

Memoranda of Fragile Machinery: A Portrait of Shaughnessy as Intellectual-Bureaucrat

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This is not an interesting memo—but it's important. In fact, if you don't read it, some part of the fragile machinery that moves us ... will probably break down.

— Mina Shaughnessy, Memorandum, December 17, 1971

By learning to look at the business of writing instruction from the administrator's view, it is possible that, in addition to finding ways both to rewrite the history of the discipline and to redefine the focus of classroom research, we might just uncover ways to materially change the working conditions of those who teach writing. Consider this, then, a thought experiment, an exercise in a different kind of boundary crossing, one that sets out to blur the distinctions between those who teach and those who manage.

— Richard Miller, "Intellectual Wasteland," (25)

Mina Shaughnessy's contributions during the initiation of Open Admissions at the City University of New York have been appraised time and time again, and one would think that the discussion of her legacy had been exhausted (if not exhausting). Perhaps because her field of study—the instruction of literacy—addresses one of the most politically charged issues in education, the richness of her work continues to provide a wide-ranging field of discourse in composition studies. When we remember Shaughnessy, we generally think of the dedicated instructor of Open Admissions students, who painstakingly analyzed their linguistic issues and so eloquently explained the writing problems they faced. Yet part of this recollection remains incomplete. In his biographical essay on Shaughnessy, Robert Lyons writes:

Shaughnessy was an administrator, moreover, as well as a teacher. As an administrator, too, she necessarily mediated between the program she ran, with its educational and social imperatives, and the college that, with some hesitation and discomfort, sponsored her program. (“Mina Shaughnessy” 175)

In discussing Shaughnessy’s role as administrator, Lyon suggests how the activities of writing program supervisors link with the “educational and social imperatives” with which they are faced. Although compositionists have often revisited her legacy, they do not thoroughly acknowledge her role as writing program administrator and, as a result, our representations of her remain historically blurred and biographically unfinished. In addition, an exploration of her role as WPA reshapes the critical positions of those ensuing critics who identified the less positive effects of her particular subjectivity to writing instruction. Ultimately, revisiting her work as a WPA recasts her portrait as a founder of composition studies, and reshapes her historical identity in composition.

Recently, scholars have begun to analyze critically the university role of the WPA. In “Composition as Management Science,” Marc Bousquet accuses that the “pronounced administrative character of rhet-comp” sustains an irresolvable power-laden condition because of the managerial dynamic set up between WPAs and the instructors of writing whose labor they oversee (*Tenured* 3). He regards the interaction between full-time writing administrators and part-time instructors as disreputable and yet, in defining it as so, he overlooks a crucial element of education—namely, programmatic organization. He writes, “[...] *academic managerialism is a relation between the managed and the managers that ensures the unhappiness of both groups* (5). In his managerial equation, Bousquet neglects the structures which allow teachers to teach and students to learn; in fact in his calculations, students don’t factor in at all. Justifiably, he reacts to the exploitation of untenured labor in the university, but offers on the other hand no pragmatic means to get the work between teachers and students in motion. If the pragmatics of programming are ignored, students cannot receive well-conceived teaching, tutoring, and advisement, while instructors cannot lead well-informed classrooms (as well as get paid in a timely fashion). If these supervised systems don’t exist, the writing program in the “managed university” undeniably and completely shuts down.

In contrast to Bousquet’s pessimistic view of the WPA, Richard Miller in *As If Learning Mattered* contends that the work of the compositionist does not begin in the classroom but in its preliminary construction. He writes:

[T]hose truly committed to increasing access to all the academy has to offer must assume a more central role in the bureaucratic management of the academy ... [I]t is at the microbureaucratic level of local praxis that one can begin to exercise a material influence not only on how students are represented or on which books will be a part of the required reading lists but also, and much more important, on which individuals are given a chance to become students and on whether the academy can be made to function as a responsive, hospitable environment for all who work within its confines. (46)

He underscores the importance of programmatic structures and how compositionists must understand them if those “responsive, hospitable environments” are in reality to materialize into successful instructional endeavors. Miller deems certain educational leaders as “intellectual-bureaucrats,” and his description aptly portrays Shaughnessy.

From 1991 to 2001 I too worked at the City College of New York as a writing program administrator and had access to the files and records of the composition program. These documents had accumulated (unattended and virtually forgotten) since the first days of the college’s Open Admissions when Shaughnessy directed. With Miller’s figure of the intellectual bureaucrat as a lens, I use these bureaucratic documents to recreate the portrait of Mina Shaughnessy, exploring how her role as writing program administrator converged with her scholarly and teaching work; she created not only a workable pedagogical scenario for students and teachers in her writing program, but also remains an exemplary figure for the aspiring contemporary WPA. She proved that one not need be solely a paper-pushing administrator, but that, in fact, the knowledge one gains from administrative work can also inform teacherly goals as well as scholarly research.

From her early administrative documents of Open Admissions, we can easily perceive how Shaughnessy intellectualized her bureaucratic position as well as how she smartly performed such administrative duties. In these bureaucratic positions Bousquet prudently warns that WPAs must realize that “having administrative power is to be subject to administrative imperatives—that is, to be individually powerless before a version of necessity originating from some other sources” (“Management Science” 23). Yet, although external forces of critics and university policy often combined to thwart her efforts, Shaughnessy seemed anything but “powerless” in her administrative position. Instead, she remained accountable because she consistently factored in the needs of students and teachers while acting as a buffer for them against the pressures of upper-level university administration. She found ways to make things work. In *The Politics of Remediation*,

Mary Soliday recommends that compositionists should take a more expansive view of curricular and classroom praxis “within the broader context of institutional policies and structural change” (102). Soliday also asserts that “Shaughnessy’s administrative legacy suggests to us now that reform does not consist exclusively of a critique of curriculum but of a struggle to improve the conditions for teaching and learning that shape the everyday experiences of both teachers and students” (104).

One rudimentary example of Shaughnessy’s administrative finesse is exemplified in an undated memo referenced as “Typewriting instruction for Pre-bac students” in which she proposed a summer typing course for students. Most of her students submitted handwritten documents because they had no access to a typewriter. She persuaded her dean that this course not only had functional value but also compositional value for students. She wrote:

Such a course would have a number of advantages: 1. It would provide much-needed exercise in pattern practice with English sentences. We could prepare exercise material that would drill the student in those grammatical constructions that give him trouble. We could also try to get at spelling problems. 2. It would increase the student’s self-editing ability. Students catch many of their own errors when their handwritten themes are returned to them in typewritten form. 3. Typing skill is of great value in all academic courses, and, of course, it is also a marketable skill. (“Typewriting”)

Shaughnessy promotes this un-academic course by promoting its multiple uses for students: grammatical practice, editing exercises, and a marketable skill. Her postscript to the memo offers the most ingenious of suggestions. She writes, “We could also get fifty typewriters (portables) and then give them to the qualifying students at the end of the course. That would solve the storage problem!” (“Typewriting”)¹ Marilyn Maiz, Shaughnessy’s administrative assistant, recalls Shaughnessy’s craftiness stating that, “She would decide that the program needed something, or that someone needed funds to attend a conference, or that something special had to be done for a student. At first, we would tell her she was crazy to think that an exception could be made or that it could be done at all, but then before we knew it, Mina had gotten precisely what she wanted” (Maher 115).

In contrast to Bousquet’s vision of WPAs as “managerial service” (*Tenured* 5), Shaughnessy assumed the role of “middle management” because she knew it would allow teaching and learning to occur even under the duress of administrative mayhem. In fact, in a personal interview, Marilyn Maiz

states that “administration wasn’t the thing she was vitally interested in but she felt it was very important For Mina, it was just a very human thing. It wasn’t like administration was separate from these other things [teaching, scholarship, classrooms]. It was just all part of the package.” The Shaughnessy bureaucratic package exemplifies another more optimistic possibility—providing a platform from which we can strategically view and perceptively assess the role of the writing program administrator.

FINESSING DURESS: SHAUGHNESSY NEGOTIATES A DIFFICULT POLITICAL CLIMATE

Shaughnessy began her administrative career at City College in September 1967 when she became the director of basic writing. She developed her writing initiatives within SEEK (acronym for Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge), a New York statewide program which introduced racially diverse and financially disadvantaged students into the university system. As an unforeseen pilot project to Open Admissions which would begin three years later, SEEK gave an early barometric reading of the campus-wide attitudes which would pressurize as the population of non-traditional students grew. During Shaughnessy’s administration, some faculty claimed that SEEK reduced the academic standards of the college while, on the other hand, other faculty and staff backed Shaughnessy’s efforts, recognizing them as a form of educational activism. Underlying her initiatives were political issues of race, class, and repression and, consequently, societal unease often hysterically entangled with anxieties about academic excellence and tradition. Shaughnessy devised educational opportunities for this new student body, and ignited fervor on both sides of the debate. She started critical firestorms among resistant faculty while lighting a friendly pedagogical flame under sympathetic advocates.

In *Working Through*, an account of the advent of Open Admissions, Leonard Kriegel wrote:

The SEEK teaching staff was directed by a woman [Shaughnessy] who had joined the department that September [1967]. She was one of the few people I had ever met who had actually thought about the problems involved in teaching essentially noncommunicative students how to write ... She had a single thought in mind: to educate.... Her sense of what was real kept her sane and made her an effective teacher and administrator. While some of the teachers in the program discussed who was and who was not a racist, she moved quietly through

the immediacies of City College. She was able to drive herself with incredible diligence, and she shamed others into making the effort their students required of them. (172)

Kriegel's portrait of Shaughnessy points to her leadership abilities: she focused on measures to enfranchise these "noncommunicative students," while avoiding accusations and stone-throwing which could sidetrack her primary goal—to promote the teaching of writing. In this administrative role, she certainly was not blasé about the political issues associated with her students but, conscientiously concentrated her efforts on improving the pedagogical possibilities in which their language skills could excel—so that in the end they could speak (and write) for themselves more effectively.

Throughout the '90s, Shaughnessy's scholarship came under renewed scrutiny. Critics have argued that Shaughnessy's accommodationist approaches essentialized and depoliticized students' linguistic conflicts; however, these critics ignore the influence of her administrative position upon her pedagogical policy decisions. In a series of articles and a subsequent book, *Representing the "Other,"* Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner reevaluate basic writing tenets and how Shaughnessy's work has been integrated into the teaching of writing. They offer sound critique when they suggest that we avoid considering Shaughnessy's work as the final word instead of relying on it as advice that may be adapted to the needs of particular students in idiosyncratic political contexts. They worry that taken at absolute face value Shaughnessy's work can prevent us from seeing "the social struggle and change involved in the teaching and learning of basic writing in ways that risk perpetuating [basic writers'] marginal position in higher education (xiv).

One point that Lu and Horner seem to overlook however is the specific social and historical contexts in which Shaughnessy was administering her programs. They stress the "historical role of basic writing as the only space in English which seriously investigates the challenges of students whose writing is explicitly marked as 'not belonging' to the academy," yet fail to recognize the historical and social role which writing program administration assumed at this particular moment. It equally did not belong to the academy. Paradoxically, throughout their critical work on Shaughnessy, Lu and Horner address the "silences about the concrete material, political, institutional, social, and historical realities confronting basic writing," yet *they* remain silent about the bureaucratic conditions under which her decisions were being made, thus underestimating the material, political, institutional, social, and historical quandaries confronting Shaughnessy as WPA. In the context of the *realpolitick* of writing administration, if Shaughnessy

was an accommodationist, it was because she was *accommodating* the possibilities of classroom teaching and the potential of student progress.

Ignoring the historical and political context she faced as writing program administrator, they fail to identify how those factors affected Shaughnessy's administrative decision-making. Contextually, she was not making her policy decisions in a political vacuum but making strategic determinations based upon the concerns and, perhaps misperceived values, of the most vocal critics around her. On the very first page of *Errors and Expectations*, Shaughnessy stated succinctly the problem of Open Admission colleges, "For such colleges, this venture into mass education usually began abruptly, amidst the misgivings of administrators, who had to guess in the dark about the sorts of programs they ought to plan for the students they had never met, and the reluctancies of teachers, some of whom had already decided that the new students were ineducable" (1). Strangely instead of foregrounding the contents of the book in her introduction (as most authors would), Shaughnessy used it purposefully to politicize her research. She wrote:

Why some will ask, do English teachers need to be told so much about errors? Isn't their concern with error already a kind of malignancy? Ought we not to dwell instead upon the options writers have rather than the constraints they must work under if they are to be read without prejudice?

There is a short answer to these questions—namely that the proportion of time I spend analyzing errors does not reflect the proportion of time a teacher should spend teaching students how to avoid them. But since teachers' preconceptions about errors are frequently at the center of their misconceptions about BW students, I have no choice but to dwell on errors. (6)

Her rhetorical tactics, although concerned with student writing, were geared more to the teaching problems of faculty—particularly Basic Writing antagonists whose obsessions with error subsumed more important issues of student writing. Shaughnessy did not want "to other" basic writing students, but hoped to reduce error-anxiety among their instructors who could then focus instead on students' critical meaning-making and composing processes.

From the perspective of bureaucratic intellectualism, *Errors and Expectations* is less a how-to manual for writing pedagogy, and more a means of administering public opinion and policy making. In her final paragraphs of the book, she writes:

Colleges must be prepared to make more than a graceless and begrudging accommodation to [students'] unpreparadness, opening their doors with one hand and then leading students into an endless corridor of remedial anterooms with the other. We already begin to see that the remedial model, which isolates the student and the skill from real college contexts, imposes a "fix-it station" tempo and mentality upon both teachers and students. And despite the fine quality of many of the programs that have evolved from this model, it now appears that they have been stretched more tautly than is necessary between the need to make haste and the need to teach the ABC's of writing in adult ways. We cannot know how many students of talent have left our programs not for want of ability but for the sense they had of being done in by short-cuts and misperceptions of educational efficiency. (293)

While never straying too far from the subject of teaching, this statement underscores administrative issues—programmatic systems, curricular approaches, and retention. Shaughnessy warns that approaching writing programming unintellectually may undermine the talents and achievements of students as well as defeat the purpose of university education.

THE CONTINUING RESONANCE OF SHAUGHNESSY'S CHALLENGES

One of the greatest challenges Shaughnessy faced was the huge numbers of incoming freshman as at the advent of Open Admissions. In *The Death of the American University*, L. G. Heller gave a carefully worded but clearly negative critique of Open Admissions. Commenting upon the extraordinary influx of students at City College and the "significant shifts that [took] place in the personnel distribution at City College of New York" (193), he wrote:

There [at City College], one hundred and five sections of remedial English had to be planned for the winter semester of 1971. When the director of the remedial English program failed to appear at one meeting of the Curriculum and Teaching Committee, the dean of the college commented, "Mina's in a state of shock. She just saw the figures on the number of remedial students we'll be getting." (194)

Under the opposition she was receiving about her relatively small body of SEEK students, imagine her administrative conundrum when she faced an increase of seven and a half times more students within one semester: there just plainly were not enough English faculty to teach these novice

scholars. Could she find the warm teaching bodies who would be likewise prepared with an innovative instructional spirit and open-minded patience with these students' challenges? I imagine Shaughnessy sitting at her desk, report in hand, dumbstruck at the daunting task she faced: there were classrooms to be arranged, faculty to be hired and trained, colleagues to be sought for help in faculty development, and new funding to be found and appropriately allocated. Placed as "executor of policies" in this administrative scenario (See Bousquet 5), Shaughnessy *managed* to create an administrative system that could support the roles of teachers and students, and potentially ensure the feeling of reward for both groups.

Shaughnessy provided a simply stated—not simplistically applied—framework for setting up a writing program: (1) be prepared to work harder than you've ever worked, (2) develop a camaraderie among the writing staff, providing enough meeting for discussion and intercollegiality, (3) recruit from senior faculty for their experience, knowledge, and influence, and (4) make it look like you're having fun (Maher 96). Much of the behind-the-scenes work that Shaughnessy did however seemed anything but the common definition of fun. As she set up the early pre-baccalaureate program, she was coordinating registration, supervising placement of students, implementing tutoring, and troubleshooting the major problems of the program. Her memorandum to her Chair Ed Volpe offers an insight to Shaughnessy's acute understanding of classroom minutiae and how those inner workings impact the success of the her staff. She wrote her then Chair, Ed Volpe:

I have the sense that the English part of the Pre-bac program is finally underway. I won't bother you with all the crimps and clanks and near-breakdowns in the machinery of registration. The right students now seem to be meeting the right teachers in the right classrooms, and for that I am grateful—and a bit surprised. (Sept. 22, 1967; Maher 92)

The strategic organization of many of her memoranda and her mechanistic rhetoric alludes to how composition instructors and policy-makers must understand the very nuts and bolts of bureaucratic systems if they are to teach and administer well.

Later in this memorandum, Shaughnessy also addressed the way her program was being poorly supported because the college would not allot it the campus space it required. She protested:

... I must again bring up the subject of office space. Everyone is aware of the space problem; the disgruntlement rises more directly from the fact that every teacher in the regular English program has some kind of office space whereas not

one teacher in the Pre-bac program has any office space. The counseling time that is worked into the teachers' schedules is not an adequate substitute [for students to find their instructors]: no one can reach the teachers by telephone except in the evenings, and the teachers, in turn, run up their telephone bills at home; they have no place to "land" when they get to campus; they cannot meet students requests for appointments; and most important, their contention that they are invisible is seriously reinforcing the failure of anyone to allot them space. Is there nothing we can do and no one we can bother about this? (Sept. 22, 1967)

Shaughnessy's complaints to her chair not only called attention to the inconveniences that her staff and students endured because of the lack of office space, but also what that lack of institutional placement symbolized. Although on the administrative surface this memorandum merely reports the daily "crimps and clanks and near-breakdowns," it also draws attention to Shaughnessy's concern with the logistics of registration, orientation, and office space. These often overlooked details gained symbolic significance to Shaughnessy because she knew that without her insistence to such dotted-Is and crossed-Ts, her Basic Writing program would neither gain the institutional recognition nor respect it deserved. If students were alternatively placed randomly, or colleagues misinformed about the program's activities, or her staff forever forced to be a rogue band of wandering writing instructors, she would not have only near-breakdowns but absolute standstills.

I think it is important to note at this point the rhetorical elegance of her memoranda; Shaughnessy never takes for granted the power of words. In all of her bureaucratic documents, she shapes language into a rhetoric of charisma and charm. Her rhetorical *je-ne-sais-quoi* cannot be underestimated in the time in which she wrote them. Her fashioning of bureaucratic documents offered her colleagues moments of comic relief in beleaguered times; rather than filling mailboxes with the doldrums of administrative tedium, she sent messages that would make people smile—even if they didn't like the message. Yet, her quick wits could also be aserbic. Once a fellow faculty member waved a grammar mistake in her face that she had left (intentionally) in a student essay question and accused her of not knowing correct English. "Why do you do things like this?" he huffed. "To catch pedants like you," she retorted (Personal interview, Marilyn Maiz). If her rhetorical abilities could be used to boost the morale of her supportive staff, it could likewise be used to put the ill-collegial in their place.

TOIL & TROUBLE: ADMINISTRATION AS SCHOLARSHIP

As aforementioned, by the seventies, the context of her program had changed. The takeover of the City College campus by students had taken place, and the college leadership with very little planning or forethought had conceded to enroll any student with a New York City high school diploma. In an October 18, 1971 memo to teachers of Basic Writing, Shaughnessy advised her staff of the ways that they could manage the increasing number of students entering their program. With the overwhelming arrival of so many students, she sought means of maintaining the interpersonal connections with students as well as sustaining the morale of her staff. She wrote:

There was a time when to many of us the SEEK English program seemed to have reached its optimal size when the number of sections grew to 20. We worried about the depersonalizing of the program, about a loss of touch with what was going on in other teachers' classes and what was happening to individual students. There was a time, for example, when teachers met to discuss every one of their students with the rest of the staff because the students were known individually by most teachers. [...] The problem of how, in the face of this vastness, to keep knowing what is going on among us now becomes critical. The planning staff for the Basic Writing program meets every week to consider ways of staying human. The orientation sessions, the "pairing" arrangement with old and new teachers, and our staff meetings are all parts of that struggle.

To sustain her teaching staff's pedagogical vigilance and morale, Shaughnessy devised various methods to draw upon her instructors' insights. During the semester, she distributed a memo to teachers and requested that they fill out a somewhat perfunctory mid-term report about each of their students. She stated this evaluative mid-term report would "enable us to see some things more quickly and accurately" by offering "a sense of who the student is and how you think his experience in your class is affecting him" (October 18, 1971) (See Addendum 1). She also added that at the end of the semester the students be given the same questionnaire as an exercise in self-reflection and feedback. The assessment form rated each student's control of various grammatical tasks as well as their literacy aptitudes with certain reading habits, writing forms, and classroom participation. She then asked each instructor to conclude with a comment on the student's overall performance.

As a means of student evaluation this form is questionable but, remarkably, the administrative form could have become a structural outline for *Errors and Expectations*. Through her administrative actions—whether consciously or not—Shaughnessy was collecting the research data for her book. The type of bureaucratic work she implemented—considered drudgery by most—became an integral resource for her scholarship. She had already started accumulating 4000 student sample tests from which she drew her scholarship, but these administrative documents would complement the thinking that emerged from the pages of those blue test booklets. One year after this memo's distribution, Shaughnessy submitted her book proposal and requested release time but, obviously her bureaucratic toils were already contributing to her scholarly work.

In addition to this mid-term report about students, she also put into practice the teacher-course inventory that compiled information about teachers' approaches to the Basic Writing courses. Along with the help of an "inventory crew," each individual teacher would describe their classroom practice. She asked each teacher to write a brief statement about their course goals, to submit a sample syllabus, and to expect a visit from a crew of observers she had selected who would describe—not evaluate or criticize—their classroom strategies. As a group effort they would record "what their goals were, what topics they were covering, what types of writing and reading assignments they are giving, and what style of teaching they favor" (October 18, 1971). She rationalized to her staff that, "The thought is that once this information has been written down, we can use it as a reference among ourselves and even develop a kind of teacher-course description that would serve as a guide to students so that those who know that they learn best in a certain type of course can be more certain of getting into a section that's congenial them" (October 18, 1971).

Beyond a guide for students, Shaughnessy was also attempting an unimposing method for teachers to become more self-aware about their teaching habits and to create situations in which instructors could share their classroom experiences. Disseminating this type of information would assist those teachers and students to meet in classrooms that could be conducive to all parties. Furthermore, if the mid-term report helped identify the problems and challenges of writing students, the advice, ideas, and conundrums that teachers reported would inform the resolutions to these same student problems. This carefully conceived bureaucratic document offers a glimpse into how her position as intellectual bureaucrat would set in motion the thought-provoking impetus of *Errors & Expectations*.

Perhaps the most useful document about program implementation was the Mid-term Report on the Basic Writing Program that Shaughnessy

composed in the fall 1971. She layed out an extensive administrative outline of the program which included information and program rationale for enrollment, curriculum, testing (placement), staff, training and orientation, evaluation, innovations, and problems. In this administrative document, she formulated and combined the quantitative information and the qualitative descriptions to demonstrate how the writing program was constructed, had grown, and could be improved. She explained how she had scaffolded the course sequence and what each course attempted to resolve with basic writers. She identified the problems that students generally had going into each course, and what goals would allow them to develop into the subsequent course.

She concluded this mid-term report, addressing the problems posed by the increasingly unwieldy Basic Writing program: class loads jumping from 18 to 23 (sometimes 27 and over), inappropriate classroom assignments which did not suit the needs of a writing classrooms, and the lack of appropriate teacher training, especially in the realm of second-language teaching. Her main lament, however, was the need for research into the “fundamental skills we are teaching so that we do not keep insisting that the things students are having difficulty with are ‘simple’ when, in fact, they involve a number of highly complex operations...that can be clearly explained only after they have been clearly understood” (16) She wrote:

We need, and here I speak not simply of English teachers but most teachers at the college, a better sense of what we can expect of ourselves and our students in the remedial situation. The three levels of English, for example, represent three distinct levels of writing that can be found among our freshmen...Once the students begin to move within the sequence, however, the boundaries of the courses get blurred. A student who begins in English 1 and moves after two semesters to English 3, for example, is seldom at the same level of skill as the student initially placed in English 3. The gaps in preparation, in other words, are greater than the time we have to close them. What standard, then, are we to use in evaluating the student who has worked steadily from English 1 to English 3 and has shown significant improvement, who may even at times have produced writing that, in its quality of insight and imagination, is superior to that which more easily meets the traditional “standard.” Can we, in short, penalize the student who has kept his end of the bargain and who has succeeded in terms of his own base line? (Mid-term Report on the Basic Writing Report, 1971, 16)

In this programmatic progress report she questions established standards of university evaluations, especially in the composition classroom where students make uneven spurts of progress that are difficult to measure. Moreover, between the lines of her memorandum, I hear a constant “note-to-self” that Shaughnessy was making to herself about what would later be revealed in *Errors and Expectations*. Following up with a response to her own rhetorical question, she wrote:

The answer to this question, it seems to me, depends on what we expect remediation to do or be. If remediation is a program, rather than a process, then English 3 is the end of the line and the students who cannot deliver a sample of writing that meets the old standard is out. But if remediation is a process that continues far beyond the Basic Writing sequence and beyond the subject of writing and reading, then there is some justification in allowing a student to proceed in the curriculum, knowing that, with sweat, the gap between the absolute standard and his performance will narrow and finally close.
(17)

I continue with the conclusion (a peroration really) of this memorandum because I feel it not only speaks to the students of her Basic Writing program but to many of the urban public college students I have encountered and watched take ownership of their intellectual abilities. She concluded:

This is the way every SEEK student I know has grown—by plugging, by patiently re-making habits, returning again and again to fundamentals but expanding each time the area of mastery, by reaching plateaus that look like standstills and having setbacks that look like failures—but moving, always, in the direction of mastery until, finally, there is a sense of an undergirding and a feeling of control.

So confident am I of the capacity of poorly educated students to make this gain that I would not hesitate to guarantee such results if we could but suspend our institutional neurosis about standards long enough to meet these students in all courses where they are rather than where we think they ought to be and proceed to give them a good education.

Too many people at the College still view this as a collapse of standards. Too many are waiting for someone else to do the “dirty work” of remediation so that they can go on doing what they have always done. The curriculum still reinforces these

prejudices, with the result that too many students are learning the same lesson here that they learned in high school—namely, that bad luck is cumulative.

This remains the long-term problem with Open Admissions, and it is difficult to know what to do about it. (17-18)

Unfortunately, I'm not sure how much these attitudes about underprepared students, standards, and the "dirty work" of writing instruction and administration have changed. Assuredly, what can be recognized in these documents is the early germination of current composition concerns: Writing Across the Curriculum, outcomes assessment, and the methodologies of comp-rhet scholarship. In the primordial ooze of the composition field, Shaughnessy was forecasting a long evolution.

The administrative records and memoranda that were left behind from the Shaughnessy era at City College offer us an alternative view of her bequest to composition studies. They show the intersection between her academic life as a scholar, teacher, and administrator and, additionally, how those roles necessarily coexist and inform one other. When studying the pedagogical and bureaucratic paperwork that Shaughnessy sent into the educational arena as serious primary sources, we begin to see the role of intellectual bureaucrat as a potential site of reflective research. As we teach students, design curricula, administer programs, and create our scholarship, we should consider the Shaughnessy "intellicrat" model and how it could inspire our own institutional positions. Shaughnessy's WPA history demonstrates that one not need be solely the paper-pushing Bartleby the Compositionist, but that, in fact, the knowledge, ingenuity, and charm that one brings to administrative tasks complements our teacherly work as well as substantiates our scholarly endeavors. In other words, the oft-tedious bureaucratic labors we will inevitably face may not deter us from the publish-or-perish work we need to complete, but on the contrary, may lead us to it. Applying our scholarly scrutiny and creativity to the administrative positions we hold may prove to make the WPA's labors both more fruitful and possibly more rewarding (perhaps even pleasurable).

NOTES

¹ Imagine the current-day equivalent of this suggestion: Let's give fifty laptops to students who pass the keyboarding/internet course for free; there would be no worries about securely storing them.

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APPENDIX

Mid-Term Report
 Term Ending Jan. 1972

Instructor _____ Student _____
 Last name, first name, initial

Course: _____
 Number Section

Number of absences as of Nov. _____

Grade at mid-term _____ Course recommended for next term _____

Please indicate student's control of:

(Check One)

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
1. subject-verb agreement	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. verb forms	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. intra-sentence punctuation (commas, quotations, apostrophe, etc.)	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. inter-sentence punctuation (fragments, splice, comma faults)	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. pronoun reference & case	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. adjective & adverb forms	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. possessive forms of nouns and pronouns	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. spelling	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. syntax of simple sentence patterns	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. syntax of complex sentence patterns requiring variations in word order and subordinating constructions	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. idiom	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. description and narration	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. short expository essay	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. research & term paper	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. reading (fiction)	_____	_____	_____	_____
16. reading (non-fiction)	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. oral discussion	_____	_____	_____	_____
18. Are assignments up to date?	_____			
19. Is student showing improvement?	_____			
20. Is student keeping conference appointments?	_____			
21. Is student repeating the course?	_____			
22. Have you referred this student to the Writing Center?	_____			
23. If so, has he attended regularly?	_____			

