

The Prospects for Rhetoric in a First-Year Composition Program: Deliberative Discourse as a Vehicle for Change?

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Colleges and universities should encourage and facilitate the development of students' capacities to examine complex situations in which competing values are at stake, to employ both substantive knowledge and moral reasoning to evaluate the problems and values involved, to develop their own judgments about these issues in respectful dialogue with others, and then to act on their judgments.

From *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* (2003)

Institutions in a free society are as good as the rhetorical transactions that maintain them. It is disturbing to note, therefore, the increasing evidence that communication is ever more difficult to achieve and in some cases appears almost impossible... Communication problems are obviously present when groups are unable to gain an audience, open lines of communication, establish the possibility of persuasion, and thus alter belief and action related to their interests and welfare.

“Report of the Committee on the Scope of Rhetoric and the Place of Rhetorical Studies in Higher Education” of the Wingspread Conference on the Prospects of Rhetoric, (January 25-27, 1970)

When I was interviewed for the WPA position at the University of West Florida, the hiring committee explained that the department wanted a director who would “take the composition program into the twenty-first century.” By hiring its first PhD in Rhetoric and Composition, the department hoped its new colleague would know what that meant. In my presentation to the faculty, I wanted to make it very clear what they would get should they hire me. I delivered my talk about one month following the invasion of Iraq, my comments echoing the concern and hope expressed at the Wingspread Conference of 1970 and in *Educating Citizens*, published in 2003, both of which argued for citizen education in the midst of a democratic crisis, the former, the crisis of 1967-69, the latter, the crisis following 9/11:

In the year and a half since the bombing of the World Trade Center, many professors continue to complain about how ill-prepared our students are to participate in discussions of the world they live in. I suggest, however, that this impression probably arises from disciplinary ideas embedded in the practices of English departments, rather than the deficiencies of our students, particularly disciplinary ideas about what properly constitutes the study of literature, writing, and culture. Among all of the literacies we attend to in English Departments, preparation for civic life has not been counted among them. It is this deficiency in our view of what constitutes English, not deficiencies in our students, to which we must attend in this post 9/11 moment. I hope that this moment becomes a wake-up call for us to rethink an idea that has been circulated for quite a bit of time in my field, but has been pretty roundly ignored when we think about what constitutes the study of English: the need for literacy education to prepare students for public and civic life.

I was offered the WPA's position after presenting my vision of a program based on the historical and disciplinary assumptions of rhetoric, assumptions that radically break with traditional composition. I promised to create a program in which students would encounter texts as the genres that actually circulate in various discourses, not as pseudo-genres invented for the classroom, and would produce writers who are cognizant of the social, cultural, and political economic relations embedded in these discourses.

In what follows, I first outline the theoretical foundations of my argument that writing programs should be constituted according to the principles of rhetoric, not traditional composition as it was formulated in the

late nineteenth century. I then advocate for a method of transforming traditional composition programs that merges the ancient rhetorical notion of deliberative discourse, through which rhetors forge the future, with Chantal Mouffe's argument that deliberation best serves the forging of the future when rhetors air out the agonal beliefs and values at work in the deliberation, a risky practice she calls "radical democracy." I then describe what our writing faculty, as a small community with common purposes, was able to achieve through a radical democratic approach. This experience, I argue, demonstrates that the prospects for breaking with traditional composition are good when the process of change is carried out as an on-going practice of speaking about the conflicts. However, I also discuss the challenges to the development of a rhetorically-oriented writing program posed by institutional beliefs and values, not only those that recall the past, but those which portend one view of the future university, a university that seeks to break remaining ties to the civic project of liberal arts ideals.

THEORIZING THE AGONAL PROJECTS OF RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

Early in my PhD studies, I became interested in the histories of English departments written by Sharon Crowley (*Composition in the University*), Ross Winterowd, Thomas P. Miller (*Formation*), and Michael A. Halloran that correlate the diminution of public literacy instruction, the core project of rhetoric, with the rise of modernism in English departments. I also began following the interdepartmental discussion initiated by Stephen Mailloux in what came to be called the "Rhetorical Paths in English and Communication Studies Series" in the *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. In this still on-going series, disciplinary historians in English and Communications departments have discussed the prospects for strengthening the presence of rhetoric in the university (Crowley "Communication"; Keith; Leff; Mailloux; Miller "Disciplinary" "How Rhetorical"; Nystrand). This series evaluated the deleterious effects of another historical development that accompanied the modernist turn in English Studies, the separation of writing and speaking instruction at the departmental level which relegated writing to English/composition and speaking to speech/communications. The expulsion of rhetorical studies from English departments in the early twentieth century forced those who retained interest in rhetoric's civic aims to form departments of speech (Halloran). The subsequent split of language instruction into writing and speech strangely placed writing and speaking at cross purposes: writing became a private and creative endeavor and speaking, a public and civic endeavor.

I was convinced by this scholarship that, as Crowley argues, “without an academic discipline devoted to its study, the use of rhetoric by powerful figures cannot be critiqued because the knowledge requisite to determine when and how an argument is fishy will be even harder to find than it is today” (“Communications” 101). Rhetoric is a “theoretical discourse” which “give(s) a central place to the systematic discovery and investigation of the available arguments in a given situation...both produced and circulated within a network of social and civic discourse, images, and events” (“Rhetoric Is”). Traditional composition, in contrast, “feature(s) an amalgam of literary study and instruction in current-traditional grammar and usage” (“Communications” 90-91) and emphasizes “classroom research and the composing processes of individual writers” (90).

Throughout her body of work on the separate disciplinary histories of rhetoric and composition, Crowley has argued that “composition, as it has been practiced in the required first year course for more than 100 years, has nothing what-so-ever to do with rhetoric.” For Crowley, rhetoricians construct theories of persuasive discourses as they occur in the dynamic flux of human activity surrounding forensic, deliberative, and ethical questions: what has happened to us, what is to be done by us, and, what constitutes a good society. In short, Crowley suggests, the field we refer to as Rhetoric and Composition mistakenly elides two epistemologically separate projects: Rhetoric assumes that writers communicate as participants engaged in a world of already existing texts, while composition assumes that individuals create original essays in which they express their ideas with aplomb, correct usage, and a distinctive, authentic voice. Rhetoric attends to invention, the study and practice of using language to persuade audiences to get things done ethically in a social and political world. Moreover, quoting Kevin De Luca, rhetoric must also include the study of the “the mobilization of signs for the articulation of identities, ideologies, consciousnesses, communities, publics, and cultures” (“Rhetoric is”). Rhetorical education, therefore, enables students to knowledgeably and ethically participate in opinion-making and knowledge-making discourses by developing their understanding of the multiplicity of ways persuasion takes place.

Composition, on the other hand, as it has been historically practiced in the first year English course, constructs students according to the bourgeois aesthetic (Crowley, *Composition*) and the assumptions of liberal political theory¹ (Roberts-Miller, Crowley *Towards*). Students are trained to write as modernist individuals free to express themselves aesthetically and independently of historically and currently circulating public discourses (Crowley *Composition* 30-45). These concepts arose from a number of historical factors traced by Crowley and others. The belletristic tradition of modern

English departments and the disciplinary assumptions of literary studies continue to ideologically dominate the department's concept of what constitutes "good writing" (Crowley *Composition*, Winterowd), resulting in disregard for the living genres that circulate in everyday and academic life (Bawashi, Wells, Waldo, Weisser). Moreover, the influence of eighteenth and nineteenth century current-traditional rhetoric privileges the surface elements of correctness and perspicuity and expunges the study of rhetorical invention as a *kairic* project from writing instruction (Crowley, *Methodical*; Miller, *Formation*; Sipiora).

As they developed throughout much of the twentieth century and continue in many, if not most, programs today (Fulkerson, Hesse), composition courses teach students to identify with the political philosophy of liberalism which "presumes that rhetorical activity occurs in the following way": "A free, knowing, and sovereign agent is moved by circumstances to survey the landscape; develop appropriate arguments concerning it; clothe them in persuasive language; and repeat them to an audience of equally free, knowing, and sovereign subjects who hear/read without impediment or distortion" (Crowley, *Towards* 36). According to the tenets of liberalism, public space and those occupying it are politically universalized as free environments and individuals. This idealization of political equality can only be sustained, however, if, as Habermas argues, the economic and the political are conceived of as separate spheres: "The state is conceived of as an apparatus of public administration and society is conceived as a system of market-structured interactions of private persons and their labor" (qtd. in RobertsMiller 26). Citizens must be considered political free agents because they are considered to be economic free agents, a notion that effectively eviscerates the collective from the public realm. In traditional composition, liberal political theory asserts itself ideologically in the form of de-contextualized and de-historicized conceptions of writer and audience. The writer, Roberts-Miller asserts, is restricted to speaking in a neutral, disimpassioned voice (28-29), the audience is generalized as sharing the same beliefs and values (81-82), and the reasoning process is ontologized, that is, fact is conflated with truth (76-77).

THE GENERATIVE VALUE OF AGONAL DELIBERATION

The rhetoric program I promised to design would leave behind the history of composition by engaging the writing faculty in deliberative discussions about the disciplinary distinctions among literary studies, rhetoric, and composition. Through such discussion, I planned to promote the development of a first-year curriculum in *rhetoric* and establish the means through

which on-going research in rhetoric and rhetorical pedagogy could take place by challenging the ideological stranglehold of composition's long first century.

For three years, the instructors, adjunct instructors, graduate students, and I devoted our energy to thinking through and deliberately arguing about the disciplinary, pedagogical, and institutional matters implied by a programmatic shift from composition to rhetoric. In what follows, I map out the generative role played by a radically democratic form of deliberative discourse in the redesign of the first year rhetoric program. I hope to show that this discourse provides an effective vehicle for programmatic change if those engaged in it value a common democratic goal, even if they differ greatly in their beliefs and practices.

Deliberative rhetoric, as I use it here, involves a commitment to the agonistic and radically democratic strategies developed by Chantal Mouffe in *The Democratic Paradox*. Unlike the assumptions of Rogerian or liberal pluralist rhetorical strategies, Mouffe's deliberative rhetoric does not seek consensus through compromise. Instead, it seeks the most informed and democratically ethical solutions that emerge through agonistic rhetorical exchange. All participants in this form of deliberation, Crowley argues, face risk because the positions with which they enter into discussion may be adversarial to others, and some positions may prove to be better and more ethical than others (*Towards* 196). The outcome of deliberative rhetoric is not compromise because the end of this radical democratic practice is not to satisfy some aspect of each participant's original desires but to achieve the most ethical course of action. Practitioners of a radical democratic model must also realize that the most informed and ethical position may not win over the majority. This is especially the case, Crowley asserts, when some participants seek decisions that are motivated by anti-democratic ideologies (102-132). In seeking to win people over to change, therefore, deliberative rhetors "risk becoming outsiders to a community because they must, of necessity, advocate attention to discontinuity or difference. Whether they persuade or not depends upon the density with which the community's beliefs are articulated with one another and upon the degree to which the system resonates for believers" (196).

Because I arrived at UWF advocating a radical departure in first year program, I could have found myself at risk of quickly becoming an outsider to the writing faculty. This did not happen, however, as a large majority of the writing faculty were receptive to the argument that rhetorical theory, not traditional composition practice, best serves our students: the majority of the faculty share Crowley's concern that teaching writing must serve democratic purposes by helping to shape critical citizen identities. In this

sense, although I advocated “discontinuity,” the discomfort that always accompanies change was superseded by the community’s densely democratic desires. However, as the authors of *Educating Citizens* warn, there are deeply engrained institutional assumptions that developed throughout the twentieth century in American higher education that have undermined the civic orientation of the traditional liberal arts model, as well as new exigencies accompanying the corporate model of university management in the late twentieth century, both of which pose “serious threats to higher education’s capacity to educate citizens” (42). For this reason, Colby et al have argued that institutions must be willing “to slowly shift some of the entrenched practices and structures that work against the new vision” (48). The authors do not call for wholesale adjustments in the university structure, but for more flexible approaches to such things as interdisciplinary collaborations and a commitment to resisting market forces that devalue the collective work of faculty and re-value students as consumers and job seekers with no need for “extraneous learning” (43). These types of adjustments, as Crowley argues, require deliberative rhetoric because they call for a discontinuity of institutional structures. As events have turned out in my university, the weight of the past has joined the market forces of the present to place a rhetorical approach to writing instruction at my university at risk. Deliberative rhetoric, as a radical democratic practice, was successful at bringing about a sea change in writing instruction, but has not succeeded in shifting the structures of my university enough to ensure a future for rhetorical and civic education. In what follows, I demonstrate how deliberative rhetoric can be a vehicle for change, but also, how it can fail.

THE FIRST YEAR: DELIBERATING ABOUT RHETORIC

Because composition and rhetoric constitute two distinct disciplinary projects, replacing a composition program with a rhetoric program, in effect, means that the mission and objectives of the writing program must experience a sea change. I wanted our first year to be spent in the kind of wide-open discussion that characterizes a Burkian parlor, a deliberative, impassioned, and sometimes heated conversation through which we would build an understanding of the distinctions between composition and rhetoric. Drawing from the various knowledges of the writing faculty and scholarship from the field, we would change the goals of our instruction and the language with which we understood what we were doing, replacing the key terms and concepts handed down from composition’s long first century with the critical language of rhetoric. I wanted to know what people were already doing in their classes, but most importantly, what informed those

decisions. I hoped that by the end of the first year we would emerge from our Burkian parlor ready to put into place a pilot program the following year based on our new, collective knowledge.

I had reason to believe that our discussions would already be informed by some rhetorical concepts. When I first considered applying for the WPA position, I had been encouraged by the fact that the composition program's web site described itself as following the WPA's "Statement of Outcomes for First Year Composition" and I was anxious to see how the teaching reflected these principles. I had recalled participating in a discussion group about the statement when it was still in development at the 1998 Writing Program Administration (WPA) conference in Tucson, Arizona. At that time, I supported the WPA's vision of propagating outcomes that would help raise the rhetorical content of first year composition programs, but I had been critical as well. I thought that the statement, though replete with rhetorical terms and concepts, nevertheless short-shrived the central concern of rhetoric, actually circulating discourse. Even though the outcomes included the statement that students should "understand the relationship among language, knowledge, and power," an understanding I considered to be the basis of a theory of civic discourse, I thought this concept had been treated as just one among many and would end up having little effect on the programs adopting the outcomes.

I also had my doubts about the extent to which the WPA outcomes actually informed the UWF program. During the summer before my directorship began, I was handed two huge binders of documents instructing me how to run the program I had been hired to transform, as well as how to teach the Composition II course the department had assigned me in the summer session. After reviewing the curriculum and sample syllabi, I wondered if, in good conscience, I would be able to teach in the program I had been hired to direct because first year writing instruction primarily followed writing process pedagogy that focused on the development of the student's voice and was heavily informed by current-traditional rhetoric.

The standard Composition I syllabus in the program's *Instructor's Course Guide for English Composition I* described the course as "encourage[ing] students to reflect on their attitudes and approaches to writing" and "become active participants in their progress in developing the content and thought in assignments." Through this process, students "understand the nature of writing" as "not merely communication of ideas, but ... a way of generating ideas, of learning, and clarifying thinking." This description of the writing process (rhetoric's first canon, invention) identifies writers as self-focused individuals whose objects of inquiry are themselves, "their attitudes," their "approaches to writing," and "their progress." Its communicative purpose

is assumed, rather than the object of study itself. More importantly, writing, by “nature,” is a process of self-discovery of what writers want to say, assisting their learning and thinking. These objectives epitomize traditional composition. The writing situation is arhetorical; it consists of writers and what they want to say. There is no text that precedes the writer and no consequences of the texts writers produce, either for audiences or contexts. The guide misinforms the student about the process writers actually engage in, one that begins with an understanding of the rhetorical situation as the writing situation. A rhetorical approach to the writing process would focus students’ attention on the texts that already surround them, the world of discourse of which they are already a part. It is only in the liberal imaginary of traditional composition in which individuals think, learn, and write by themselves. The writing process in rhetorical education, therefore, requires the writer to step into Burke’s parlor, discovering rhetorical strategies of persuasion, argument, and knowledge-making in already-circulating texts, strategies that assume various audiences, occasions, and purposes. The course goals, therefore, downplayed the central role of communication in the construction of texts by adhering to the expressionist notion that students can best develop their own voices by becoming aware of their own writing process, not by listening to the voices of others, understanding what these writers are arguing, identifying whom they hope to persuade, recognizing in what context the writers and audiences exist, discerning how they represent that context based on their assumptions, and coming to grips with what is at stake in the discourse. As students analyze the rhetorical situation, they are also researching a discourse, discovering its complexities and contingencies, and gaining awareness of the ethical and ideological underpinnings and consequences of the representations and positions taken by others and themselves. By privatizing the writing process as the writer’s self-discovery of her needs and how she translates these needs on paper, traditional composition excludes the social, the collective, and the purposeful nature of language.

In its discussion of assignments, the *Instructor’s Guidelines* retained traditional composition’s, rather than rhetoric’s understanding of composing (rhetoric’s second and third canons – arrangement and style). In the standard syllabi for both Composition I and II, assignments/tests are referred to as a diagnostic essay, in-class essays, out-of-class essays (described as first drafts, revised drafts, and papers), quizzes, a final exam essay, a holistically-scored essay, and journal writing.

Composition I covers “personal and academic writing.” In supplemental material for instructors, Composition I assignment suggestions are further broken down into description, narration, analysis, argument, and a research

or documented paper. These suggestions refer to what Robert Connors eulogized (although reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated) in his essay, "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse." Modes pedagogy is arhetorical in that it is impervious to the rhetorical construction of actually circulating texts; rather, it is an "abstract model that seem[s] to be adaptable to anything which a rising young American might wish to say" (4). No one outside of an English classroom, in other words, sits down to write a compare-contrast paper. Although I was told that the modes had not been taught since the program had adopted the WPA Outcomes Statement, I noticed that the program still used one of their in-house publications, *Student Successes 2002*, a compilation of UWF student model essays organized around the modes classifications. I also noticed that in the notes taken during classroom observations by the senior faculty of newer instructors, the kinds of writing assignments discussed were modes. One instructor is praised for her "good explanation" of "the rhetorical modes" including "narration – the elements of a short story" and "comparison/contrast – used specific example, cats and dogs!" Another criticized an instructor because she "went over narrative only because student asked about narrative" and for having difficulty coming up with an example for her comparison and contrast assignment. Another instructor was praised for asking her students to "give me interesting stories...descriptions make up the story" and for commending a student for using a simile. In a sample assignment, an "argumentative essay," students are informed that "A solid argument begins with a clear, unambiguous statement of what you believe and why you believe it." The documented paper is described as "an argument in which you use sources to back up your claims in MLA format." Practicing the modes and writing thesis-driven-with-reasons-attached "arguments" on a topic the student either has or has not researched is what Thomas P. Miller refers to as the "formalist" approach to traditional composition ("How Rhetorical"). The student is successful according to the extent to which the form is mastered; students' texts have no other purpose outside of this mastery. Students also develop formalist attitudes about reading because of these kinds of assignments. This formalist approach also carries over into the way assigned readings are discussed in the program's materials. In one class students read an excerpt from "A Confederacy of Dunces" ("notice colors and narrative style") to prepare them to write a "descriptive essay" entitled "A Place to Remember." In assignments like these, students are asked to read in order to imitate style, not to enter into any conversation with the text. This disconnection of reading from substance is also replicated in 10 minute "freewriting" exercises or journals entries. I saw no evidence that journal topics had any connection to subject of the paper being drafted. In sum,

formalism in no way prepares students for “academic writing” or any other rhetorical genre including, for that matter, the “personal essay.” Students have no purpose, audience, or reason to write outside of skills mastery.

Composition II covers “critical reading and writing in different rhetorical situations: personal, academic, civic, and workplace, the goal of which is to help students develop as writers in the university and beyond.” Composition II assignment suggestions are broken down into: a letter to the editor that is then rewritten for a middle or high school audience, “rhetorical analysis of a published article or speech,” a literary analysis in which students discover “the implicit argument in a literary work,” a Rogerian argument, an argument of evaluation in the form of a memo containing definition or cause-effect arguments, or a letter of application and resume. In addition, Composition II students are required to write a “proposal argument with researched (and MLA documented) sources” which may be written as a “memo,” “letter of inquiry,” “email inquiry,” “memo progress report,” or “letter of transmittal for the proposal.” Here I could see the influence of the WPA statement about genre on the curriculum. But the requirement that a memo or letter of inquiry should include MLA citation countered the supposed rhetoricity of the pedagogy. Public texts such as these certainly follow conventions, but the MLA citation system is not one of them. I also wondered how the relationship between reading and writing in the public sphere and the interplay of “language, power, and knowledge” in public texts were dealt with by instructors. Are the genres taught as discrete forms or as genres participating in complex political-economic, social, or cultural rhetorical situations? Are the ethical underpinnings and argumentative strategies of Rogerian theory presented as appropriate for all rhetorical situations? Are students given enough time to rhetorically analyze the multiple arguments in a discourse before stepping in to speak?

The students in both courses also received a heavy dose of current-traditional rhetoric, another staple of traditional composition. The standard syllabi were designed around precisely timed and regulated assignments from the Department’s Writing Lab which included diagnostic testing for grammar and usage, bi-weekly grammar mastery testing and remediation, intricate reporting systems, mandatory paper reading which privileged grammar remediation and thesis-driven papers that were effectively five paragraph essays, and holistic grading sessions that enforced this essay style.

I decided to officially open up a conversation about rhetoric among the writing faculty at the composition orientation meeting normally held before the fall semester begins. In my address, I drew clear distinctions between composition and rhetoric using terms and concepts from Berlin’s social-epistemic rhetoric that were to become key in the meetings and docu-

ments for the coming year. I began by asking why it is that we, in English Departments, subscribe to complex theories of language, discourse, and culture, but don't bring these theories into first year writing. We know that writing emerges in the social and political world, rather than the creative mind of the individual. We also know that ideology probably has more to do with the persuasive power of language than *logos*. But do we teach this to students? We can teach these things, I argued, if we practice rhetoric, not composition. Rhetoric is the study of how we socially construct texts and, in turn, are socially constructed by texts. Rhetoric is the study of how language gets things done in the world by creating constructions that have both positive and negative effects. If we teach rhetoric, I argued, students will participate in the world of text by engaging with actually circulating discourses and genres, not with a series of disconnected topics about which they write in pseudo-genres that only exist in the composition classroom. All texts, including students' own, have social, political or cultural implications and ideological assumptions of which they should become aware.

The conversation begun at that meeting continued throughout the fall semester. I turned every interaction into an opportunity to deliberate with individuals and groups on the distinctions between composition and rhetoric. Adjunct faculty dropped by so we could get to know each other. I asked them why they did what they did and how they thought assignments lead students towards literacy in the university and beyond. I posed a number of questions repeatedly in these conversations. If no actually circulating piece of writing is constructed in the classroom forms we teach, why do we teach this form? The answer to this question most often revolved around what I call the "basic foundation defense" which goes something like this: Before students can engage with more complex text, they have to know the basics. If they can't even write a thesis, they will not be able to deal with more complex forms of argument. I often countered with these questions: "When we ask a student to commit to a thesis before engaging the discourse surrounding an issue, aren't we creating a writing situation that deters students from engaging the complexities of arguments? Are we asking students to read and write in the genres that actually circulate in rhetorical situations or are we teaching ways of reading and writing that only exist in writing courses? Are we giving students enough time to immerse themselves in an academic or public conversation before asking them to argue about it? Is academic writing reducible to a "documented paper" in MLA format or does it entail disciplinary logics?

The basic foundation defense also carried over into conversations regarding the mastery model of teaching grammar built into the standard syllabus. I distributed Patrick Hartwell's article that argued that students

improve in grammar, diction, and mechanics when problems are addressed in the rhetorical context of their own writing, rather than mastery exercises. I advocated that we develop in students a rhetorical understanding of syntax and hypotactic sentence structure.

Another site for deliberation was in a weekly discussion group with the graduate students who taught a one hour a week Composition Lab course for composition students deemed to need extra help. Many of these students also tutored in the writing center. Judging from the books that were assigned for Composition Lab, the one hour course was to have focused on grammar workbooks and reading/writing assignments in *Student Successes*, the in-house “aims of discourse” collection of model essays I mentioned above. I decided to throw the whole plan out and encourage the graduate instructors to use their hour with students as a writing workshop instead. The instructors and I discussed scholarly articles and built knowledge about writing workshop techniques. An article by Charles Bazerman, for example, challenged expressionist pedagogy by arguing that student writing should address what they read, not what they already felt or believed. As I look back on those discussions now, I recall that the graduate students, so indoctrinated by current-traditional rhetoric, were first silent, then defensive, and finally thoroughly engaged in our excursions in the rhetorical scholarship.

I also developed the department’s first graduate course in rhetoric, “Topics in Rhetoric,” that departed radically from the usual survey course in composition theory often required for first time TAs. In these seminars, graduate students who are slated to teach composition discuss a topic of controversy in rhetoric and composition that in some way or another helps us build the collective knowledge we need in the program. At the end of the semester, students hold an academic conference attended mainly by the composition faculty. This seminar, to date, has been the most fruitful way of informing our practice with rhetorical research. Topics have included: a seminar on the distinctions between literary and rhetorical studies and the intersections between critical/cultural and rhetorical theory; a seminar on the influence of liberal/modernist ideology on writing instruction and the implications of this ideology for the teaching of civic and public discourse; a seminar on the rationalist foundation of disciplinary rhetorics and the distinctions in scholarly knowledge-making systems. The scholarly papers that graduate students present at the academic conference spark discussion among the entire writing faculty. These papers, along with other pertinent scholarly articles, also inform the two day summer workshop for writing faculty as we prepare for the fall semester.

Composition Committee meetings became the central place in which we analyzed what we had been doing and why. The committee, three writ-

ing instructors, an adjunct instructor, a graduate student, and I, approached the questions by considering not only the distinctions between rhetoric and composition, but also what a program in rhetoric would look like, what principles it would follow, and what pedagogies would be possible. At first, there was enthusiasm for the ideas I was introducing, but general approbation was soon shattered when the particularities emerged. I recall that requiring themed courses became controversial for fear that students would become bored by discussing a single debate all semester. This opened up discussion about the difference between asking students to read “both sides of a debate” versus immersing students in the complexity of the discourse surrounding an issue and led us to research models of civic education (Colby et al) and Rosa Eberly’s concept of the “citizen critic.” We began to imagine pedagogical possibilities for teaching civic and public discourse as well as how to develop assignments and projects that asked students to analyze the arguments and genre formations of their readings. Probably the most dramatic pedagogy we have developed to date came out of a rather heated discussion about whether it was possible to require students to actually circulate their public writing in a public venue. We researched Herbert Simons’ creation of deliberative conferences at Temple University, and after discussing this model of civic engagement, we decided to gradually extend the graduate student conference to all Composition II students. At these conferences, first year composition students have invented all sorts of venues for their public writing, from a community-wide, rhetorically savvy campaign to provoke conversations on sexual violence to a film festival that encouraged students to see beyond the entertainment value of movies.

The majority of the writing faculty has been delighted to study and deliberate over questions that challenge long-held ideas about the teaching of writing and develop pedagogies for a program in rhetoric. The process we have engaged in over the last three years has been anything but orderly. Out of the deliberative chaos, we have developed a program that, in the words of one of our instructors, is now characterized by highly unified programmatic principles which, at the same time, offer instructors maximum flexibility in course design, assignment design, and pedagogical approaches.

Radical deliberation allowed the faculty motivated by scholarship and an approach to pedagogy as rhetorical invention to create the new program that bears little resemblance to traditional composition. In this regard, if we return to Crowley’s argument that rhetors who use deliberative strategies to bring about change face “the risk of becoming outsiders to a community because they must, of necessity, advocate attention to discontinuity or difference,” I can say that I was at no time at risk in my immediate community of writing instructors. Offering dedicated writing instructors a

chance to study, teach, and argue about the distinctions between composition and rhetoric, in other words, is like taking them home. It also turns out that offering students a chance to engage in challenging but meaningful research and text production has had an exhilarating effect. Our students' comments on evaluations indicate that the majority of them experience this approach to writing as difficult, but intellectually stimulating. This energized atmosphere of civic concern and critical investigation among faculty and students, however, faces serious challenges that have threatened the program's sustainability

THE PROSPECTS FOR RHETORIC IN FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION

As indicated in *Educating Citizens*, the pressures of market forces on the university and deeply embedded beliefs about first-year writing, program administration, and general education were evident during the entire period of the program's development, and we attended to them as they presented themselves. However, recent decisions regarding the program, labor issues, and curriculum reform have almost halted the program's on-going development.

The first challenge has been posed by conflicting disciplinary assumptions about the nature of work in English departments. English departments hire PhDs in Rhetoric and Composition to improve their composition programs, but, as Jeanne Gunner suggests, most still are unwilling to understand that WPA work radically differs from the work of other English faculty. Granting a course release each semester implies that the work of a WPA is considered merely to require some adjustments in time management. But Gunner argues that WPA work continues to be rift with ideological conflicts about disciplinarity. The WPA is hired for her disciplinary expertise, but when she acts according to that expertise by creating new venues for the professional development of faculty, she begins to inhabit a collaborative space rife with ethical questions (Leverenz). Negotiating the program's progress through this conflictual ideological and ethical terrain constitutes a scholarly life that is inconceivable to most scholars outside of the discipline. Indeed, William Lalicker argues that an important part of the WPA's work is to challenge the traditional ideas that interfere with the WPA's disciplinary agency.

The department came to understand my work as a burden to my identity as a professor rather than the professorial work of my discipline. At the end of my third year, the chair felt it was time to unburden me so I could begin to develop as a professor. This decision was made even though the dean had suggested to the chair that my work as a WPA should be evalu-

ated by the standards of my discipline. An instructor was named director in my stead who said that she reluctantly took the job because she is not paid enough to do it and doesn't have the disciplinary background to provide professional development. At the time of this writing, the program is guided by a managerial, not a scholarly orientation. All venues for professional development, both formal and informal, have halted; new adjunct instructors and TAs are given the syllabus, assigned textbooks, and wished good luck. This turn of events sharply illustrates the second challenge our program, and most programs, according to Lalicker, face.

I am, of course, referring to the starkest contradiction of the discipline: Most people who teach composition do not have a degree in rhetoric and composition, are not involved in the on-going discussions in the field, and are only considered by the university in which they teach to be part-time adjuncts or graduate assistants just passing through. The labor issue continues to be at odds with not only what constitutes ethical employment practices, but, in our field, our very claim to be a discipline (Lalicker, Young). There is no other university discipline that does not require its adjunct faculty to have a graduate degree in the discipline in which they teach. The content of graduate course work and scholarly production in rhetoric and composition in no way resembles that of literary studies. Nevertheless, most people teaching composition courses have a degree in literary studies, not rhetoric and composition. By immersing our faculty into discussions of the disciplinary distinctions between literary and rhetorical scholarship, as well as current issues in the scholarship of rhetoric, our faculty gained a new sense of their work as a discipline distinct from literary studies. But because we have continued to have a turnover in adjunct faculty from one year to the next, we are always reinventing the wheel in one way or another, rather than steadily increasing our knowledge base. This situation has only been exacerbated since my role in the professional development of the faculty has ended. There are now adjunct faculty who have no scholarly basis for teaching in our program. What is practiced in the program is steadily moving away from what our new mission and course descriptions promise.

Anticipating that the labor issue would interfere with the success of the program, at the end of my first year and at the request of our Department Chair, the Composition Committee and I wrote a 76 page report to the University's new President, Acting Provost and new Dean of Arts and Sciences entitled, "Effective Composition Instruction." In the document, we outlined our new program and explained the difference between the traditional program we had and the rhetorically-oriented program we were developing. The report offered a theoretical argument that demonstrated how the new program could help develop academic and citizenship litera-

cies across the university. We appealed to the President's promise to recognize and support those programs which could demonstrate that they were "centers of excellence." We explained that in order to sustain a rhetorically oriented writing program, we had to continually train and maintain our faculty. New programmatic goals, we stated, are only achieved after years of practicing them in the classroom. No matter how dedicated and knowledgeable the adjunct faculty is, we argued, curricular innovation cannot be developed or sustained by a workforce whose membership is in constant flux. The faculty who had worked to create the program was clearly invested in it, but to keep them in the program, the university would have to invest in them. We requested that plans begin to be made to convert five adjunct lines into instructor lines. In the meantime, as lines were added, we requested that adjuncts be offered the opportunity to take my seminar for graduate credit, tuition-free, that a modest raise be offered to graduate students and adjuncts, and free parking be provided.

Our report was completely ignored. Receipt of the report was never acknowledged and all my attempts to open up discussion about it were in vain. During the second year of the program, we again tried to open up discussion of the labor issue by hosting a showing of the film, *Degrees of Shame*, to which we invited administration, permanent faculty, adjunct faculty, and graduate students from across the university. After the showing, the new President stood up and told us that our concerns would soon be moot. In the new university model he was working for, he would eliminate what he called the "redundancy of knowledge" among faculty. He would introduce a new model in which a few master professors wrote curriculum and standard syllabi which would be taught by the majority of instructors whom he characterized as not wanting to research, but to teach. This is the kind of flexibility, he assured us, most people today want in their lives. Although stunned by his vision of the flexible, post-industrial work force described by David Noble in his futuristic, nightmare study, *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education*, the audience nevertheless recovered enough to ask for a meeting, which he granted. One month later, when the meeting began, the President, dispensing with the usual introductions of all of the participants sitting at the table, turned the meeting over to the Acting Provost who, he said, had already considered all of the ramifications of our request. The Provost spoke for half an hour on all of the adverse effects of turning adjunct positions into instructor lines. The final image he impressed upon us was the following scenario: The administration could declare that only permanent faculty could teach composition, but to pay for them, it would mean firing all of the adjuncts, canceling most of the upper division courses in the major, and requiring the literature fac-

ulty teach mostly composition. He reminded those at the table that meeting their request, would, ironically, put all of them out of a job and effectively end English Studies at the university. The meeting had been set up to deter any efforts on the part of faculty to open up deliberations over the educational and ethical consequences of the university's labor practices. Later that year, I was informed that the administration was considering giving the department an instructor's line, but it would be dedicated to increasing on-line technical writing courses, not first-year composition. To date, that line has not materialized. During the third year, I met with the Dean to request a raise for the adjunct faculty based on a case I made about the labor intensity of the work. She was very sympathetic and informed me that the administration was well aware of the labor-intense nature of the work of writing instructors and suggested that the department make a "cost-benefit, not an ethical case" to raise the salaries of the adjuncts when it submitted the budget. The department chair and I worked on such a request which, of course, was not granted.

Finally, I developed relationships with professors who teach in the lower division who are dedicated to general education reform, all of whom have been highly supportive of pairing their department's general education classes with composition and working towards a WAC or WID model. I met with the heads of advising and other support programs such as our Student Success program for first-generation students and our international student support program to discuss similar innovative ways of supporting rhetorical education. There has been a great deal of enthusiasm, but without administrative support, we have not been able to accomplish anything. I became hopeful during my second year when an announcement was made that the general studies curriculum would be reformed by pulling together a faculty taskforce. I indicated to the Dean my desire to be on this taskforce and informed her of the faculty across the disciplines who wished to partner with composition to improve student literacy. But, instead of pursuing the curriculum reform efforts it promised, the administration hired assessment experts from around the country with whom they interacted for a year. At the end of that year, the faculty responsible for supervising general studies course attended two days of workshops in which we were taught how to formulate learning outcomes by these experts, a task the composition program had already completed. During one of the workshop breaks, I asked the dean if curricular reform would follow the assessment initiative; she explained that assessment would preclude curricular reform because individual instructors' performances and teaching strategies would improve once the assessment rubrics were in place. The administration had conflated curriculum reform with assessment in a way that insured that discussions

about curriculum reform would not take place. Just to be sure that I understood, the Dean said, “WAC is not on the horizon.”

Our attempts to open up deliberative discussion with the administration have failed miserably. Our experiences lend credence to Crowley’s argument that “whether [deliberative rhetors] persuade or not depends upon the density with which the community’s beliefs are articulated with one another and upon the degree to which the system resonates for believers” (196). The university, with its rhetoric of “excellence” and its preference for managerial systems instead of faculty initiative, seems to be far away from or even antagonistic to the beliefs of the writing faculty. We based our strategy for change on the hope that arguing for the educative value of a rhetoric program would win it support. The prospects for broadening the presence of rhetoric on our campus, indeed, even maintaining the quality of the two course sequence in rhetoric we have, do not appear to be good. We are teaching our students to engage in deliberative discourse and have used deliberative discourse to bring about considerable change in our pedagogies. We also learned that the institution similarly recognizes the power of democratic deliberation, and given its non-democratic aims, carefully chooses with whom it will enter into deliberation.

NOTE

¹ By liberal political theory, Crowley, Roberts-Miller, and Mouffe do not refer to the contemporary, party-line identifications between conservative and liberal agendas. Rather, they refer to the theorizing of a liberal society which accompanied the rise of capitalism.

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