

**The Purpose(s) of English: A Conference on the Future of English Studies  
University of Illinois @ Springfield  
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*Keynote Speakers: John Schilb and Christine Farris  
University of Indiana, Bloomington*

Since at least the 1980s, it has been fashionable to speak of English Studies as being in a state of crisis. Budget cuts, theory wars, hiring limits, and identity politics have made the curriculum a site of great contention among the teachers and scholars who inhabit English departments. In addition, changes to our national economy and political landscape have forced English Studies to re-examine its role in contemporary higher education and, at times, to explain its relevance in the ever-increasingly corporatized university. Because college English is perhaps the most visible nexus of humanistic education and skills training in higher education, it is particularly susceptible to conservative pressures for standardized curricula and workforce preparation. We might say, then, that the current crisis for English Studies is one of purpose.

Whether or not we invoke the rhetoric of “crisis,” it is easy to see that English Studies needs to square its configuration with the current economic and political climates. To do so, it must be prepared to articulate the purposes and benefits of its curricula to students, administrators, and legislators. Such articulation requires us to reflect on how we structure our curricula in the first place, and how those structures hinder or enable our responses to economic and political pressures. One place to start, we believe, is at the relationship between English’s two largest areas of instruction and research: composition-rhetoric and literature.

Of course, much has been written about the comp-rhet/lit-crit divide, and the scholarship has promoted ideas ranging from the abolition of the first-year writing course to the development of separate programs in composition and literature to integrated curricula based on the classic trivium. This conference seeks to apply a different lens to the conversation: *What does the question of the relation between comp-rhet and literature have to do, if anything, with the marketplace pressures on English departments?*

We welcome proposals on any topic concerning the relation among comp-rhet, literature, and the English curriculum. We are especially interested in papers that address the following questions:

- In light of the growing pressures on colleges and universities to offer transferable curricula that teach workplace literacy skills and career-specific knowledge, what should the English curriculum look like?
- How can the comp-rhet/lit-crit divide be a productive force in English departments and curricula?
- How do professionals rely on knowledge grounded in composition-rhetoric and literature courses in their jobs and lives?
- How can literature be taught from a rhetorical perspective?

- How might current trends in composition and rhetoric that emphasize cultural studies or service learning affect the study of literature?
- In what ways are old hierarchies still in place in English departments? In what ways are they being dismantled? To what end?
- Can English departments and the study of literature survive in an environment where composition and rhetoric courses are housed in writing programs?
- Do different types of institutions require different types of English curricula? What students get what kind of English education?
- How do online courses in English represent the pressures of a corporatized, globalized university? How do/should they respond to such pressures?

**Please submit 500-word abstracts for individual papers or panels to Sara Cordell ([scord1@uis.edu](mailto:scord1@uis.edu)) or William Carpenter ([wcarp2@uis.edu](mailto:wcarp2@uis.edu)) by July 15, 2007.** Email submissions preferred. All submissions will be acknowledged. Acceptances will be sent by August 15, 2007.