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## Upcoming Dates

WPA Summer Workshop,  
Arizona State University.  
July 8-11, 2001.

Composition in the 21<sup>st</sup>  
Century:  
Miami University, Ohio.  
Oct. 5-7, 2001.

## An Overview

I take great pleasure in introducing this issue of the newsletter—for reasons I hope you'll appreciate as well. You'll see **announcements and reminders**, of course. Our summer workshop, for instance: only a few spaces remain, so those looking for rejuvenation and community will want to contact David Schwalm asap. Our fall conference is in the good hands of Don Daiker, Lynn Bloom, and Ed White—they also welcome inquiries.

We also have some **"new" news**. Beth Daniell announces the 2001 Research Award winners, and Kristine Hansen summarizes only a few of the attractions we'll find at the 2002 Summer WPA Workshop and Conference.

We have as well **updates and reports**—both official and semi-official. Alice Gillam narrates the story of the Denver WPA breakfast, and Duane Roen brings us up to date on the Affiliate Subcommittee thinking. Shirley Rose explains how our two new awards—for the best article and the best book—will be determined. She too invites your response.

Carol Rutz weaves WPA-L conversations into a lively tale for us, and Tom Amorose talks about the distinctions that small-school WPAs share and the questions common to all of us. Keith Rhodes writes the second in a continuing series on the WPA Outcomes Statement, its uses, and its future.

I have **invited two other contributions** that I hope will point us toward the future. In the first, Paula Gillespie, an officer with the National Writing Center Association (NWCA),

initiates another continuing series, this one aimed at helping us think about **how folks in writing program administration and in writing centers might collaborate more effectively, more often, and more "naturally."**

We have begun this effort formally. In March, the WPA Executive Board approved—as did the NWCA—a trial collaboration with the WPA Consultant Evaluators. Specifically, two places on the Consultant Evaluator Board have been established for Writing Center consultants. Nominations for these places are being forwarded by Michael Pemberton, NWCA President; Deb Holdstein and Ed White will then make the final selection. The NCWA is supporting this effort financially as well. At the end of a three-year trial period, we will all review this relationship to determine how to proceed.

I have also asked Becky Rickley to help us think **about how technology can inform and affect our programs** in another of what I hope is the first of a continuing series, this one on **the intersection between technology and WPA work**. Here, she tells us about a database that offers both possibility and threat. I hope that some of you will want to respond to the questions raised in Becky's scenario. Is such a database a good idea? If so, when? And where? Are there safeguards that can assure its ethical use? Alternatively, is such a database too fraught with nightmare consequences?

Good reading here, I think. And as important, I hope—and wish for all of us—that we can and do take some time this summer to engage in this kind of reading—and some reflection and rejuvenation, too.

*Kathleen Yancey*

## **Annual WPA Summer Workshop**

**July 8-12, Tempe, Arizona  
Hosted by Arizona State  
University East**

There is still space available in the annual summer workshop offered by WPA for both new and experienced writing program administrators. The workshop is intended not only for those with formal WPA appointments but also for others who have primary responsibility for writing instruction or support of writing instruction (e.g. writing centers) on their campuses.

The workshop will begin on Sunday, July 8, with an evening reception at the hotel and will conclude on Thursday, July 12, before noon. Jeanne Gunner and David Schwalm will be the workshop leaders this year.

The workshop will be held at the new Courtyard by Marriott hotel in the heart of the dining, shopping, and entertainment area of downtown Tempe, near the ASU Main campus. The workshop fee is \$750, which covers conference materials, opening reception, all breakfasts, all lunches, all breaks, parking, dinner at Dave's on Wednesday, and four nights lodging at a very nice hotel.

Please join us. Information about the workshop and a downloadable registration form are available on the WPA website

<http://wpacouncil.org>

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## **Still Room at the WPA Fall Conference at Miami!**

There are still plenty of registration spaces available for the WPA Conference, "Composition Studies in the 21st Century: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the "Future," Conference Director Don Daiker reports. The conference will be held

at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, from October 5-7, 2001.

The conference is an interactive and participatory one. The program features a plenary address by Peter Elbow, forums with WPA presidents and editors, and seven three-hour sessions which focus on a question central to composition studies. Each session consists of two thirty-minute talks by invited speakers followed by an hour of small-group table discussion and then a concluding hour of group reports and at-large discussion. All conferees will be asked to participate in the conversation and in that way to contribute to the volume of conference essays and proceedings that will be published by Southern Illinois University Press.

The invited speakers include Susan Miller, Lynn Bloom, Wendy Bishop, Kurt Spellmeyer, Art Young, Mark Reynolds, Gesa Kirsch, Todd Taylor, Cynthia Selfe, Lester Faigley, Min-Zhan Lu, Gary Olson, Harriet Malinowitz, and Keith Gilyard. The respondents are Christine Farris, Joseph Harris, Ellen Cushman, Susan McLeod, Christine Neuwirth, Brenda Brueggemann, and Richard Miller.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of WPA, there will be two forums. One forum features past and current WPA Presidents: Lynn Bloom, Barbara Cambridge, Theresa Enos, Douglas Hesse, Winfred Horner, Ben McClelland, Linda Peterson, Charles Schuster, and Kathleen Blake Yancey. The second forum, highlighting the journal *WPA* and its editors, includes Marguerite Helmers, Dennis Lynch, Doug Hesse, Chris Hult, and Bill Smith.

The conference registration fee of \$195 comprises two breakfasts, two lunches, coffee breaks, three nights of entertainment, all conference materials, and the volume of conference essays. To register, please make a check to "Composition Studies in the 21st

Century" and send it to Don Daiker, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056. For lodging and for further information, please contact Conference Secretary Krista Orlando at the above address or at [daikerda@muohio.edu](mailto:daikerda@muohio.edu) or, by phone, 513-529-1901.

The officers of WPA, along with conference directors Lynn Bloom, Don Daiker, and Ed White, look forward to welcoming you to a conference that we guarantee will break new ground in composition studies. We promise you a good time as well! Please join us!

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## **Research Grants Announced**

*Beth Daniell, Chair  
WPA Grants Committee*

Three research proposals funded by WPA for 2001 were announced at the annual breakfast at CCCC. Grants were awarded to Pamela Takayoshi and Katherine Wills at the University of Louisville for their project entitled "Building a Methodology for Studying the Intersection of Writing Program Administration and Computer-Aided Instruction in First-Year Curriculum"; to Barbara L'Epplattenier of the University of Arkansas--Little Rock for "Comparing Administrative Strategies of Women WPAs during the Progressive Era"; and to Carrie Shively Leverenz of Texas Christian University for "The Ethics of Access: Three Contexts for Computer-Supported Writing Instruction."

The 2002 Research Grant Committee will be chaired by Alice Gillam, who will issue a Call for Proposals in early fall. Please keep your eye on the WPA Listserv and journal for the announcement. Proposals should be aimed at contributing to knowledge about writing program administration. Criteria for rating proposals include

relevance; prior scholarship (that is, indication that the investigator can in fact carry out the proposal); methods feasibility; cost effectiveness; and plans for dissemination of results. Awards are

generally up to \$2000 and cannot be used for release time. Recent grants committees have been impressed with the quality of submissions and report difficulty in deciding on only two or three awards. If you have submitted

in the past, please consider re-submitting. If you have a WPA topic or issue you would like to research, please consider proposing that research.

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## **WPA Summer 2001 in Utah**

*Kristine Hansen*

The 2002 WPA Workshop will be held on the beautiful University of Utah campus in Salt Lake City. The capital of Utah, nestled between twospectacular alpine mountain ranges near the edge of the Great Salt Lake, will host the Olympic Winter Games in February 2002. In July the workshop participants will stay in the university's new residence halls used by the Olympic athletes during the games.

The workshop will be followed by the WPA Conference in nearby Park City. Once a small mining town, Park City has now become a prime destination for skiers seeking the incomparable powder snow that falls in Utah's arid climate. It is home to three ski resorts with summits of over 9,000 feet in the towering Wasatch Mountains east of Salt lake City. Park City's "old town" has been beautifully restored and is home to many award-winning restaurants, several theaters, a variety of art galleries, interesting (and expensive) shops, a couple of museums, and a good sprinkling of taverns and micro-breweries (yes, it is possible to buy alcoholic beverages in Utah). In January each

year, Park City is home to the Sundance Film Festival. In the summer, the hills and mountains offer a variety of outdoor activities, including hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, fishing, golfing, hot air ballooning, hay rides, Alpine sliding, taking chair lifts to the summits, and boating at Jordanelle Reservoir or Deer Creek Reservoir. This conference will be one the whole family can enjoy. The optional evening activity will involve spending time at Robert Redford's strikingly beautiful Sundance Resort in Provo Canyon.

The Salt Lake International Airport is just ten minutes from the heart of downtown, and reasonably priced van shuttles travel to Park City. The airport is Delta's western hub, and is served by nine major airlines and two regional carriers offering 700 arrivals and departures daily with over 80,000 passenger seats. One-half of the nation's population is located within a 2-1/2 hour flight. Interstate highways 15 and 80 offer excellent accessibility to both Salt Lake City and Park City for travelers approaching by car from any direction.

### **Search for Director of WPA Webpage Announced**

Applications are invited for the directorship of the WPA webpage! Doug Hesse has graciously hosted the page for several years, and we now are looking for another volunteer. We'd like a WPA who is technologically savvy (or willing to learn), who would like to help us maintain the site's current offerings, and who could help us develop additional services, including linking to our print publications and listserv. Please contact Kathleen Yancey [kyancey@clemsun.edu](mailto:kyancey@clemsun.edu) for additional information.

## Small School WPAs: An Overview of Concerns

*Tom Amorose, Liaison  
Small WPA Working Group*

As a number of us small-school WPAs work to give a face and voice to small-school WPAing in the profession, several themes keep coming up in our conversations with one another. These themes usually prompt questions we're working as a group to answer.

**Graduate preparation for teaching/administering composition at the small college/university.** How many grad programs consider that a significant number (do we even know how many?) of their graduates may end up administering or working in programs at small institutions? Do grad programs prepare new WPAs for how their heads may spin (or be handed to them) if they apply large-school methods in a small-school environment?

**Information sources for small-school WPAs.** Much of the research and even folk wisdom of WPAing assumes a large TA-based program, a semi- (or fully) administrative WPA, and at least some kind of budget. But how do you function, as one small-school colleague put it, as "a WPA without a program"—which is sometimes (frequently?) the case at small institutions?

**Data on the nature and number of small-school comp programs and their WPAs.** How many programs are there? Do they all have someone serving as WPA? MLA and ADE data aren't helpful in answering these questions. We need a fuller description of this under-reported sector of comp programs

**The diversity among small institutions, reflected in a**

**diversity among their writing programs.** The reigning stereotype of small colleges/universities is that of privileged enclaves of elite students and faculty. Some small institutions no doubt fit this mold; others would certainly like to. But most small colleges don't, and they vary so much from one another in mission, history and student body that easy classification becomes impossible. This same variety is probably reflected in their writing programs.

But beyond detailing the distinctiveness of small-school writing programs, we all—"small" and "large" WPAs alike-- also need to explore **the continuities in WPA work across the small-large gap.** A fuller, more accurate picture of all WPA work can then emerge. Exciting work lies ahead.



## WPA Breakfast 2001— Not Your Grandpa/ma's WPA Breakfast

*Alice Gillam, Chair  
WPA Breakfast Committee*

A crowd of two hundred. The take-over of an entire restaurant. A traffic jam of LA-freeway proportions in the food line. Some things have changed since the first WPA breakfasts in small hotel meeting rooms, but happily, some things haven't. It's still the best way to kick off the Cs and the best place to connect with old friends, meet new ones, and hear the latest WPA news and gossip.

Bright and early on March 15, WPAs and friends gathered at the Wolfgang Puck Grand Cafe in Denver for the annual WPA breakfast. Chet Pryor continued the tradition begun last year of providing "party favors" through the generous support of his sister and brother-in-law, Sandra and

Richard Oxendine. It is Chet, however, we have to thank for the handsome design and production of the pins and pens. Highlights of the breakfast included the announcement of the research award winners and the presentation of a special award to Doug Day for his many years of support. The newly created Connors Fund, which supports graduate student attendance at the breakfast, garnered \$1,162 in donations! Plans are already underway for the Chicago breakfast, which promises to be a gala affair, so mark your calendars: Thursday morning in crisp Chicago.

## Council of Writing Program Administrators Awards

*Shirley Rose, Chair  
WPA Awards Committee*

With the publication of the "Intellectual Work Document," the Council of Writing Program Administrators made an argument for recognizing the scholarly qualities of much of writing program administrators' work. An important subsequent step for us as a professional organization is to identify and acknowledge outstanding scholarship in our field.

What are the characteristics of outstanding scholarship in writing program administration? The recently formed CWPA Awards Committee is currently in the process of developing criteria for "Best Article" and "Best Book" awards. We welcome commentary from members who are interested in helping identify and articulate the qualities of outstanding scholarship in writing program administration.

Each award will be given bi-annually. The "Best Article" award for an outstanding article published in *WPA: Writing*

*Program Administration* will be given to the author(s) of the best article published during 1999 and 2000. All articles published in the CWPA's journal for the past two years are eligible for consideration. The award-winning article will be announced at the 2001 WPA Conference in October.

The "Best Book" award will be given to the author(s) or editor(s) of the best book addressing issues in administration of higher education writing programs, including first-year programs, undergraduate writing majors, advanced composition programs, technical/scientific/business/professional writing programs, writing across the curriculum, and writing centers. The first "Best Book" award will be given for a book with a publication date of 2000 or 2001. Calls for nominations, including instructions, will be published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and future issues of the CWPA newsletter. The award will be announced at the 2002 CWPA Summer Conference.

If you have suggestions for appropriate criteria for selecting outstanding scholarship in writing program administration, please contribute to the Awards Committee's discussion by sending your comments to Shirley Rose (roses@purdue.edu).

## **Outcomes Update**

*Keith Rhodes, Liaison  
Outcomes Group*

Last time in this column I urged that the Council of WPAs should take full ownership of the Outcomes Statement, including that part of the statement's Introduction that calls for regular revision.

There is another choice, though. We could regard the statement as something like "open source

code," available for any adaptations, with improvements simply adopted by anyone else who wishes to do so. The statement could become the Linux of position statements, a cheap and stable "operating system" for composition programs. It could be the OS (Open Source) OS (Outcomes Statement): the OS<sup>2</sup>. Groovy. Documents do not work entirely like computer code, of course. People are communal and willful; they care about relationships with those who write their instructions. Still, if the Council would invite something like "open source" uses, we could feel at once connected and free. Way groovy.

To a great extent, the Outcomes Statement has already seen such uses. The statement itself openly invites adaptations of the central text for local applications. This only makes sense; the central statement is very general, certainly not suited to all particular uses. I want to clarify something about local adaptations, though. Nowhere does the statement invite local users to change the text and still call the result the "Council of Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition." We have seen this done on occasion, and at this point the Council really needs to ask for some restraint and care. Things are not quite that groovy.

That is, while the document itself is doubtlessly in the public domain for copyright purposes, the Council has not given away the right to say what it has authorized. The issue is not so much respect for the document, then, as it is respect for the reputation of the Council.

Such respect does create problems, though. If we compare the statement loosely to Linux, I suppose we could call local versions things like the "Wherever State University

Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition"—or just the "University of Wherever Outcomes Statement," with a note that it is a local version of the WPA version. Such solutions create new problems; such titles are even more ungainly than the original, and they don't have the same clout without that official WPA tag.

This collection of difficulties with adaptation and authorization were the center of discussion at a CCCC 2001 Roundtable on the issues of collaborative raised by drafting the statement. At that session, Rita Malenczyk, Irv Peckham, and I—with WPA Council President Kathi Yancy chairing—successfully goaded most of our audience into joining the Collective, entering into the on-going effort to determine just how the statement, once adopted, can still be revised.

Their conclusions seem like a happy resolution of the open-closed problem. I hope I do not lose too much in a translation and summary here. Essentially, the plan is to have the Council wait three or four years, collect as many local versions as it can, and then appoint a working group to review the "core" statement in light of the local variations. The "source code" will be open, but an official body will review and revise it, to continue the analogy.

There will still be a role for something like the old completely open collective. That is, to ensure that the Council really can collect the local versions, it would help to have a way of tracking this work while it is going on. Thus, some of the old "Collectivistas" plan to revive the old Outcomes listserv (at a new location to be announced) and website (still at <http://www.mwsc.edu/~outcomes>). We hope to gather versions of the statement and link them to the website. Not only will these

Internet activities help the Council track what is going on, but it will offer local groups working on their own statement a ready source of assistance. The Outcomes listserv and website will remain something of an "insider's" area, though. The Council will still maintain the official Outcomes Statement web page, which should be the source to which we refer outsiders interested in what the "national standards" might be.

## Knotted Threads from WPA-L

*Carol Rutz, Carleton College*

The late winter-early spring (depending on your perspective—as I write in mid-April, Minnesota temps are careering from the 60s to the 20s and back again) threads on our favorite listserv have once again demonstrated impressive range of topic and speaker. **Rich Haswell** announced *CompPile*, a website that offers a complete bibliography of work in composition from 1939 through 1999. Rich gratefully acknowledges work already completed by **Lee Honeycutt**; **Glenn Blalock** will be webmaster. Watch the list for developments on this important professional resource.

**David Jolliffe** invited WPAs to fantasize about ways to establish a brand-new, "alternative" English department for a branch campus. **Deany Cheramie** and **Deborah Bosley** recommended emphasis on professional and/or technical writing; **David Schwalm**, seconded by **Jeffrey Walker**, voted for a strong, interdisciplinary program to support the discourses of more technical fields; and **Bill Condon** reminded us to remember our passion for outcomes and to consider the influence of writing technologies as a focus.

**Steve Wilhoit** raised the issue of dialect and teacher authority: To what extent are writing teachers held to a particular standard of writing and speaking within their classrooms? **Kevin Eric De Pew** and others pointed out the social necessity of flexibility; **Bridget Fahey Ruetenik** noted the advantages of relaxing her language in class, but wondered whether she would continue to do so when charged with mentoring new TAs; and **Samantha Blackmon** raised the question of requiring students to use the "culturally oppressive standardized language variety" in their work, and how that requirement affects a teacher's choice of dialect in the classroom.

On the lighter side, **Leon Coburn** suggested that the time has come for a WPA motto. His choice, from Helen Keller: "I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble." As **David Jolliffe** observed, it beats the hell out of "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." **Chet Pryor** quoted **Deb Holdstein** on her inspired offering: "WPA: Administration gone good." Other possibilities tickle the funny bone (even in Latin!), but I have to agree with **Don Bushman**—the best option is Alfred E. Neuman's "What? Me worry?"

Check the WPA-L archives <<http://lists.asu.edu/archives/wpa-l.html>> for details on these and other worthy topics, as well as instructions for joining the list.

## Committee Recommends Changes to WPA's Policies on Affiliates

*Duane Roen, Chair  
Ad Hoc Committee on Affiliates*

In the fall of 2000, then-WPA President Doug Hesse appointed an ad hoc committee to

recommend changes in the policies for local and regional affiliates of the organization. After soliciting suggestions from members via the WPA Listserv, the committee—Tom Amorose, Clyde Moneyhun, Meg Morgan, Jan Neuleib, Chet Pryor, and Duane Roen—drafted recommendations to consider at the WPA Executive Board meeting in Denver on March 14.

Generally, the committee recommended making the policies more flexible to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of affiliates. Specifically, the committee recommended the following changes:

Currently, all members of an affiliate must hold membership in WPA. The recommendation is that only the affiliate's officers be required to hold national membership. (The Board approved this change on March 14.)

Currently, proposed affiliates must present budgets for the first two years of operation. The recommendation is that affiliates need to submit budgets only when requesting funds from WPA. (The Board approved this change on March 14.)

Currently, there appear to be no written procedures for requesting affiliate status. The recommendation (which has not yet been submitted to the Executive Board) is that groups wishing to become affiliates of WPA should send a letter to the WPA Executive Board requesting affiliation and providing basic information such as the group's name, a roster of officers, an estimate of membership, and a list of schools represented by members. The Executive Board will consider the application and communicate a decision to the group.

The committee also recommended that proposed and existing affiliates collaborate with local institutions and other local organizations to sponsor WPA activities. For example, all writing program administrators and English department chairs in Arizona's public postsecondary institutions convene each September for a joint meeting of the Arizona Association of English Departments and the English Articulation Task Force. It might be relatively easy to add a WPA affiliate session to this

annual event. A similar situation exists in Maryland, where the Association for the Advancement of College Teaching meets each January. Likewise, in North Carolina writing program administrators from across the state meet informally each year.

Finally, WPA might consider following NCTE's lead in devoting time and effort to supporting the affiliates. One possibility would be to earmark some travel money for the President to travel to major events

sponsored by affiliates. Of course, in some cases it might make more sense to have some other member of the Executive Board participate in an affiliate's events. Another suggestion is that the President and a few other Executive Board members host an affiliates session at WPA's annual summer conference.

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## **Fit and Feel: Writing Centers and Writing Programs**

Paula Gillespie, Vice President, National Writing Centers Association

When I was brainstorming for this article, I made a Berhoffian move: I needed to get rid of oppositions, so I trotted out our differences so that I could dispense with them. That way, I could think productively about our connectedness. There I sat with my pot of green tea and Microsoft Word--my 21<sup>st</sup> century substitute for a pot of coffee, legal pad, and sharp number two pencils. Instead of the list I'd have made on my yellow pad, I made a table: that magically inexhaustible Gatesean grid. You fill it in, and when you come to the last square, you hit Tab, and up pops a new line to fill in. The borders around the grid, crisp-cornered and rhetorically delineating, frame the thinking. As I filled it in, the visual rhetoric suggested that writing centers were one kind of enterprise and writing programs another. Period. Those table borders proved it, declared it. But even as I was filling in the list, I was thinking of a term that I believe my colleague Michael McCauley coined: the semi-permeable slash mark. What I was claiming as opposition wasn't an opposite, but simply a variant. That line that separated us was not a barrier, but simply a mark of difference.

Quickly I exhausted the oversimplified differences and began filling in the columns.

<b>WCs</b>	<b>WPs</b>
<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Yes, lots</i>
<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>In spades</i>
<i>Staffing</i>	<i>Amen</i>
<i>Training</i>	<i>Ditto</i>
<i>Ethics</i>	<i>Oh, man, yes</i>
<i>Accountability</i>	<i>Yadda, yadda</i>

Then I forced myself to back away a bit, try to see the larger picture, both the programmatic picture and the institutional picture, and the picture of us all going to different breakfasts at CCCC, trying to see how all of this could work together in a productive kind of coalition. As I backed away from the clutter of numbers, portfolios, record-keeping and accountability, I saw an image: a student hesitating in the writing center's doorway, tentatively scanning the faces there, clutching a copy of her assignment and a rough draft, wondering what kind of help she will get as she composes her way through the writing program. Someone grabs a number two pencil and they're off, unifying what the two programs share. University mission might not be foremost on their minds as they begin, but it is there, along with the shared component of the writing program's and the writing center's mission: to create not only better writers, but better, more critical thinkers, readers, researchers. The writer may well be focused on dusting off the grammar, but the tutor is in there, finessing these concerns into an attempt to get the student to meet the goals of the writing program, if the tutor is lucky enough to know them.

Within an institution, we know how to build productive coalitions between our programs by

- Sharing assignments
- Having tutors visit writing classes to invite writers in for tutoring
- Including writing program TAs or instructors on the tutoring staff

- Having those instructors explain goals and pitfalls of assignments to tutors
- Discussing the overall goals of the writing program in writing center staff meetings
- Sharing assessment strategies
- Brainstorming about assessment/outcomes progress
- Visiting writing classes
- Including writing center staffers in a mock tutorial as part of TA training
- Keep teaching staff aware of ongoing services the writing center provides

This summer our incoming WPA and I will attend the summer workshop in Tempe as well as the fall conference at Miami of Ohio. We have been brainstorming about approaches and assignments,

imagining ways to re-envision the program. She knows that our tutors are a rich resource: they sit on the writing end of the current assignments—and in the fall they too will be included in focus groups whose voices will help in the planning of her new program.

These observations ask us to consider: how can our two organizations work together to augment, foster, and encourage open, reciprocal communication between those of us who con/spire (who literally breathe together) with writers? How can we collaborate to provide writers with challenges to ease, cajole, force, facilitate, and tempt them into the world of college-level analysis and expression?

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## Technology, Institutional Assessment, and Big Brother

Rebecca Rickly  
Texas Tech University

At Texas Tech, we have a fairly robust, locally grown interactive writing, revising, and editing web-based application, TOPIC (Texas TechOnline-Print Integrated Curriculum) that we are now using in all FYC courses. However, “using” is a tricky word here—we can’t force TAs to make their students integrate all of the online peer editing and email, nor can we require that their students submit through a draft-function that TOPIC provides.

What we can do is require them to keep administrative data online so that students know up front where they stand in a course. To this end, all FYC teachers are required to keep attendance online (since our institutional policy states that “more than 2 or 3 absences—depending on how frequently each week a course meets—can affect a student’s final grade in the course”) as well as to post all grades online (using a nice database that figures final grades for the teacher).

Here’s how the required online component works. A student logs on to the particular class by entering a secure password; then, he or she is immediately greeted with an opening screen that is privy only to him/her. It includes syllabus/course information that the teacher has entered, as well as the number of absences to date the student has accrued and the grade he or she has earned thus far in the course. If a student has been absent more than the allotted number of times, a note saying as much appears. Also, a note is sent to the dean of the student’s college as soon as he or she goes over the allowed number of absences.

We’ve found that this kind of individual visibility has helped defer a lot of end-of-the-semester anxiety (“But I didn’t KNOW I’d been absent!” and “I didn’t KNOW I was failing the class—I would have dropped!”). Sure, students get a copy of the policy statement at the beginning of the semester, and they often have access to it—in their texts, through the online, and in a handout—but a daily reminder of exactly where a student stands in regard to those policies has helped to lower our complaint rate (or at least focus it on non-administrative topics). In a sense, by posting administrative information on TOPIC, students have been given a sort of “Big Brother” type of insight into the teacher’s gradebook, one most of them felt they didn’t have until the teacher bestowed it upon them at the end of the semester. Of course, it works the other way, too: all of the WPAs have access to TOPIC, and we can see if, in fact, TAs are posting the data they’re supposed to be posting.

### Renew Your Membership

The date on this newsletter's mailing label is when your membership ends. If that date is spring 2001 (or earlier), it's time to renew! A Membership Renewal Form is included with this newsletter. Thanks.



I begin with this example because via technology and a relatively sophisticated database, the traditional power structures of the classroom have been inverted—at least in part. What I would like to propose is a grander model of administrative record keeping in which records are privately available to students, but also available to those administering large writing programs. Such a database would allow for a better-run writing program, as well as an inversion of power so that students could feel informed and take on a larger, more reflective part in their own professional development.

Here I would like also to talk about an assessment rubric which operates on a data base structure that's kept, maintained, and available—but at different levels for different audiences—online. But because I think this is a complicated, touchy situation, I'm going to situate it in a narrative.

Once upon a time, a brand new assistant professor took on the job as associate WPA at a mid-level university. She was thrilled to be part of a collaborative program in which each member of the composition/rhetoric faculty helped to run the writing program. Her job was to make sure all undergrads in FYC had a comparable experience; to train new TAs to teach FYC; and to assist with professional development. She thought about her job, discussed it with her colleagues and some of the grad students she met, then tried out a few of her ideas, including establishing peer evaluation teams, conducting workshops, reading all the FYC student evaluations . . . . She tried to keep track of who did what in terms of professional development, and how well they accomplished their—and the department's—goals. Due to time constraints, her record keeping wasn't perfect, yet she found that she needed resources like these to draw upon when TAs came to her for letters of recommendation, advice about teaching portfolios, or nominations for awards.

Clearly, she needed to be able to access the data, and she encountered two problems. First, the data were fragmented. Second, the data didn't always tell the same story: too often, she found that one piece didn't always support another, or she didn't have all the pieces together when she needed them. For instance, she had to identify TAs who could be offered the opportunity to mentor new, incoming TAs as part of a newly conceived, institutionally based program. She went to the student evaluations, and came up with quite a list of good people. Later, however, she was asked to target some of these same TAs for counseling because of their skewed grade distribution (all A's and B's, mostly A's, etc.)--which the institution found problematic and which might have accounted for the high student evaluations in the first place.

At a weekly composition program meeting, one of the associate directors suggested a data base with information like that listed above for all the TAs. To our WPA, it seemed to be a good thing; after all, she could use it to write letters of recommendation, citing real specifics; she could find consistent, good teachers to ask to be mentors; she could address specific questions students (and parents) had when they came to ask questions or even to complain. She thought it would also be good for the TAs, since they could log in to their own "space" and see data that pertained to them—they could see their own growth, they could use specific information for teaching portfolios, and they could have real "proof" of teaching excellence, since so many jobs ask for this.

But when the idea was pitched to another committee, she was surprised at the reaction. Some thought it sounded too much like "big brother is watching you." She was puzzled; these were data, after all, that the writing program gathered every year. The collection was centralized and accessible to those running the writing program, and because it would be password protected, individuals would have access to (and the ability to add to) their own private information only. It could be a central location for them to keep track of their own professional development so that when they revised their letters, their vitae, and their teaching portfolios, they could simply go to the database and pull out information.

I'm going to ease out of my story now, and talk a bit more about the implications of such a database in terms of what I know, as well as information I've received from others about this possibility. As a WPA like the one in the story, I know that much more of my time than I can afford professionally is spent on "keeping track" of program information. I would love to have a database of information that I use to write letters, to see patterns, to catch problems--and help fix them--before they get to be overwhelming. But I

can also see the problems with such a database in terms of who has the power, who has access, and who interprets.

This scenario has also been discussed online—as part of the Computers and Writing Online Conference held in April and May—and some of the observations and concerns articulated there are worth recording here. Linda Hanson, for instance, noted that TAs, adjuncts, and staff/faculty need to have a discussion about what matters programmatically, what should be assessed, and how it should be assessed. “The conversation would clarify the overlaps and gaps between mentoring and professional development and evaluation,” she asserted. Jeff White wrote: “A database like this should be useful in their own teacher development, and it should be a service to adjuncts in composing letters for merit pay, contract renewal, and for application files if they are looking for employment elsewhere. It seems that the more open the access the better (as long as individual instructors cannot check up on other individuals).” But Kathi Yancey countered with a cautionary note: “I take Becky's point that it would make her life easier and serve the needs of many of the faculty to collect these data. [But] this makes me nervous. What I'm afraid of is something like Hawthorne's “The Birthmark,” in which a fascination with technology--what we are \*able\* to do rather than what we \*should\* do--leads to disaster.”

Keith Rhodes suggests an alternative: “I've always kept data on comp programs as a whole, but I intentionally leave out identifiers of instructors. If instructors want me to make a comparative study of their practices against the over-all norm, I will do so--but they have to give me the key information about which sections were theirs. If it's programmatic adjustment I want to make, programmatic information will do.” Yet I'd argue that programmatic information isn't all we need; for instance, when I need to select mentors, I need to find out which TAs are exemplary teachers in the context of our institutional confines. I have to look at individuals.

Finally, for Kathi Yancey, it's rhetorical: “What's the purpose? And not least, who's the author?” I tried to address some of these rhetorical ideas below. I agree--this is rhetorical--and it presents a variety of competing, possibly conflicting rhetorical situations.

Ideally, among the purposes and audiences I see for such a database would be:

#### **For the Program**

- to ensure that FYC students are having a comparable experience by being able to compare syllabi, policies, etc.
- to be able to get information--accurate information-- quickly, in the case of a complaint, serious or otherwise
- to have specific, important information to address the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and of individual teachers when it comes time to make decisions (eg, select mentors)
- to be able to see patterns that evolve so that possible problems--such as, for instance, consistently low teaching evaluations-- can be addressed in an "intensive mentoring" situation
- to be able to see patterns among the whole group of TAs so that group patterns might be rewarded or addressed in professional development workshops or other means of "non-voluntary opportunities for growth and reflection"

#### **For the TA**

- to have immediate access to data like those in student evaluations so that the TA can construct a teaching portfolio and/or provide evidence of excellent teaching while seeking a job
- to have access to data that others need, e.g., when the TA asks for a letter of recommendation, he/she can provide the writer with specific info

#### **For the WPA**

- to facilitate ease of record keeping so that information that does intersect can be viewed as a whole.
- to make good PR easier: the WPA can identify specific things that teachers/the program are doing well, and broadcast this information

- to make program integrity central, since the WPA has a chance to know exactly what's going on and respond accordingly

Finally, I want to stress that we're looking at this possibility—that of online reflection, assessment, database information—reflectively and critically and rhetorically. When I shared these ideas with Fred Kemp, one of the database builders (along with Susan Lang), he reminded me that, in a sense, what we're doing is a heuristic. He continued:

Seymour Papert says that computers are "naturally heuristic," because one can't try to computerize any activity without having to (1) completely rethink the activity, including all the assumed behaviors that have become virtually invisible, and (2) discover in the new perspectives afforded by such rethinking, possibilities for actions that were never possible through the old perspectives. In other words, the sheer act of re-coordinating all these data through the efficiencies of the database and universal access to it (breaking through the time/space problem of access) provides a new lens through which to view the whole picture. This lens shows us new ways of conceiving of the very mission itself and supporting it.

As long as we understand this database as providing a way of organizing our activities and the perspectives of those involved and considering as well who has access and when and the impact of this type of electronic database, I think it can be well used--as a boon for administrative record keeping, institutional decisions, and professional development, rather than as a tool for "big brother."

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Yancey, Kathleen. Online Post to CW Online List. 19 April 2001

Please respond to the issues embedded here, by email, to <a href="mailto:kyancey@clemsun.edu">kyancey@clemsun.edu</a> . Responses will be published in the next issue of the WPA newsletter in October and after, as interest, response, and space permit.
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