela Sandoval’s methodological call for a “differential mode of consciousness,” one that functions “like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power” (58).

The Writing Subject

Let’s return to the question of authorship: How might globalization re-figure the student writer?
At an expensive private school like Syracuse, more centered on professional colleges than the liberal arts, are we producing what feminist theorist Sara Ahmed cites as the new “global nomads”? She is referring to people who are part of a highly skilled workforce, whose intercultural communication, linguistic competency, and management of diversity make them very useful in a globalized economy of difference: “The ability to travel clearly gives global nomads access to a set of privileges, a set of equipment, which makes them highly commodifiable as skilled workers on a global landscape of difference and cultural exchange” (85). Is this the purpose (or one of the purposes) that a multicultural reader, or an interdisciplinary research project, or a collaborative writing assignment fulfills? If indeed we produce mobile writers, adept at crossing disciplinary and professional and national boundaries, what might be the many results? Do students have to become comparative linguists as they make sense of the “plethora of dialects, accents, discourses and registers” they will inevitably encounter as English becomes lingua mundi (Kalantzis and Cope 140)? In what ways might this mobility affect corporate and civic life? For example, does flexibility, that great value of globalization, produce freedom or fragmentation and lack of temporal attachment—and what are the long term results on workers (Sennett 62)? What does it mean to live as a “portfolio person” (Gee 61)?

Globalization depends too on the circulation of texts, technology and e-space. Students need to acquire an understanding of “rhetorical economy” (Sidler 3), or the ways texts move through production, distribution, and circulation (McComiskey, Trimbur). What texts are read? By whom? In what ways and under what circumstances? What transformations do texts go through as they move through various spaces and across time? The question applies to print as well as online texts. The Web offers, seemingly, a much larger public sphere for students to participate in; indeed it offers a “dizzying array of available texts [. . .] a shopping mall of rhetorical choice—of ideas and options, words, and images” (Sidler 6), but “[a]s they undertake public participation, students need tools not only to write texts but also to understand how, why, and when they might be accessed and engaged (Sidler 6). How do we ourselves master the demands of the new technologies, multiple literacies, and modalities or engage with them critically? How does the rapid commercialization of the Web dilute, diminish, or destroy its original distributed and democratic potential? Is textuality becoming virtualized? Have the material realities of the publishing cycle become invisible or even irrelevant to students? And at what cost?

Digital electronic texts are “based on notions of hybridity and intertextuality (Luke 73), where “cyberspace navigators” (73) draw from multiple linguistic, audio and visual texts, as they click on hotlinks and move around in a textual and multimodal universe, reading and writing in hypertextual
or nonlinear ways. In this world, Luke argues, “relations among ideas is as important, if not more important than, mastery of the ideas themselves” (73). The expert is the one who sees connections among related ideas and knowledges. Social geographer David Harvey (cited in Luke 79) argues that these new communication technologies have altered our traditional categories of time and place. For example, through email one can ‘be there’ with someone across the globe within milliseconds. We can transfer vast amounts of material almost instantaneously. And the ability to access and download texts within seconds—as opposed to going to the library, checking out books, copying pages or taking notes—reorients our organization of time. It’s not surprising that these new possibilities of hybridity and intertextuality have raised new questions and definitions of plagiarism.

And finally in what ways do we “internationalize” the topics of inquiry in our writing classes in order to keep up with these changes? Students can access information instantaneously from around the globe, and need the geopolitical knowledge to assess that information, to frame it, and to challenge and critique it. That is surely one of the great lessons of September 11, 2001, and the war on terrorism, including the war in Iraq, which consume us and all of our resources. As we would no longer plan a course without considering questions of gender and race, we need to consider questions of globalization.

Working (with) Contradictions: Archaeological Analysis, or Connecting the Dots

So much to think about as writing program administrators and teachers of writing—and so difficult to figure out the terms of the conversation and contestations we need to have with students, other faculty, administrators, and ourselves. At such an historic (dis)juncture, amidst convulsive economic, social, and technological changes, with so many competing ideologies and investments, setting the terms for that discussion may be our most urgent job. Surely that is our main task at Syracuse right now.

As teachers of writing, we are talking about what it means to understand the classroom now as a global space—a placed and placeless space. At our annual spring conference (2003), entitled Globalization and the Teaching of Writing, we debated definitions of globalization, recognizing it as a deeply contested economic, social, and cultural concept, with panels on social justice, work, international rhetorics, and the American dream. We invited faculty from other departments to join us, to enlarge our perspective, to talk about the challenges we all face in responding to and within the complex relationship of the university to the processes and effects of globalization. More specifically, as Steve Thorley pointed out, how can the
writing program’s required courses provide openings for educating citizens in addition to—or opposed to—educating emerging experts in the disciplines, future producers and consumers of a global economy?

For many, this question means deploying globalization as a topic of critical inquiry in our classes—e.g., the student anti-sweatshop movement, the changing nature of work, the effects of agribusiness, the McDonaldizing of the world, the emergence and effects of world Englishes, the anti-globalization movements, the feminization of poverty, representations of current events on mainstream and alternative and international Websites, the politics of sentence-level pedagogy and notions of correctness, the war on terrorism, and the war on Iraq. This spring’s WRT 205 syllabus for new TAs, drafted by Anne Fitzsimmons, is called “Going Global”:

**Going Global: A Research Essay Explaining a Concept**

I have selected the genre or type of essay I would like you to write for your sustained research project this semester, an *explanation*, but I am inviting all of you to select the topic you would be most interested in researching and writing about. But why go global? you ask. Good question. And I’ll respond with a question of my own: why *not* go global when the United States is on the verge of declaring war in the Middle East; when economic, political, and cultural developments blur national boundaries; when American college students can live and study in virtually any corner of the world; when so much of what we desire, purchase, use on a daily basis, and take for granted is produced outside of the United States. Even if we have never left the country, we remain logged into the global network. *That’s* why we are going global this semester in WRT 205.

**What Can I Write About?**

Think of the kinds of global concepts, issues, and phenomena you are aware of from watching the news, listening to the radio, attending campus lectures and events. Consider what are you reading about and discussing in your other courses. Pay attention to what your roommates, friends, and dorm-mates are studying and talking about. We will devote good class time to brainstorming and exploring topics, but eventually I would like you to choose one specific to a discipline, or to a course you are taking, or to some professional or cultural arena you are invested in if possible. Some examples: One of my students from a year ago, a political science major, chose as
his topic *Kashmir*, the country bordering India and Pakistan and the source of much of the tension between the two powers over the last fifty-five years. So a *geographical space* might be an appropriate topic, if it represents current or historical moments of importance, like North Korea’s DMZ; Chiapas, Mexico; Jeser, Israel; or Derry, Northern Ireland. Another student, a nursing major from China, researched and wrote about the Chinese New Year, so a *cultural phenomenon* could be an appropriate topic. Think of the songlines of Australia, the practice of female circumcision among certain African and Middle Eastern peoples, soccer hooliganism in England, rubber bullets in Northern Ireland, or knee-capping within the IRA. David Byrne, of the now disbanded Talking Heads, has produced collections of Brazilian music, including samplings of *Bossa Nova*, a combination of traditional Brazilian pop music and the harmonies of American cool jazz, and *Tropicalismo*, a cultural/musical movement inspired by the imprisonment and exile of two beloved musicians, Caetano Veloso and Giberto Gil, after a military coup in 1964. You might choose as your topic a person, a *particular political, historical, cultural figure*. Who is Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, for example? Why is she important, worth knowing about? How about Margaret Thatcher, Imelda Marcos, Che Guevara, Frida Khalo, Diego Rivera, Artemesia Gentilesch, Gerry Adams?"

Other teachers are starting with the local—the clean-up of Onondaga Lake, the proposed development of Destiny USA (to be the largest mall-entertainment-hotel complex in the U.S.), or the Oneida Indian land claims—and pressing outward to the larger issues and debates these local projects are embedded in historically and economically. In both approaches, it is the complex interconnections of the local and the global that drive the inquiry.

Regardless of the topic of inquiry, we are teaching a kind of *archaeological analysis*, an intellectual process that works to excavate the many meanings of events, artifacts, and texts, as the critical practice of thinking and writing. This is a nonlinear process of framing and reframing the object of analysis in order to understand it from many perspectives and through many interconnections. We have learned a lot from David Rosenewasser and Jill Stephen’s *Writing Analytically* about teaching the skills of analysis. Many of us have also turned to Wendy S. Hesford’s “Memory Work” as a critical methodology for reading a family photograph within multiple layerings or frames of reference—autobiographical, historical, cultural, and economic:
Family photographs are rich sources for analysis, as Wendy Hesford so powerfully illustrates in her essay “Memory Work,” although you don’t have to do a Hesfordian analysis in order for your own essay to be successful. Think of the sorts of questions you might ask of a family photograph: Who is present? Who is absent? How is the photo representing your lives? Is that representation accurate? What sorts of power relationships does the photo reveal or obscure? What key events—emotional, social, economic—link up to the period represented in the photograph? What scenarios are possible subject matter for your family’s photo album? And conversely, what remains invisible in family archives? In what ways does the photo prompt you to reconsider your self-history? What social and cultural values and ideas shape the family’s visual representation of itself? (WRT 205 Syllabus)

In this assignment (and others), we start with what students know and begin to ask questions about how that knowledge came to be formed, and then put those various analyses into conversation with other analyses—from other students as well as from course readings—in order to see the world and the self historically and from multiple perspectives, from peripheries as well as from positions of privilege. It is certainly our hope to locate student knowledges as knowledges, not as deficits, as ways of understanding the world that come out of particular histories, investments, values—in the same way we present and argue for/with our own knowledges.

This kind of analysis is a way of thinking and writing that is complex, that is more about networks than grids (Taylor), that recognizes how connected everything has become and how profoundly underlying tropes and paradigms have changed. It is a way of thinking and writing that recognizes what Eileen Schell calls “transnational linkages.” It is a way of thinking and writing that locates us within emerging, dynamic and global economic, cultural, political, and social systems of meaning. It is a way of thinking that values the dynamic nexus of the “personal” and the “global” as interconnected and complex networks of discursive and material meaning-making and that locates us all as global citizens.

This kind of analysis also requires and rewards the critical research available to us through the new technologies as well as library and primary research. As we all learn how to cast researchable questions and develop the literacy skills necessary to access and assess the vast amount of material available electronically now, we can easily say, “How is Iraq responding to the pending threats of war?” and look at http://www.uruklink.net/iraqnews/eindex.htm and find pro-Iraq government news stories in English to complicate the perspectives available on mainstream TV news in the
U.S. We can—and we should—and we will—as more and more of our lives take place within this globalized landscape. And it is the kind of analysis that calls for new forms of design for textual and Web documents.

I would like to see the writing program join with other departments and disciplines in rethinking the first-year courses, in moving away from the fragmented set of distribution requirements and into an integrated and challenging course of study that makes visible the linkages among fields of knowledge. I hope we can initiate conversations with faculty, chairs, deans, and other administrators in order to do the same kind of archaeological analysis we’re asking students (and ourselves) to do and with the same kinds of “simple” questions about how competing definitions of writing and writing pedagogies have come to be and what’s at stake in one over another—and why.

Notes

1 What has come of this signature so far is that the vice chancellor charged a university-wide committee to design a multi-disciplinary writing major. Rebecca Howard chairs this committee, and there seems to be grounds for some optimism about the major.

2 Designed by Rebecca Howard, teachers were invited to participate in a day-long discussion of contemporary theories of authorship, based on readings they had to complete ahead of time. They were also compensated.

3 A common and contested trope, my particular use of “borderlands” draws from the work of political economist Saskia Sassen, where “borderlands analytic” refers to historically produced spaces constituted in terms of overlapping systems and discontinuities, not to a dividing line (ff. 19, 102).

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Beyond First-Year Composition: Not Your Grandmother’s General Education Composition Program

Juanita Rodgers Comfort, Karen Fitts, William B. Lalicker, Chris Teutsch, and Victoria Tischio

Grounding Points: Theory Meets Pragmatics in Program Reform

In Composition as a Human Science, Louise Wetherbee Phelps titles her preface “Theory is Autobiography.” Our collegial journey toward program reform begins with our belief that a fully realized college composition program can be an effective vehicle for advancing the goals of critical democratic literacy. Many times throughout this process we were tempted to throw up our hands in communal resignation as we faced yet another challenge, yet another obstacle, yet another blockade on the road to reforming our program. However, after the bouts of anxiety and frustration passed, we would inevitably return to and reaffirm our belief in the value of literacy instruction for educating a critical democratic citizenry. Our “autobiography” is a performance of theory.

Our journey begins with our experiences as tenure-track composition and rhetoric faculty at a comprehensive state university in southeastern Pennsylvania that serves about 9,800 undergraduates. We mark the start of our journey with an event that actually occurred outside of the English department. This event was our university’s reaccreditation process and our academic policy council’s response—first the council’s closed-door examination of the composition requirements, followed by several controversial and ill-considered proposals for changes from that committee (which included at various times both eliminating one writing course and increasing the number of writing courses), and finally with our insistence that we be allowed to define the terms of reform for ourselves.
Within these actions by the academic policy council, we see evidence of lack of knowledge, ambivalence, and even hostility toward college composition and those who teach it. The first-year nature of our courses (marked by the 100-level course numbers) and the prevalence of temporary faculty as instructional staff ensured writing instruction's restricted place in the general education curriculum (and in the English department as well). Our reforms were designed to enhance the teaching of general education writing by improving it from the viewpoint of student motivation as well as faculty interest. We were guided in this effort by what we think is valuable about a campus-wide writing requirement, namely its ability, as James Berlin describes in *Rhetoric and Reality*, to advise students “in ways to experience themselves, others, and the material conditions of their existence” (189).

In addition to composition’s marginalization across campus, there were departmental factors that influenced the course of our journey. Like many other English departments, ours is organized in a hierarchical manner, dominated by literature. If we take the degrees conferred by the department as a guideline, then the study of literature (articulated in a BA in literature and a BA in comparative literature) and the teaching of literature (codified in the BS in English education with courses almost exclusively in literature) rank at the top of the hierarchy. The department certifies students in a number of minors as well, including African/African American literature, linguistics, business and organizational writing, creative writing, film studies, and journalism. Composition and rhetoric faculty teach only a minimal number of courses in the minors. While we do offer a few advanced courses, such as tutoring writing and essay workshop, the composition program is essentially associated with first-year writing.

In addition to departmental politics, the beginning of our journey was also marked by significant developments in composition and rhetoric hiring. Traditionally, the majority of our general education composition courses were taught by temporary faculty, a situation unfavorable both to adjuncts and to the composition program. Temporary faculty are required to sit out every fifth semester at West Chester, and many don’t qualify for benefits. Being unable to vote on departmental issues and having little influence among regular faculty, their numbers weakened the composition program’s ability to push for a more equitable share of departmental resources. However, in 1999 our faculty union, APSCUF (Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty), identified over-reliance on adjunct faculty as a labor issue and negotiated clause 11h, which required that full-time positions perennially filled by temporary faculty be converted into tenure track positions. This initiative has led to three straight years of multiple-position searches in composition and rhetoric and an increase in our ranks from eight tenure-track composition-trained faculty in the fall of 2000 to
fifteen by the fall of 2003. This larger number of compositionists required a program with greater diversity in advanced course offerings, providing an additional motivation for the work of curriculum reform.

Theory and the autobiography of our composition community directed our approach to these challenges. Having previously committed to radical reform of our writing program’s administrative structure by introducing a collaborative model of writing program administration underwritten by post-masculinist theories, we applied this same principle to curriculum revision. We had already recast the content of our courses (albeit not the structure of the curriculum) to recognize “composition as a cultural practice,” to quote the title of our colleague Alan W. France’s book. Our texts and model syllabi foregrounded the teaching of discourse as a process of promoting critical consciousness and democratic practices and reforms. Building on our intellectual commitments and taking advantage of our new collaborative model of administration, we began the process of restructuring our fairly typical-looking two-semester course sequence into a two-year course sequence that would expand the writing requirement beyond the stigmas often associated with first-year one-size-fits-all courses: “introductory,” “preparatory,” “service-oriented,” and even “remedial.” In other words, our reforms aimed at getting us beyond the concept of “first-year composition” itself but without giving up what we collectively affirm as valuable in that enterprise.

Our reforms involved colleagues from a variety of disciplines in the process of designing the new courses and identifying new topics for the future. As we increased the number of stakeholders in the composition program, we simultaneously reduced the temptation of what Gerald Graff decries as the “course fetish”: the stultifying “conventional picture of ‘the classroom’ as an autonomous entity, a ‘course’ taught by a single teacher with no regular or functional contact with other courses or teachers” (281).

First-year composition’s troubled history as a gatekeeping enterprise shaped the context of our efforts at reform. Prominent voices in our discipline have, over the last decade or so, advanced strong arguments for the abolition of general education composition. The crux of this argument is that the courses mechanistically impose a narrowly-defined hegemonic literacy on new students, which divests FYC of the intellectual agency that validates academic disciplines. As John Schilb summarizes this argument, “Composition studies will never be ranked with Shakespeare studies as long as writing programs are charged with teaching basic human language to alleged Calibans” (66). The problem is well-rooted in history. Berlin, for instance, has summarized the nineteenth-century origins of writing instruction as an enterprise devoted to inculcating inadequately-literate students of the aspiring classes with the written voices expected of gentle-
men (*Rhetoric and Reality* 23-25). This history persists in the current institutional definition of composition as a “basic skills” course. Sharon Crowley (among others) has argued that the gatekeeping function of FYC denies the field’s long history of rhetoric and eschews opportunities for engaging students (or practitioners) in intellectual inquiry. Thus, useful production of discourse, for academic or life purposes, is subjugated to mere linguistic hazing, with continuing classist implications (“A Personal Essay” 155-76). Our reforms do not, by any stretch of the imagination, solve these complex problems. However, they demonstrate some potentially useful alternatives to a purely electivist model of college composition.

We would like to characterize our reforms as answering some of the charges of the abolitionists by reclaiming (some might say, usurping) a measure of disciplinarity for composition. What we have done, in effect, is redefine our program as “beyond FYC.” We have made three small changes that have created a more significant ripple effect throughout the campus than even we anticipated. Each of these changes is discussed in detail later, but for now it will suffice to list them. First, we expanded the time frame for students to take the courses; instead of requiring students to follow a two-semester, first-year sequence, our program allows the second course to be taken in the second or third year. To dislodge the one-size-fits-all model common in FYC, we expanded the course options. We resisted the pressure to design these new courses around disciplines, which would reinforce the “service” nature of composition; instead we reaffirmed the value of cultural critique by designing a number of non-discipline specific culturally-oriented topics for the five new courses, each beginning with the heading “Critical Writing.” And finally, we changed the course prefix from ENG to WRT, giving them a distinct identity as *writing* courses and nuancing them within the broader concept of “English,” which on our campus is synonymous with literary studies. We have begun to see evidence that these changes are challenging preconceptions about “college composition” among students, English department colleagues, faculty in other disciplines, and administrators.

More keenly than before, we recognize that the curriculum must respond to a range of on-campus constituencies, including the administration, campus-wide curriculum committees, students, and our colleagues (both tenure-track and temporary, compositionists and non-specialists). It also must respond to external bodies such as the regional accreditation agency, the state system’s board of governors, and the state legislature which, in their increasing conservatism, have stepped up the rhetoric of accountability concerning the state’s publicly-funded universities. Under such conditions, our
new administrative structure—stressing collegiality and democratic decision-making—has enabled us to engage these powerful hierarchical influences while resisting the move toward hierarchy ourselves.

Ultimately, then, the most radical components of our revisions are not structural but intellectual and ideological. In re-forming the general education writing course in light of a cultural studies commitment to critical discourse and agency, we have further incorporated an open call for ongoing curricular revision, encouraging all interested parties to collaborate in the process—compositionists, faculty in all disciplines, and students, who select courses (and who thus determine which ones live, die, or evolve)

These reforms, however, also created unanticipated problems and have brought new forms of resistance to the surface. What’s more, our courses have not transcended all of the constraints of FYC. They must still meet a university-mandated slate of outcomes for assessment, although these outcomes can certainly be made to suit our pedagogical aims. In fact, our reform of the program to meet assessable outcomes has provided a basis for making more explicit our program’s progressive, social-epistemic, cultural-studies emphasis that, to quote two members of our team, “steps forward as the social praxis of (too often empty or unrealized) rhetorical theory and cultural criticism” (Fitts and France xi).

The remainder of this essay explains how theoretical and pragmatic considerations converged as our decision-making process unfolded, how the decisions we made opened up new possibilities for us, and how they made us aware of new threats. To many our journey will seem like compromise, and on some levels it is. Institutional reform cannot escape the institutions themselves; however, we feel strongly that these are indeed “steps forward,” illustrative instances of autobiography as the performance of theory.

**Curriculum Reform as Institutional Critique**

The purpose of first-year composition is frequently and strenuously debated. Some argue that it is to prepare students for later course work or a career, familiarizing them either with general conventions of academic discourse or the more specific signifying practices of particular disciplines—i.e., the “service” course. Others claim it should refine students’ aesthetic sensibilities by exposing them to important cultural texts—i.e., the “belletristic” course. In her overview of these debates, Crowley classifies such goals as either pragmatist or humanistic (Composition in the University 9). We frequently returned to this question of purpose in deliberations about the new program, its courses, their content, and our pedagogical practices. In this section we describe how our reforms of the curricular and administrative
structures challenge the status quo of knowledge-making practices and institutional relations.

A cultural studies writing program is designed to raise students’ awareness of the make-up of discursive worlds: their construction of truths, mis-truths, perceptions, and deceptions along economic, social, political, and cultural demarcations. It provides schooling in the critique of and creation of “what is,” as encountered in texts of all kinds—the artifacts of everyday life. Our curriculum description mandates that we teach students “to see the ‘big picture’—to question common sense and to be suspicious of the obvious.” This mandate is an effort to provide students with critical strategies that make visible the ways in which “business as usual” is constructed of values: biases, hierarchies, and privileges, as well as the patterned inconsistencies of bigoted discourse. It calls for students to be critical in both method and attitude and to see their role as interventionists in the search for ways to create a more just society. Such strategies might enable students, for example, to consider the extent to which we can accurately describe the U.S. as a democracy, or its people as “free,” and, given one’s answers, what a person’s “patriotic duty” might be.

We, in our cultural studies writing curriculum, foreground the conflicts and contradictions encoded within texts, literary and non-literary, in consistent efforts to create classrooms in which distinct voices may be heard. Such a curriculum affirms the basic interestedness of all language and explores the ways in which language practices create “ideological prescriptions” about what exists (Berlin, Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures 86). Ultimately, the goal is to enable students to use their awareness of how knowledge is constructed in discourse as the basis for democratic action of their own. (See Candace Spigelman on writing pedagogy’s commitments to “counterbalanc[ing] rhetorics of injustice with humanitarian rhetorics” [324].)

Our composition program’s collaborative model of administration, mirroring this commitment to the democratic construction of knowledge, rejects the authoritarianism of more traditional leadership models. Our administrative model seeks *stasis*, or the level of discussion where there is basic agreement among parties, that is essential to the recognition of constituency, or of one’s place among similar but different others. This means that, at the department and university level, the group, not one or two individuals, represents the program. Many faces and intellects are able to speak authoritatively about it. This is especially important for a composition and rhetoric program because its campus contacts are interdisciplinary, affected by and mattering to faculty and students in a range of other disciplines.
What began three years ago as the possible death of one of our courses has led to a far more interesting and collaborative program for students, composition faculty, and interested colleagues. “Learning to invent in communities,” Karen Burke LeFevre says, “will do more than enable success in classrooms or careers. It is absolutely essential to achieving peace and, indeed, maintaining life on this planet in the twentieth century and beyond” (129). Though we cheer LeFevre’s global claims for collaboratively-created composition, our contention here, for the present at least, is a smaller one: that in our local institutional community, a democratically-invented transformation of general education composition has produced some degree of institutional democratic reform both in classrooms and in meeting rooms.

**Opportunity Knocks: Recognizing Emerging Democratic Possibilities in Institutional Flux**

It’s probably not unusual for institutional regional reaccredidation to cause a degree of panic on a college or university campus. Past reports had cited incoherence in the general education curriculum as a weakness on our campus, and now was the time to address this weakness. Two years before the reaccredidation visit, the administration began preparing the campus by taking several steps: forming a strategic planning and accreditation council charged with writing the University’s new strategic plan, mandating outcomes assessment from every program on campus for the first time ever, and initiating review and revision of the aging general education curriculum. Many of the effects of these preparatory measures appeared, at first, to close off opportunities for democratic participation, as changes were being driven from the top down. The task we faced was to turn these obstacles into opportunities. During the events described over the next few pages, we felt at times as if a funnel cloud was bearing down on us. Our attempts to create curricular and administrative reform were as much an effort to keep our existing program from being caught in the vortex as an effort to establish something new.

The larger political and economic scene was not rosier. Then-Governor Tom Ridge made quite clear his desire to reduce state spending on public higher education. The rhetoric of accountability was summoned to aid the shrinkage of the state system’s budget. Assessment mandates were partially an outgrowth of this larger political context, and many faculty were concerned that it would ultimately result in abstract performance mandates for individual programs beyond those already active in the full-time-equivalent credit-hour driven “FTE economy” that runs the university. The rhetoric of accountability also plays well in the largely conservative mind-set of the
surrounding communities, where many individuals are suspicious that universities harbor secretly liberal agendas that are a detriment to the students, the economy, and the broader culture.

In such a political climate, it is difficult not to feel oppressed and overwhelmed. Many faculty were leery of the administration’s motives and resisted the new mandates for assessment and curriculum revision. Although the composition and rhetoric faculty were less recalcitrant than some, we were nonetheless very concerned about the influences these changes would have on our program. The main curricular body on campus—the curriculum and academic policy council (CAPC)—formed a subcommittee charged with reviewing the current general education curriculum and proposing a new model. No one from among the composition and rhetoric faculty was chosen to serve on that committee. Adding to the mystery around this process, this committee did not make regular reports to the faculty on their progress, feeling that secrecy would allow them to conduct their work more efficiently. Subsequently, rumors about proposed changes circulated around campus. One such rumor involved abolishing ENG 121, the second course in our first-year writing sequence, on the grounds that it was not well-liked by students or faculty. Meanwhile, the university assessment team awaited each program’s plan, which involved selecting general education goals from a list they provided and designing instruments to measure students’ learning for each one. The confluence of factors (reaccredidation, assessment, general education revision, the 11th hiring clause of the union contract, state policies and local politics) converged to bring about the curriculum revisions described in the next section. Suffice it to say for the moment that in this context, where the composition and rhetoric faculty were feeling the squeeze from many angles, our commitment to democratic reform was reaffirmed.

“Assessment” is an unpopular word with many academics. It conjures up images of multiple choice tests, exit exams, functionalist educational philosophies, and bureaucratic administrative procedures. The composition and rhetoric faculty worried that assessment might bring with it abstract performance measures from the administration or state legislature. On the other hand, we were also very much aware that assessment could yield useful information consistent with the cultural studies pedagogy that informally guided our curriculum. For instance, we were well-versed in the use of portfolios for assessment and the type of qualitative data it yields, but felt overwhelmed by the volume of reading which this approach would entail. We were also concerned about maintaining the academic freedom of faculty teaching general education writing courses and wanted to design an assessment plan that would not erode this important privilege. Consequently, we resisted the idea of imposing specific writing assignments on all
sections of our courses or taking other similar steps that would make assessment easier to conduct but would be invasive of classrooms. We also felt very strongly that, while there are many legitimate ways of achieving the same educational goals, any one approach was bound to undermine those efforts, creating a “teach-to-the-test” mentality.

Developing an assessment plan began with our choice of four general education goals from the list of seven provided by the administration. The process of choosing, defining, and articulating goals for the first-year writing courses began a long and intensive examination of our curriculum. What are the goals of our courses? How do we know if we are meeting them? Ultimately, we chose the following goals and revised their definitions (in italics below) to more directly address our courses:

- “The ability to communicate effectively through writing effectively:” In order to learn to communicate effectively in writing, you will be asked to examine the uses and effects of various types of writing, noticing how different contexts for writing call for changes in tone, syntax, and genre. Feedback from your instructor and classmates will guide you as you write, rewrite, and revise your work.
- “The ability to think critically and analytically:” Thinking critically requires you to recognize and analyze patterns of argument. To analyze arguments you will locate and evaluate writers’ claims, the supports for these claims, and the counter arguments. You will also assess the credentials and authority of the writers.
- “The ability to respond thoughtfully to diversity:” Responding thoughtfully to diversity calls for careful attention to the language in which categories like race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc. are represented. Since writing is a social and cultural act, WRT courses examine how discourse can perpetuate unexamined and sometimes prejudicial assumptions about the character and value of diverse groups.
- “The ability to lead productive and contributing lives:” These intellectual activities have the larger objective of preparing you to lead productive and contributing lives. By honing your skills of communication and analysis, this course will further your understanding of your place among others in a democratic and diverse society.

These definitions focus on important features of the philosophy that underlies our curriculum, emphasizing that writing is a complex social and intellectual ability not easily mastered through rote practice, even as publications in our own discipline continue to assume the opposite (see, for instance, Stanley Fish’s recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education). Our curriculum is designed to produce rhetorically-adept and literate
citizens rather than competent but docile writers. The assessment process helped lay the groundwork for the more sweeping curriculum revision we undertook as a result of the general education revision process that was already underway.

Meanwhile, the CAPC general education subcommittee had been meeting to review and revise the curriculum. Near the end of the process, it became known that the committee would recommend deleting ENG 121, our research writing course. It was argued that the benefits of this change would be twofold. It would help to address the pressures from the board of governors to reduce graduation credits, and it would reduce the level of dissatisfaction with the first-year writing courses. Anecdotal evidence (in the form of second-hand reporting of casual conversations with students and faculty) suggested that students were unhappy with the course and that faculty perceived it as doing little to improve students’ writing. Clearly, these assertions could be made about almost any course at the university, and not all committee members were swayed. In fact, other members of the CAPC subcommittee actually argued for increasing to nine the number of required writing credits as a way of addressing students’ apparent weaknesses as writers.

The composition and rhetoric faculty were both stunned and frustrated by the hierarchical nature of this process. All of the proposals were ill informed, lacking a foundation in composition theory and pedagogy in general as well as specific knowledge about the effectiveness of the general education writing courses on our campus. Even a campus-wide assessment of sample student essays from 100-level composition courses and 300-level WAC courses proved too problematic for any conclusions to be drawn. After considerable turmoil and debate, CAPC approved language that changed the general education writing requirement to “ENG 120 and any other Department of English writing course,” maintaining the six-credit requirement in a radically transformed condition. This new language posed unexpected challenges for the composition and rhetoric faculty since the Department of English had a series of upper-division writing emphasis courses that were discipline/career specific or that were part of the creative writing and journalism concentrations, but no other actual writing courses that could fulfill the same general education goals as ENG 120 and ENG 121. For instance, few instructors of advanced writing emphasis courses taught research or included the rhetorical practices foregrounded in ENG 121. In some subdisciplines, such as creative writing, doing so would be pedagogically inappropriate.

People in a position to make decisions about general education writing lacked knowledge about our courses and imagination about how they could be successfully revised. It seemed from their perspective that the only
solution was to eliminate the course. Other faculty, who wanted general education writing courses to serve the narrow disciplinary interests of their programs, began requesting courses specifically designed for their students. Here, a functionalist and careerist mentality prevailed that proved to be a difficult stumbling block for us. Realizing we were dealing with a runaway horse, we went outside the university’s committee and reporting structures to develop our own proposal for revising ENG 121.

Both the lack of knowledge about composition as a subfield of English and the recalcitrant pragmatism that dominated the rhetorical scene led to the need for a definition of a general education writing course that would distinguish it from other types of writing courses. We composed the following, which stresses heavily that these are writing and not writing emphasis courses:

A writing course is first and foremost a course about students’ writing. Unlike a writing emphasis course that must cover disciplinary course material, the most significant and substantive portion of a writing course are the texts being written by the students themselves. Writing, then, is both the main activity and the object of study in a writing course. In writing courses, students are given the opportunity to write and conduct inquiry in at least two different genres or modes, and attention is paid to the principles of effective written communication, including, but not limited to, the connections among purpose and audience, self and audience, grammar, style, syntax, and punctuation. Writing courses treat writing as a process by providing students with substantive written and verbal feedback on their writing and requiring revision of students’ texts.

Writing courses also assist students in understanding the complexities of written communication by investigating the relationships among language, thought, and culture. Writing persuasively requires that students learn the social and cultural contexts of the claims they make—the interestedness of all writing in public forums—in order to anticipate counterclaims to the positions they take (for refutatio). Writing as a liberal art requires students to see the “big picture”—to question common sense and to be suspicious of the obvious. In an academic setting, it also means that students will learn to conduct research, including learning how to locate, evaluate, use, and cite sources. (“WRT 120 and 121 General Course Guidelines and Principles”)
Our commitment to critical cultural studies has been inscribed into the very definition that we presented to CAPC in that we identified discourses as already and always “interested.” Thus, our new general education writing courses are not open to conservative skill-and-drill approaches, such as those advocated by Fish and others; for even when students are studying grammar, they are doing so as part of their attempt to understand how this “interest” is inscribed in the very structures of language. At this point, we decided that the disciplinary distinctiveness of our new “critical writing” courses would be best articulated by changing our course prefixes to WRT.

The converging influences that threatened to diminish and further disempower composition on our campus instead became an opportunity for critical intervention into the operations of the university; this intervention bears the potential for transforming how the work we do is understood by students and colleagues across campus. One of the most significant components of the curriculum revision was signaling the rigor of the critical writing courses by offering them at the 200-level, where students would be challenged to see the writing they do as part of their university studies rather than as mere preparation for them. Colleagues in English and other disciplines are similarly challenged to reimagine the roles that our courses play in students’ educations. The new curriculum has also proven itself to be an effective recruitment tool for new tenure-track colleagues, who find attractive both the teaching opportunities it offers and the collegiality of the composition and rhetoric faculty. In this way, we addressed the concerns of the campus abolitionists, who saw our courses as providing students with inadequate instruction, and of the instrumentalists, who wanted to co-opt the general education curriculum to meet their own program-specific ends. Our autobiography shows that, even though the moves we made were informed by the critical pedagogies that we value, the specific shape of reform was contingent upon local material conditions.

The New WRT Curriculum: Expanding the Circumference of General Education Writing

In transforming the curriculum “beyond FYC,” we acknowledge that writing for college requires students to deepen their understanding of diverse formal and informal approaches to knowledge-making. We believe that such an understanding is likely to help students achieve crucial curricular goals related to critical literacy, and that this learning will serve the students well not just in their short-term academic lives but in their longer-term pursuits as citizens. In other words, we take seriously Berlin’s conclusion to *Rhetoric and Reality*:
Writing courses prepare students for citizenship in a democracy, for assuming their political responsibilities, whether as leaders or simply as active participants. [ . . . ] The writing course empowers students as it advises in ways to experience themselves, others, and the material conditions of their existence—in methods of order and making sense of these relationships. (189)

The reforms we undertook are a working out of this philosophy. It is our belief that the ambitious goal of democratizing the composition program for faculty and students alike is best achieved through giving faculty and students choices of course offerings and of times during which to take them. Broadened access strengthens student agency and provides for philosophical coherence within the composition program: we seek not only to introduce our students to discourse practices that will democratize our society; we seek to do so within a democratized composition program.

To appreciate how much our critical writing curriculum differs from the basic, preparatory, and mechanistic conception of composition it replaces, one need only examine fragments of the philosophy statement section of the English Composition at West Chester University: Policy Handbook for Effective Writing I and II, last published in 1995. The passage below communicates the impression that writing is ultimately little more than the skillful manipulation of prefabricated elements:

Composition is the process of selecting, combining, arranging, and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and larger units of discourse. The process requires writers to control many variables. Among them are the following:

• deciding on and implementing a method of development [ . . . ]
• modulating tone [ . . . ]
• determining form [ . . . ]
• achieving a purpose [ . . . ]
• adjusting writing to a particular audience

The verbs in this passage are key, creating as they do an impression of writing as a mechanical act. Ontology shapes epistemology: it’s easy to see that this atomistic “Legoland” conception of writing harms students and faculty alike. It signals to the student that writing is like any mechanical activity requiring the polishing of a skill, not unlike changing a flat or fixing a meal. Within this “small picture” conception of writing, students blame themselves for not becoming good writers and non-writing facul-
ties blame the writing teachers for failing to instill in their students that which—as this approach suggests—is easy to teach and straightforward to apprehend.

In our new “big picture” configuration, Effective Writing I and II continue to offer first-year students a range of composing strategies that can be adapted to the more discipline-specific genres they will work within as they advance in their majors. Typically, although not exclusively, the first course focuses on expository genres while the second provides more experiences with argumentation, persuasion, and writing based on formal research. While these courses retain their 100-level status, their underlying content (along with that of the new 200-level courses) has been altered. These courses create conditions in which students reflect critically about rhetorical matters and practice the problem-solving strategies that experienced writers employ when they wish to report, analyze, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate information and ideas.

Regardless of level, WRT courses are all informed by critical cultural studies. This fact is underscored by our selection of “developing thoughtful responses to diversity” as one of our four general education goals. This emphasis on responding to diversity puts writing students and their teachers in a particularly strong position to interrogate issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, spirituality, and so forth, as they are negotiated across a wide range of discursive contexts. Each course provides frameworks for interpretation and dialogue that respect students’ status as culturally-defined knowers while supporting their growth as critical writers.

To complement the more broadly-defined approach to composition represented by Effective Writing I, in the new curriculum students may substitute any of the following courses in the critical writing series for Effective Writing II to fulfill the university’s six-hour general education writing sequence, or they may choose these courses as electives at any point in their undergraduate studies:

**Approaches to Popular Culture** (WRT 204): This course starts from the premise that popular culture confers different qualities and worth on groups in our society, and that these differences are inscribed in language. Students in this course use a variety of critical methods (textual analysis, examination of personal experience, and theoretical explanations of social meaning, such as semiotics, feminism, queer theory, Marxism, or Afrocentric criticism) to interrogate social and cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions textualized in such pop culture forms as movies, song lyrics, cartoons, advertisements, etc. Writing assignments ask students to participate in cultural production through the lens of cultural critique.
Investigating Experience (WRT205): This course invites students to explore texts that foreground contrasts in the experiences of people (including themselves) who represent diverse viewpoints and cultures. The course examines social, political, and economic influences on descriptions and uses of experience. Writing assignments ask students to pay particular attention to the ways that different topics, contexts, purposes, and audiences construct experience differently, thus influencing their own and others’ thinking and writing choices.

The Multidisciplinary Imagination (WRT 206): Whether we choose to define it as vision, creativity, inspiration, inventiveness, or something else — imagination is credited with enabling us to rethink conventional explanations and narratives. This course examines how one’s perception, value, and use of imagination is changed by such circumstances as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Students in this course use writing both to critique various roles that imagination plays in academic achievement and gain insight into their own use of imagination in addressing disciplinary issues.

Entering the Public Sphere (WRT 208): The “public sphere” is a metaphorical arena where competing groups engage in defining issues, values, and themes that are important to the public interest. This course investigates the theories and contexts of a variety of public discourses—and their positive and negative consequences in the lives of communities—from social, historical, disciplinary, and critical perspectives. As writers, students are asked to participate in this inscription of the public sphere in class publications and/or service-learning projects.

Special Topics (WRT 220): Although the theme will vary by instructor, this course will always attend to the ways that different topics, contexts, purposes, and audiences influence an individual’s thinking and writing choices. The first topic developed for this course, “Writing in the Information Age,” focuses on analyzing and producing writing that takes into account emerging writing technologies. Other topics will be developed through ongoing dialogue with faculty from across the university and students in WRT120.
Students in critical writing courses conduct inquiry in multiple genres, learning to more accurately assess the contexts for which they must write and developing strategies to improve their writing proficiency. These courses offer students alternatives that are normally off-limits in a college composition classroom. Working with alternative discourses and knowledges also calls into question that which is more traditional, making the entire enterprise of academic literacy available for inspection.

From the standpoint of classroom pedagogy, this series is intended to act as an invitation for students to take their learning seriously. It is an effort to move critical literacy from the margins of the academy to the center of students’ lives and in this way create what Patricia Bizzell describes as a “center reconceived as expanding the circumference” (41). We are also trying to broaden the circle with our colleagues in English and other departments by inviting them to act as partners in the new program through ongoing dialogue. Collectivity, rather than aggressive defense of intellectual turf, is our objective.

Issues And Opportunities

As we implemented the new curriculum in Fall 2002, we found ourselves continually redefining and articulating this critical cultural studies pedagogy for ourselves, students, and colleagues across campus. Recognizing these groups as distinct constituencies, albeit with overlapping interests and needs, assists us in reflecting on the effectiveness of the new curriculum for achieving the goals of critical literacy. One of our chief aims, to maintain an open democratic posture, is challenged almost on a daily basis. The following sections describe these challenges and our efforts to turn them into opportunities as we work to refine the new curriculum.

For the Compositionists, Whose Collective Action Was the Basis Of Reform

In making the pronouncement that we are “democratizing” our curriculum and committing to a critical cultural studies pedagogy, we are of course compelled to carefully examine what it means to enact democracy and critical consciousness among ourselves and within an increasingly pluralistic university community that has not always honored or celebrated its diversity. We must take great care to ensure that the theories within which we operate truly support our work, mindful of Diana George and John Trimbur’s observation that the cultural studies movement, with its origins in white male heroic narratives since the 1950s and 1960s, focused largely on class identity, tending to marginalize, even omit, the impact of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and spirituality.
The growing number of students and faculty of color in our program, for instance, has made it imperative that the structure of our curriculum, the substance of individual courses, and the agenda of our faculty development initiatives all push against the institution’s white male hierarchical biases.

For Writing Students, Whose Need to Be Addressed as Full-Fledged Intellectuals and Citizens Is the Main Motivation behind the New Curriculum

Our curriculum is based on choices for students and for faculty; however, students, especially, may be unused to having such choices. What’s more, they may have grown apathetic in the face of an alienating education. Ira Shor remarks that students act out the internalization of that alienation by moving to “Siberia” (the back of the room) physically and/or mentally. Shor cautions us not to see student withdrawal as “mere passivity,” but to recognize that it is a “complex way to construct oneself socially in relation to authority” (25). Apathy thus can be understood as an active form of resistance. On the first day of the semester, our classrooms are already overwritten with the discourse of an alienating education to which the students have developed responses.

One possible way to address this apathy is to convince students that the choices our courses present are genuine and that their decisions regarding them will be consequential to their lives. Shor calls this negotiation “power sharing,” which involves breaking the expected routines of the classroom (23). In our case, it also involves enfranchising students in the university by encouraging them to raise their voices in shaping the curriculum.

Given the constraints of their previous educational experiences, students may approach this partnership with suspicion. As Berlin notes, “those of us who have experienced the dialogic classroom know how reluctant many students are to engage in public debate. Their years of enduring the banking model of education, the model of teacher as giver of knowledge and student as passive receiver, have taken their toll” (Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures 102). We need to be prepared to coax, encourage, convince, cajole, and even push the students into taking more active roles.

For Faculty Teaching the Curriculum, Whose Labor and Commitment Are Essential to Its Success

Not unlike the students, many faculty are apathetic toward composition instruction. They, too, have been alienated by a functionalist curriculum that mandates instruction in classical forms and practice in surface correctness. Burdened by this routine, faculty have come to believe that there
is no intellectual spark in a general education writing classroom. Matters are further complicated by the fact that some have developed institutional identities that are hinged to a knowledge hierarchy, where consuming texts is the far better activity than producing them. Apathy, conservative pedagogies, and intellectual elitism make it difficult to enact our vision.

The curriculum is designed, however, to begin to address these longstanding difficulties by shifting the ground upon which some of these attitudes are based. Most obviously, by moving away from the generic construction of general education writing to a slate of courses with interesting topics, we generated attractive teaching options. Not long after the new courses were announced, non-composition faculty began inquiring about when the courses would be available to teach.

There is, however, a lot of room for misinterpretation of the courses, especially with a large faculty (our department numbers fifty tenure-track members and about twelve temporary members) trained mostly in literary areas. Our non-composition tenure-track faculty are more knowledgeable about theories that inform composition (from semiotics, rhetoric, poststructuralism, discourse studies, and so forth). Still, they seem largely unaware of how those theories translate into composition pedagogy. Rather than building their composition courses around writing generated by their students, these faculty typically focus on the appreciation of texts by professional writers. These conditions place a tremendous burden on faculty development to maintain coherence in core themes across multiple sections and to help the department develop a shared discourse and understanding of the new courses. These workshops can generate useful discussions about composition theory and pedagogy, as well as generate new ideas for ongoing curriculum revision.

For the Larger Campus Community, Whose Support for the New Curriculum Was a Vital Part of Its Successful Development

As we have described, an uninformed response to composition prevailed at one time across campus and underwrote proposals for general education reform. We recognized that we needed interdisciplinary partners, rather than adversaries, in the reform process if we were to effect democratic change. We extended our own internal collaborative approach to the campus community by inviting representatives from each program and school to attend meetings to discuss the new curriculum in draft form and to provide input on their students’ needs as writers. This process smoothed the way for passage before the university curriculum committee.
We designed WRT 220, “Critical Writing: Special Topics,” to function as an on-going invitation for faculty from any discipline to participate in the development of new composition courses. English department faculty who are interested in teaching a special topics course are charged with the responsibility of initiating a dialogue with colleagues in other disciplines about that topic, looking for suggestions of issues or debates, readings, writing assignments, and approaches to the topic. This component provides the composition and rhetoric faculty with an opportunity to keep the dialogue (and the education) about our discipline going, both disrupting the reflex toward disciplinary territorialism and creating the potential for substantive dialogue about the teaching of writing.

A Final Thought on Enacting the Democratic Vision of the Critical Writing Curriculum

Our autobiography is really an auto-ethnography in the sense that Mary Louise Pratt describes as a “contact zone: “a space in which competing, conflicting forces —represented here by students, our colleagues in English and other disciplines, the university administration, and outside agencies —vie for influence over the writing curriculum. The text we have written to transform the ideological conditions of writing instruction at our university is itself a record of these conflicts. This is a lesson worth carrying away: that writing program revision is not about fixing problems any more than writing instruction is about fixing mistakes. It is about incremental progress, in sometimes planned and sometimes unexpected ways. In other words, it is a continuation of the journey.

Works Cited


Language Matters: Rhetoric and Writing I as Content Course

Debra Frank Dew

At the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs (UCCS), writing faculty recently reconceptualized English 131 (ENGL 131: Composition I) by claiming an instructional agenda beyond the instrumental function of general skills writing instruction. Our shift from a Writing-WNCP, “writing-with-no-content-in-particular,” curriculum (77) to a Writing-WSC “writing-with-specific-content” curriculum, (82) follows David Kaufer and Richard Young’s conceptual parameters as articulated in their theoretical inquiry into the relationship between writing and content. Kaufer and Young define the Writing-WNCP course as an instructional tradition that has long “dominated the thinking of most English departments,” a tradition that encouraged “the splitting off of writing from the rest of what is taught and learned in the academy” via the establishment of the separate course in first-year composition (77). Such a course focuses on “mechanics, usage, style, and the paragraph” while other disciplines focus on “content, for which language is only a vehicle” (78). The “fundamental premise” that scaffolds the W-WNCP tradition is “the separability of language and content” (77) where content serves “an instrumental rather than an intrinsic” function (78). In said tradition, one assumes that “the same [writing] skills will develop no matter what content is chosen” as the “language skills taught and learned are generic” (78). W-WNCP courses choose content “presumed to be of interest to students” as students “write best” about such things (78), but such content must not require “so much time and effort to learn—lest instruction in writing be compromised” (79). The emphasis, then, is often on “personal expression” (79).

In contrast, Kaufer and Young then define W-WSC courses wherein “language serves more than” an “instrumental function” (82) as “language practices are inextricably linked to [one’s] discipline” (86). To teach dis-
disciplinarian content is “to teach languaging about the discipline” (83). As students write within disciplines, “writing assignments are dictated by the specific rhetorical practices of the community” (81) and students negotiate both language skills and content. Whereas Writing-WNCP courses artificially separate instruction in rhetorical skills from disciplinary contexts, (first-year composition from content courses across the curriculum), Writing-WSC courses ask students to direct their intentional attention to both skills and content in process.

At UCCS, our theoretical revision of ENGL 131 may be understood as a shift from such a general skills W-WNCP course to the alternative W-WSC model. Our curricular revision includes deep conceptual moves in four related areas. First, ENGL 131 is now a content course with rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) as the subject matter. Second, the integration of content restored the theoretical link between language and disciplinary content. The relinking of language and content led us to conceptually reanimate form. Rather than teaching fixed patterns of arrangement, we now address form as rhetorically contingent. Third, the language-content link further motivated us to recover instructional liability for sentence-level competencies from our supplemental skills course taught in the writing center. Finally, the integration of rhetoric and writing studies as disciplinary content in the first-semester course reconstituted our instructional labor by aligning ENGL 131 with other content courses across the disciplines. By definition, our writing instruction is now more fully a scholarly enterprise with disciplinary integrity.

**ENGL 131: Composition I as General Skills Writing Instruction, W-WNCP**

When I assumed administrative oversight of the UCCS Writing Program in the fall of 2000, ENGL 131 was a general skills writing course with an accompanying exit portfolio. Archived program reviews from 1982 (“Academic”) and 1990 (“Composition”) indicate that the ENGL 131 curriculum, as first developed in 1980, remained the same through 1990. Accrediting reports from 1997 and 1998 then indicate that the ENGL 131 curriculum remained essentially the same up through the late 1990’s (Odell, “1996”; “1997”). Overall, writing program policies and practices were internally coherent and yet aligned with the curricular vision of 1980 when I arrived in the fall of 2000. UCCS archival documents offer rich insight into the logic that informed the development of ENGL 131: Composition I in 1980 and then the practices and policies that sustained its identity through the fall of 2000. During my first year as WPA, I came to more deeply appreciate ENGL 131: Composition I in all of its principles and practices.
ENGL 131 was a general writing skills course “designed to give all incoming students experience at writing analytically in a number of different formats and genres directed to different purposes” (“UCCS English 131”). Students wrote one diagnostic essay, three in-class essays, and three out-of-class essays. All essays drew their content from the writer’s own experience, the experience of others, and hypothetical examples. As such, they were to “stand up in terms of analysis and argument without the inclusion of outside information” (“Suggested Guidelines”). Students needed to analyze and reason with “their own thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and understandings before they [reasoned] with others” (Odell, “Composition Faculty” 1). Further, writers who “start[ed] first with others’ essays, tend[ed] not to learn how to take their own position; rather they parrot[ed] someone else’s” (Odell, “Composition Faculty” 1). This principle complemented the early-process claim that “students [needed to] find their own voices, their own sense of authority over their prose” (Napierkowski 1). To develop personal authority, as evidenced through voice and independent reasoning, ENGL 131 cordoned off academic content.

Writing program documents justified the general writing skills curriculum for first-semester students. These writers all had to formulate a thesis, generate topic sentences, develop paragraphs, and reason analytically. The Composition Program Review (1990) cited such developmental needs: “[M]any entering freshmen ha[d] so little idea how to write a competent academic paper that they need[ed] a structure—even a formula—for doing so if they [were] going to survive in college” (6). In “reality,” “many entering students [could not] handle the fundamental writing tasks that college require[d] of them” (7). ENGL 131’s curricular aim worked from the skills-first, content-later principle, which sustains most W-WNCP courses.

Syllabi explicitly described the W-WNCP curriculum. ENGL 131 focused on “the fundamentals of academic argumentation,” as developed “within the confines of the five-paragraph, thesis-driven essay” (Timm). Formal competencies—“how to write sentences and paragraphs that read well and flow”—were taught as structural building blocks to be crafted (Hester). Writers built diverse analytical structures, e.g., a casual analysis, an evaluation, a problem-solution, a compare-contrast, or definition, which would capably hold diverse content across the curriculum. Writers “finger practiced” with differing structures to master the techniques and conventions of analytical discourse, and “to promote cognitive development” (“Composition Program” 5). Syllabi timelines were organized topically by the specific analytic structure under construction.

Students wrote in-class essays (ICEs) to prepare for exams across the curriculum. ICE prompts were self-contained writing problems, each with context, aim, audience, and issue clearly defined. ICEs were experience-
based, analytical essays written on common topics, such as the effects of television violence on children and the causes of addictive behavior. Writers received topics on the test day to assess authentically their ability to generate experiential content on demand. They wrote three ICEs in order to generate one successful essay for their final ENGL 131 portfolio.

Students chose one ICE and one out-of-class essay (OCE) for their final ENGL 131 portfolios. Portfolios were scored twice; split decisions received a third read. Portfolios received a pass, pass/lab, or fail. Students with passing portfolios received letter grades for ENGL 131; those with pass/lab portfolios received an incomplete, and had one year to complete ENGL 135, a laboratory course focusing on sentence-level issues. Students with failing portfolios repeated ENGL 131. An appeal process enabled instructors to resubmit failed portfolios. If the portfolio failed the appeal process, the student repeated ENGL 131.

The instructional emphasis on the construction of formal elements as general writing competencies was coherently linked to portfolio criteria and clearly addressed in course syllabi. The “liberating confines of the basic five-paragraph essay” was the “form that most appeal[ed] to those unknown readers who at semester’s end decid[ed] [the student’s] fate: the portfolio readers” (Hester). Portfolio essays needed a thesis, and micro-theses, “accompanied by the clear, logical movement,” of ideas as “demonstrated by appropriate transitional and cohesive devices” (“Composition Program” 4). Paragraphs “proceed[ed] in either parallel or subordinate patterns (4). The essays “manifest[ed] reasonable correctness of sentence structure,” a “felicity of syntax,” and were also “free of serious usage errors” (4). Portfolio criteria emphasized structural competencies and the development of experiential detail. Writers who built these formal features into their essays and adequately developed their ideas passed the assessment.

The Writing Program’s Review of ENGL 131: Composition I

ENGL 131 and its companion portfolio came under review when English faculty hired a new WPA, who was specifically charged with the task. Writing programs are complex, dynamic systems, which—to remain healthy and effective—must necessarily respond to shifts in local context and external relations. The immediate past WPA was a classified employee who enjoyed no license to revise the curriculum or program policies and practices in response to the shifting constraints of the program’s administrative (rhetorical) situation. In the fall of 2000, a new tenure-track WPA was hired to review and revise all of the above.

As the new WPA, I worked with administrators, letters, arts and sciences (LAS) faculty, writing faculty, the writing center coordinator, and tutors to review ENGL 131. Because writing faculty already met for monthly portfo-
After a few months of discussion, writing faculty individually completed the Composition Faculty Survey Fall 2000 (Appendix A). At the same time, I visited with colleagues in English, LAS faculty, the writing center coordinator, and her tutors. Many sent follow-up memos and emails detailing their observations and concerns. Guiding documents that heavily informed our review included the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” and the newly formulated “UCCS Core Goals for General Education.”

UCCS Faculty and Student Perspectives on First-Year Writing Competencies

Faculty in LAS assessed their first-year students’ writing competencies across the curriculum. Our English chair, for example, explained that first-year students “[had] major trouble with a writing topic that [required] them to go into a text, extract evidence to support a thesis and sustain an argument, and embed quotations in their own writing, so that this evidence [worked] fluently with their argument” (Ray). Furthermore, “they [were] unable to evaluate evidence, and frequently [overlooked] salient points in the texts that would buttress their analysis.” She felt “students [were] afraid of text” as they struggled to set up their arguments. They “reach[ed] into the air for evidence instead of the text” (Ray). Essays were mostly “about themselves” rather than their literary texts. Joan Ray’s rich description of her text-based, analytical assignments and her analysis of her students’ struggle with task formation enabled us to assess ENGL 131’s external relevance to ENGL 150 as a general education literature survey.

Philosophy professors assigned analytical arguments based on academic readings. Students who entered “Introduction to Philosophy who [had] taken English composition [did] not have analytic skills in thinking and writing, and it [took] half a semester to even begin to teach them” (Olkowski). Students “[needed] not just to know how to construct a grammatical sentence,” they had to “construct arguments based on evidence and to distinguish these from beliefs and opinions” (Olkowski). Philosophy students, very much like Ray’s literature students, struggled to generate text-based, analytical arguments sustained with evidence from course readings.

History professors regularly assigned thesis-driven essays in their general education courses. As in philosophy, first-year history students “[passed] their opinions as analysis,” and reiterated a text’s arguments rather than formulating a “viable thesis” and shaping an argument of their own (Sheidley). Faculty across general education identified academic reading and textual analysis as the necessary “place” for writerly invention to begin. Students negotiated academic texts during their first semester on campus (in His-
tory 151, English 150 and Philosophy 100), but such content-based inventive strategies were not integral to ENGL 131 as a general skills writing course.

In their formal survey of the ENGL 131 curriculum (Appendix A), writing faculty echoed other faculty’s concerns and shared their observations as ENGL 131 instructors. Faculty consistently questioned the transfer value of ENGL 131 ICEs generated from stand-alone prompts. Faculty suggested that we integrate readings so essays would “more closely represent the kind of writing students will do in other classes” (Napierkowski). Because ICE prompts were standard, faculty “read the ‘same’ essays over and over, and expected certain perspectives” on the issues (Loterbauer). ICE prompts “often [encouraged] formulaic, empty essays” (Flint). Faculty also registered student concerns that the in-class topic and time constraints actually impeded their ability to demonstrate writing competency.

Writing faculty noted that first-year students pushed for increased responsibility in ENGL 131. “[Students] regularly [asked] to do more research” (Timm). Faculty had “to rein in [first-year-writers] to keep them from doing so, and [didn’t] enjoy doing that because many of them [had] written research papers in high school” (Timm). Students felt like they were “backpedaling” (Timm). Faculty shared student-to-student, hallway comments overheard in passing. A recurrent theme was captured by the following comment: “All they want is a five-paragraph essay, and I already know how to do that.” Writing faculty identified developmental needs and writerly desires as articulated by the students themselves.

Finally, faculty claimed that portfolio criteria and assessment procedures constrained their practice. The exit portfolio prevented risk taking in assignment design. The “quest for safety in the portfolio” led faculty “to leave behind genres such as definitions and narratives” (Johnson). Instruction was “driven by [faculty] desire to submit successful exit portfolios” (Napierkowski). Exit portfolio pressure, and high-stakes production bore down on faculty and students alike. One instructor described her students’ experiences: “Let’s face it, [ENGL 131] is about as much fun as a trip to the dentist—without Novocaine. [Students] feel this way because the stakes are so high with that winner-takes-all portfolio. Most of my English 131 students are scared, pissed, and wary” (Fallon). Faculty agreed that the portfolio standards and procedures focused “much too much on writing the minimally accepted form to pass the exit portfolio” (Odell, “Composition Faculty” 1).

UCCS writing center tutors met with me to share their insights from writing conferences across the curriculum. They “noticed a lack of engagement in [first-year students’] writing,” perhaps because the “131 curriculum [did] not adequately challenge students to engage in their work” (Macna-
They felt students could be asked to write “more than the ‘cookbook’ 5-paragraph essay structure” (Macnamara). One tutor, Adrienne, mentioned “other 100-level courses” in which students were already asked “to analyze texts and include research in their own writing—History 151, for example.” Another identified a common need: “an ability to critically analyze or critique a piece of writing, whether it [was] an outside source or the student’s own work” (Burkey). Most students could “construct a thesis and organize an essay,” but they could not “really critique a piece of writing” (Burkey). Tutors observed a gap “between basic skills and sophisticated analysis techniques” (Macnamara, Hill, and Williams). As students advocating for students, they proposed that first-year writers “read a text and then write an analytical paper including their original thoughts” (Macnamara, Hill, and Williams). Peer tutor observations and suggestions generally complemented those expressed by LAS faculty.

**Guiding Standards: UCCS Core Goals and the WPA Outcomes Statement**

As part of our curricular review, we considered the “UCCS Core Goals for General Education” as adopted by faculty in the spring of 2000. ENGL 131, as a universal requirement, naturally addresses core goals in written communication. As a common course, ENGL 131 further functions as a vital venue for delivering core experiences, including the principles and values of a liberal education on a grand scale. Two specific core goals informed our revision of the first-semester course:

**Goal One:** Students will be able to read, write, listen and speak in a manner that demonstrates critical, analytical and creative thought.

**Goal Four:** Students will be prepared to participate as responsible members of a pluralist society—locally, nationally, and globally.

Goal One’s reading, writing, listening and speaking competencies called for the integration of academic readings, along with the critical and analytical discussion of the same. Goal Four promoted curricular diversity and made rhetorical competencies integral to general education curricula. We discovered that integrating critical and analytical reading and discussion in ENGL 131 and diversifying our readings would better serve our undergraduate mission. ENGL 131, reconfigured as a W-WSC course, would more richly serve the UCCS core goals and thereby enhance the external relevance of our writing curriculum.
The Council of Writing Program Administrators adopted its “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” in April of 2000. The Outcomes Statement’s aims are “curricular” as it focuses “on what we want students to know, to do, to understand” (Yancey 323). UCCS writing faculty assessed course competencies against the Outcomes Statement’s common expectations to generate a broader context for curricular revision. The Outcomes Statement both guided and authorized our local revision of ENGL 131. As the Outcomes Statement thoroughly integrates rhetorical competencies, it admits a civic function for first-year writing, a function that complements democratic discussion as a venue for enhancing students’ abilities “to participate as responsible members of society” (UCCS Core Goal Four). It also integrates critical reading and analysis and calls for diversity in course content. As an external document generated by WPA professionals, the Outcomes Statement provided the necessary theoretical and professional leverage we needed to advance our deep revision of ENGL 131.

Administrators, faculty and students all variously confirmed that ENGL 131 as a general writing skills, Writing-WNCP course no longer served our collective needs. Program constituents had identified needs and set new goals, which cohered into our agenda for curricular change. Our proposed revision incorporated UCCS core goals and standards from the WPA Outcomes Statement and immediately responded to gaps identified by the UCCS collective.

**Language Matters: From General Skills To Content Course**

ENGL 131’s emphasis on general writing skills and experience-based essays did not enable first-year writers to negotiate assignments across the disciplines. Students struggled to transfer writing skills into context-specific, content-rich writing situations. The appearance of “opinion” (Sheidley; Olkowski; Ray) and the experience of writers “themselves” (Ray) in documented essays across the curriculum may have been content transfer from ENGL 131, where experience was legitimate content. Writers may have transferred ENGL 131 writing tasks to other disciplinary contexts, especially since most of these students were concurrently enrolled in ENGL 131.

ENGL 131 assignments needed to enable students to negotiate assignments across the curriculum more effectively. Writing faculty chose to replace experience-based essays with documented analytical essays based on course readings. Both the WPA Outcomes Statement and UCCS core goals supported the integration of content. ENGL 131 students now write three documented analytical essays and one ICE based on readings. We selected rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) as our disciplinary content, broadly cast
as language matters. RWS content, locally understood as the study of language matters, encompasses the following subtopics: multicultural rhetoric and language practices; language and technology; language and literacy; pop culture and language practices; or writing in the disciplines (WID), as a survey of discourse conventions (skills and content) across the curriculum. Faculty choose their specific subtopic, but no matter the subtopic, students analyze diverse essays that address language issues. The essays then provide a discipline-specific, discursively rich context to facilitate invention. The documented essay now closely replicates the writing assignments students negotiate across the disciplines. RWS content, under the umbrella of language matters, gives disciplinary presence to our subject matter, so students learn that “language practices are inextricably linked to disciplines” (Kaufer 86). Our ENGL 131 writers are already “languageing about [a] discipline,” (83) about our discipline within their very first writing course. Finally, the study of language theory and practice should enhance skills transfer since our subject matter further enhances students’ awareness of writing principles and practices as always linked to disciplinary content.

Relinking Language and Content: Matters of Form

As a W-WNCP course, ENGL 131 asked writers to work with language and to build local and global analytical structures in the absence of substantive content and without the generative constraints of a disciplinary situation. Prescribed analytical forms constrained our first-year writers’ delivery of their ideas. Faculty interpreted this struggle as a sign of writers’ developmental immaturity, proof that they needed even more formal constraints (“Composition Program” 6). Alternately, the struggle perhaps ensued as writers forced their content into prefabricated language structures, such as the three-point, closed thesis. Such form-fixing enforced an ineffectual split between language and content, where form did not rhetorically respond to content. ENGL 131’s reliance upon fixed forms inadvertently delayed the writer’s rhetorical maturation. As writers were denied rhetorical control over matters of form, they did not learn to strategically negotiate language-content relations, the one “inextricably linked” to the other (Kaufer and Young 86). Writing faculty chose to reanimate form, to teach form as rhetorically contingent and to give writers control of formal matters throughout the writing process. We released students from the protective custody of a three-point thesis, and a five-paragraph essay, and thus admitted the complexity of rhetorically situated invention and arrangement.

Our theoretical re-linking of language and content and subsequent reanimation of form affected the portfolio assessment. Our local implementation of the portfolio assessment had created a culture of fear and instructional intimidation for both faculty and students. The high-stakes
assessment constrained instruction to formulaic directives for producing the generically “good” text. As ENGL 131 students’ mastery of essay forms was likewise evidence of instructional competency, faculty pretty much taught to the test (“Composition Program” 6). For faculty and students to negotiate the theoretical and practical demands of relinking language and content, they needed a supportive instructional environment that rewarded risk-taking and developmental messiness. We relocated the ENGL 131 portfolio by converting it into a general education assessment. Students now submit a portfolio after completing their six credit hours of required writing course work.

Our reconceptualization of form deeply reconstituted writing instruction as faculty knew it. Writing instruction depended conceptually upon the material presence of form as “content.” Since ENGL 131 emphasized language skills, assignments existed as forms to be made: compare/contrast and problem/solution, for example. Instructors lectured on thesis statements, topic sentences, and paragraph patterns. Their critical attention to form largely constituted their instructional labor. Understandably, the removal of fixed forms from our curriculum (the material loss of their labor) traumatized writing faculty. The following comment captures the loss felt by many: “Our revision of 131 took away form, but gave us nothing in exchange” (Odell, Email, emphasis added). The removal of fixed forms (their reanimation and representation as rhetorically contingent) signaled the removal of the instructor’s practice. The addition of RWS content and the pedagogical shift to rhetoric as techne were conceptually invisible substitutes. Our theoretical relinking of language and content compelled writing faculty to materially reconstruct their practice. Writing faculty yet mourn the conceptual loss of fixed forms as substantively equivalent to the loss of their comfortable and familiar practice, a practice which had sustained their professional identities for years.

Relinking Language and Content: Sentence-Level Competencies

Restoring the language-content link further motivated us to recover instructional liability for sentence-level competencies from our supplemental course taught in the writing center. Even as ENGL 131 emphasized general writing skills, the curriculum held that sentence-level issues were outside the course’s instructional domain. Faculty assumed that students mastered sentence-level skills before enrolling in ENGL 131. If not, faculty advised students to concurrently enroll in ENGL 135 for supplemental instruction. Most students did not enroll in the lab as advised; instead, they waited until their portfolios received a pass/lab rating, and then completed
the lab the following semester. Alternately, some students managed these issues on their own or visited the writing center for support.

Faculty assessed portfolio essays for sentence-level competencies but did not teach them. On average, 20% of ENGL 131 students received pass/lab ratings for insufficient language control (Odell, “1996-1997” 5; “1997-1998” 4). To redress the high pass/lab rate and quite fully secure the language-content link, faculty recovered sentence-level competencies from the laboratory course. The laboratory curriculum was freestanding—students worked on general editing skills in the absence of disciplinary content. Recovering the competencies enabled us to offer sentence-level instruction within the discursively rich, discipline-specific context of our revised W-WSC curriculum.

**W-WSC, Disciplinary Identity and the Professionalization of Writing Faculty**

Writing faculty gained much from our curricular revision even as the subsequent rebuilding of their practice was (yet remains) professionally exacting. In “Depoliticizing and Politicizing Composition Studies,” James Slevin reminds us that our writing “curriculum [. . .] communicates some important messages to students; it teaches students how to read the courses they enroll in” (5). They learn “what forms a coherent order and what doesn’t, and to that extent, what counts and what doesn’t” (5). Our shift to a content course tells students that our disciplinary content “counts,” that RWS, locally defined as *language matters*, merits their intellectual engagement. Ours is a critical claim for disciplinary appreciation and respect.

ENGL 131 as a W-WNCP course constrained writing faculty’s labor relations to the department of English and the college of LAS as one of service and thus perpetuated an unfortunate academic labor trend. When the first-year course defines itself by the absence of intellectual content (the W-WNCP course) it enables academic institutions to “endorse and institutionalize” an “impoverished notion of first-year composition and what it means to teach it” (Slevin 6). Furthermore, such a “reductive notion of composition” enables university administrators to justify shameful employment policies (Slevin 6). Slevin appropriately implicates writing professionals as well because we “let institutions get away with it by endorsing and institutionalizing impoverished notions” of our labor—we perform our work in ways that reinforce our own impoverished state (6). Locally, UCCS writing faculty work inside this labor trend as they are all instructors who work extremely hard for very little pay. By reconstituting their labor as scholarly teaching, faculty resist the academic labor trend and add professional integrity to their work. As a W-WSC course, ENGL 131 need not attach itself parasitically to other fields and feed off their content. Such content-depen-
dency perpetuates an impoverished definition of our work as remedial writing skills. The integration of our own content gives faculty more intellectual control over their labor.

Some might argue that the integration of content in ENGL 131, even if it’s ours, sustains service relations with other disciplines because we aligned writing assignments with those across the disciplines. Actually, the integration significantly alters our institutional location and curricular relations. We have moved from a skills and service curriculum below other disciplines to a W-WSC curriculum that enjoys parallel relations to other disciplines. Our coursework is externally relevant as we share responsibility for teaching core competencies. Our work is supportive but no longer subservient in its disciplinary location and lesser in its curricular function. ENGL 131 as content course deliberately disrupts our local labor hierarchy, a hierarchy that has not rewarded writing faculty, professionally or materially, for their institutional loyalty and hard work. By performing our work otherwise by giving presence to the intellectual in our work, we undermine the institution’s continued justification of shameful policies (the heavy workload, the low salary), instead of perpetuating the same. Writing instruction performed as scholarly labor gains professional legitimacy across the institutional terrain.

Rhetoric and Writing I: Academic Reading and Analytical Writing

In the spring of 2002, the LAS curriculum and review committee approved a title change, the new course description, and our common outcomes for ENGL 131 (Appendices B, C). Composition I is now: Rhetoric and Writing I: Academic Reading and Analytical Writing. LAS committee members respectfully entertained our claim that composition has its own disciplinary content. They appreciated the integration of academic reading and discussion—no matter the disciplinary subject. Our colleagues across the disciplines embraced our curricular revision, and thereby sanctioned the refiguring of our academic labor relations. Now, writing faculty and program administrators need to perform these relations anew by advancing curricular claims that relentlessly enhance the professional integrity of our work.

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**APPENDIX A**

**COMPOSITION FACULTY SURVEY FALL 2000**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this survey is to gather input from all writing faculty concerning our current approach to English 131. We will use the survey data for critical discussion and then curricular decision-making. These decisions will have an immediate impact upon your practice, so
please take the time to thoroughly express your ideas, concerns and needs relative to 131. Feel free to move beyond these questions as well. Thanks.

Course Goals:

- What is your current understanding of the purpose of English 131?
- Do you think the current purpose of the course needs clarification, expansion? If so, what should we consider?

Course Description: Currently, our 131 description asks for one diagnostic essay, 3 OCEs, and 3 ICEs.

- What is a reasonable workload for English 131?
- What types of papers should we teach in English 131? What values/interests/goals inform your choice of papers for this course?

Content or Materials for English 131 papers (OCE): Currently, students are invited to draw from personal experience, experiences of people they know, and sometimes they ask us to let them draw from outside sources (minimally).

- Which of the above sources do your students regularly use?
- How do you facilitate the gathering of materials for 131 papers? For example, personal experience may be accessed or recovered through invention activities. If you invite students to draw from observations/interviews/outside sources, how do you facilitate their research process in 131? What kinds of support are we offering for this process?
- Should we include other resources for their papers? If so, which sources?

Content or Materials for English 131 (ICE): Currently, many students write their ICEs from our departmental pool of prompts, and a few are drawing content from readings.

- What are the limits/benefits of the departmental prompts?
- How do you feel about shifting to reading-based ICEs?
- How many ICEs should students write? Why?

Conferences: Currently, many of us are using conferences for purposes of revision and portfolio preparation.

- How often do you schedule conferences, and for what purposes?
- What factors impact the number and kinds of conferences you schedule?
- How might we alter our instructional context to better support conferencing?
English 131 Textbooks: We have some instructors working from packets and some using Axelrod and Cooper’s *The Concise Guide to Writing*.

- What are the strengths/weaknesses of your current “text”?
- What should we look for in our 131 texts?
- What type of text would meet our students’ needs and address their interests?
- Do you require students to buy a handbook? Should we all require a handbook, the same handbook?

Diagnostics and Supplemental Instruction, English 135: Currently, students write a diagnostic essay, and we can then recommend that they enroll in 135 to address sentence-level issues.

- What are the benefits/limits of our current placement process for English 135?
- What suggestions do you have relative to our placement process?
- What do you think about our current approach to English 135 as a supplemental course for our English 131?
- How do students respond to the placement process and to 135 as our supplemental course?

Portfolio Process: Currently, we read portfolios at the end of English 131, and we include one ICE and one OCE in the portfolio. Students receive a fail, pass/lab or pass as a result of the assessment. We have an appeal process.

- What texts should be in our portfolio? Do you like the current make-up?
- What outcomes should be possible for this portfolio? Are there other outcomes we should consider?
- What are the benefits/limits of our current criteria for the 131 portfolio assessment? What should we keep? What should we change, if anything?
- Do you have ideas or concerns about our appeal process?
- How would you feel about using an exit portfolio to assess competency after students complete both of their writing courses? In this process, students would complete our courses and receive their grades. Then, they would put together a writing portfolio that would be assessed to determine writing competency. If students didn’t pass this portfolio, they would be required to take English 301, or another 300-level writing course. Students would have one year to demonstrate competency after completing their writing requirements. The portfolio assessment would be detached from our first-year courses.
Anything else you would like us to address:

**Appendix B**

**Rhetoric and Writing I: Academic Reading and Analytical Writing**

*Rhetoric and Writing I* is the first course of a two-semester sequence, required of all UCCS students. Students develop critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through class discussion, the rhetorical analysis of academic texts, and the writing of documented analytical essays. Emphasis is given to reading and writing processes as multiple and rhetorically diverse. Course content focuses on *language matters*, the discipline-specific content of the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies. Students study language theory and practice in one of the following areas: multicultural rhetoric and language practices; language and technology; language and literacy, pop culture and language practices, or WID, as a survey of language practices across the curriculum. Requirements include academic journal writing, an in-class essay exam, and three documented analytical essays. *Rhetoric and Writing I* is taught in a computer-mediated environment.

**English 131 includes the following writing, reading and speaking activities:**

**Writing Assignments:** English 131 includes four formal writing assignments: an in-class essay based upon academic readings, and three documented analytical essays. Essays ask students to integrate evidence from course readings. Students use writing-to-learn activities including: journals, peer reviews, and other in-class writing assignments throughout the course. Writing-to-communicate activities include computer-mediated exchanges, synchronous online chats, and threaded discussions.

**Reading Activities:** English 131 incorporates critical reading as integral to academic learning and inquiry. Students read essays that articulate diverse perspectives on language issues. They analyze academic essays for purposes of invention and inquiry, to develop strategies for responding to diverse rhetorical situations, and also to increase their awareness of the relationships among language, knowledge, and power within their fields.

**Oral Communication:** English 131 incorporates discussion as both a supportive counterpart of academic reading and writing processes, and to enable students to participate as responsible members of a pluralistic society—locally, nationally and globally. Students develop oral communication skills through the following activities: group discussion of academic readings, writing conferences, and brief in-class presentations.
APPENDIX C

ENGL 131 FIRST-YEAR OUTCOMES

*English 131, Rhetoric and Writing I,* at UCCS is aligned with the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” (*College English,* Volume 63, Number 3, January 2001).

**Rhetorical Knowledge**

*Students should . . .*

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences and rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure, and adopt a voice and tone appropriate to the rhetorical situation
- Understand how genres shape reading and writing
- Write in various genres, including critical, analytical, reflective discourse

**Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing**

*Students should . . .*

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand writing assignments as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate content and sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power through the reading and analysis of academic essays

**Writing Processes**

*Students should . . .*

- Generate multiple drafts to complete a successful text
- Develop strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proofreading texts
- Use later invention strategies to rethink and revise their texts
- Understand writing as a social process and use collaborative strategies throughout the process
- Effectively critique their writing and that of their peers
- Use computer technology throughout the writing process
Knowledge of Conventions

Students should . . .

- Format analytical academic texts
- Employ genre conventions relative to structure, paragraphing, tone, and mechanics
- Integrate ideas, cite course readings, and document the readings as warranted
- Demonstrate control over their written language, including syntax, punctuation, grammar, and spelling
In spite of its universality as an institution, first-year composition (FYC) is local in its instances. One of the innovations in FYC that has received little critical attention from writing teachers and writing program administrators is the first-year seminar (FYS). In 1998, the Boyer Commission issued a call to America’s research universities to “construct an inquiry-based freshman year” featuring a writing-rich seminar and to “link communication skills and course work”; several of America’s smaller liberal arts colleges had already established such seminars. In this essay, I argue that the first-year seminar is an important instantiation of first-year composition, well-suited to small colleges, but perhaps not without significance to larger, research-oriented, institutions. The FYS offers a third alternative to the FYC-or-no-FYC debate, but has received very little attention in the dominant professional discussion. I propose to open that discussion, first by describing the major variants of FYS. Drawing extensively on my own experience as the WPA in two different colleges with FYS programs rather than FYC programs, I map the development of the FYS in those institutions. I discuss the philosophical and pedagogical fit of the FYS with writing across the curriculum programs and with individual institutions’ missions. I analyze other structural characteristics that suit the FYS to liberal arts colleges. Finally, I speculate about why these innovative programs have received so little professional notice and suggest that writing program administrators might find such discussion useful.

**Features and Varieties of First-Year Seminars**

The FYS programs I discuss here will perhaps seem ideally—if not exclusively—suited to small liberal arts colleges, where an emphasis on teach-
ing is paramount. In this context, the description of first-year seminars as vehicles for first-year composition includes the following features:

- The college/university catalog recognizes the FYS as the initial writing course.
- The catalog requires the FYS of all first-year students.
- The catalog assigns full course credit to the FYS.
- The catalog indicates that full-time, permanent faculty from several disciplines have responsibility for teaching the course.

That is, the FYS under consideration in this essay is not the first-year seminars whose primary purposes are instruction in study skills, high school to college transition, or retention—those which frequently carry only partial academic credit and do not serve as writing courses. Nor do I initially refer to pilot projects, FYC alternatives for specific curricular tracks or programs, or seminars taught by a discrete writing faculty—although all of these might well be developments well suited to a wide range of institutions. Rather, I consider the seminar in the form that most sharply delineates it as a programmatic innovation in first-year writing.

First-year seminars share many features, wherever they are taught. They are often described as interdisciplinary and carry either no departmental designation or a special interdisciplinary or core curriculum designation. Class sizes are small (typically 12-18 students) to allow for discussion and a substantial amount of writing. Catalog descriptions of FYS frequently point to critical thinking and engagement with the enduring questions of human societies as their hallmarks. Unlike the many broadly introductory, textbook-based courses students take in the first year, or even first two years, the FYS focuses on a limited number of primary texts, developing students’ understanding of what it means to do careful, critical reading and writing. Faculty are drawn primarily from the tenured or tenure-track ranks of departments across the curriculum and, in many cases, serve as students’ first-year advisors as well as their seminar professors.

There are two predictable varieties of seminar: the common course and the topical course. In the common course, like the “World Views” course I currently teach at Willamette University, all sections read the same texts, following roughly the same schedule. In fact, at Willamette, all sections meet during the same hour to allow for three or four convocations with guest lecturers during the semester; all papers are due on the same dates four times during the semester. Faculty shape the discussions and paper topics for their sections individually—based on their own experience and interests and on those of their students—and students are explicitly encouraged to expect and appreciate this kind of diversity. Faculty remind students, explicitly and implicitly, that common conversations about impor-
tant questions benefit from the contributions of people with very different perspectives. They also, of course, demonstrate to students that writing, conversation, and critical thinking identify the intellectual work of all disciplines, not merely the humanities. Texts and organizing theme change periodically in common courses, though generally not every year.

In the topical course, faculty propose seminars based on their own interests and disciplinary expertise. The topical seminars program—like the one I once promoted, directed, and taught in at Gustavus Adolphus College (modeled on an older seminar at Grinnell College)—invites faculty to propose seminars that fit a set of pedagogical guidelines. At Gustavus Adolphus, for example, faculty specify the critical questions and questions of value that the seminar would address and sketch out the nature and number of writing assignments for the course. Entering students, who register in June for their first fall semester courses, receive brief descriptions of every seminar and instructions to list at least five choices. In contrast to the campus-wide conversation in common course FYS programs, the topical course programs support social groups based on intellectual, or at least curricular, identity; that is, the FYS serves as a kind of primary social group that often persists long past the first semester of the students’ academic careers.

From General Education to Writing across the Curriculum to the First-Year Seminar

The mission of many undergraduate colleges has understood inquiry as the defining characteristic of a liberally educated person and critical thinking, speaking, and writing as inquiry’s attendant technologies. These technologies have long been fostered, carefully and cooperatively, by faculty across the curriculum in liberal arts colleges—not only among senior majors, but from the beginning with entering students. The FYS is, as I have described it here, principally a phenomenon of the private baccalaureate liberal arts schools, and beyond that, of the more selective private schools. Their mission and goal statements frequently envision communities united across rank (especially faculty and student) and discipline, which jointly pursue truth through critical inquiry, writing, and discussion. Willamette University lists first among the three central goals in its “paramount task: passing on the tradition of liberal learning” a mastery of precisely these tools: “First, the College of Liberal Arts seeks to strengthen students’ intellectual powers. These include the ability to think, to speak and to write with precision, depth, and cogency, as well as the capacity to perceive and expose fallacious reasoning” (10).

Arguably, a distinguishing feature of the liberal arts college is its sense of the general education program as its signature. The commitment of the permanent faculty at large, not graduate students or large numbers of adjuncts,
to general education enables interdisciplinary teaching cooperation in FYS programs, in WAC programs, and, in a significant number of schools, in both. At the two schools which serve as examples here, it was reform in general education which led to the creation of the writing across the curriculum program and eventually to the designation of a seminar as the first writing course. Gustavus Adolphus College had since 1972 no writing requirement, or even any English requirement, when it undertook an overhaul of general education in the early 1980s. Faculty assigned writing, of course, but by then had become generally convinced that a more deliberate practice of teaching writing would better prepare its graduates for lifelong learning, personal and professional pursuits, citizenship, and service. And they were convinced that this would be done best in a curriculum that extended across and through the curriculum. Thus, the new curriculum of 1985 required students to take three designated writing courses, in at least two different departments, with at least one of these in the upper division. The English department continued to offer an elective course called Reading and Writing as it had under the old curriculum, but could offer enough sections for only about one-third of the students.5

When I arrived in the fall of 1987 as a member of the English department to fill the newly created position, Coordinator of the Writing Program, I found that the faculty fully owned the writing program. Large numbers of faculty representing every department had spent summer weeks in workshops with consultants, most memorably James Kinneavy. There were existing writing-designated courses in most departments, often several courses. Faculty were conversant in the language of writing process, understood the value of writing for learning, and generally enthusiastic about teaching their students to write in the discipline. As the new WPA, I met with all department chairs in my first year, asking them what their departments were doing, what they wanted from me, and what they saw as pressing concerns for the writing program. Repeatedly, I heard that faculty offering upper-division courses, mostly to their own majors, often met juniors and seniors taking their first designated writing courses. And they found this fact problematic: they understood writing abilities to develop through engagement in increasingly complex problems and repeated practice, and they were concerned that students were getting too few occasions. But few wanted to introduce a mandatory FYC.

With the support of the dean, my English department colleagues, and several members of the faculty particularly dedicated both to general education and interdisciplinary work, I requested and received faculty permission to pursue a planning grant and, subsequently, a full faculty development grant from the Bush Foundation to implement a seminar. So the Gustavus faculty, already at home with WAC, agreed to develop an across-the-cur-
riculum FYS, guaranteeing an intensive writing experience integrated into a seminar which would satisfy another general education area requirement in the first semester. The “first-term seminar” was first fully implemented in 1993, with thirty-seven faculty members from twenty-one departments.

The English department ceased offering Reading and Writing, though it continued to offer a number of creative writing and more advanced expository writing courses as electives. For the first several years, each member of the English department taught one section of the seminar, accounting for almost one-third of all sections. As the program has developed, the English department’s dominance has declined.

At Willamette University, the history of the FYS becoming the FYC course is also a result of general education reform, though its history is different from Gustavus’s. The FYS, World Views, began at Willamette University in 1987. For the first eight years, it existed with a required one-semester College Writing course, the only college writing requirement, taught by the English department and several adjunct instructors. In the early 1990s, the faculty undertook an extensive revision of the general education program, defining distribution in terms of “modes of inquiry” rather than disciplines. Although the faculty did not originally intend changes to College Writing in the new curriculum, the review nearly coincided with a FIPSE-funded three-year review of its own literature and writing curriculum by the English department. The department surveyed faculty from other departments about their practices of teaching writing, surveyed students about their learning, sought the help of two consultants, and studied writing across the curriculum programs at other institutions. By the end, it successfully proposed to the faculty a new writing across the curriculum program and eliminated College Writing from the catalog. When the faculty voted to replace the old FYC writing requirement with a four-course WAC program in 1995, it seemed logical to develop the writing component of the World Views seminar as the first “writing-centered” course. Faculty had already been teaching a first-year course with a substantial writing component—and more important, had been meeting weekly as a faculty to discuss the teaching of that course. Thus, they knew what they would be facing in agreeing to teach writing to first-year students.

This is not to say that college faculty uniformly welcome the opportunity to teach writing-intensive courses, especially the important seminar, to first-year students. Or that they expect the task to be easy. WPAs who direct WAC programs are familiar with the difficulties of encouraging departmental faculty to develop courses for lower-division students. Faculty generally prefer to assign and teach writing to advanced students in the major. A few, maybe quite a few, will continue to believe that FYC is the responsibility, even the duty, of the English department. Faculty, even
at selective baccalaureate institutions — those requiring minimal combined SATs of 1200, for example — regularly lament the lack of adequate preparation in incoming students and conjure up images of that Golden Age when students arrived at college in love with the classics and in perfect command of standard edited English. But in my experience in two colleges, faculty who have become converts to WAC by teaching advanced writing intensives in the major find the experience of teaching first-year students in seminars a difference of degree rather than kind — and quite doable, even rewarding. They believe that writing across the curriculum, from the first year on, is the best way to teach writing.

In addition to the congruence of college mission to FYS teaching, several structural features probably make baccalaureate institutions, and again especially private institutions, peculiarly hospitable environments for the FYS.

Size is, of course, an issue. Small school faculties find interdisciplinary collaboration a familiar way of life. Entire teaching faculties the size of research university departments or divisions do not agree on everything or overcome their disciplinary preferences, prejudices, and ways of seeing. But they meet together and have very active roles in college governance, particularly over the curriculum. So they talk together about students, curriculum, pedagogy, even assignments, often in meetings where almost all faculty are present and certainly at least several representatives of every department. A variety of interdisciplinary faculty collaborations flourish in small colleges, partly I suspect as an extension of the collaboration involved in general education. The FYS might be seen as the largest interdisciplinary endeavor.

Moreover, class sizes at small colleges are also likely to be small, especially at the private schools. Thus, when a department assigns a faculty member to FYS teaching rather than to a departmental offering, the change in student load may be minimal. That is, if most classes in an institution are held to 25 or fewer, the seminar of 16 or 18 does not require as disproportionate a share of faculty resources as it would at a large research institution where general education classes regularly enroll hundreds.

Staffing is also an issue. Small liberal arts colleges do not have graduate teaching assistants to staff FYC courses. If the English department is charged with FYC, and it does not or cannot hire a substantial pool of adjuncts, its members will devote up to two-thirds of their teaching to composition, or frequently, the old “Freshman Lit and Comp” course. Thus, FYS courses taught by faculty across the curriculum allow the English department to offer a richer variety of courses, including elective writing courses, and curtail the practice of advertising a writing course but teaching a literature course. In small college English departments that do employ
adjuncts, FYC teaching accounts for the majority of adjuncts on campus. The small college sends a strong message to its students and their parents about the value of writing when it devotes its full-time, tenured faculty in all disciplines to the teaching of writing.

Finally, teaching is at the heart of smaller, liberal arts colleges. Discussions in the CCCC special interest group on small college/university composition suggest that while the more selective and more highly ranked the college the greater the expectation for scholarship and published research among the faculty, teaching is the *sine qua non* in tenure decisions for liberal arts colleges. The significance of this value cannot be overstated in considering the applicability of the FYS model to large research institutions.

**The Writing Program Administrator and the First-Year Seminar**

The WPA plays a crucial role in the success of the FYS as a composition course. During the development of the seminar curriculum, she must be active in working with other course leaders and the faculty in shaping the language that will describe the course, its aims, and its pedagogy. Founding documents go through many drafts to assure a high degree of faculty consent, and once vetted through the committee structure and accepted by the entire faculty, acquire a kind of constitutional authority over future decisions. Because it is not uncommon for a faculty member in a baccalaureate institution to live out an entire career there, the founding document’s framers may well be there to reassert their intentions until the next major curriculum replaces it. Of course, every institution has its own unwritten rules about how explicit the pedagogical expectations for any given course can be. And especially in private colleges, where the hand of external regulators is relatively light, tolerance of individual faculty autonomy in bending curricular and pedagogical guidelines is fairly high. Thus, as Tom Amorose argues, the WPA—in the small undergraduate college most often one among equals—wields authority most effectively by persuasion (90).

Like the WPA who coordinates a WAC program, the WPA in an FYS program must educate colleagues about best practices in composition pedagogy. She must offer many examples of ways to incorporate best practices into the seminar curriculum, preferably examples drawn from colleagues in several disciplines. She must help with assignment design, with ways to structure peer response, and with providing feedback to students on preliminary drafts as well as final drafts. Unlike the WPA’s work with faculty teaching writing in their own disciplines, however, this work asks faculty to see themselves in the role of FYC instructors, preparing first-year stu-
dents to read critically and to use writing as a way of thinking and engaging in the critical, analytical discourse of democratic, as well as academic, citizenship.

The introduction to the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” cautions,

It is important that teachers, administrators, and a concerned public do not imagine that these outcomes can be taught in reduced or simple ways. Helping students demonstrate these outcomes requires expert understanding of how students actually learn to write. For this reason we expect the primary audience for this document to be well-prepared college writing teachers and college writing program administrators. (60-61)

The WPA must take an active role in the faculty development programs attached to the FYS and perhaps even create additional opportunities. In my own experience, and in the reports of other FYS programs that I researched as principal writer for the Gustavus Adolphus College program, faculty development most commonly takes the form of a summer workshop (perhaps a week long) and some meetings as the seminar is underway. At Gustavus, faculty meet in an intensive, stipended workshop for an entire week at the beginning of summer and then periodically through the year. The workshop focuses on the common components of the first-term seminar: critical thinking, writing, discussion, addressing questions of values, advising the freshman student. Not surprisingly, the teaching of writing spills over into all of the other categories and faculty design courses with significant opportunities for students to use writing for learning as well as for writing and revising formal papers. At Willamette University, with its common readings World Views course, half-day workshops begin a semester ahead, resume a week or two before school starts, and include a full day devoted to the teaching of writing. During the fall semester, the entire World Views faculty meet weekly to discuss how they will approach the texts, what writing assignments they will make, and how their own disciplinary interests affect their teaching.

What is a bit more difficult, as everyone with WAC experience has discovered, is sustaining and renewing interest in pedagogy. At Willamette University, where the creation of the WAC program and the designation of the existing FYS program as the first writing-centered course were simultaneous, faculty had many opportunities to participate in workshops on teaching writing, but little with serious attention to the FYS as distinct from writing-centered courses in the disciplines. For the fall 2000 faculty, I wrote a small grant to fund additional faculty development in writing. A working group of ten faculty met throughout the summer to study problems in teaching writing. During the fall semester, they met before
assigning each of the four papers to discuss appropriate, effective, challenging assignments; they met again to read samples of the papers these assignments generated. This practice was so helpful that faculty continued to meet to discuss assignments over lunch the next year, and shared their discussion and assignments on the faculty email list. In Summer 2003, a similar working group will form to discuss and adapt for our campus the “WPA Outcomes Statement,” with which many seminar faculty are already familiar (see below), and a new plagiarism statement, as well as review the assessments of student writing in the seminar and program assessments of the seminar conducted this year.

The “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” was published during my first year as the WPA at Willamette University and as a member of the faculty teaching in the World Views seminar. I distributed it to my World Views colleagues during the annual summer workshop for the next fall. They read it almost as insiders, noting its congruence with Willamette’s goals for creating a culture of writing on campus. Some examples might justify this claim. The current iteration of World Views focuses on ancient Athens (other iterations have included Latin America, Victorian England, and the Middle East). Students read a variety of primary texts from the fifth century, BCE: Aeschylus, Oresteia; The Acropolis and the Parthenon (architecture as text); Euripides, The Bacchae; Aristophanes, The Clouds and Plato, Republic or the dialogues of trial and death (Euthyphro, Crito, Apology, Phaedo); Aristophanes, Lysistrata and Thucydides, The Peloponnesian Wars. Reading each of these texts engaged faculty and students in talking about rhetorical situations and genres. What does it mean that a play presented at the foot of the Acropolis, to what may well have been an all-male audience, figures Athenian and Spartan men as victims of their passions and a woman as superior strategist? How do Plato and Thucydides use dialogue differently? Why does each of them fear the power of oratory? How does the Parthenon tell Athenians who they are? How does the Oregon State Capitol (literally across the street from Willamette) tell Oregonians who they are? Faculty quite explicitly introduce questions of how genre shapes reception, how writers address different audiences differently, and how language, knowledge, and power are related.

Many also ask their students to write in a variety of genres—to create a dialogue, for example, about culture, language, power, and emotion between the Lapiths and Centaurs or a messenger speech for a Melian escaped from the siege. Some faculty ask their students to produce first a dialogue and then to represent the argument in an essay. As is common of most writing-intensive courses at most institutions, faculty are expected regularly to incorporate informal writing into classroom activity as well as
to assign formal writing that will go through stages of generating, regenerating, revising, editing, and proofreading, with feedback from multiple audiences.

My colleagues welcome the stated expectation that first-year students “control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling” (WPA 63); they also applaud its position at the end of the list of outcomes. To varying degrees, they understand how it is related to sections on process and rhetorical knowledge. Like all other audiences for whom writers write, they differ in their assignment of importance to various of these features.

Perhaps the FYS taught by faculty from across the curriculum—that is, without formal, graduate school training in composition—seems an unreliable, ill-advised first-year composition course. I hope I have described curricular and pedagogical practices that make it clear that the FYS is neither a reduced, simple way to attempt the outcomes which lie at the very heart of liberal education nor an undertaking by faculty ill-prepared or unconcerned to understand “how students actually learn to write.”

**The Relevance of the First-Year Seminar for WPAs**

Perhaps the institution of the FYS has received so little critical attention from writing program administrators and rhetoric-composition scholars because it has seemed an instance of abolitionism, a misconception I hope I have corrected. Perhaps the fact that FYS now exists most visibly in baccalaureate liberal arts colleges relegates it to the periphery. The writing programs of liberal arts colleges—and their administrators—as Tom Amorose has pointed out, are generally unremarked in the literature (85). Perhaps in the form I’ve described—as the college-wide first-year composition course, taught by faculty across the disciplines—it has seemed an innovation unavailable to institutions whose budgets depend on graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty for major portions of undergraduate education, particularly general education.

If the FYS model were to be adopted at other kinds of institutions—with different faculties, different students, different missions—it would surely take different forms, just as there are local variations within the overall common course/topical course division. But it surely could find local names and habitation at many more institutions than it does now. It seems most likely that the FYS model would move first to more of the baccalaureate institutions, where commitment to general education and to teaching generally is strongest (as evidenced in the criteria for tenure and promotion). But that it could be adapted also to the master’s institutions and research universities also seems likely, if perhaps only as an option among other forms of FYC. In any event, baccalaureate colleges make up 39% of
the institutions granting four-year degrees (master’s colleges and universities another 43% and research universities 18%); that’s a lot of WPA positions, a large share of the future for new rhetoric and composition PhDs, and reason enough to consider the innovations in FYC that baccalaureate liberal arts colleges contribute.

The well-developed FYS programs have much to offer other institutions from their experience, most notably in faculty development. Because the FYS is taught by faculty across the curriculum—as nothing else is—it generates considerable enthusiasm for faculty development programs on campus. At both colleges, I have found that faculty enter FYS teaching with considerable anxiety about teaching writing. Because the FYS is across the curriculum, nobody is afraid to express this anxiety. For a chemist, for example, admitting uncertainty about how to teach writing isn’t as threatening as admitting uncertainty about how to conduct a lab. It isn’t even as threatening as admitting uncertainty about how to evaluate the chem lab write-ups the majors produce. Faculty come willingly to these workshops—and follow up with phone calls, emails, and visits—because they genuinely want to teach writing well. Of course, it is also true that like faculty teaching FYC, their continued commitment to best practices and curricular agreements varies widely.

The success of faculty development initiatives for freshman seminars is seen in two additional ways. First, faculty discourse about writing changes, slowly perhaps, but it changes. A well-conceived faculty development program begins by providing a theoretical basis for understanding best practices. The commonplace dismissal of peer response workshops as a waste of time gradually gives way to the recognition that there are other reasons for students to read each others’ papers than to correct spelling, for example. The suspicion that comments on drafts will simply lead to grade inflation gradually gives way to an appreciation for the role of reflective readers as a writer’s ideas are forming in words. Second, faculty report that they use writing for learning techniques in other classes now, too. They report that they can no longer teach any other way. They find that they want to assign more papers and encourage more revision in their disciplinary courses. They support WAC programs by redesigning their courses to receive a writing designation. Writing across the curriculum, both with and without formal recognition, flourishes at the colleges with a first-year seminar program. Thus, the great writing program goal for faculty development—to so infuse writing across the curriculum that it no longer requires special designation—becomes quite imaginable.

How the FYS would, in new sites, reform FYC, invigorate WAC, and affect the careers of the current composition workforce remains the work of the writing program administrators and their colleagues in those sites.
There is much work yet to be documented in how local FYS programs work with the Outcomes Statement and, in fact, how FYS courses affect student learning, WAC, and disciplinary knowledge about writing and learning to write. What I have attempted to demonstrate is that the replacement of first-year composition by a first-year seminar can advance the college mission, elevate the teaching of first-year writing, free writing faculty to create and staff courses beyond FYC, invite greater participation in writing across the curriculum, and enhance faculty development opportunities.

Notes

1 See the fuller text for these recommendations in the full Boyer Commission report:

II.2. All first-year students should have a freshman seminar, limited in size, taught by experienced faculty, and requiring extensive writing, as a normal part of their experience. (from “II: Construct an Inquiry-based Freshman Year”)

V.2. The freshman composition course should relate to other classes taken simultaneously and be given serious intellectual content, or it should be abolished in favor of an integrated writing program in all courses. The course should emphasize explanation, analysis, and persuasion, and should develop the skills of brevity and clarity. (from “V: Link Communication Skills and Course Work”)

One might quibble with the Commission’s implication that FYC does not generally have “serious intellectual content,” or indeed that “brevity” merits special recognition as a goal of FYC.

2 For additional information about the Willamette University FYS, World Views, visit its Website: www.willamette.edu/cla/wviews.

3 The generic description of the Gustavus Adolphus College “first-term seminar” is under “graduation requirements” in the catalog, online at www.gustavus.edu.

4 The 2000 Carnegie Classifications introduce new categories and descriptions. What was, since 1973, the distinction between Baccalaureate I and II was “selectivity.” The distinction now, between Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts and Baccalaureate General is curricular: liberal arts schools are characterized as having more than 50% of their majors in liberal arts fields. The data which support my claims come from a survey I conducted of the Websites of all of the Baccalaureate, Master’s II, and Research University (“Extensive” and “Intensive” now replacing R-1 and R-2 categories) institutions and approximately 20% of the 500 Master’s I institutions. I found information about writing requirements for approximately 75% of the Baccalaureate and Research institutions, and, taking into account the Master’s institutions, for 52.5%, or 735, of all 1398 institutions listed in the
Carnegie classifications. I plan to report on this survey more fully elsewhere. Of 53 FYS programs which met my criteria as the only FYC course and as taught by faculty from across the curriculum, 40 were in schools classified as private Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts.

5 It is likely that the absence of any existing writing requirement muted any arguments that English was “not doing its job,” or that the department’s faculty should be reduced; indeed, the new writing program resulted in an additional position, that of the writing program coordinator. I am grateful to my colleague Claude Brew for these insights. A narrative of the first years of the Gustavus Adolphus writing program may be found in chapters 2 and 4 of William Zinsser’s Writing to Learn.

6 The history of the creation of Willamette University’s writing program is included in Karen Langdon’s master’s thesis “The Willamette Writing Program: Faculty Perceptions during Its Pilot Year,” 41-47.

7 The MLA’s 1997 Report by the Committee on Professional Employment cites the following statistics for the staffing of first-year composition:

• In the PhD-granting departments, graduate student instructors taught 63% of the first-year writing sections, part-timers 19%, and full-time non-tenure-track faculty members 14%, on average.
• In the departments where the MA was the highest degree granted, graduate student instructors taught 11% of the first-year writing sections, part-timers 42%, and full-time non-tenure-track faculty members 11%, on average.
• In the departments where the BA was the highest degree granted, part-time faculty members taught 38% of the first-year writing sections and full-time non-tenure-track faculty members 12%, on average. (MLA)

This means that tenured or tenure-track faculty taught 4% of the sections, on average, at PhD-granting institutions, 36% at Master’s degree-granting institutions, and 50% at Baccalaureate institutions. If we can’t staff FYC out of the English department, will we find it any easier to staff a First-Year Seminar? Nevertheless, many small college WPAs have developed undergraduate writing programs that meet these challenges.

8 The abolition debate has a long, discontinuous history, summarized and annotated in the “Conclusion and Postscript” to James Berlin’s Rhetoric and Reality and given new arguments by Sharon Crowley’s “A Personal Essay on Freshman English,” (Composition in the University), and given the label of “new abolitionism “by Robert Connors (1995). It has flourished sporadically on the WPA-L listserv, particularly in April 1993, June 1994, November-December 1997, and August-September 2000.
Works Cited


Rethinking Research Writing: Public Literacy in the Composition Classroom

Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem

During the first half of 2002, it seemed impossible to escape stories about "plagiarism" in the news. From stories about authors like Doris Kearns Goodwin and Stephen Ambrose, conceding that they did not properly document their sources in their best-sellers, to discussions about "student cheating" in various college (and high school) courses, research, writing, and documentation were front and center. Of course, these discussions were not new—they had appeared before, and they continue to appear.

In the midst of this public discussion of plagiarism, there was (and still is) the day to day work of the WPA. Much of this work deals with research writing: developing curricula in our research writing courses, working with instructors as they teach these courses, teaching them ourselves. Whereas stories about Goodwin, Ambrose, or students in high school who "plagiarized" as part of a school project (the list goes on . . .) focus on a few (albeit prominent) writers, we work with hundreds, if not thousands, of writers in our courses every semester. In point of fact, through sheer numbers, we probably have more exposure to and experience with researched writing than do most of the professors or prominent authors featured in these stories; we may have also devoted more thought to how to develop as researchers than they have. Yet, in these very public discussions about researched writing—whether misuse of sources by best-selling authors, or what many stories call “cheating”—our voices are only occasionally included.

Meanwhile, in our private corners of the world, in places like the WPA-L discussion list, sometimes we are equally disparaging of students and the research writing process. WPA-L has seen many discussions about what constitutes plagiarism, certainly. But it has seen many more about struggles of instructors who are "required" to assign research papers seeking advice
about how to manage the process, how to make research writing meaningful for students, how to work with the conventions associated with researched essays.

At first glance, there seems a conflict here. On the one hand, we are asserting that the voices of those who work with researchers and writing frequently are absent from public discussions of researched writing practices. On the other, we are suggesting that sometimes, instructors who work with researched writing struggle with the very practices associated with that work. But at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), we have designed an approach to research writing used for our second semester course that we think addresses these issues (and this potential conflict). First, our approach is intended to assert a more public presence for college writing; second, it is intended to address the struggles some writing instructors describe in their discussions of research writing. Operating within the structural exigencies surrounding our program, we have attempted to address public perceptions (of research writing and of students), issues of status and control surrounding the work of instructors, and students’ perceptions of research by defining and extensively supporting a curriculum that is grounded in local sites and driven by specific purposes. We also have developed and extensively supported three models for researched writing, and created an event honoring and celebrating student writing at semester’s end. Here, we’ll describe the basis for this course and sketch its broad outlines. The goal of this work—in pedagogical workshops, with students on their own research, and in campus outreach efforts—is to change the tide of the conversation about student writing. First-year writing courses, the frameworks for them, and the public moments that come along with them encourage different kinds of public conversations about student literacy.

Course Beginnings: Theoretical Foundations, Institutional Realities

Although we were hired separately, we both arrived at EMU in Fall 2001 knowing that we would shift the focus of our two writing courses fairly dramatically. And while we hadn’t known one another before we were hired, we shared a common vision for this shift originating in research projects that convinced us of the necessity for grounding the work of literacy development in specific contexts. For Linda, this realization came after studying perceptions of "basic writing" in a variety of sites and the ways that students placed in basic writing classes thought about writing and reading. From this work, Linda became convinced that to mitigate against the view of "autonomous" literacy shared among these students, sources, and sites—that is, the view that literacy is a set of practices entirely distinct
from any context (Street)—courses should help students develop their own understandings of the connections between literacy practices and context.

Heidi arrived at EMU having just finished a long-term case study project in which she observed and interviewed three students throughout their senior years of high school English and their first semesters of college composition. These students, while successful at "studenting"—that is, at figuring out "what the teacher wanted" and then doing it—could point to very few moments in this year and a half of English courses when they had either felt a sense of personal engagement or imagined an audience beyond the classroom instructor. School, for them, was adding up course credits and grade points. Consequently, Heidi was interested in rethinking the focus for first-year writing courses so that students and instructors alike could re-imagine writing as a living, engaged response to the world around them.

Coming in, we inherited what seemed at the time (and still does) a complex set of institutional structures surrounding our first-semester courses. EMU is a comprehensive university of about 25,000. While we are not open-admissions, we are not far from it. Our students cover the range of educational experiences, from the most to the least successful, and bring a range of experience with writing to our first-year courses. As an institution, EMU faces the same challenges that many comprehensive, regional universities do—we are chronically under-funded and a good part of our annual budget comes from enrollment. Thus, the pressure to admit and retain students is omnipresent.

Our situation in first-year writing is also complicated. As we describe above, we admit a range of students; some of them have relatively little experience with extended writing or reading. However, as a result of strategic decisions made in the English department many years ago, we offer no so-called "developmental" writing courses. We have two writing courses—English 120 (Composition I) and English 121 (Composition II). English 120 is nominally a first-semester course; however, when students are admitted, they can place out of English 120 with an ACT verbal score over 19. As a result, about 600 of our entering 1400 or so writers need to take only English 121. Additionally, each semester there are 5-8 sections of English 120/121 set aside for students who elect to enroll in the "PASS" program, a program which provides additional support for students who may not be traditionally prepared for college. One or two sections of Honors 121 are also offered each semester. Courses are taught by three primary groups: between 18 and 23 graduate instructors, 20 and 25 part-time lecturers, and about 15 full-time lecturers. A few faculty members (4-6 beyond the two of us) also regularly teach these courses). We work closely with graduate instructors, who receive intensive mentoring and guidance during the two years they spend in our MA programs in the teaching of writing, imagina-
tive writing, literature, children’s literature, or linguistics. Full-time lecturers unionized in Fall 2001; their new contract stipulates that they must participate in professional development and mentoring/evaluation programs to be promoted through three lecturer ranks. Even before this new contract, we worked closely with some of them; this year, we have begun to work more closely with others. Professional development is less consistent among part-time lecturers. Although they have no job security, many are regular fixtures in the department and in the first-year writing program.

The diversity of experience with writing among students and the range of teaching experience that instructors brought to our program reinforced our commitment to curricula (in both courses) that asked students to explore intersections between ideas about literacy and different contexts where those definitions were shaped. Such a curriculum would create opportunities for students to understand that components of "literacy" are always grounded in a context. Thus, if one were labeled "less literate" (for instance, by their placement in a particular course), they might consider how the definition of "literacy" shaping that label reflected a particular, "academic" context; alternatively, if they were to consider another context, they might be highly literate in ways that others in the academy were not. Similarly, instructors might begin to reflect on their own ideas of "good" and "bad" literacy and consider how to work with those in a course.

We also knew we had to design a curricular framework for, through, and around these themes that would support a meaningful, thoughtful curriculum for all students, yet be flexible enough to encourage instructors to bring their particular strengths to their courses. While we can never ensure that every first-year writing student has exactly the same experience, we do want to have a shared language for talking about first-year writing and a sense that we’re all working with the same goals in mind. We’ve come to adopt the metaphor of a baseball stadium for this approach—we wanted everyone to be in the same ballpark, even one as big as Yankee Stadium.

**Engaging Researched Writing**

A central goal of English 121 is to make researched writing a meaningful experience for students and instructors, rather than a hoop-jumping activity. Discussing researched writing with students on the first day of class, students often identify it as the kind of "autonomous" practice mentioned earlier. One student used the image of a "Ferris wheel of index cards" to describe her previous experiences with the practice: She took notes on those cards, set them in an order, and (metaphorically) spun them around to complete the essay. Her experience echoes those recorded by Bruce Ballenger in *Beyond Notecards*; one student interviewed described research as "tiresome studies on a subject that a person does not like" (4). Ballenger
also relates the frustration experienced by a student who wanted to move beyond this approach. The student remembered research writing as "going to the library after school for about two hours, reading things by other people and then making notecards," but said that "the teachers would always be angry at me because . . . I ‘thought too much while writing the paper.’ What did a teacher mean by thinking too much?” she wondered (4). These are the kinds of research that we did not want students to experience in English 121.

In reconceptualizing the course, we faced two challenges. First, we wanted students to experience research writing as a meaningful process of inquiry and to think of writing as a more public act. Second, we wanted to help TAs, instructors, and faculty rethink their pedagogical models for teaching research writing. While we have not mandated adoption of the approaches we have designed, we have found that these changes (and the ones we continue to make) have encouraged conversations among instructors and faculty about student writing and research that we are told did not occur before. Public documents (course outcomes, course baseline standards, curriculum guides), public conversations (departmental listservs, hallway talk, shared assignments), and public moments (specifically, the Celebration of Student Writing, discussed later in this article), all have contributed to new discussion of student writing among those who teach it, among students, and on the campus as a whole.

The first step in shifting discussion was to rethink models for researched writing and develop curricular support for them. Initially, we developed three models for researched essays that reflected the general outcomes for English 121 (which we revised, in collaboration with other instructors, during our first year with the program). We also defined specific strategies that instructors would need to incorporate in each essay, and embedded these in three models for researched writing, each based on innovative composition/writing pedagogy. Our curriculum guide provides instructors with a description of each approach, along with an explanation of the writing strategies practiced in them, a "generic" assignment, classroom sketches illustrating what several class days might look like with each model, and a list of resources for students and instructors for the model. The models include:

• An inquiry-based researched essay (rooted in the work of Bruce Ballenger; some instructors also look to Ken Macrorie’s "I-Search" model for this).

In our curriculum guide, we write that:

The core of the researched essay is the belief that research should begin with genuine interest and inquiry, and the shape of the essay should grow out of the development of
that inquiry. As Ballenger describes it, "the essay is less an opportunity to prove something than an attempt to find out." Thus, research essays often proceed from a question that an author has about a particular topic, through what she or he has learned about that topic and its relevance for an audience (defined by the student and/or the instructor).

- An ethnographic researched essay (something like the work of Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, as outlined in their textbook *FieldWorking*).

Here, the curriculum guide explains that Ethnographic research is time- and labor-intensive, and yet it can be a valuable undertaking for students because they become experts in a specific area and can then relate their findings to the rest of the class. Students choose communities or cultures that they will conduct fieldwork in by becoming a participant-observer, conducting interviews, and collecting written and spoken documents. They listen to what stories are told and valued by community members, what rituals are observed, what the community’s rituals and traditions are. In doing so, they work to make the "familiar strange and the strange familiar," the most famous tenet of traditional anthropological ethnographic work.

- A multi-genre researched essay (based on Tom Romano’s work, also Davis and Shadle, "Building a Mystery").

The guide describes this essay as one that asks students to see, understand, interpret, and know a subject through multiple genres. In employing genres as both a lens and a rhetorical tool, the multi-genre research paper asks students to be explicitly creative and scholarly, to pay close attention to matters of style as well as matters of research.

Additionally, we urged instructors (and required graduate instructors) to adopt a common process leading into these researched essays. First, students identify a community of interest to them. Then, students spend an hour a week observing that community for the first four to six weeks of the semester, compiling their observations in double-entry journals. About halfway through their observations, students identify a question, an issue, a topic that has captured their attention in this research—often, we steer them to the "question/comment" side of their double-entry journal for this. This then becomes the basis for a research question that students pursue through multiple means: library research, interviews, analysis of artifacts, and (of course) additional observation.
In practice, through these models, students work through a carefully staged process of research writing. Typically, about three weeks into the term, students encounter their first research writing assignment; in most courses, they actually create two researched papers. Often, this first one is based on the inquiry model, above, and students work through it over a period of three to four weeks. Instructors adopting this model stress to students that, particularly in this initial version, it is a process essay—the idea is to work through what research the writer has located, how the sources connect to one another and to a central question (or, in some cases, do not), and what is the relevance of the work (and for whom). Writers are urged not to resolve issues in this assignment, but instead to explore what they’ve learned. They also learn that if they revise this researched essay for their portfolio at the end of the term, they will need to shape it into a more directed researched product. Once students work through their research, many instructors move to some version of the multi-genre essay described above. Students write on the same topic, and use much (if not all) of the same research. This time, though, the focus shifts away from process and on to synthesis, rhetorical/audience analysis, identification and use of genre conventions, creation of a product, and reflections. As our curriculum guide and sample assignments explain, successful multi-genre essays begin from clearly defined questions or theses. It is essential that the authors know what they want to explore; that’s why students work through their process in the earlier research project, and then consider what has emerged from the project that is relevant for a particular audience.

The evidence we have gathered thus far on English 121 demonstrates to us that we are on the right track. Students’ end-of-class comments, as well as reflective statements (often accompanying multi-genre essays) indicate that many understand researched writing differently by the end of the course. Typical are comments like these, written by students in lecturer Clarinda (Rin) Flannery’s class, about their multi-genre papers:

From a reader’s standpoint, the impact of the paper is much more dramatic than a standard paper. [. . .] From a writer’s standpoint [. . .] it requires more in-depth research and studying. It also allows the creativity of the author into the paper, making it more interesting for reader and writer alike.

The difference (between a multi-genre essay and a traditional research essay) is amazing! I feel like I am actually using my brain. Not that I wouldn’t use my brain on a traditional research paper, but in this case the information [. . .] is incredibly thought-provoking and sustaining. Because we have so
much creative freedom, while at the same time following very specific guidelines, my mind is more free to wander. It is in that wandering that I capture and develop my deepest and most profound thoughts on my topic.

In fact, Rin points to the only negative comment she collected on multi-genre essays as additional evidence of the approach’s success:

To tell you the truth, I didn’t really like the MGE paper. [. . .] It let me be creative and I had to think. [. . .] [But] I couldn’t do it in one sitting; I had to really think about it piece by piece. There was no way I could do it at the last minute.

In addition to anecdotal comments like these, we are also involved in a study that asks students to gauge how effectively English 121 achieves the outcomes established for the course. While we do not yet have complete data, the results from a pilot study administered to 128 students during Fall 2002 are encouraging. Over 80% of the respondents said that they believed the writing strategies emphasized in the course would help them in later courses. In prompts asking students to rate how confident they felt using specific strategies emphasized in the course, several key criteria emerged as highly significant positive changes: using a variety of research strategies, using evidence and ideas from other sources in writing, using writing to discover and develop ideas, identifying "rules" surrounding the form and language of writing, understanding and using conventions of written English expected in writing at the university, knowing where to find resources if unsure of conventions, and using academic citation systems.

While we would like to say that all of the writing instructors have moved to these approaches and achieved the same effects, we can’t. Graduate instructors, faculty, and some lecturers teaching the course have contributed significantly to the changes; the multi-genre research assignment came from Rin, who adopted it the semester before we arrived, and many of the heuristic assignments included in the curriculum guides are from graduate instructors and lecturers. Through occasional workshops on researched writing, as well as the visibility of the Celebration of Student Writing, other instructors are moving toward participating in the models above. And, those instructors who are involved in rethinking how they teach research and who have moved away from the monolithic "research paper" see their work with student research writing as meaningful and purposeful. Again, the hallway conversations slowly affect others.
The second goal that we brought with us to EMU’s writing program was a desire to change public perceptions of students and of student writing. These discussions abound in mainstream public sites, in the composition literature, and on campuses. In discussions of "cheating" in mainstream media, for example, there is abundant evidence to support a profile of students’ intellectual work and student abilities that is less than flattering. This kind of talk is sometimes evident in the professional literature, as well. Mike Rose includes numerous such characterizations in Lives on the Boundary, beginning with a comment on basic writing students from a UCLA administrator — that "these are the truly illiterate among us" (Lives 10; see also "The Language of Exclusion"). Marguerite Helmers’s study of "Staffroom Interchange" submissions to CCC reveals that instructors frequently characterize students as lacking, deviants, or beginners (45). And who among us has not heard colleagues (and/or administrators) invoke the mantra, "my students just can’t write"?

As we rethought English 121, we were mindful of these perceptions. At the same time, we were equally cognizant of statements like those by Joseph Harris, who has noted that composition instructors are not very practiced at participating in public discussions about writing and literacy (A Teaching Subject) and Peter Mortenson, who admonishes that if we do not learn to participate in public discussions of literacy—like those about plagiarism and cheating so prevalent in mainstream media during the first part of 2002—"we consign ourselves to mere spectatorship in national, regional, and . . . local struggles over what counts as literacy and who should have opportunities to attain it" (183). For us, affecting the local conversations has been and continues to be our most important goal.

Our attempt to address these issues has been to create the Celebration of Student Writing, held near the end of each semester and featuring the work of students in first-year writing. The Celebration, as it is known, is a sensation. It takes place near the end of every semester, for sixty to ninety minutes, in the ballroom and several rooms adjoining it in EMU’s student union. For the Celebration, English 121 students create, display, and discuss with the hundreds of Celebration attendees products that represent the research work they have done throughout the semester. Participating students comprise a large part of the audience for the event; they are joined by faculty, administrators, staff, and teachers and students from surrounding colleges and high schools, as well as prospective students and parents. The first Celebration, during the winter 2000 semester, featured the work of 550 students. The Celebration at the end of winter 2003 will feature the work of almost 900. At the event, spectators mill around in a crowd of people and
displays, talking with students and spectators about the work on display. VCRs are scattered around the room, showing videos created by students based on their work—one in which students interview people about their perceptions of race at EMU, another on time management in the dorms, a third on participants in the AmericaReads program. In the middle of the room stands a twelve foot cardboard tower covered with representations of men and women from popular magazines read by college students. Directly in front of the entrance doors is a four by three foot pegboard display of fishing lures, artifacts representing the authors’ ethnography of a fishing boat; next to it a display features newspapers and artifacts from another author’s ethnographic work in a Nation of Islam temple. On another table are several “magazines” on EMU campus life, with articles written by students based on their research: dorm rituals, music preferences, nutritional practices, leisure activities, study habits, and so on. Circulating through the room are two "living presentations," students who have covered themselves with conflicting gender representations (one representation on their fronts, another on their backs). The room is boisterous, bright, active, crowded, hot. And most important for our purposes, it is loud—loud with the sounds of people talking with writers, about writing, not about writers (without writing).

As the capstone event for English 121, we wanted the Celebration both to highlight students’ increased investment in and engagement with research writing, and to create a forum where students, faculty, administrators, and visitors could engage in public discussions about what students could, not could not, do. To this end, we had three related goals for the event: to help students see themselves as writers; to make the concept of audience more real; and to change those discussions about writing on our campus. While we have yet to empirically demonstrate that the last of these is occurring, we have anecdotal evidence to attest that it is—ever-increasing numbers of administrators attend the Celebration and discussions about writing are more nuanced than they have been in previous years.

We can, however, be more confident that our approach to English 121 is shifting students’ perceptions of writing, and that the Celebration is contributing to those changes. Students’ comments after the Celebration, for instance, attest to a shift in their perceptions of themselves as writers and as students:

• I got to rub shoulders with some bigwigs on campus. I gained confidence in my writing that I felt was very important.

• The experience at the Celebration was very valuable because I have never experienced anything like this before. It was neat to write about a certain topic and be able to share it with other people.
• Being a part of this university is fun. It doesn’t always have to be about sports or clubs, but it is good to know that there are other ways to be involved.

Each semester, then, hundreds of students—many of whom are highly reluctant to see themselves as writers, some of whom are still struggling to see how they fit in at college—display their work.

With the Celebration, we also wanted to make sure that students at EMU began to see themselves, from their first year on campus, writing for real audiences in ways that mattered—having a voice in a way that mattered to the rest of campus. We wanted them to believe that what they said would be heard by their peers, other faculty members, and the campus at large. At a large, commuter-heavy campus like ours, this is no small feat. We also wanted students to gain flexibility as writers (our program outcomes, modeled on the WPA Outcome Statement, state that students in English 121 will "become aware of expectations of different audiences" and "employ genres that achieve the purpose of their writing and that reach their audiences"), and we envisioned the Celebration as a way that students (and the faculty, instructors, and TAs that work with them) might write toward a particular audience, one far beyond the confines of their individual classrooms. Their evaluations illustrate the differences that students noticed when writing for this broader audience:

• I thought it was a good way of showing all the different ways people use writing.
• I learned that you have to go into detail or in depth because everyone does not know what you’re talking about.
• You have to catch the eye of your audience; maybe your project is very interesting but if your audience doesn’t know that, you don’t have one.
• I definitely had to be more careful in case I accidentally offended someone. I wrote for an audience and by being an audience myself, I know we had to pick and choose our choice of words.
• I learned to have my work reach a larger audience, not just have something that the teacher would want to see, but something everyone wanted to look at too.
• It helped me to realize that writing is not limited to novels and essay papers. There are many forms of expressions.

Thus, students also seem to have realized the ways that writing extends to others through the Celebration.

**Instigating Conversations**

The Celebration encourages conversations among those who teach first-year writing. Graduate instructors are required to participate, and each semester
more and more instructors and faculty have participated as well. Because lecturers are extremely busy and overwhelmed with teaching, they often have less time to talk about writing with colleagues or to imagine changes in their own curriculum. Several instructors have simply attended the Celebration for several semesters. The Celebration gives them a space to talk to other instructors who have used innovative kinds of research projects and to begin imagining alternatives within their own classes. Further, it gives all instructors of first-year composition a sense of being members of a writing program, where we all gather together to talk to students and among ourselves about student writing.

As the Celebration becomes a part of EMU’s institutional fabric, campus administrators have also gone out of their way to attend—a significant achievement. We have watched the president talk with students about their display on nutritional content of campus food and its link to students’ health and body image, the provost talk about a project on campus safety with a group of students, other English department faculty discuss multi-genre projects with instructors, and students talk to other students about what they discovered during their research processes. Nowhere is there a conversation about plagiarism, or about the poor quality of students’ writing and thinking; instead, the focus is on what students have done and what they have produced.

Of course, as our earlier renditions of the realities of work at this institution make clear, the situation is far from perfect here. We have tremendously overburdened full- and part-time instructors, and we struggle with the ethical issues inherent in the highly stratified, hierarchical staffing issues that confront us daily. We know, too, that these realities are not unique. As we have continued to work together (and with lecturers, faculty, and teaching assistants), we also revise our own models for what it means to be WPAs. We see our program, as Tom Recchio does, as “relational and receptive, a series of sites organized to sustain ethical conversation,” and the metaphor of conversation drives our work with each other, with colleagues, and with students (150). However, as we work on both small and long-term goals, it is our belief that changing the atmosphere that surrounds talk of student writing and research will, ultimately, slowly lead to changes in the talk that surrounds the teaching of writing.

As writing program administrators, we realize that these conversations are never done. We look forward to the new turns that may be ahead for our writing program because of input and observations by students, instructors, and campus community members—conversations that lie ahead, we’re sure, and that we cannot predict. And, we are hopeful enough to think that perhaps, someday in the future, these students’ experiences will affect how they in turn conceive of and talk about the work of writing and research. While tales of professionals and students turning to plagiarism will no
doubt continue to surface with regularity, we believe that providing alternative ways to work with and talk about students, writing, and research is an imperative for WPAs, and one way that we can affect the public discourse surrounding this area of writing instruction.

**Note**

1 In a forum like this one, we need not rehash the problems with using a standardized test score to measure writing competence. However, EMU does not now have the money to fund a reliable and valid placement program (and even if funds that could be used for such a program were to appear, we would argue that they should be used elsewhere, e.g., to fund instructors and classroom space enough to require all students to take English 120 and 121). We don’t believe that this placement system is more flawed than a number of others, and we happily live with the consequences —like all first-year programs, we have a range of writers in our courses. The difference is that in many other institutions, such placements tend to land writers out of basic writing courses; here, writers are placed out of our first-semester course.

**Works Cited**


Distance Education and the First-Year Writing Curriculum

Laura Brady

Technology ranks high among the issues that Charles Schuster asks writing program administrators to consider when they examine the role that writing programs play in recruiting and retaining students and in establishing a university’s academic excellence:

Given the pressures on institutions to teach more efficiently and to distribute their learning outside the conventional classroom, how can composition participate? How can we be sure that writing instruction does not get left behind as conventional classrooms are transformed into online sites with chat-rooms, virtual instructor, and electronic administration centers? (94)

If first-year writing programs participate in distance education, what are the advantages and what are the risks we need to examine at our individual institutions?

Considering Contexts for Distance Education and First-Year Writing

At my institution (West Virginia University), the question of whether composition could or should participate in distance learning demanded some immediate answers when the office of the provost and its division of extended learning recently sponsored a grant competition for online learning initiatives. These “Entrepreneurial Learning Innovation” (ELI) grants aimed to innovate practices for large enrollment classes through the use of instructional technologies and to increase educational opportunities for students located at a geographical distance from the campus or who have time constraints that restrict access to courses on campus. The grants
emphasized entrepreneurial innovations because the resulting courses were expected to earn income generated by distance education registration fees.

ELI grant proposals could request up to $45,000 from the provost’s office for design and delivery of an online course sequence, as long as the requested amount was met with a dollar-for-dollar match from the department’s college. The funds were largely restricted to faculty and curriculum development requests (i.e., the funds were not for the technology itself). To increase accountability and minimize the risk of this particular university investment in new learning initiatives, all projects had to start within a year of funding and, within two years, the department had to repay 25% of the total amount funded. For instance, a project with a $50,000 budget would have to repay $12,500 over two years. The repayment condition required applicants to consider carefully their costs and potential revenues.

When the chair and dean made clear that our two university-required English courses (which collectively serve about 6,000 students a year) were among those courses “strongly encouraged” to apply for an ELI grant, I was initially resistant. I knew that our English 101 and 102 sequence was attractive because of the ELI grant’s emphasis on “large enrollment” classes, yet 15 years of experience with computer-assisted writing instruction in a variety of forms and contexts (including a completely online course) convinced me that a distance delivery method was not well suited to the general needs of the majority of our traditional eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old, campus-based writing students—at least not given the current technologies available to our particular group of students and faculty in the year 2000. I also resisted the emphasis on “entrepreneurial” initiatives, even though we’re all acutely aware these days of the budget exigencies faced by higher education. Pedagogy driven primarily by profit displaces student and instructor needs and goals (Brady 348, 355-56).

Strategic resistance to the entrepreneurial side of distance education led our writing program to take a principled stance: we refused to create online writing courses to serve large numbers of traditional, campus-based students. Following Patricia Webb’s logic in her essay “Writing Classes in the Virtual Age,” we instead examined the specific purpose and value of putting courses online (beyond complying with a request from upper administration) and considered as well what advantages (if any) the online environment would have over a traditional bricks-and-mortar setting (2). We reached two conclusions:

1. Face-to-face instruction held more advantages than distance instruction for the traditional eighteen- to twenty-two-year-old students living within five miles of campus,
2. Distance education did suggest one way of reaching some of the nontraditional students constrained by multiple schedules and/or geographic distance.

In West Virginia, adult learners—those students who have been away from school for five years or more—represent a significant portion of the population, yet they are also a group that our university has not been very successful in recruiting and retaining. We kept this audience in mind as we considered course goals, technology options, and instructional needs.

Although this small and specific student audience directly and severely limited the “entrepreneurial” profit potential emphasized in the ELI grant title (because we would reach 64 students a year instead of hundreds or thousands), our proposal met another grant goal to increase educational opportunities for nontraditional students. We received full funding in Spring 2001 for an ELI grant entitled “Writing over Space and Time: English 101 for Adult Learners.”

Mapping Local and Distance Teaching Terrains

Moving even a few sections of a first-year writing course online raises interesting questions about literacy, about presence and absence, and about the nature of instruction and authorship. In “From a Distance: Teaching Writing on Interactive Television,” Joyce Magnotto Neff asks:

1. How are students constructed as writers in [a distance] setting?

2. What mediating elements have roles in distance education?

3. What impact does distance education have on composition pedagogy? (138)

Technology and institutional ideologies always contribute to writers’ identities, but Neff demonstrates how new technologies and pedagogies can make us more conscious of these factors. She gives as an example the many mediating human and technological elements—ranging from technicians and mail carriers to cameras and transmission lines—that interrupted her notions of authority (149). These elements prompted her to find “alternative methods for the physical and oral presence” (151) that she had grown accustomed to in face-to-face teaching, to increase the emphasis she placed on writing as the main communication medium, and to consider how the physical distances between readers and writers “more closely approximated the distance in the non-school world where expert writers publish their texts for imagined (rather than known) audiences and where expert readers interpret texts without personally knowing the individuals who wrote them” (149).
Although our distance courses do not rely on interactive television, Neff’s points remain relevant to our online teaching. We have had to become newly aware of the material and virtual dimensions for teaching and learning, reading, writing, and collaborating. For instance, we found that the physical distances between readers and writers approximated more than the realities of published texts. The physical distances also represented chasms of access and economics between readers and writers, students and teachers, and traditional and nontraditional students. Although distance education may help our students maintain their current class positions, we consciously resist the metaphor of distance education as bridges that students can cross “anytime, anywhere” to a better world. (This is a metaphor that circulates at our university, where one distance education program is titled “Bridging the Gap.”)

Neff’s points help remind our writing program that the shape of the real world—and status within that world—differs depending on where instructors and students live, both literally and metaphorically. In Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century, Cynthia Selfe reminds us that technology cannot be viewed as a “fix for many social, political, and economic problems” (142). We continue to strive for the type of critical engagement with technological issues that Selfe calls for, but we have a long way to go. We are trying to keep our knowledge situated; we are trying to pay critical attention to issues of access for our students; we are trying to pay critical attention to the relationships among technology, literacy, education, and ideology; we are trying to put research into practice (Selfe 148-54).

Other scholars have helped us develop strategies as technology critics. For instance, Dawn Rodrigues draws attention to four “ingredients” that situate knowledge and teaching practices: the curriculum, the discipline-specific pedagogies, the students, and the available technologies. Rodrigues explains why it is important to consider the way these four ingredients interact:

> In many cases, professors are asked to work with available technology, even if it is not what they feel is the optimal paradigm for their particular learning situation. Similarly, institutions across the country find themselves in situations where they are expected to offer distance education courses before having had an opportunity to consider the range of possibilities and develop a plan of their own.

At my institution, we were fortunate. We were able to define a specific student audience and consider student needs in relation to our course goals, pedagogies, and available technologies. After considering what Rodrigues calls the “campus ecology”—the number and type of interactive courses available, our technologies, and our students’ needs—we decided against
real-time interactive television courses. In part, we did not have a “campus” ecology: our terrain is distinctly off campus: the roads and topography in our state can often require over two hours of travel even to reach the closest remote course site. As a result of our terrain, our previous experience with distance courses revealed that remote sites often had only one or two students—not enough to create the type of community we wanted.\(^1\) For instance, Rodrigues describes the way she turns the camera on her local class so that “students at the remote site can see [the instructor] helping students on their writing or on their group discussion tasks” and students at the local site can get a similar view of the remote classroom. She calls this approach “mirror pedagogy.” When we practiced mirror pedagogy, our campus site typically had 20 students while the remote site typically had one person. As a result, the mirror presented a distorted image that emphasized contrasts rather than similarities and underscored just how “remote” the distance site was.

Rodrigues emphasizes that no single mode of distance education will work for all students. She stresses the need “to offer courses that meet the needs of the local curriculum, that tap the available technology, and—most importantly—courses that serve the needs of the students.” For our particular context, that meant we drew on prior televised and online teaching experiences to increase access and retention. To achieve curricular and pedagogical goals of community and collaboration, we moved away from a face-to-face model entirely. However, we also resolved to use varied activities such as email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and Web pages to foster student participation and interaction and to supplement these online approaches with phone and print components.\(^2\) Flexible access, combined with a Web-based and largely (but not completely) asynchronous approach, fit the multiple and varied schedules of students who were primarily working adults with no more than basic access to the Internet.

**Developing a Design**

The pedagogical choice to move our course completely online was also shaped by institutional factors. In a recent issue of *Kairos* that focuses on distance education, Cristie Cowles Charles describes two prevalent models for developing distance-learning-based online writing courses. In one model, the courses are funded, developed, administered, and evaluated by distance education programs rather than by English or writing programs. In the second model, individual composition instructors add innovative methods to their traditional courses. We were able to combine these models. While our university’s distance education program provided startup funds and continues to manage student enrollment and fees, our writing program develops and administers the curriculum, directs staffing and fac-
ulty development, and assesses the course from the perspective of both students and instructors. We also retain the right to discontinue the program if we find that our distance writing courses do not meet the needs of adult learners, do not fulfill our pedagogical goals, or do not prove viable in terms of ongoing curricular or faculty development goals. In this way, we hope to maintain what Charles identifies as “the instructor’s and students’ flexibility to change or adapt the course to their own needs.”

We kept the needs of instructors as well as adult learners central as we redesigned our English 101 course in keeping with the principles that guide our program. And we promised only four sections of the online section of English 101 per year (each section’s enrollment capped at 16 instead of our usual cap of 22 to recognize the added time involved in such a text-based version of the course). We were aware of the obvious appeal that fees from large enrollment classes have for budget-strapped universities, but we knew we needed to start small if we were to develop a strong course that responded first to student and teacher needs. By focusing on a maximum of 64 adult learning students per year (compared to the 3,000 students per year that we serve in our traditional English 101 class), we could concentrate on how to use distance technology to meet the needs of nontraditional students. Our course development process thus embodied many of the guidelines that Todd Taylor outlines in “Ten Commandments for Computers and Composition,” such as “keep people first,” “identify and build from program principles,” “start simple,” and “invest heavily in hands-on instructor training” (231). Faculty training and development has been a distinguishing feature for our program.

**Arguing for a Distance Writing Coordinator**

We have been able to invest—and reinvest—in faculty development. A university grant allowed us to hire a full-time distance writing coordinator who could design content and teaching strategies for a new medium and a very specific audience of adult learners who, we knew from past experiences, needed flexible access to the courses and to the technologies we planned to use. To keep adapting our courses to changing student and instructor needs, we are reinvesting the small revenues we have earned from student enrollment fees to continue to fund a coordinator. More significantly, our Division of Extended Learning is continuing its support by authorizing up to two years of additional funding (an extension of our initial ELI grant) to give us time to assess whether the revenues from distance course fees might eventually make the coordinator position self-funding.

When we applied for an internal grant to respond to our university’s demand for distance writing innovations, we specified that we would use most of the funds to hire a full-time faculty member. This faculty member,
we argued, could devote focused attention to designing a version of our writing courses for this small, specialized audience in a completely online medium. We successfully gained funding for a year-to-year faculty line by creating a short- and long-term plan based on projected enrollments and the small income received by distance learning fees.

In the short term (the first pilot year of the project), the faculty member hired for this position was expected to create two online courses (English 101 and English 102)—one each semester—and to test the student need for and response to these pilot courses. We stipulated that the faculty member would have summer course development time and a reduced teaching load. Although our one-year appointments typically carry a four-course load each semester, we argued successfully for two courses per semester with a single preparation (just English 101 in the fall and just English 102 in the spring). The reduced teaching load recognizes the time it takes to do course design while also adapting the material (and instructional approaches) to a new medium; the reduced enrollment to 16, not 22, recognizes the additional time it takes to respond online; the single preparation allowed the faculty member to develop one course at a time. We also used grant funds to hire a graduate teaching assistant who could provide technological assistance in the first year.

In our long-term plan, we argued for ways the curriculum and the full-time faculty position could enrich our regular classroom-based writing programs, and we projected other courses that might be added if the initial courses proved successful in reaching the adult learner audience. Long-term, we argued that a full-time position would:

• manage ongoing faculty and curriculum development for our distance writing program (in collaboration with our existing faculty and curriculum development programs)
• supervise our online courses and provide training for new instructors of online courses
• act as a liaison between the department and the Division of Extended Learning
• possibly work with the Division of Extended Learning on site licenses with other schools in our state system

We established the need for a faculty member devoted to our online writing programs as distinct and separate from the existing hiring needs for our regular writing program since the online initiative represented an addition to our current plans and commitments.

We were able to fill the position of distance writing coordinator partly by good fortune, but also because we took care to design a reasonable workload with plenty of collegial and technical support, a separate budget for
the faculty member’s professional development (to attend conferences and workshops, buy books, etc.), and a long-term plan that shows how we see this position fitting into our permanent program.

In terms of faculty development and the preparation of graduate students, our online programs provide a small workshop-type environment for faculty and GTAs who want to learn about distance education firsthand. Currently, one full-time faculty member and two GTAs teach distance writing courses—in addition to the full-time distance writing coordinator. The coordinator works with this small group (always in the context of the activities of the writing program as a whole) to share teaching resources and current scholarship. The community that results is a small one but growing.

In addition to collaborative networks and short- and long-term planning, the initiative of the person who currently serves as our distance writing coordinator contributed directly to our success in extending an initial one-year position into a second year and (barring a budget crisis) most likely a third. My colleague, Catherine Gouge, has worked extremely hard on the research and reporting side to give us the material we need to communicate our current project and future plans to upper-level administrators. She has, for instance, designed surveys that let us know about our students’ demographic profile, their experience with and access to basic technologies, their needs in terms of writing and computing, and that help us evaluate how well the course is promoting their learning through the new online medium. She has also established an Excel database that allows her to present her information visually and statistically. At the end of each term, she provides me information that I can pass along to the chair, the deans, and the provost. We collaborate on the final presentation of the reports to be sure that we reach our upper administration audience as effectively as possible. We will need to keep building our case if we hope to create a permanent position that keeps our focus on changing student needs.

**Focusing on Students**

To make sure that we would be able to reach our defined audience of adult learners who might otherwise find it difficult to take traditional classes, our distance writing coordinator worked closely with our extended learning division to match students to our courses. We have discovered that the non-traditional student population corresponds fairly closely to the part-time student population (those who register for nine credit hours or fewer); the part-time students on our campus tend, for the most part, to be students who are returning to school, working full-time jobs (or multiple jobs), meeting family obligations, commuting long distance, or juggling some combination of these factors. While some traditional, full-time students
challenge the fact that we now limit our distance writing course registration to part-time students, we successfully counter-argue that full-time students get priority registration for the 150 other sections of English 101 that we offer at a wide range of times and with varying degrees of technology emphasis. The completely online sections remain reserved for those students who would find it difficult or impossible to enroll in a traditional class. The access principle that informs our distance registration practices allows us to accommodate a few special cases (such as a full-time student who might have physical disabilities that render traditional classroom access difficult) while primarily serving the needs of adult learners.

A focused student audience helped us define the rhetorical situation that our instructors would face as we redesigned an existing course. In the first semester that we offered our English 101 class online, we found that:

- The average age of students was 43.5 (compared to the average age of 18 in our traditional FYC course)
- The majority (58%) could not have taken the class at all if had it not been offered online
- All of the adult learners who registered for the initial online course completed the semester (a 100% retention rate the first semester; after two years, our average retention rate has been 90% —comparable to our traditional English 101 retention rates)

Adult working students could easily navigate the Web-based course even if the computers that they would likely have access to at home, at work, or at their public libraries were older models with slow Internet connections. We did specify that students registering for the courses should be able to access a Web page and have very basic word processing and email skills. An introductory questionnaire (see Appendix) asks several questions about students’ computing skills and access so that instructors can gauge needs and, when necessary, help students access and navigate the course site. We have no way of knowing how many students we might be losing who do not possess this basic level of access and skill (that’s a group we’re still trying to track), but we do know that our enrollment rates (16 students per section) and retention rates (90% or above) are already much better than they were when we last tried an interactive television approach.

The online teaching approach took advantage of the range of synchronous and asynchronous technologies provided on WebCT (the Web-based instructional platform available at our school): integrated email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, access tracking, etc. So that neither teachers nor students would have to rely on just this one platform, our distance writing coordinator had additional ways of contacting students through other email accounts and a class listserv. Other media that supplement the email and Web-based interfaces include:
• a video series on writing (English Composition: Writing for an Audience, a Higher Education Instructional Television series (HEITV) produced by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and available weekly on the local PBS station for students within the state or via tape for out-of-state students)

• a local and toll-free phone line

• A print textbook (most recently McMahon and Funk’s Here’s How to Write Well, 2nd ed.)

• printed papers submitted and returned via regular mail

These supplements to email and the Web allowed for some flexibility. For instance, one student—who missed a direct, personal connection with a teacher—would often phone her instructor during regular office hours to ask questions or touch base; another student used the phone to get advice only when he had trouble meeting a deadline (and was surprised to find that the teacher he had assumed was male was, in fact, female); yet another student used the phone to report trouble accessing the course Web page (alerting the instructor to the fact that the WebCT server had gone down, which allowed her to create a back-up plan). Likewise, some students liked the video series that interviewed a wide range of writers about their craft because it made the text-based materials come alive; others saw it covering much the same ground as the textbook, which they preferred.

Evaluating the Online Version of English 101

Assessment results from the initial English 101 online sections indicate that the project is successfully meeting the needs of adult learners. The vast majority of students reported that they learned a great deal about writing effectively and that they would like to take another writing class online now that they feel more comfortable with the involved technologies. Even though almost half of the students who participated in the pilot sections expressed concern about Web-based instruction when the term began, 100% of those same students were pleased with the Web-based delivery method at the end of the semester. The success was further underscored by a 100% retention rate—a marked change from our previous experiences with distance writing courses. The success is due to a combination of factors that include a better sense of our audience and a better course design, but credit largely goes to our distance writing coordinator, Catherine Gouge, who developed student surveys; gathered, analyzed, and reported the results; and created, taught, and refined the pilot version of our distance FYC course.4

While students have responded positively to our distance first-year writing course, I don’t mean to suggest that the same template would work for everyone. Instead, I return to the point that Rodrigues, Taylor, Walker and
others all make: course design needs to respond to the specific rhetorical context of your institution, program principles, and student population. In the past, our distance writing courses were not terribly successful. In some instances the courses were limited by an imposed technology that did not match our specific learning situation (like the failed attempt to use interactive television). In other cases we relied too heavily on the efforts of a single instructor (like our previous attempts at online courses), and the design could not adapt easily to the changing needs of new students and new instructors (see Rodrigues and Charles). It was only when we began to think programmatically about the role of distance education for our first-year writing program that we realized how important it would be to designate a full-time position to help us design course content, develop teaching approaches, and work with new instructors.

In retrospect, the idea of a designated position for distance writing seems obvious: redesigning content and teaching approach for a new student population is demanding work. As Teddi Fishman puts it, “the task of the DE professional becomes not only to teach, but also to ascertain and employ media in such a way that their strengths support the attainment of pedagogical goals.” Drawing on recent work in *The American Journal of Distance Education*, Fishman identifies key interactions in distance education: (1) between learner and subject matter, (2) between learner and instructor, (3) between learner and other learners, (4) between learner and technology. We created a full-time renewable position to focus on these multiple interactions and instructional challenges. If our university had not been able or willing to support a position that could focus exclusively on distance writing challenges, creating a distance writing program would have proven to be much more difficult—if not impossible.

### Thinking Programmatically

Thinking programmatically about distance writing and first-year composition, our overall goal was to create teaching and learning conditions necessary for quality education. In terms of teaching conditions, we reduced the standard teaching load to two courses per semester and reduced the class size from 22 to 16. We also created faculty development workshops and materials for future distance writing instructors. In terms of course content, we continued to emphasize the same goals we had adapted from the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.” Following the WPA model, our outcomes describe the theoretical, productive, and practical knowledges that students should achieve by the end of first-year composition, and we use the WPA categories: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; and knowledge of conventions. While the goals remained the same, we tried to tailor reading and writing
activities to our adult-learner audience. When our distance writing coordinator summed up the primary instructional goals in a year-end report to me, she explained that the Web-based courses:

1. diversified the content and technologies (Web, email, video, phone, printed texts) to appeal to differences in student learning styles

2. built into the course design opportunities for students to receive frequent and meaningful feedback (from both the instructor and their peers) to encourage learning and retention, and to develop community

3. provided simple technological support to all students, especially those who are less familiar with email, chartrooms, and other Web-based tools

4. created a Web-based discourse community that is supportive, professional, and engaging (Gouge 2002)

Our new distance writing coordinator also considered the available technologies and the students’ needs and reached the following conclusions:

• informal writing and discussion are important parts of our first-year composition course; in the online course, a series of 15 email prompts encourages individual informal writing and active participation

• a portfolio approach emphasizes the processes of writing, response, reflection, and revision. In the online course, the portfolio centers on three essay assignments (instead of the four we typically require in a traditional class) to allow for extra response time in the completely text-based exchanges online or via regular mail; the online portfolio also allows students to include self-selected pieces of email and Web-based writing

• peer response groups provide an immediate and varied audience for student writing; they demonstrate why it’s important for writers to read and explore different voices and approaches. Online, students respond to other student work on the full-class bulletin board and in small group chat rooms (set up for three or four students)

• instructor conferences take the form of email, chatroom discussions, phone calls, and even regular office hours in case a student occasionally wants to meet in person (Gouge, “Instructor’s Guide”)

In addition to considering how to meet common program principles and course goals in a new medium, our distance writing coordinator also
worked hard to create a set of conventions to structure the online instruction; she wanted students to know what type of work to expect from week to week—much the way that traditional classroom instruction falls into a certain rhythm. Each week, the students came to expect five types of activities: reading, writing, watching, discussing, and sending.

The distance course that currently responds to the needs of our non-traditional students is intensely text-based: every online exchange depends on writing and reading. As Patricia Webb points out, students in an online course coauthor the content in significant ways; their participation is active, and they often have more control over the direction that a discussion will take than they might in a classroom where a teacher can more immediately control the focus. Webb sums up the difference this way: instead of the instructor being situated as the expert, “students + experts + [instructor] + text = the content of the course” (7-8). This new way of thinking about course content is one of the ways in which our distance writing courses contribute programmatically to the way we teach writing: the design and content of the distance courses help us examine the way we think about issues of course authorship and the collaborations we enter into with our students.

Assessing Risks

To return to the point where I began this essay, it is clear that profit-based competition in the areas of distance education and distributed learning are putting new pressures on campuses to take their own online initiatives. As writing program administrators, we need to examine continuously our reasons for and against creating online courses, stay true to our principles, and know what’s at stake. For instance, if your writing program pursues distance education, will you need to sacrifice faculty or funding for other initiatives? In addition to the partnerships that you will need to develop across the university, are there any alliances or positions that might be compromised? Will distance education serve your students and faculty—or are there other approaches better suited to your institution’s student needs and faculty talents? If your institution is willing to support grants for early test cases, what happens in one, two, or three years?

One of the associate deans at my university posed a particularly useful question that helped our program assess our risks in a very practical way. She asked: “What happens if the whole project fails? Does anyone get hurt?” Our writing program decided that we were willing to risk failure because we found positive results that could redeem the risk. We had:

• planned carefully and realistically in terms of the purpose, the audience, and the size of our online offerings to be sure that we
could meet our goals, and along the way found a new understanding of student and university needs

• kept the scale of the initial offerings small enough to be sure that no students would be hurt (i.e., we knew we could accommodate any already enrolled students if we decided to discontinue our distance writing programs)

• protected the person in the year-to-year faculty line as much as possible with yearly assessments and analyses of the real and projected enrollments, created a position with a reduced teaching load and a development budget that would enable our colleague to pursue publication and other professional development in case we are not able to convert the line into a permanent position, and—most importantly—we made sure she knew the risks

• established the faculty line devoted to our online writing programs as distinct and separate from other hiring needs for our regular writing program so that we were not compromising existing plans

• anticipated ways that we could use what we learn about student needs and instructional technologies in our traditional, classroom-based writing programs

• communicated our needs, our goals, and our expectations as clearly as possible with our immediate colleagues, our college, the division of extended learning, and the office of the provost.

We don’t expect to fail, but in any new endeavor, we have to be willing to take that risk or our programs will stagnate. At the moment, we think we’ve developed a simple yet well-designed online curriculum that meets the needs of the adult learners that we are trying to reach. We also think our online course designs may prove useful to programs at other institutions in our state. We’ll know more each year. And if we fail, we’ll have learned quite a lot about the politics of institutional collaboration, about managing change, and about teaching with new technologies—all of which will help our writing program respond to other changes that are facing higher education.

Notes

1 Just to clarify: the interactive television versions that linked remote sites with a campus-based writing or literature class reflect our department’s earlier (1995-1999) experiments with distance education methods; these televised courses were not part of the ELI grant.
My colleague, Catherine Gouge, designed and taught the pilot versions of our online English 101 class. I want to acknowledge her valuable work developing our distance writing program and her help supplying information and feedback on this essay.

Our first-year writing goals are based on the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.”

For more specific information about our distance writing course content or student responses, please contact Catherine.Gouge@mail.wvu.edu

Works Cited


**APPENDIX**

**DISTANCE ENGLISH 101 STUDENT SURVEY**

(Designed by Catherine Gouge, Fall 2001, West Virginia University)

This questionnaire is designed to help your English 101 professor better understand the individual needs and backgrounds of each student registered for English 101. I appreciate you taking the time to provide thoughtful answers to the questions below.

**About you:**

1. Name:
2. Current email address:
3. Age:
4. Location:
5. Current job:
6. Number of hours each week you devote to your job:
7. Desired profession:
8. Have you taken any other college-level courses? If so, how many?
9. Major (or anticipated major):
10. Is there anything else you would like me to know about you?
11. Please provide at least THREE times when you are likely to be available for a real time chatroom discussion (NOTE: Two will be required over the course of the semester):
   Tuesday: 7am-10am 10am-1pm 1pm-4pm 4pm-7pm 7pm-10pm
   Wed.: 7am-10am 10am-1pm 1pm-4pm 4pm-7pm 7pm-10pm

**About your computing skills and access:**

12. Will you be using a computer that you own for this course?
13. Do you know its processing speed? If so, what is it?
14. Do you know how much RAM your computer has? If so, how much?
15. Do you know how much free memory you have available on your hard drive?
16. Do you know how to purge your cache (short-term Internet memory)?
17. Do you know your modem speed? If so, what is it?

18. If the computer you plan to use as your primary computer for the class is unavailable for whatever reason, what computer will you use (friend’s or relative’s, public library, local school campus)? (Note “I don’t know” is an acceptable answer; however, if that is your answer, you should look into finding a back-up computer option as soon as possible.)

19. Of the following list below, please tell me which skills you are able to perform:

**Basic Skills**

- [ ] Enter a URL
- [ ] Point and Click
- [ ] Locate a Web browser and go online
- [ ] Use scroll bars
- [ ] Use the back button
- [ ] Recognize the visual cues indicating a link
- [ ] Recognize a homepage
- [ ] Type and enter text in chat area
- [ ] Use email
- [ ] Print

**Intermediate Skills**

- [ ] Conduct an Internet search
- [ ] “Save As”
- [ ] Cut and paste
- [ ] Send email attachments
- [ ] Open email attachments
- [ ] Download data from the Web

**Advanced Skills**

- [ ] Create a Web page
- [ ] Create working links
- [ ] Copy and paste HTML code
- [ ] Write HTML code
- [ ] Upload data to the Web
From First-Year Composition to Second-Year Multiliteracies: Integrating Instruction in Oral, Written, and Visual Communication at a Technological University

Dennis A. Lynch
Anne Frances Wysocki

BACKGROUND

The fascination the New London Group has for compositionists these days certainly circles around the Group’s strongly voiced arguments that literacy instruction needs to change in response to the new global economy and its social and cultural effects. Changes we are experiencing in all our living spaces—the spaces of work, civic life, and home—necessitate, the Group argues, rethinking what we mean by literacy and how we should approach developing students’ communication abilities in addition to reading and writing. “The increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral, and so on . . . ” in particular, occasioned the New London Group’s decision to form, meet, and discuss how we—teachers and administrators of communication programs—should realign what we do in school with the new contexts of communication (Cope and Kalantzis 5). The outcome of those meetings is something of a pedagogical manifesto whose emphasis on multimodality gives focused voice to what many in composition and communication have already been considering and discussing.

Of course the call to redesign how we teach communication skills is not new. As John Heyda, Diana George and John Trimbur, and Stephen Mailloux have reminded us, in the late 1940s and 1950s we heard a similar call in response to that era’s rapidly changing social and economic world—and academia responded to the call by forming the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC, with its journal, CCC) and by developing communication courses designed to bring speaking and writ-
ing (and sometimes reading and listening) together in one course or curriculum. That effort lasted nearly a decade and a half, and though it spread widely across the country, by the early 1960s it had mostly faded from view. It is hard to say that such communication courses failed, given the longevity and extent of the movement, but the movement clearly did not take hold with the institutional tenacity that, say, first-year composition courses have enjoyed.

Heyda, George and Trimbur, and Mailloux agree that the main reason the communication courses disappeared was disciplinary. According to Mailloux, the effort was doomed from the start because the national organizations representing speech communication and composition (the Speech Association of America [SAA, now the National Communication Association] and the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE]) were unable to find a way to merge, create strong, substantial ties, or at least define the communications course as a common project worthy of joint organizational investment. Organizations not only reflect the interests—and as George and Trimbur point out, the “sensibilities” (690)—of their members, but they also project a field of relatively integrated research projects, and thus the inability of the SAA and NCTE to institute collaboration on the communications course effectively marginalized research that might have supported the course and strengthened its theoretical base. True, the CCC journal published articles by both speech communication and composition faculty, and the CCCC brought them together for a few days each year, but the disciplinary gulf is everywhere evident in the pages of the journal during the 1950s, with few people even aware of the need to face their differences, historic and otherwise. (Our favorite example of ships passing in the night is the February 1958 issue that has, side by side, an article on “The Seven Sins of Technical Writing” and another by Marshall McLuhan on mass communication in a global society [Freedman; McLuhan].)

Another reason the communication courses faded was that teachers were unable to develop the courses theoretically and pedagogically beyond their earliest formations. Proponents of the course had begun their work grounded in the belief that speaking and writing belong together and hence can easily be taught together because they share a “general semantics”: S. Stewart Gordon, for example, writes in a 1956 CCC article titled “Recent Developments in Communications Courses” that “[a]s we all know, one of the basic arguments for the communication course is that the likenesses within skills are basic and the differences are superficial” (14). This belief sustained the communication course because it provided the reason for the course being able to exist in the first place—but this belief then also prevented those involved with it from seeing a need to develop any more complex understanding of multimodal communication. The New London Group, to their credit, has a more sophisticated understanding of language
as social action and a stronger grasp on how difficult integration of the modes can be; specifically, they combine the rich history and language of design with notions of genre and meaning-making (semiotics) in order to define an active pedagogy (a new understanding of literacy) that positions students to use and transform the genres of school, workplace, and civic sphere.

If there is a problem with the call issued by the New London Group to teachers of communication, though, it may be its failure to address the disciplinary dynamics many instructors will face trying to enact the principles of “multiliteracy” in any meaningful or comprehensive way. The Group’s own examples of the new pedagogy in action, for instance, are drawn either from individual classrooms converted to the new ways (the same model used in the 1950s), or from new programs or centers whose institutional role or place is not always clearly explained. In neither case, however, do the authors address potential institutional resistance to their pedagogy nor the problems that can arise for instructors who remain tied to the academic histories that produced the current division of labor and the instructional isolation of the modes. The experience of the 1950s teaches us the importance of institutional location and disciplinary exchange to the success of curricular experiments such as the New London Group propose, and that means special attention to the concept of “integration,” that is, to the way the disciplines historically responsible for speech, composition, visual communication, and so on are actually and not just theoretically brought together.

In what follows we describe a new curriculum we recently implemented at Michigan Technological University (MTU) that tries, again, to “[r]e-unit[e] the language arts” (23), as Mailloux names the process. We set out to integrate not only oral and written communication but also visual communication, given how the design of electronic technologies call the visual aspects of all our texts to our attentions, as we see in student work and as the New London Group and so many others acknowledge (Faigley; Bolter; George and Trimbur; Trimbur; etc.). Given our readings into what happened with the communication course in the 1950s and 1960s, we knew the effort to combine the oral, written, and visual into one course would not be easy, and it hasn’t been . . . but because of our readings we also went into the process with some awareness of the disciplinary, theoretical, and practical tensions into which we might get strung. Our awareness of the particularities of our specific school and department (we are in a Humanities department, for example, with faculty in the areas of rhetoric and composition, communications, visual studies, literacy, linguistics, philosophy, literature, modern languages, and cultural studies) also very much shaped our designings, and so we cannot—of course—offer the following description of our course as a model for all to follow. At best our course is what the New London Group calls an “available design”—part of a repertoire of
emerging curricula and pedagogies available as resources for others who are redesigning curricula in response to demands being placed on our schools by legislatures, accrediting agencies, changing demographics, privatization, the effects of globalization, and new communications technologies.

**The Course: External Pushes to Genesis**

We wish we could say that the course we’ll be describing below came solely from our own initiatives, our own responses to our readings and research, and our perceived needs within our institution. If it had not been for external forces, however, we would probably still be offering—in line with our university’s requirements of several years ago—two first-year ten-week (that is, quarter-long) composition classes and one ten-week speech class (required for many students on campus and to be taken, generally, early in a student’s undergraduate career). That we now offer one second-year, semester-long communications course—called Revisions: Oral, Visual, and Written Communication—is as much a result of changes in the university as of our beliefs about the work students need now to be doing. We start with the outside impetus to our changes because its reasons provide us several lessons about how we need to make our courses and practices present within the university’s structures.

In 1998, the external forces took very specific shape on our campus. The North Central Accreditation (NCA) association had assessed our then-general education program and found it neither “coherent” nor “integrated” enough. NCA and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) were shifting from requiring students to take a specific number of credits in communication courses to requiring outcomes-based assessment; this was to be fully implemented in 2000-2001. Dropping retention rates for first-year students at MTU brought discussions of how to make students’ initial college experiences more engaging, with talk of “learning communities” and “cohorts.” And we were shifting from quarters to semesters. In response to this particular commingling of forces and concerns, MTU’s administration moved an associate dean into a position of new power with considerable resources for reconceiving the university’s general education program—in a very short time. Starting in the summer of 1998, the newly-formed general education taskforce, composed of faculty from across campus and under the close direction of the former assistant dean, was given eight months to absorb the latest national thinking on general education, respond to NCA’s criticisms of the university’s program, and design a new program that would fit the university’s mission, student needs, and the new outcomes assessment models; the new program was to be put up for faculty vote of approval in 1999 and—if the program were approved—1999-2000 was to be a transition year for working out the concrete details with full implementation woven into the coming semesters in 2000-2001. All this happened.
The Taskforce began by defining a grounding philosophy and mission statement for general education at MTU. The statement of philosophy contains all one would expect:

In our General Education program, faculty and students cultivate intellectual values essential to the practice of democracy: respect for others, desire to engage in constructive discourse, clear reasoning and communication, and careful and balanced analysis. Students learn to understand, value, and negotiate individual, intellectual, and cultural difference, and to recognize and understand the significance of historical, social, and environmental context. Every graduate should understand the diverse modes of inquiry that distinguish the sciences, humanities, social sciences and professions, and should acquire a broad knowledge of the world’s intellectual, spiritual, and artistic traditions. Together, these elements prepare graduates who can work with others to improve their communities, their societies, and their world. (“MTU’s General Education Curriculum”)

Within the context of the other outside forces motivating this new-to-MTU philosophy, the process of turning the philosophy into concrete curriculum threw into the air all that had seemed fixed.

For example, the move from credit-based to outcomes-based requirements from the various accrediting associations resulted in scrambles over where required credit-hours could and would be placed, running the humanities department headlong into conflict with credit-hour-hungry technical programs on our campus. It was as though the outreach work we had done earlier to promote the importance of written and oral communication on our campus had never happened: we took part in discussions where engineering faculty (for example) argued that, because composition has no content and because communication courses were no longer specifically mandated by our various accrediting boards, they should fold the teaching of writing into their courses, taught solely by them—as long as they were given more credit hours for their curriculum. There was also the issue of graduate students being the instructors of record for the composition classes we offered under semesters: because the model of graduate student teaching in the technical departments on our campus is one of exam grading and overseeing labs, many faculty across campus did not believe that having undergraduate students take their first college courses from graduate students would give undergraduates the initial rich intellectual experience that many argue contributes to the retention and successful college careers of undergraduates.
As a result of those perceptions coming out in the time of critical and quick change, we now, in calmer moments and preparing for future moves toward change, try to make more concerted efforts to inform others across campus about the “content-full” disciplines of composition and communication and about the pedagogical training and support given to graduate students in the Rhetoric and Technical Communication (RTC) program housed in the humanities department; we also try to get others to see RTC graduate students in action as teachers and researchers. In the hurried midst of the taskforce discussions, however, we argued and persuaded and convinced others of the centrality of our—faculty and graduate student—work to the general education of students in technical fields. We took the situation as an opening into possibility: based on the work many in our department had already been doing with integrating the modes of communication within individual classes and on our readings in the work of the New London Group and other writers such as Trimbur, George, Cornbleet, and Carter, for example, and based also on our knowledge of the needs of students in the technical fields on our campus—and of the perceptions of many faculty in those fields—we proposed a course centered, practically, on direct instruction in the mixed communication modes of the oral, written, and visual.

Before we describe the specifics of this course, we need to show it to you in the context of the general education curriculum that resulted from the Taskforce’s work. The outcome of the eight-month design process (what many on the committee jokingly referred to as “just-in-time” curriculum development) was a four-course general education core curriculum:

- a first-year, first-semester, small seminar called Perspectives on Inquiry, to be taught only by faculty, who are to come from all departments across campus. (In day to day practice, the class has been taught by faculty primarily from the humanities and social sciences departments as well as by a fair number of part-time adjuncts whose pay comes out of other departments and is subsidized by the university. There are faculty from various departments who have found this to be a wonderful class to teach and who are strongly committed to it.)
- a first-year, second-semester large lecture course on world cultures
- a second-year, moderately sized course concerned with social, cultural, political, and economic institutions
- a second-year, small section course—Revisions: Oral, Visual, and Written Communication (hereafter referred to as Revisions)—providing direct instruction in communication, taught mostly by
graduate students from the RTC program located in the humanities department.

The general education curriculum also has a loosely structured upper-division distribution requirement of 15 credit hours, in which students take classes from two out of five areas of focus (language, thought, and value; aesthetics and creativity; histories and cultures; science, technology, and society; economic, political, and social institutions).

Students are to begin working on their speaking, writing, and visual skills in the small first-semester seminars taught by faculty from across campus; they are then to build on that with direct instruction in the second-year small communications course that we proposed and designed.

The Course: Design

In accord with the philosophy of general education on our campus, the main objective of the course we developed—Revisions—is to help students increase their civic agency by helping them strengthen their communication practices. Although the other core courses in the general education program are also supposed to stress the differing modes of communication, only in Revisions do students receive instruction informed by the disciplines traditionally responsible for studying and teaching communication; it is only in the Revisions courses that students have a consistent and prolonged opportunity to observe, learn about, and reflect overtly on their own and others’ communication practices, as well as to learn techniques for intervening in their own processes of communication with the aim of improving them.

The core group that originally designed Revisions—three humanities faculty whose work focuses, respectively, in rhetoric and composition, speech communication and cultural studies, and rhetoric and visual and digital communication, along with one graduate student who served as a paid assistant to the director of writing programs in humanities—designed the course in stages. We began the design work with the core general education goals outlined above. Then, in discussions with other faculty and with the graduate students who would primarily be teaching the course, we developed more specific goals and objectives—tied to the three modes of communication—and then developed a general outline of the course; the core group then (over one summer) developed a central assignment sequence, specific activities, and teaching materials and gathered readings and other support materials for the class that was taught for the first time in the fall of 2000.

Knowing that it had been problematic for communications classes in the 1950s to approach the different modes of communication as though they shared a “general semiotic,” the core group worked to have the course
incorporate the differing and complex approaches to communication that have developed around the oral, visual, and written—and yet we also did not want to offer students a disjunct course consisting of five weeks on speech, five weeks on visual communication, and then five weeks on writing. Instead, we want students to understand that only in rare (and usually artificial) communication circumstances are these three modes separated from each other; we want them to understand how (for example) processes of discussion, in class and in other social circumstances, feed into and circle about writing, or that writing on screen or paper always involves making rhetorical decisions about visual presentation, and so on; we want them to understand that the conventions of presentation—whether oral, visual, or written—are indeed conventions, which can be learned by careful observation and which require thoughtful and aware modification for particular audiences and circumstances. In developing Revisions, therefore, we decided to use a rhetorical approach as an overarching framework for aligning but respecting the three different modes: by encouraging students always to be alert to particular audiences and particular communicative contexts as they make choices about which modes to use and how to use them, we hope that students will be comfortable and fluid in moving between and among the differing abilities and practices asked by the differing modes.

Here then are the goals—admittedly very ambitious—that we developed for the course. We started by developing overarching goals for the course and then pulled specific goals from our disciplinary backgrounds, subservient to the overall goals of the course, and we did so mindful of the need to embed the goals in activities that stress integration across the modes.³

The Overarching Goals of Revisions

In this class students will:

- acquire a wide repertoire of oral, written, and visual communication strategies and tools
- assess different communicative contexts in order to decide which media, strategies, and tools are appropriate for the situation and audience
- develop a range of strategies for effectively giving and getting feedback and for assessing their own communicative products
- learn the possibilities of and necessity for revision as a strategy for achieving specific communicative goals
Specific Goals of Revisions

In considering all three modes of communication, students will learn how to:

• be attentive—as communicators and as audience—to the ethical dimensions of different kinds of communication
• choose appropriate communication genres for differing contexts.
• choose the medium or media of communication appropriate for a specific context
• do the research necessary for, develop, and present formal academic texts
• analyze the argumentative structures of different media, and develop appropriate argumentative structures for the texts they produce
• elicit useful feedback from others
• revise texts in response to audience feedback
• revise a research question in response to a developing argument.
• develop and revise texts for audiences of differing interests and abilities
• use processes of reflection, review, and assessment
• recognize that many perspectives and arguments can be developed from any collection of information
• make explicit and question assumptions—cultural, temporal, and personal—that underlie the communication practices they have learned
• learn small group decision-making strategies
• cope with and make practical use of the anxiety that often accompanies having to be a communicator

Goals Relating Specifically to Oral, Written, and Visual Communication

This class will help students learn the following vocabulary, concepts, and practices specific to the three modes of communication addressed in the class.

Oral

• discussion formats (for example, how different sizes of groups lead to different kinds of group interaction)
• strategies for planning informal and formal group discussions
• listening: active listening; vocabulary for listening; how to facilitate different kinds of listening in an audience
• interviewing: relational adaptation; understanding how to formulate questions and elicit useful responses; drawing data out of an interview
• the parts of a speech
• modifying writing for oral presentations
• oral delivery strategies
• narrativity in speeches
• oral/aural Strategies

Written
• the writing process: recognizing that there is a process; learning to analyze and troubleshoot one’s own writing process
• the distinction between writing and editing
• editing for different purposes (i.e., editing for brevity versus variety, etc.)
• the distinction between an argument and the presentation of the argument
• transitions in writing
• citations and bibliographies, according to differing academic standards
• writing as choices of words, ethos, tone, style, etc.
• voice and style

Visual
• conventions of layouts for differing contexts: how they develop and learning how to recognize them
• testing visual layouts with audiences
• typefaces: categories and conventional uses
• using words and images together
• basic conventions of layout
• using, interpreting, and composing photographs, charts, and graphs
• making effective overheads: color, type, and arrangement considerations
• visual style
• materials for different kinds of visual presentations
From the beginning we cautioned ourselves against hubris by admitting that in any given classroom we will undoubtedly fall short of achieving all our stated goals. We articulated such a broad range of goals, however, in order to keep ourselves mindful of the challenges of integrating the modes—a challenge that our students (like us) face daily in our quotidian practices—and to make sure we keep the three modes of communication in balance. The question of balance is of course a tricky one, depending on the course and program. It was our decision to strike an equal balance between all three modes, in part because the course was no longer defined by the university as a writing course, or even primarily as a writing course.

To facilitate the work instructors and students do studying communication against the background of civic participation and to make sure we addressed our goals as consciously and fully as possible, we laid the course out in five sections. As you look through this sequence, we hope you get a sense of how we tried to give separate but equal weight to each mode—and then to include assignments that steer students toward reflecting on how the modes and the respective vocabularies and concepts merge, overlap, alternate, and flow into each other. In addition, our structure draws on how the New London Group integrates four kinds of teaching into the multimodal approach they advocate: they call these approaches to teaching “situated practice,” “overt instruction,” “critical framing,” and “transformed practice.” Without putting too heavy a hand on it, we shaped the central assignment sequence in the Revisions course around these four moments, the idea being that working across communication modes requires each of these experiential, conceptual, critical, and transformative approaches to learning. Here, finally, is the structure of the course, planned for a fifteen-week semester:

1. An introductory three weeks called “Emergent Strategies” that introduces students to the concept of civic participation in their own lives and communities, explores aspects of written, oral, and visual communication (and the connections between them) by asking students to develop a literacy narrative in which they consider how they have been shaped as communicators across the modes. This section also begins the process of teaching students basic rhetorical concepts and the various languages used to support the study of writing, speech, and visual design.

2. A three-week section titled “Communication in Context: Initial Research and Analysis” in which the class chooses a set of national or international civic advocacy groups to study in depth. The class, in small groups, conducts archival, library, and online research to develop a collection of materials for the groups being studied (Web pages, videos, brochures, printed or taped speeches, photographs,
magazines, yearly reports, organizational charts, histories, mission statements, etc.); while collecting this data the class also begins learning strategies for analyzing different media and modes of communication.

3. A five-week section titled “Communication in Context: A Critical Research and Analysis Project,” during which students learn more about relationships among audience, context, and purpose in communication in order to analyze the data collected and produce (write and revise) a five- to seven-page academic critical analysis research paper. Students also prepare and deliver an individual, formal, oral (persuasive) presentation. The paper and oral presentation both make arguments about what appears to be effective—or not—in the communication practices of the group(s) studied by the class.

4. A four-week section titled “Communicating with Community: Making Use of Analysis,” in which the students (in small groups) apply their research from the preceding section to develop documents that they think might be useful to one of the organizations they studied. Doing the work of this section, students have developed Web pages for teenagers, brochures for an international audience, games for parents and children, oral presentation for elders, fundraising events, and public service announcements for television. During the weeks of this section, teachers work to help students move from analysis to production—and students describe enjoying “making things” that can be of use in the world.

5. The final week is given over to assessing the class, both formally and individually: students reflect on what they learned, assess their own work, and the work and effectiveness of the class. (We also have been piloting a direct measure assessment tool, which takes the somewhat standard form of a kind of pre- and post-test).

In support of the goals and the course structure, the first year we taught Revisions all instructors used four books:

- John Trimbur’s *A Call to Write*
- Robin Williams’s *The Nondesigner’s Design Book*
- Tracey L. Smith and Mary Tague-Busler’s *Icebreaker: A Manual for Public Speaking*
- A reader we compiled for the course and had custom published. The reader includes an eclectic range of work contributed by faculty grounded across the modes; among the writings are:
  - excerpts from Bellah (et al)’s *The Pursuit of Happiness*,
- Lakoff’s chapters “We, The Jury” and “Language, Politics, and Power” from her book *Talking Power*
- Christensen’s article “Every Student Teaches and Every Teacher Learns”
- Blair and Michel’s article “Commemorating the Theme Park Zone: Reading the Astronaut’s Memorial”
- Foss and Foss’s chapter “Inviting Transformation” from their book *Inviting Transformations: Presentational Speaking for a Changing World*
- Kinross’s article “The Rhetoric of Neutrality”
- Kostelnick and Roberts’s chapter on “Rhetorical Background” from their textbook *Designing Visual Language*
- McCloud’s chapter “Show and Tell” from his book *Understanding Comics*
- Siple’s article “The Cultural Patterns of Deaf People”
- Schriver’s chapter “How Documents Engage Readers’ Thinking and Feeling” from her *Dynamics in Document Design* text

These pieces derive from the areas of speech communication, rhetoric and cultural studies, visual studies, art and design history, and popular culture, and they are intended to fill gaps in and between the more traditional speech, composition, and design textbooks we also used. In response to students’ mostly financial complaints, and as we developed more of our own materials, we dropped the speech text during the first year and Trimbur’s text the second year; we have kept *The Nondesigner’s Design Book* (students as well as faculty across campus respond well to its straightforward and informal approach to basic visual composition and typography), and we have thickened the course reader by adding sections on speech, rhetoric, civic advocacy, and ethics and communication.

The broad range of readings has turned out to be a strength for Revisions: the readings help teachers help students make connections across the areas of communication; compare—and weave together or keep separate—terminologies from speech, composition, and visual studies; and see ideas and concepts in both everyday and unusual applications. The readings also range from highly accessible to more theoretically dense; instructors order the readings to support their particular approaches to arranging the class. For instance, in the first few weeks of class, when students are just beginning to get their feet wet, some instructors choose to catch students’ attention by using McCloud’s piece because it has the appeal of being written in the comic book genre—but the piece also argues that there are categorizable ways words and visual representations can be related together on a
page and it provides terminology for talking about the word-visual representation relation, and so the piece also demonstrates how complex analysis can be structured and presented in modes other than those to which students are academically accustomed. The piece thus also leads naturally into activities in which students explore how words and visual representations function together and how visual arguments can be made by analytically trying out McCloud’s categories. Other instructors prefer to begin with Kinross’s “The Rhetoric of Neutrality” in combination with Stephen Katz’s analysis of Nazi technical communication documents: the two pieces both argue that what we might have learned is neutral and without effect on us in pieces of communication—the visual aspects of even the most mundane texts in the Kinross article, the technical efficiency of memos in the Katz article—is in fact ethically charged and rhetorically complex; this is a fine way for students to begin thinking about the effects of the choices they make across the range of communications they produce.

As our short discussion of the readings indicates, there is necessary room in Revisions for instructors to modify the materials to fit their interests and strengths and the interests and strengths of different classes of students. In the past year, for example, the graduate student teachers of Revisions have given themes to their sections of the class, themes such as computer technologies or environmental concerns about water and land. In addition, classes choose widely differing civic advocacy groups to study. We have discovered, however and happily, that as classes move through the semester, sections that began in different ways tend to converge because, no matter how the class begins or how the civic advocacy groups are chosen, the production of papers and speeches and the final projects keep classes on the same track. This is necessary for ensuring that the goals of the course are being met consistently, to maintain a coherent connection to the rest of the general education program, and for purposes of assessment.

Before moving forward, we should address a concern raised by our insistence on integrating instruction in the modes and keeping attention to them balanced in time and importance. How is it possible, we might ask, to offer effective, direct instruction in each of these modes? Put otherwise, is it not the case that much writing instruction is necessarily being sacrificed in the construction of this course? The answer is both simple and complicated. Yes, we did not design the course as a “traditional” composition course—or as one model calls it, a “Comp Plus” course. And as a result, for instance, there is only enough time to draft and revise one long paper, which means that a student’s experience with revising writing will be limited. But we are not alone in this regard, for what many in the field mean by “composition” is changing in many different ways. We pushed for balance between the modes, then, because we felt responsible for the wide range of texts students
are being asked to take in every day, and for the kinds of critical analytical skills they need to address these new media. We should add that—just as we do not expect in any single-term composition class to turn students into professional writers—we do not expect to turn students into full-fledged designers or fully formed orators when they are done with Revisions. We do want them to gain competence and confidence in each of the modes, separately and together, and we hope to help them fit into changing contexts of communication, productively and critically. As we said, it is a feature of our local situation that we could originally design a course that is not, even primarily, a writing course, and we did what we did for the reasons outlined. We also can report that this year a different colleague—one not involved in the original design—took over responsibility for the course and training graduate students to teach it, and in the process we noticed that a more “traditional” notion of composition moved more to center, with instructors being asked to give more sustained attention to writing than our design called for. And we suspect that over time other changes will be made or evolve, as the course is overseen by others and as instructors negotiate what instruction in multimodal communication is or should be.

**The Course: How We Support It, How We Assess It, Some Learning . . .**

In keeping with the need for coherence and in order to facilitate the development of useful support materials (class exercises, ways of using the readings, grading rubrics, etc.), all Revisions instructors participate in a week-and-a-half long orientation before classes start; they also get together in workshops two to three times a semester. New instructors have several more days of orientation and take a year-long pedagogy seminar that meets once a week, in addition to participating in the semester’s workshops; new graduate student instructors visit each other’s classes and the classes of more experienced teachers. During the orientation, semester workshops, and pedagogy seminar we listen to presentations by faculty and graduate students whose areas of expertise are rhetoric and composition, speech communication, visual studies, or some combination; we also have people from the community or campus speak about local possibilities for civic action. In addition to the director of graduate teaching assistant instruction, two advanced graduate students—experienced in teaching Revisions—support teachers of Revisions: the director and assistants are available for discussion about classes, to help with the planning of syllabi, and to visit classes for feedback. We share ideas for class exercises, ways of keeping assignments productively sequenced, and ways of coping with the stress involved in trying to do so much in so little time.
This kind of support for teachers began when the class we were teaching was a more conventional composition class, and, by holding to this support (and increasing the length of orientation), we were able to help teachers make what had to be a quick transition from teaching written communication to teaching written, visual, and oral communication. Nonetheless, the transition had its rocky moments: many of the graduate students had considerable experience setting up and running composition classes and so were resentful of having a course designed for them, even though they had had input during the initial design phases (but, unfortunately, little input during the design of many of the course particulars, which necessarily had to take place over a summer) and even though few of them had much experience teaching across the modes of communication. Understandably, also, many teachers were nervous about—and hence somewhat upset about—having to teach a class that promised such a complex interweaving of the three distinct modes of communication.

As the course has progressed, however, and as we all have become more comfortable and flexible with the day to day realities of making concrete what we shaped, teachers and the core group of course designers have started to relax into believing that the course is working. Informally, we hear from other teachers across campus that students think Revisions is giving them real tools, abilities, and habits of analysis they can apply in their varied school and work communication practices; while some students are cranky about the civic advocacy aspect of the course, many others have welcomed that they are taken seriously as agents in shaping the communities in which they move. Most students also report enjoying being able to make objects—brochures, logos, video public service announcements—that allow them more creativity and exploration than is usual in what they call “English class;” the concreteness of this making and the sense that they see themselves in what they make have often given students, we have noticed, more motivation in thinking about the real rhetorical functioning of these objects in the world. More formally, as a result of pre- and post-tests that we are using for assessment, we are seeing that over the fifteen weeks of the course students are gaining in sensitivity to the audiences with whom they communicate: because they are asked to make different kinds of communication—paper brochures as well as Web pages, for example, or oral presentations as well as writing—and because we have worked to emphasize the different vocabularies and concepts of the disciplinary modes at the same time we work to integrate the modes rhetorically, we are seeing that students come to understand audiences from different angles, in different contexts, and in finer and more complex detail than when audience is approached through a single mode. It is important to emphasize here this matter of vocabularies and concepts: now that we are past the initial design
stages and have taught and seen the course taught over six semesters, we have learned from classroom experience—from watching students learn and from their changing responses to the formal assessment materials—that we not only needed a coherent, theoretically robust language for designing this course in multimodal instruction, but we also needed to make that language a part of the content of the course. We need to make the concepts on which we based the course available to the students by weaving them into daily classroom practice—hence the course’s mix of situated practice with overt instruction (to use the New London Groups’ terminology).

The course also appears to be working, generally, for the graduate student teachers. The RTC graduate program has always been interdisciplinary and had a strong focus on communication technologies; it has therefore always attracted students interested in broader notions of composition than the traditional. Many of the graduate students are enjoying being able to apply and think through in their teaching theories about multiliteracies and new media that inform so much of what they read.

There are also, of course, aspects of Revisions that are problematic. Because of differences in the disciplines attached to visual and oral communication, it is sometimes hard to move students—and teachers—to attend to the broader contexts of these modes of communication. Visual studies, for example, has an immense gap between texts that offer practical, often step-by-step approaches to visual composition and the rich and thick theoretical work now being done in visual culture and histories of the development of ways of seeing; because of this gap between theory and practice, there is little already written that helps students see how the practical advice that encourages them to lay out coherent pages of crisp visual hierarchies ties them into (for example) cultural practices of industrialization and standardization. There is little already written, in other words, to help students move from their immediate needs of making a page that fits a context to thinking about how they can work with and against visual conventions in making visual compositions that might question how the visual aspects of texts have been shaped and shape us. Similarly, speech texts for undergraduates offer practical, directive, hands-on approaches on how to give a short oral presentation but there are few writings that help students make the bridge between such focused development and how the genre of oral presentation supports certain kinds of perhaps problematic relations between speaker and audience. But these gaps are also opportunities: some teachers of Revisions are making issues like these the subjects of dissertations, and are motivating us to develop more of our own materials. These gaps also cause us to think more about what we are already trying to achieve in the course, and about how our largest concern is that of time: our goals ask us to reach for a lot, and—as we did when we taught more traditional
composition classes—we wish this course could be extended across several semesters, for our own learning about multimodal discourse as well as for student learning.

In short, we see the kinds of teacher-researchers emerging from our graduate program as changing in ways that reflect changes in the field and in the worlds we share with our students. Since the advent of computers and writing, composition teachers have been being challenged to develop their pedagogical repertoires, and the shift to multimodality we have described merely continues that trend in a new direction. The twist we believe we have added is that graduate students in our program will be more conversant with the histories and struggles making up the areas of rhetoric and composition, communication studies, and visual design, and as a result they will be in a better position to negotiate the demands made of them in the programs they move on to and the institutional politics surrounding those demands.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper, we described how Heyda, George and Trimbur, and Mailloux attribute the failure of the communication class in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s to a lack of organizational support at the national level, to teachers’ inabilities to develop strong and complex theory and pedagogy for classes that mixed oral and written modes, and to institutional resistance. We know we cannot control how the particular course we have developed, Revisions, will fare in the future, but in the design of the course, we tried to be alert to the matters raised by Heyda, George and Trimbur, and Mailloux.

The longevity and effectiveness of Revisions will certainly be enhanced as faculty across campus, those who teach the course, administrators, and students not only see the course tied to such larger efforts to rethink how students learn to communicate but also see the course receiving national organizational consideration and support. In support, we can point to—and take encouragement and ideas from—similar efforts emerging on campuses across the nation (North Carolina State University, Boston University, University of Missouri-Columbia, Iowa State University, and Stanford, to name a few); some simply “add” speech to existing composition courses, some merge WAC with CAC Programs, and some only seek to strengthen the visual dimensions of writing through technology, but taken together the trend toward a broader definition of composition seems clear. In support of our work we can also point, thankfully, to recent efforts by the Rhetoric Society of America and the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies to bridge organizations concerned with rhetorical studies. And although there are not widespread national or international organizations for studying
multimodal pedagogy and curricula, the CCCC, the RSA and the NCA have been open to—and sometimes actively sought—conference presentations on communication modalities other than the written, and books and journal articles on these modalities have been increasing yearly as interest—and the recognition of need for such teaching—grows. Because of such publishing, we can also in our discussions with students, teachers, and administrators refer to the varying ways in which well-regarded theorists (many of whom we have already mentioned in this paper) are arguing for—if not exactly a course like the one that we have designed—courses that broaden our notions of composition, given present cultural conditions. Trimbur and George, for example, point to the emergence of cultural studies and the fading of notions of “high culture” and the sensibilities toward mass culture that went along with them, but they, like the New London Group, are especially attentive to the changing dynamics of communication. Referring positively to the CCCC reluctance to abandon the “4th C,” George and Trimbur argue, in words that suggest a large part of what happens in Revisions, that

“Communication” exerts a useful pressure to acknowledge that writing cannot be reduced to the mental activity of composing [. . .] “Communication” pulls us toward the actual, the material. It makes writing, like other types of communication (musical, graphic, handicraft, engineering, design), into an act of labor that quite literally fashions the world. (697)

The New London Group, perhaps more than George and Trimbur, also stress how their semiotic theory, based on the language of design (“Available Designs,” “Designing,” and “The Redesigned”) “fits in well with our view of social life and social subjects in fast-changing and culturally diverse societies” (20). What this changing scene calls for, of course, are new pedagogies, which, again, the New London Group has begun to generate, and which we have tried to build upon, extend, and adjust to our local circumstances, our history, and our experiences with teaching multimodal communication.

The second stumbling block to the communication class of the 1940s and 1950s—the inability of teachers to develop growing and complex theoretical underpinnings to the work of integrating the written and the oral—is also addressed, in part, by the work of the theorists we have cited in this paper. Their work supports what we do in our course at the same time it supports the developing practices and theories of the graduate students and faculty who teach the course. It is clear that complex theories exist to get a class such as ours off the ground, and the climate of thought and focus
present in the existing theory, together with the pleasurable challenges of teaching this class, suggest that theories and approaches will continue to develop and provide more support.

There is one issue, finally, that Heyda, George and Trimbur, and Mailloux raise that we, happily, do not have to face too much. Because all who helped design Revisions are housed in a humanities department, we do not have the problems of dealing with turf and resources that can come when working across departments. We have had disciplinary differences, of course, but because we were already used to working (and sometimes being edgy) together doing curriculum building before we had to design Revisions, we had already—to the extent necessary—learned the importance of finding strategies for accommodating and respecting what each other brings to the table. The general education situation on our campus required us to sit down together and kept us at the task of designing this course, but we are aware that we can only continue if we acknowledge and honor the different vocabularies, histories, and disciplines we have each learned. There is no point in designing the kind of course we have if we do not, individually and pedagogically, believe that each of the modalities and its attached disciplines offers as rich and complex possibilities for thought, communication, and expression as the others.

Notes

1 What should we call our programs as our notions of composition broaden?

2 It is very hard here (and in the descriptions to follow on committee negotiations) not to think about—and to second, strenuously—the varying levels of advice about stretching WPA work outside of one’s department and learning about national organizations that Hesse gives in his article “Understanding Larger Discourses in Higher Education: Practical Advice for WPAs.”

3 It is worth mentioning here that part of what helped us get as far as we have with Revisions has been the addition of the visual to the course. Speech and composition bring with them a complicated history, interwoven and conflicted on several levels (institutional, theoretical, and pedagogical). By bringing the language of primarily visual design into the mix, one would think the process of integration would get exponentially more complicated, but in our experience, the presence of the visual, the fresh language it brings to the scene of instruction, the slightly different ways it addresses audiences (through notions of “participatory design,” for example, and through its emphasis on the bodily aspects of communication), and its focus on production, have interrupted the historical standoff between speech and writing and allowed us to think of them in new terms, on fresh ground.
Works Cited


Remembering a Past—Revising the Present


Suelynn Duffey

In James D. Williams’ Visions and Revisions: Continuity and Change in Rhetoric and Composition, four respected figures in composition’s twentieth-century renaissance reminisce and report: Ross Winterowd (to whom the book is dedicated), Richard Lloyd-Jones, Frank D’Angelo, and John Warnock. In Part Two, five others (Irene Clark, David Fleming, Randy Allen Harris, George Hillocks and Williams himself) “Examine [. . .] the Legacy” of this renaissance. The book’s tidy, two-part, generative organizational structure promises to lead readers, especially ones like me, to experience a sense of old, familiar territory re-explored, reawakened, and revitalized and to follow threads from the (lived as well as public) past spun, in Part Two, into a continuous, more highly-textured, new weave.

To some extent, Williams’s book lives out its promise. As Winterowd speaks, his voice transports me, vividly, to the seminar room in which I first discussed his work. There, across the table from Ed Corbett in the mid-1970s, I reported on an essay from an early Winterowd work and spoke with the enthusiasm inspired by my first CCCC, where I had encountered Winterowd, the living, breathing human. My report was one of the intellect and of lived experience, simultaneously.

Winterowd and the other “pioneers,” as Williams calls them, do provide invaluable records for historians. We learn that Winterowd studied under Alfred Kitzhaber, for example—a direct link from the earliest historian (according to Bob Connors) to the originators of one of the first doctoral granting rhetoric and composition programs. We hear Lloyd-Jones contextualize the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” and offer interesting insights into CCCC’s relationship to social problems and scholarly knowledge. We are reminded of the role linguistics played in composition. We follow the conference get-togethers (and high jinks) that led to the formation of the Rhetoric Society of America. We hear inside stories on how conference programs were put together (and what they represent about the field’s evolving scholarship). And we realize how many important figures clustered in the midwest plains (Nebraska, Iowa) and the southwest (Arizona and California), a realization that gives a sense of geographical and/or familial “explanation” to our field’s recent history. Reading these four, I
had a strong sense that one could construct a geography and genealogy, a family tree branching out from pioneers across certain geographical locations that could help explain the field’s recent intellectual history. (The family in William’s book, we might note, is with only one exception male.) Equally strong, however, is my sense that readers without an already developed contour of the field’s history since, roughly, the 1960s, could easily get lost because of the microcosmic detail and the meandering style of remembrance that some of the chapters follow. Others may find both valuable and/or charming.

More problematic (for me) are the remaining five essays and their “fit”—with each other and with the history laid out in the first section. Williams indicates that each chapter in Part Two will examine “some [. . .] revisions” (vii) to the field in the decades between the 1970s and now. Setting us up to expect revisions “in detail,” Williams perhaps indicates that the view in Part Two does not intend to be comprehensive. And so we get, from Clark, a discussion of genre that calls for genre awareness, explicit genre instruction, pedagogical emphasis on argument, and a blurring of genres. We get from Fleming a prediction for the end of composition-rhetoric that argues from premises established by Douglas Ehninger, a speech communications rhetorician, an argument that leaves me wanting Fleming to acknowledge how institutional, disciplinary segregation impinges on the prediction. We read Williams’s gloss on liberal democracy, individualism, and more, plus Harris’ argument on knowing, rhetoric, and science in the disciplinary style of linguistics. And we read a useful qualitative addition to Hillocks’ meta-analytic study of epistemic (and other) classrooms. (This chapter, in its case study transcripts of classroom interactions and Hillock’s fine-grained analysis of them, would be superbly useful for new teachers.)

While the term “rhetoric” in most of the chapter titles intends to link them, its varied definitions, its multiple meanings, and its links to composition are only acknowledged, not explained. As a result, I leave the book feeling that except for Part One and Hillocks’ chapter in Part Two, I have read about a field I hardly know. Rhetoricians of science might feel more at home, as would readers who agree with E.D. Hirsch’s variety of cultural literacy, Francis Fukuyama’s analysis of technology, and conservative views toward democratic education.
New Directions/Critical Reflections: The Past, Present, and Future of Writing Center Research

Paula Gillespie, Alice Gillam, Lady Falls Brown, and Byron Stay, eds. Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002. 296 pages $59.95 (cloth), $27.50 (paper).

Tara Pauliny

As a new member of my department’s writing program, and the WPA field at large, this collection offered me the opportunity not only to reacquaint myself with writing center studies, but also to listen in on the current conversations circulating around the issue of research within the discipline. Divided into three sections, this text situates writing centers as sites of “self-reflective inquiry,” “institutional critique and contextual inquiry,” and places where “inquiry” is translated “into practice” (v). More than a review of various dialogues and studies, however, the collection acknowledges its disciplinary roots as it also widens the scope and structure of theoretical and practical inquiry.

Opening with a call for “more explicit talk about what we mean by research, what should count as research, and how to conduct research,” the Introduction provides an economical history of early composition studies’ research patterns (xv). Offered as a way to better understand and articulate the origin of writing center studies’ own research goals, this history grounds the collection methodologically and epistemologically. It reflects on past incarnations of writing center theory and practice and discusses how inquiry is currently being conceived within the discipline. Articulating the practical, theoretical, methodological, and ethical dimensions of this varied and rich body of work, Alice Gillam’s commencement concludes with an invitation to its readers: follow the lead of the collection’s authors, it urges, critically engage in and reflect upon the ongoing “conversation about the nature and purposes of writing center inquiry” (xxvii).

Such introductory remarks by Gillam do not, however, lead to a prescriptive or narrow view of research practices, for the picture drawn by this collection is one of complexity and variance. Moving in the first section, for instance, from Gillam’s discussion of early writing center work that tended to argue for the very legitimacy of writing centers’ existence, the next three essays claim writing centers as places where researchers are born (Boquet), investigate the national listserv WCcenter as a location (albeit virtual) where
“real” research is conducted (Gillespie), and reflect on the myriad positive effects that arise when writing center “insiders” conduct participant-observer research (Lerner). The third section of the collection returns to the ever-present negotiation between theory and practice and continually asks its audience to recognize the tensions, pitfalls, and possibilities offered by writing center work. In Nancy Welch’s essay, for instance, she employs psychoanalytic object relations theory to analyze the stories tutors tell. Claiming that “any single story [about work done in writing centers] contains a surplus of meaning,” she contends that the critical “examination of a story’s excesses” can serve as a productive “model for reflective research” (206). As such, she asserts that narratives—or lore—contain a plethora of truths that, when acknowledged, can allow often suppressed or overlooked stories to emerge. Tutoring stories thus function as sites of inquiry brimming with illustrations of theory’s intimate relationship with practice; for the concepts emerging from these stories are not separate from the tales’ plot, but arise from within it. Ultimately, Welch’s study contends that practice cannot be contained by research, but must be kept in dialogue with it; her analysis of writing center work and theorization of writing center “lore” compel a sustained interaction between researcher and subject, and reading and text.

The middle portion of Extending the Conversation, with its focus on the contexts in which writing centers are situated, will be of special interest to WPA’s. Driven by institutional concerns and administrative dilemmas, these six essays encompass such diverse issues as how writing centers are discursively represented (Carino), how computer-assisted technology can impact the work of the center (DeVoss), and how the application of grounded theory can be used to study writing center work (Magnotto Neff). Here, practical advice is offered alongside theoretical considerations: Muriel Harris provides suggestions for how writing center directors can educate “campus administrators so that they realize that running a writing center requires [. . .] institutional research” (87), while Jon Olson, Dawn J. Moyer, and Adelia Falda present a “research-oriented, student-centered application of assessment that is low pain and high gain for the writing center administrator” (112).

This compilation, with its inclusive lens and forward-looking premise, offers rhetoric and composition professionals—whose institutional roles and academic interests defy the boundaries of administrator, researcher, and teacher—a comprehensive resource laden with a diversity of scholarly projects. Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation provides not only a basis for informed institutional operation, but also functions as a means of investigative inspiration. It maps the state of research in writing center studies and encourages a critical exploration of this still-developing terrain.
Announcements

The Writing Instructor, a freely available networked journal and digital community indexed in the MLA International Bibliography, announces the release of Beta 3.0. This new release feature work from Jeff Jeske, Theresa Bruckner, Martha Davis Patton, Patricia Bizzell, and others. TWI accepts open submissions for blind, peer review year round. Contact editors David Blakesley (blakesle@purdue.edu) or Dawn Formo (dformo@csusm.edu) for more information, or visit the Website: http://www.writinginstructor.com.

The Twentieth Computers and Writing Conference will meet in Honolulu, Hawai‘i from June 10 to June 13, 2004, hosted by the Department of Language Arts at University of Hawai‘i Kapi‘olani Community College and the Dept. of English at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. The conference theme, “Writing in Globalization: Currents, Waves, Tides,” points to the immense but sometimes unrecognized impact of globalization on the cultural, social, linguistic, and institutional contexts in which we work. Many people in the computers and writing community are incorporating perspectives on globalization into our research and teaching, trying to understand how global systems intersect with our local engagements with information technology, writing instruction, rhetoric, literary studies, distance learning initiatives, and our personal writing practices. All proposals must be received by Wednesday, October 15, 2003. Submissions will be accepted beginning September 8, 2003 and must be sent through the conference Website at <http://www.hawaii.edu/cw2004>. Program participants will be selected through an anonymous peer review process. We invite proposals for papers, panels, and poster presentations. Hosts and contact information: Judi Kirkpatrick, Dept. of Language Arts, Kapi‘olani Community College, kirkpatr@hawaii.edu; Darin Payne, Dept. of English, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, darinp@hawaii.edu; John Zuern, Dept. of English, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, zuern@hawaii.edu, 808.734.9331.

The Conference on Basic Writing requests applications for its 2004-2005 Award for Innovation. This award recognizes basic writing programs for innovations that improve educational processes through creative approaches. Only innovations that have been implemented will be considered for the award. The winner will be presented with a plaque at the 2004 CCCC meeting in San Antonio, Texas. CBW wants to recognize those programs that are implementing new or unique ways to improve the success of their basic writing students. Is your program doing something especially useful and effective in terms of assessment, placement, pedagogy, curriculum, community outreach, etc.? If so, please nominate your program for the 2004-2005 CBW Award for Innovation. For complete application information, see <http://www.asu.edu/clas/english/composition/cbw/Inny_1.html>, or contact Greg Glau (gglau@asu.edu).
Contributors to WPA 26.3

Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem work together administering the writing program at Eastern Michigan University. Together, they have written about the program and EMU’s approach to first-year composition. Separately, they have published articles on subjects ranging from portrayals of basic writers and basic writing to the experience of graduate students with preliminary exams.

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Rhoda Cairns is a PhD candidate in English at Miami University (Ohio), and for the past year has been an Assistant Director of the Center for Writing Excellence. Her fields of specialization are Renaissance literature and rhetoric and composition. She holds two degrees in English: a BA (Honors) from the University of Regina (Canada) and an MA from Xavier University (Ohio). Her current area of research is women’s rhetorics in early modern England and New England.

Juanita Rodgers Comfort is incoming Co-Director of Composition for Curriculum Support and Development at West Chester University, where she teaches courses in composition, business writing, and black feminist essayists. Her work appears, among other places, in The Relevance of English: Teaching that Matters in Students’ Lives (2002), Beyond English, Inc (2002), Contrastive Rhetoric Revisited and Redefined (2001), and CCC (June 2000). She has also presented at CCCC, RSA, CLA, the Penn State Conference, and the Watson Conference.

Mary Jean Corbett typically teaches and writes about nineteenth-century British literature. She served as Director of Graduate Studies in English at Miami University from 1999-2002.

Jennie Dautermann is currently Associate Dean of Arts and Science at Miami University where she formerly served as Director of College Composition. She also teaches both composition and technical communication in Miami’s English department. Her publications include Writing at Good Hope: A Study of Negotiated Communication in a Community of Nurses (ATTW) and numerous articles in NCTE and ATTW publications. For several years she has been teaching principles of business and technical communication in summer workshops for college teachers in China. In addition, she collaborates with a group of mathematicians...
who explore similarities between learning to write and learning to do mathematics.

Debra Frank Dew is Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs. Her administrative effort to integrate diversity across the first-year writing curricula at UCCS earned her a 2003 service award from the University of Colorado Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. She thanks UCCS writing faculty for their dedication to their students, and their professional commitment to the UCCS Writing Program.

Suellynn Duffey directs the First-Year Writing Program at Georgia Southern University and has also directed first-year, basic writing, and WAC programs at Ohio State University, Ohio University, and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Her scholarship includes work on writing program administration (collaborative structures, ethics, and generational metaphors), basic writing (issues concerning mainstreaming and pedagogy), and technology, aging, and literacy. She has also published in Rhetoric Review, CCC, and in edited collections.

Christine Farris is Associate Professor, Director of Composition, and former Associate Chair of the English Department at Indiana University in Bloomington, where she redesigned the first-year composition curriculum and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in composition and cultural studies, literacy, and literature. She is the author of Subject to Change: New Composition Instructors’ Theory and Practice (Hampton) and coeditor with Chris Anson of Under Construction: Working at the Intersections of Composition Theory, Research, and Practice (Utah State UP). She is currently coediting a volume on connecting the teaching of writing and the teaching of literature in first-year English.

Karen Fitts is Composition Co-Director for Faculty Development and a member of the faculty at West Chester University, where she teaches courses in composition and rhetoric. She has published works on cultural studies, composition pedagogy, and the rhetoric of medical discourse. She and William B. Lalicker have an article, begun with Alan W. France (1943-2001), forthcoming in College English, linking the MLA’s representations of composition and rhetoric to needed curricular reforms in English.

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