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Recopying to Revise: Composition in an Old Key

Peter Kratzke

The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction. By that time you begin to clearly & logically perceive what it is that you really want to say.

—Mark Twain

For composition instructors of a certain age, the time-honored story beginning, “When I was your age, I walked to school ten miles a day . . . in the snow . . . uphill,” has become, “When I was your age, revising a paper meant retyping it . . . every single page . . . on a typewriter . . . a Smith-Corona manual.” Just as school busses saved subsequent generations all that shoe tread in getting to school, the computer has changed what students get from school. And exactly what students get, in fact, continues to change before our very eyes. In the opening essay of Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe’s Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies (1999), Dennis Baron raised the flag for composition teachers: “in the future the computer will be put to communications uses we cannot now even begin to imagine, something quite beyond the word-processing I’m now using . . .” (15). In light of iPods and “texting” and “chat rooms,” Baron was only too correct. Indeed, the use of computers in the classroom has spawned nothing short of a scholarly industry addressing how to incorporate computers in composition pedagogy. The issues are multivalent, but underlying all is the persistent question, “Who is to be the Master—humans or their machines?” My response appeals to fundamentals: it is not that students should abandon word processing, but they should learn to use the technology better.

As one who learned “keyboarding” on an IBM Selectric, I have approached technology with Miranda-like rejoicing: “O brave new world that has cut-and-paste in it.” Then, an incident gave me pause. I am diligent in backing up electronic files, but I had somehow lapsed with a five-page essay I was writing. Murphy’s Law prevailed: my hard drive “fried” and my files were unrecoverable. All was not lost, though, for I had previously printed a draft that I thought presentable. I am a speedy typist, so I quietly resolved to recopy the text into a new Word file. While I typed, I found myself changing aspects of both diction and content. In the act of recopying, I was revising in the truest sense of the word—to re-see expressions and ideas. The task completed, it was painfully obvious that the recopied version was superior to the original. Had I stumbled, I wondered, onto a useful-but-forgotten footnote to our multimodal world that Kathleen Blake Yancey has
called “Composition in a New Key”? Perhaps, I concluded, we need to tell our students to slow down and double back, if only for a moment.

Whether in the optimistic annals of a journal such as *Computers and Composition* or a pessimistic diatribe such as Todd Oppenheimer’s descriptively titled *The Flickering Mind: The False Promise of Technology in the Classroom and How Learning Can Be Saved* (2003), scholars in Composition and Rhetoric often forget the cognitive skills for revision that they forged, in effect, by recopying, a low-tech practice not used by our tech-savvy students. In 1972, Donald Murray formulated ten implications for the process approach to composition, including (listed as his fourth) that “[t]he student should have the opportunity to write all the drafts necessary to discover what he has to say on this particular subject. Each new draft, of course, is counted as equal to a new paper” (5-6). Murray might have had a point in 1972, but the concept of “a new paper”—the product of finger-crunching recopying on a typewriter—has changed with the emergence of computers. Tellingly, vanished on campus is the pre-computer universal student conversation: “What draft are you on?”; “I’m on my second draft.” Although it is true, then as now, that a first draft for many students is their last draft, the physical concept of a *draft* has radically changed with word processing, especially in terms “writing to learn.” How can we, without sounding like machine-smashing Luddites, convince our students that something as tedious as recopying can be beneficial to their abilities with technology?

Before all else, recopying to revise suggests as much about technology in our lives as it does about the writing process. People have long since pondered how what we can do with technology changes how we think and, so, who we are. Socrates thought that written texts would inhibit memory, and Gutenberg’s press raised criticism that people would become lazy and disrespectful of religious authority (Carr 63). In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche observed of his own writing that touch typing created a terse quality: “our writing equipment takes part in the forming of our thoughts” (qtd. in Carr 60). Nietzsche would only wonder at what the microchip has wrought. In her 2004 Chair’s address for the CCCC, Yancey summarized the present situation: “Never before has the proliferation of writings outside the academy so counterpointed the compositions inside. Never before have the technologies of writing contributed so quickly to the creation of new genres” (298). These genres, Yancey says, represent a “tectonic change” in composition. Yancey’s point is not to be underestimated, but, at the same time, an ounce of precaution is in order with all matters of historical cause-and-effect. In fact, David Edgerton has recently argued in his *The Shock of the Old* that the lasting applications of technologies are often the seemingly secondary ones. One technology does not necessary lead to another: despite the idea that aircraft have radically
changed warfare, the foot soldier remains decisive to victory; corrugated iron has had a far more pervasive effect on the world than many high-tech inventions. In light of such examples, it comes as no surprise that what was once thought “futuristic” is often today’s haunting disappointment: nuclear power has not answered our energy needs; supersonic air travel was never commercially profitable, the Concorde existing today only as icon (Edgerton 20-21). Tidy timelines subsequently get messy, and we need to rethink how we perceive machines in our lives. For its part in composition, the “old-school” practice of recopying reminds us that real literacy, after all, is not a technological product but a cognitive process—not a thing on paper but an activity in the brain.

The Present Situation

Whatever the current disposition in the field of Composition and Rhetoric—whether product-oriented or process-driven, whether advocating an expressivist or a feminist or a social justice pedagogy—the persistent question remains, “Why do students continue to struggle with writing?” To be sure, instructors have lamented forever amen that students have underperformed. In 1905, Henry Adams commented in The Education that, at Harvard, “[t]he number of students whose minds were of an order above the average was in his experience barely one in ten; the rest could not be much stimulated by any inducements a teacher could suggest” (995-96). Likewise, Josephine Bacon’s 1900 collection of stories about Smith College offers an uncomfortably familiar depiction of impressionable freshmen. In the epistolary “The Education of Elizabeth,” Elizabeth’s teacher complains to a friend, “You might not believe it, but [the undergraduates] grow stupider and stupider. Perhaps I’ve been at it a bit too long, but I never saw such papers as these freshmen give one” (142-43). From the turn of the century to today, the situation has only deepened. In 1983, Talmudic scholar Jacob Neusner published a column titled “The Speech the Graduates Didn’t Hear” in the Brown University student newspaper. Critical of the students’ preparation, Neusner cites from an earlier Chronicle of Higher Education essay by Rutgers University business professor Carter A. Daniel, where, in a moment of painful and brutal honesty, Daniel tells graduates,

College has spoiled you by reading papers that don’t deserve to be read, listening to comments that don’t deserve a hearing, paying attention even to the lazy, ill-informed and rude. We had to do it, for the sake of education. But nobody will ever do it again. College has deprived you of adequate preparation for the last 50 years. It has failed you by being easy, free, forgiving, attentive, comfortable, interesting, unchallenging, fun. Good luck tomorrow. (qtd. in Neusner 268)
Neusner continues in this muse, and he (as well as Daniel) raises the unsettling question about who is to blame: “it was not even that we [the faculty] wanted to be liked by you. It was that we did not want to be bothered, and the easy way out was pretense: smiles and easy B’s” (268). Anyone (and I mean anyone) who has taught composition semester after semester will wince a bit at Neusner’s observation.

Impressionistic tales of dubious learning outcomes are well-supported by the kinds of statistics that educators know all too well. Nobody seems to agree on how well America’s alphabet soup of tests measures achievement or predicts future performance, but what is clear is that America’s educational system is far from perfect. The 2007 Nation’s Report Card states that, in comparison against 2002 assessments, there was no significant increase in levels of “proficiency” (37). These data are echoed by results from standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE). During the 1970s, average SAT verbal scores declined 47 points, from 460 to 427 (math scores, which also declined, fell only 22 points during the same period). Although verbal scores rose during the early 1980s, with scores reaching a nine-year high of 431 in 1985, scores declined by 1990 to an all-time low of 424 (Morgan 1). Subsequently, verbal scores did not change from 1994 to 2007 (DeRosa). The GRE reflects the same kind of roller coaster ride. From 1972 to 1987, average scores for the English Language and Literature test—taken mostly by native speakers—declined from 545 to 526 (Healy 19). Between 2001 and 2004, 50 percent of those taking the same test scored below 540 (Graduate 15).

Of course, the SAT and the GRE are very different tests, and interpretation of data is fraught with questions of validity. Moreover, underlying issues are complex, spanning an increasing population of second-language learners, emphasis on standards-based testing in the secondary schools, a host of socio-economic factors, changing test procedures, and the plain difficulty in comparing statistics. Regardless, the bottom-line issue is not so much that pre- or post-college test scores have dipped or returned to the standards of pre-whatever date or even that we disagree about what the tests test; rather, it is that the scores of our educational achievement have not dramatically increased in light of all our reform efforts.

The most obvious general cause behind woes in student writing and verbal skills is the democratization of our educational system. Whatever our particular interest in democratization, we should not be too sanguine in jumping to conclusions. When principles of democracy and educational achievement collide, the result is anything but coherent—one is reminded of Thomas Carlyle’s term “big black Democracy”—and widely variable and ongoing Composition and Rhetoric discussions about the nature of style and standardization emphasize the problem. Mary Louise Pratt, writing in 1991 about what she terms “the contact zone,” remarks,
In universities we started to hear [during the 1980s], “I don’t just want you to let me be here, I want to belong here; this institution should belong to me as much as it does to anyone else.” Institutions have responded with, among other things, rhetorics of diversity and multiculturalism whose import at this moment is up for grabs across the ideological spectrum. (479-80)

Suffice it to say that “the import” is constantly evolving, including the root problems of how we read and write.

**Technology and the Present Situation**

By far the most pervasive symbol of educational democratization is the computer, a technology often taken as a quick answer to various educational issues—the Apple II was the precursor and symbol for what has become today’s “smart classroom,” and Nicholas Negroponte’s One Laptop Per Child program aims to give poor populations laptops “with content and software designed for collaborative, joyful, self-empowered learning” (“One Laptop”). Not often in history have people so self-consciously lived in an era identified by something besides a political label. Few people awoke in, say, 1730 to think, “It feels great to be a Neoclassicist,” but, today, we are keenly aware of our place in “The Information Age.” Our increasing attention to technological literacy, however, bears on more “traditional” literacies like reading and writing. In her 1990 study, *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don’t Think and What We Can Do About It*, Jane Healy warned, “The state of literacy in the United States today is declining so precipitously, while video and computer technologies are becoming so powerful, that the act of reading itself may well be on the way to obsolescence” (22). Responses from teachers to this prospect have varied. Rather than despair of conventional literacy, in 2004, the Executive Committee of the CCCC announced, “[T]he curriculum of composition is widening to include not one but two literacies: a literacy of print and a literacy of the screen. In addition, work in one medium is used to enhance learning in the other” (“CCCC Position Statement”). Obviously, we have not reached that point. Camille Paglia cautions, “The computer, with its multiplying forums for spontaneous free expression from e-mail to listservs and blogs, has increased facility and fluency of language, but degraded sensitivity to the individual word and reduced respect for organized argument, the process of deductive reasoning” (2-3). In teaching one literacy to enhance another, it seems, we sometimes only rob Peter to pay Paul.

For their part, students in our classrooms face a formidable challenge in negotiating the competing demands of new and old literacies. As a result, what Louise Rosenblatt identified back in 1938 as the “transactional” nature of reading has changed: “ultimately any literary work,” Rosenblatt formulates, “gains its significance from the way in which the minds and
emotions of particular readers respond to the linguistic stimuli offered by the text” (28). Then and now, “the way” in Rosenblatt’s declaration is at issue, today’s students rarely reading with pen in hand, instead highlighting their texts with fluorescent swipes of oranges and yellows. Beyond the latest findings that the nearly obsolete practice of handwriting seems tied to learning (Kelley 69), highlighting sentences is not the same as taking marginal notes, students not pressed to understand paragraph-by-paragraph the expository questions of who, what, where, when, how, and why. Rosenblatt’s declaration, however, is only partially current: what she probably could never have imagined is that the word “text” would one day become operative. The November 26, 2007, Newsweek featured a cover story on the digitization of books, leading the way the web-based giant Amazon and its pocket-sized Kindle. The mode of paper, though, still has a place, digitized texts arguably only increasing student passiveness. A few decades ago, teachers would stress to students “not to write in library books.” Today, many teachers would fall on their knees to have students scribbling notes in those same books: not only would this “problem” mean that students were transacting with texts, but it would entail that students had the books in the first place. Instead, for many students, if a text is not on the web, then it is not worth tracking down.

If the practice of active reading has become increasingly rare, passive writing in the composition process only compounds the issues of how students too often assume technology will do the intellectual “heavy lifting.” Microsoft is keenly aware of this fact: in a magazine advertisement, the company uses three pictures to represent three stages of evolution: for 1857, an ink pen; for 1937, a typewriter; and for 2007, a laptop. In particular to the composition process, the computer has seduced us with its instant—call it democratic—abilities. Nancy Sommers, in a 1980 article for CCC about the nature of revision, never even mentioned the role of computers. By 2003, Victor Villanueva prefaced his second edition of Cross-Talk in Comp Theory with a sense of the sea change since his research between 1992 and 1994 for the book’s first edition: “not much has emerged in our journals that can stand the test of time—not because of any shortcoming in our scholars but because of the speed with which the things written about become archaic, this morning’s innovation becoming this evening’s anachronism” (xi). From peer-reviewed scholarship, one point quickly trickles down to students: everything is instantly printable and, so, potentially presentable, including drafts that should have been discarded to the (physical or electronic) recycle bin.

Although the computer certainly has its place in educational democratization, perhaps the real engine driving student problems with reading and writing is that we are, in fact, trying to do too much at once. Scientists have shown the rather commonsense point that the human brain
does not learn very well when exposed to different tasks at the same time (Evans et al.). This idea is nothing new (“To do two things at once is to do neither,” commented Publilius Syrus, a first-century-B.C. Roman slave [qtd. by Kirn 66]), but considering the practice as a kind of social virtue is relatively novel, the word “multitasking” coming into circulation only in the mid-1980s (OED). Paglia notes the resulting artistic sensibility: “Students now understand moving but not still images” (4). Nicholas Carr’s July/August 2008 cover story for The Atlantic, “Is Google Making us Stupid?” confirms Paglia’s observation. Carr explores how the Internet has altered the depth of information we can process because our minds move through material like stones skipped over water. Rosenblatt’s idea of transactions echoes, Carr wondering whether “deep reading”—the sustained engagement with a text valuable for more than content but “the intellectual vibrations those words set off within our own minds” (63)—is an endangered activity, if not ability. The computer genie is long out of the bottle, but, when composition teachers try to explain the finer points of style while students fiddle with their BlackBerries, something has to give.

**Metacognition**

Permeating almost all debate in Composition and Rhetoric is the question, “How do students learn best?” How, to summarize the idea of metacognition, do we sensitize students to their options while they write? In his 1909 handbook titled *Write It Right: A Little Blacklist of Literary Faults*, the curmudgeonly San Francisco journalist Ambrose Bierce nicely distinguishes that we are “conscious of what we feel; aware of what we know” (20). Bierce was one who feared that machines would eventually control our emotions and minds, and, to an extent, his prophecy has been fulfilled: when students do not know a word, they too often blithely assume that their computer “tools” will be along after them to correct automatically matters ranging from spelling to presentation. Everyone knows the pitfalls. When real thinking is required, spell-checkers cannot distinguish between their, there, and they’re. At the same time, when little or no thinking is required, students get downright creative with the otherwise-mundane jots and tittles of documentation for a Works Cited (MLA) or References (APA) page—not to be confused with marshaling evidence within an argument. Students, in a nutshell, do not think when they should and (at least idly) think when they should not. Whether in thought or form, the result is that much student writing lacks a certain human quality. It is as if papers are written by robots, not students aiming, in the familiar phrase, “to join the conversation.”

Faced with problematically robotic papers, are teachers left to shrug their shoulders and look to the heavens? Discussions in post-process theory suggest that teaching an activity as mysterious as writing is elusive at best.

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After all, well before today’s theorists began doubting ideas of process, Mina Shaughnessy—in the wake of her examining errors in basic writing during the 1970s—concluded of writing in general, “Few people, even among the most accomplished of writers, can comfortably say that they have finished learning to write, nor even that they always write as well as they can. Writing is something writers are always learning to do” (275-76). Maybe the reason that we never learn to write is that language never does what we would have it do, quite. The old procedure for line editing by moving from back to front, tellingly enough, was meant to counter the human mind’s propensity to overlay ideas on words that may or may not express those ideas. Context overrides text. We think we have written words that say what we think they are saying, but anyone who has been maddened by an unnoticed mistake in an important document knows that the relation between signifier and signified when word processing is fraught with peril. At such moments, our transactional sweat turns from cooling to nervous, the moment a kind of linguistic terror as language fractures. To distill the moment in Bierce’s terms, we are consciously aware of our failure.

Recopying as Competition

One polemical response to the problems generated by computers is to abandon the machine. In his A Man Without a Country, the late Kurt Vonnegut comments in a chapter titled “I have been called a Luddite,” “[W]e have contraptions like computers that cheat you out of becoming. Bill Gates says, ‘Wait till you can see what your computer can become.’ But it’s you who should be doing the becoming, not the damn fool computer. What you can become is the miracle you were born to be through the work that you do” (56). Although few people long to throw the carriage of a manual typewriter, I would agree with Vonnegut that writing has a visceral level beyond even the metacognitive, and our goal as teachers should be in that direction. In his still-current 1985 essay, “The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University,” Mike Rose concludes that how we teach writing will always be in as much flux as the world in which we teach, for our work “requires a complete, active, struggling engagement with the facts and principles of a discipline, an encounter with the discipline’s texts and the incorporation of them into one’s own work, the framing of one’s knowledge within the myriad conventions that help define a discipline . . .” (566-67, emphasis added). Without question, recopying to revise is a holistic struggle, less a question of engaging with or responding to but being in. Being in, though, does not mean abandoning our “contraptions.”

In the struggle that is recopying, our heads oscillate from the printed to the typed page and back again. To recopy, in a paradoxical sense, is multitasking in a single activity (as opposed to a single task serving
multiple activities). When done in the manner I mean, recopying a six-line run-on sentence is all but impossible. The brain recoils, the typing halted. A nonsensical paragraph dissolves before our fingers hit the keys: do we really know what we are saying? The end result is that by disempowering (but not unplugging) computers, we are ultimately empowered. I and most others trained in the Humanities are not neuroscientists, of course, but I can say that recopying, properly done, is nothing short of an existential literacy during which we are aware of our own thinking even while we think about something. We are placed in the gap between the methods that can be taught and the achievement that cannot, a moment “those who do” in all walks of life—from musicians to athletes—despair in describing when they resign, “Watch me.” Hunter S. Thompson, for one, wanted to do more than watch, and he dove into the gap when, early in his career, he would recopy Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* in order to learn in his own “neurological system how it felt to write that kind of prose” (qtd. by Kaul 314). As Thompson’s subsequent success as a “gonzo” journalist shows, the gap is not unbridgeable. To students who resign with a sense of absoluteness, “I’m bad at writing,” we can thus assure them, “Only for now.”

In recopying to revise, students truly learn that almost all good writing is rewriting, and to explain the point I turn to the idea of competition (*to compete* is, congenially enough, a Latin word meaning to “strive for [something] together with another” [*OED*]). To recopy sentence-by-sentence is to engage, as Susan Wall explains about the nature of audience, in a dynamic process in which “there are really not only but two contexts for rereading: there is the writer-as-reader’s sense of what the established text is actually saying . . . and there is the reader-as-writer’s judgment of what the text might say or should say . . .” (12). Wall’s conception might seem to demand a slightly schizophrenic perspective, but it also happens to capture precisely the competitive spirit of recopying. In his 1982 book on editing, Arthur Plotnik identifies the competition between editors and authors in moving toward the larger, public goal of writing:

Ideally the war between editors and authors should be won by neither beligerent, but by the readers. The readers are served best when the editor has preserved the author’s strengths and eliminated only the weaknesses in communication. . . . An editor’s job is to shape the expression of an author’s thoughts, not the thoughts themselves. (31)

The end result is not that one wins while the other loses, but that a better product emerges. Likewise, in recopying, the solitary writer engages in a kind of internal competition, pitting self against subject against audience. Effectively updating Plotnik’s observation, Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch (of post-process emphasis on indeterminancy) says, “Meaning is made through our interactions” (113). The experience of recopying to revise affirms as much.
Classroom Strategies and Realities

For today’s students, the notion of recopying to revise is as strange as the notion of erasable bond. In this shift, to use Baron’s phrase, from “pencils to pixels,” students are bound to be reluctant even to try the practice for a paragraph or two. At the very least, we may remind them that the practice will put them in good company, almost no famous author not having recopied to revise. Stung by the publishing failure of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Henry David Thoreau was extra-careful when writing *Walden*, putting the text through seven revisions in order to achieve the right note of artful artlessness (Harding 175). Sophie Andreevna Tolstaya, Leo Tolstoy’s long-suffering wife, recopied *War and Peace* a Thoreau-like seven times for her husband (Wasiolek 322). But what about, students may rejoin, Jack Kerouac and his famous “automatic writing”? One answer is Truman Capote’s, who remarked about *On the Road*, “That’s not writing, that’s typewriting” (qtd. in Liukkonen). Or, students might observe that great writers know what they are doing. For students to recopy, they might continue to observe about themselves in a moment of honesty, is pointless because they do not know what they are doing in the first place.

At that moment, the stage is set for one whom we may call the Patron Saint of Recopying to Revise, Benjamin Franklin: a man, in keeping with the attitude of many students, who probably cared less about literacy as an intrinsic virtue and more about how literacy controls one’s socio-economic environment. Even now, Franklin’s autodidacticism during his apprenticeship is astonishing: in his *Autobiography*, Franklin recounts how he studied an article in *The Spectator* and, “making short Hints of the Sentiment in each Sentence, laid them by a few Days, and then without looking at the Book, tried to complete the Papers again . . .” (11). Franklin then compared his version against the original, noting what rhetorical decisions he made or missed. When students look mystified at even the thought of Franklin’s self-training, we may smugly remind them that, in the phrasing of a popular lyric, “It’s all about the Benjamins.” Although this kind of mercenary appeal is less than what many teachers and theorists would have, it does squarely hit many students where they live.

Implementing recopying in the classroom might involve exchanging single paragraphs or using a sample paragraph as a common source. At other times, it might mean having a single student work on a given paragraph during office hours. One way or another, after a session of recopying, our first response to students should not be that they read what they have revised but to identify what they did, why they did it, and how their choices affected style and content. Our heuristic goal, after all, is to move from what James Paul Gee calls our “telling” (“humans are quite poor at learning from lots of overt information . . .”) to empowering students with a systemic
understanding about “doing” (“humans don’t learn well when they are just left to their own devices to operate within complex contexts about which they know very little” [112]). Having students circle grammatical elements such as adjectives, adverbs, and verbs is a start toward awareness of diction, and identifying paragraph elements (topic sentences, transitions, and moments of commentary) is also important. Overall, my experience is that discussion tends toward the usual suspects: improving style is a question of brevity, argumentation a question of verifying a snug fit between purpose and evidence. The quintessentially old-school Bierce, as usual, said it best, starting Write It Right by extolling “precision in writing; and of good writing (which, essentially, is clear thinking made visible) precision is the point of capital concern” (5). To be sure, achieving precision with style and content means there are no “quick fixes.” I once asked my dad how he learned to fix cars. He replied, “Son, you get your hands dirty.” Students get it. While my dad’s words ring true for all sorts of occasions in their worlds, in recopying the idea of “busting some knuckles” is particularly applicable.

Before I close, a word of professional caution seems in order. In educational environments where student evaluations count for job retention, teachers need to measure their steps carefully, especially with something as potentially challenging as recopying. The teaching moment is, in a sense, remedial, but in another sense the effect is that in recopying students achieve an “inside edge” in mastering the machine. A step back means two forward, and mastery of anything is, if nothing else, _fun_—a concept holding no small appeal to our students. In her ethnographic engagement with student life, _My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Being a Student_, University of Northern Arizona Anthropology Professor Cathy Small reports, “In 2003, ‘fun’ continued to be one of the most ubiquitous words in college discourse, a way to describe a good evening, a good person, or a good class. ‘Fun,’ as a concept, is associated with spontaneity, sociability, laughter, and behavior (including sexuality) that is unconstrained” (23). In answer to our students, we might suggest that a lack of constraint does not mean chaos, real fun starting with awareness and control.

A strange groundswell of fun in reading and writing seems to be occurring in this spirit. Students who learn to write marginal comments in their textbooks act like newly baptized converts when they can extemporize substantive answers during classroom discussions, and pockets of students celebrate grammar as a cult-like magic for writing because, as it happens, grammar demystifies so much about sentence craft: Facebook even has one group called “Grammar Gang” (“If you sigh when a semicolon is not followed by a complete clause,” the student authors declare, “then you belong to the Grammar Gang”). These students, in other words, are embracing the pure fun not in “winning” or “losing”
mere grades but, more simply, in joining in the larger world of academic competition. To that, we may happily exhort them when they discover the power in recopying to revise, “Bring it on!”

**Works Cited**


I Thought Composition Was About Commas and Quotes, Not Queers: Diversity and Campus Change at a Rural Two-Year College

Danielle Mitchell

“Freaking queers.”
“That’s so gay.”
“What are you, gay?”
“Faggots should be nuked.”

Can you remember the last time you heard such phrases while walking down a hall on campus? While grabbing a refill in the coffee room? While sitting at your desk, student voices greeting you through the open window, making you privy to the conversations as students walk by? Was it recently? Do you hear such things frequently? If not, then your location has afforded you some distance from the heterosexist discourse that many of us customarily experience at work.

Let me be clear, here. I’m not talking about the occasional campus flare up between conservative and liberal student groups that takes over the front pages of the campus newspaper and that litters the Editorials section with diatribes about the destruction of traditional values or tirades against bigoted rhetoric. I’m not talking about the occasional act of hatred between individuals. Such confrontations and acts of hate are significant and worthy of attention, certainly; they enact the social contest over sexuality, reveal the importance of diversity instruction, and reinforce the fact that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) safety cannot often be taken for granted. But I want to focus on a different sort of institutional context—one where chilliness is the norm. Given the often-frigid temperatures at many rural, two-year colleges, the closet is more than a historical metaphor. Public battles amongst the student body such as those waged in student newspapers across the country are rare because confronting the status quo of exclusion would require a sort of vocal, overt support of LGBT difference that much of the population isn’t ready to risk. Situated in this context, many educators such as myself face the specific pedagogical task of using their introductory composition course as both a site of writing instruction and a critical zone of cultural contact. Simultaneously, then, the goal is to facilitate improvement in student writing while also broadening their range of cultural experiences in order to better foster diversity, making room on campus for difference—different subjectivities, different ideas, and different expectations.
Given their geographical and cultural profiles, diversity instruction is not only part of the ethical imperative of rural open admissions colleges such as mine, but also, I would argue, of composition programs in those colleges, programs that focus on critical reading and writing as well as critical thinking. Thus, I’d like to add to the disciplinary discussion of diversity education by sharing a course model designed to facilitate discourse analysis and discussion of gender and sexuality. The course certainly wasn’t a curricular silver bullet. Although students learned a lot about critical literacy skills and the social construction of gender, an explosive student confrontation reminded me that the work of a single class is not enough to challenge the dominant heterosexist ethos of a campus. Altering the climate requires systemic and systematic efforts. To this end, then, I’ll also share a broader yet integrated model that attempts to address the curricular, administrative, and cultural forces that collectively produce a campus climate. This model makes composition courses more visibly central to the civic discourse taught at rural colleges while it also produces a systemic form of diversity instruction. The cultural pedagogy that results may not work at all institutions, of course. In fact, with its assumptions of collaboration across the curriculum, administrative responsiveness to faculty initiatives, and opportunities for integrated curricular and extra-curricular activities, it seems best suited to small, two-year colleges that tend to enjoy measures of flexibility that larger institutions do not.

Getting Situated: Expectations of Normality on a Rural Campus

Running along the Appalachian Mountains, Fayette, the county in Southwestern Pennsylvania where I teach, has a distinguished history. It was the site of the first battle of the French-Indian War, the stomping ground of US Secretary of State and Marshall Plan initiator George Marshall, and the world’s largest provider of coal and coke during the First World War. Some residents now refer to the county as Fayette-nam, however, contrasting its illustrious history with its depressed present. Some readers may consider such nomenclature glib, but consider the fact that the once-prized resource that fueled the national defense industry as well as the local economy is no longer a cash cow. A number of the large Victorian mansions once photographed and toured for their beauty are now abandoned, or at least dilapidated. The once vibrant downtown streets are now the targets of a philanthropist’s revitalization efforts because they sport dusty storefront windows, graffiti, and vacant buildings. And the solidly middle-class income that the region provided its miners has been replaced with a median yearly income of $27,451—thirty-five percent below the national average.
Fayette County, once home to the Carnegies, the Mellons, and the Fricks, now punctuated by abandoned mines and coke ovens, is the second poorest county in Pennsylvania. It has one of the highest teen-pregnancy rates in the state; 53 percent of its children live below the poverty level; 24 percent of its population has less than a high school education; and 96 percent of its residents are white. Economically depressed, fiscally liberal but socially conservative, this is a region that tends to favor small government and big churches. Some local bumper stickers make reference to “poverty-necks,” but many outsiders (as my students have referred to them) dismiss the region, culture, and people as redneck, hillbilly.

Of the campus’s nearly 1,000 students, most were born and raised in the county, and most are the first in their families to attend college. Nearly 46 percent are categorized as non-traditional (over the age of 24), more than 90 percent are on financial aid, and many are also on public assistance. Very few students openly identify as lesbian or gay. In fact, even the number of semi-out students and faculty (those who will identify their status only within confidential settings, such as on diversity committees) can be counted on one hand. It’s not uncommon for derogatory retorts of choice in this context to be “That’s so gay,” or “Only faggots think like that,” as suggested above. Moreover, posters publicizing the campus appearance by a gay member of MTV’s The Real World have been defaced, torn down, or otherwise destroyed. Brochures about LGBT safety have been removed from a public space and replaced by a New Testament. A student was recently advised by a faculty member to remain in the closet while living in the region. And another student was informed that a gay man could not be the leader of the Minority Student organization, even if that meant the group would remain dormant given its lack of members, because gays aren’t legitimate minorities and the group was never intended to include them.

I would be remiss to suggest that there are no positive forces or progressive students on campus that work to challenge such hostile conditions. Given its affiliation with a large Research I institution, the campus is guided by an ambitious diversity initiative that asserts the need “to foster a humane University community in which everyone feels welcome, by eliminating disrespect and harassment and by working toward the goal of civility and acceptance of everyone” (“Framework”). The plan goes on to identify “respect for others” as one of “our most important educational goals.” To translate the theoretical into the practical, the university also added a diversity component to its general education guidelines, thereby requiring students to enroll in one course that addresses international cultures and another that addresses diverse cultures within the US. The desire to create respectful campuses and to foster appreciation for diverse people and ideas is evident in other institutional acts as well, such as the
establishment of commissions that focus on diversity, the implementation of domestic partner benefits, and the administrative support for studies that assess climate. And, at the larger four-year campus with which a number of two-year campuses such as mine are affiliated, students, faculty, and staff willing to drive that distance can participate in an active community that includes an LGBT Center, film series, lecture series, mentoring program, and student groups for undergraduates and graduates as well as a broad range of other social and political activities.

There is a measure of support for LGBT diversity at the local level as well. A core group of students seek out diversity courses, for instance, taking them even when not required. Listening generously and speaking carefully, they wrestle with issues of difference, work toward creating greater access for diverse perspectives, and welcome minority students into their friendship network. A few of the bolder students even entertained, albeit briefly, establishing a gay-straight alliance in order to create a stable support network, a visible presence of allies, and a student group that could lobby campus leaders. Several faculty members include LGBT issues in positive ways, funnel funds toward diversity-related activities, and bring open-minded speakers to campus. And a group primarily composed of faculty and staff formed a Diversity Task Force that has worked for nearly a decade to warm the campus climate. Among other things, they arrange for guest speakers and develop multicultural presentations, emotionally support individual members of the community, and act as liaisons to the central campus and its service coordinators. Yet the ethos of hostility on campus remains palpable.

As rainbow stickers and pride regalia are often hidden from public view, personal pictures may be left in desk drawers rather than placed on desktops, LGBT resource centers are few and far between (often requiring a lengthy drive to a city), and coming out truly is a radical—sometimes dangerous—act, the painful realities of exclusion based on sexual orientation are all too familiar on campus—and on many campuses like it across the country. The rural locations, demographics, and financial resources of our two-year colleges simply do not allow lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender visibility, let alone tolerance, to be taken for granted. Expectations of normality and the fully acceptable dictate heterosexual subjectivities and heteronormative politics.

Given an institutional context such as that outlined above, the politics of location clearly complicate the institutional goal to foster diversity as well as the two-year college’s mission to provide open access to all citizens, especially those deemed outsiders based on their sexual orientation. In the remainder of this article, however, I’ll discuss my efforts to intervene in this complicated problematic by deploying a diversity-focused first-year writing course, and then by using that course to envision a broader, more integrated
program that both deploys composition as a site of diversity instruction and diversifies sites of cultural instruction. To this end, I’ll discuss my rationale for creating the course, the scholarly precedents that enable this work, and the broader cultural work that has come to the fore as a result of this work. Ultimately, because the cultural curriculum I outline extends pedagogy beyond composition, it may enable instructors at two-year colleges to achieve change more quickly, change that extends beyond the walls of their classrooms to touch the wider campus community. And as I’ll argue, some faculty members in composition are in ideal locations to facilitate such a curriculum, even when chilly climates may feel less than ideal.

**Disciplinary Locations: Composition, Discourse, and the Inclusion of LGBT Diversity**

The political nature of the classroom has become a professional commonplace. The issue most often explored is not whether politics belong in the classroom, but rather, what politics shape particular classrooms and curricula. While there are the politics associated with location, such as those outlined above, a range of political factors are associated with what content is included and excluded from the curriculum as well. My rhetorically based composition course raised questions on both fronts.

While my peers in English wholeheartedly endorsed my work, they also told me to be prepared for student resistance. Most peers in other disciplines asked me if I knew what I was getting into given the conservative nature of the student body, but they offered their support. Of the few colleagues who discussed with me their doubts about the legitimacy of my diversity focus, often asserting that writing courses are about punctuation, spelling, grammar, and sentence structure, most were assuaged once I explained the departmentally established (and University Senate approved) course goals, which include training students to become “critical citizens” inside and outside the university, people who engage actively and influentially with the communities they belong to because they have an awareness of how communities are created and influenced through language and other symbols. The course proposes to create a safe and yet provocative environment where [students] can develop sophistication as a producer and consumer of discourse. [And it] asks not simply for self-expression, but for [student] participation in public discourse on matters of public interest—such as might be expected of educated adults in the world outside of school. (“Freshman Writing”)

The expected course goals revolve around reading, writing, thinking, and public discourse. Including pertinent and timely social issues prevalent in the news is expected. Moreover, including such goals seems little more than an
ethical response to real material conditions that demand students make real political choices based on their abilities to analyze claims, evidence, authorial credibility, and the long-term consequences of public discourse.

As I asserted then and believe now, college training in writing is more than learning punctuation and grammar; it is about more than knowing when and how to use commas or quotation marks. Rhetorical training is about learning to think and read critically, to analyze thoroughly, and to write clearly. It would be irresponsible not to provide students opportunities to practice on issues that are pertinent to their lives, votes, nation, campus. Thus, given the course goals, the university’s expectations that students be trained for civic participation, and the fact that the introductory composition course usually is the only course in reading and writing that all students must take, these courses are institutionally located to conduct the theoretical and practical work of studying the discursive construction of difference. Moreover, these courses are critically important to this work. They certainly are not the only sites for this work—nor should they be. But as the only course in critical reading and analysis that many two-year students will take, and the only course in writing of our two required courses that is not specialized (such as writing for business or writing for technical professions), the introductory composition course becomes even more important to both the university’s mission and its diversity initiatives.

The work required to legitimize my course may not be required in this particular scholarly arena, as those within the discipline are likely well versed in the progression of composition pedagogy since the linguistic turn. Understood as both the study and production of discourse, while paying attention to the relationship between discourse and power, disciplinary inclusion of issues such as race, class, sex, and gender is no longer surprising. In fact, given the work of scholars such as Shirley Wilson Logan, Stephen Parks, Patricia Bizzell, James Berlin, Sharon Crowley, Lynn Bloom, Joy Ritchie, and Susan Jarratt, among others, these have become central lines of inquiry. The dominant paradigm is far more attentive to issues of difference, social privilege, and material ramifications of discourse than it once was. However, the scholarly emergence of sexuality as a disciplinary line of inquiry may be less well known.

Harriet Malinowtiz dates the first CCCC panel on sexuality and composition studies to 1987, noting a special interest group (SIG) followed in 1993. The panel she references occurs two years before the 1989 discussion led by Paul Puccio that is cited by Allison Berg, Jean Kowaleski, Caroline LeGuin, Ellen Weinauer, and Eric Wolfe as the first to bust homosexuality out of Composition’s closet. During the year between those two panels, though, Ellen Louise Hart’s “Literacy and the Lesbian/Gay Learner” appeared in a small collection by an independent publisher. As do Sarah Sloane and Alison Regan in their later publications, Hart
argues that the dominant paradigm of expressivism put LGBT students at risk. By privileging personal narratives and authentic voice, she explains, expressivism asks LGBT learners to either out themselves to their peers (and teachers) or to censor their lives, to censor their authenticity. This may not seem like a concern since sexuality may not be a topic teachers ask students to address. However, if students are to use writing to express their fears, desires, families, weekend plans, or visions of the world, then it becomes increasingly difficult to refer to their loved ones and their friends and their activities without replacing pronouns, at the very least. So students must weigh issues of “authenticity against safety, self-revelation against distortion or silence” (Sloane 32).

Scholars since Hart have also interrogated the power dynamics that pedagogies produce as well as the potential dangers, both intellectual and physical, that can be associated with acts of inclusion and exclusion. As early as 1989, for instance, David Bleich argued that it’s not necessarily the inclusion of sexuality as a line of discursive analysis that challenges dominant logic or leads to thoughtful inquiry. In fact, in “Homophobia and Sexism as Popular Values,” he argues that inclusion can actually enable the reproduction of heterosexist ideology as much as it can challenge exclusion. Sixty percent of his students considered homosexuality “gross and disgusting” when polled, for example (23). Some even considered the extermination of gays a legitimate social plan. Challenging such discourse can be difficult, especially in a classroom, and especially by a student—especially a student who may fear being linked to gay subjectivity. Additionally, because studies claim that adolescent and college-aged men are the most likely both to commit crimes against LGBT persons, and to consider the violence justifiable, even called for, the classroom can become a hotbed for not just heated debate, but also potential violence. Thus, how inclusion is deployed is just as important as it being deployed.

Hart and Sarah-Hope Parmeter reiterate the importance of methodology in “Writing in the Margins,” published in 1992, as do Sloane and David Rothgery. The latter two publications are notable for another reason, though. In addition to linking composition studies and LGBT issues, their publications appear in mainstream sites, an edited collection about the profession and CCC, respectively. Richard Miller followed their lead in 1994 with his mainstream publication in College English; he argued that fears of alienating students or creating risk via discussions of sexuality ought not be used to sustain exclusion, nor should pressures to limit a writing course to technical issues of correctness. He believes the contentious nature of public discourse ought not be sanitized for the classroom. Rather, homophobic discourse ought to be challenged, not only on the level of grammar and punctuation, but also on philosophical, ethical grounds as well. As he clearly asserts, composition is a course in which the reception
and production of discourse is central. Making clear the assumptions and ramifications of discourse, then, is integral to the course, just as integral as issues of correctness.

With the now fairly consistent presence of LGBT issues in disciplinary venues, and the fact that discussions have shifted from the legitimacy of inclusion itself to queering the classroom, professionalizing queers, and queer identity as an academic commodity, we’re clearly a long way from the early days when disciplinary exclusion was the commonsensical norm. However, we’re still a long way from having pedagogies appropriate to all academic contexts, let alone effective pedagogies.

In part, then, I share with you an experience I deem less than successful in order to talk about the cultural curriculum that emerged from the course. It’s not that my students didn’t learn to create stronger thesis sentences or tighter arguments. In fact, many students became stronger writers as well as stronger readers of discourse who could theorize about the construction of subjectivity via linguistic and social practices, as I’ll discuss in the next section. But the course also underscored the magnitude of the problem—the limited potential of a course to alter the cultural climate. As a result, as I will discuss at the conclusion of this article, a far broader form of systemic intervention seems necessary, a cultural pedagogy that reaches beyond the writing course and makes discourse analysis central to campus life.

**Anxiety 101: An Introductory Composition Course**

The composition course I developed was similar to many of those deployed across the country and outlined in the discipline’s scholarship; I wanted to focus on the discursive construction of culture, for instance, providing a sense of how people are written at the same time they write the world, and to assist students as they improve their writing. As I was training students to write carefully organized and clear prose, then, I also wanted to train them to be careful and conscious readers who traced concepts, phrases, social practices, and expectations in order to pay attention to their historical emergence, moments of deployment, ideological assumptions, and material ramifications. As I told them the first day, and as illustrated by the course’s overall goals, introductory composition is as much about reading as writing, as much about reading the world as the word, and as much about cultural production of ideas as the textual production of essays. Thus, students would study the principles of rhetorical analysis and audience awareness, analyze the ideological features of genres ranging from the popular to the professional, and produce documents ranging from summaries to analyses and narratives to research papers. Given these parameters and my desire to highlight the relationships between language, social practices, cultural values, and power, my course was not
radically different than those offered by other instructors at the campus. I was, however, the only teacher of introductory composition including an extended unit on both gender and sexuality. Moreover, I was, according to reports from students as well as other faculty, the only teacher whose sexuality was a topic of student debate.

To achieve the course objectives of inclusion, I knew I had to establish a strategy that produced a measure of safety on multiple fronts. Obviously, I didn't want to incite violence against anyone perceived to be LGBT. Nor did I want to wage an outright assault against the ideological safety many of the students enjoyed. The sort of inclusion I envisioned would certainly be disruptive to this safety, as it was based, at least in part, on a form of heterosexual privilege that included an intolerance of things LGBT. But to be successful, as Amy Winans models in “Local Pedagogies and Race,” I needed to create as safe a context as possible for the interrogation of the safety that privilege accords. Thus, I needed a way to analyze discourse—both the overt discourse of hate employed in the region and on the campus as well as the less obvious forms of heterosexist discourse that students were unwittingly likely to experience and/or reproduce. As Winans so accurately explains, for instance, a number of students at rural colleges are striving to embody a middle-class ethos, one that relies on appearing polite, sophisticated, thoughtful—not racist, sexist, classist, or even homophobic. So any course that attempts to reverse the dominant sentiment of hostile contexts must devise a strategy for addressing such discourse and its related constructs of ethos. My strategy was to create progressive units that would culminate in one dedicated to the interrogation of gender and sexuality as social constructs. The progression would be based on the fact that analysis—versus summary—is a critical component of higher education (one that our campus has agreed needs to be central to the curriculum), and that there are multiple types of analysis, two of which have been deemed integral to the first-year course in composition. Thus, I created a schedule that included both rhetorical and ideological analysis and presented the course as one designed to teach a form of socio-academic interrogation that could trace the connections between ideas, assumptions, subject positions, and material realities, and to help students become stronger readers and writers.

The course began with a series of activities designed to differentiate summary from analysis—a distinction with which many of our first-year students struggle, but one critical to engaging the work of the course. Essentially, if students don’t understand the fundamental difference between what happens in a text and doing something with the text, it’s difficult to analyze texts as historically constructed artifacts that simultaneously inform and are informed by social values. So students worked in small groups, studied particular texts, and completed activities that made more
concrete the genre, expectations, and organizational options associated with summaries. Then, using the same texts, students shifted to the rhetorical analysis unit.

Exploring the strategies of textual production that writers deploy to achieve their goals, students used the basic terms of rhetorical analysis (ethos, pathos, logos) to determine how texts persuade readers to engage their materials as well as how they develop arguments. One group focused on Sesame Street, for instance. They explained how the show works to secure viewers by appealing to two very different audiences: parents and their children. Other groups focused on home improvement programs, such as This Old House and Design on a Dime. They linked program content to the gender and anticipated values of target audiences, and interrogated how the show’s established credibility. Students were pushed via this group work to clarify the logic of their analyses, explain their use of evidence, and substantiate their claims. Doing so led them to articulate the distinctions between rhetorical appeals, to recognize the need to explain (not just present) evidence, and to explore the importance of context (whether it be understood geographically, demographically, psychographically, or socio-historically) to an audience’s reception of a text.

While I have often argued that students are typically adept at a type of rhetorical analysis—altering their speech for particular audiences, such as professors versus best friends—transferring such skills to the analysis of the discourse produced by others isn’t always as easy for them. One student asserted in a freewrite, for instance, “I’ve never really had to do anything like this, anything other than summarize something. Doing my own thinking is hard. Analysis is hard.” Similarly, other students suggested that rhetorical analysis both required and enabled them to engage texts and arguments in a different way; they were beginning to see them as products of authorial choices, as things to be analyzed, rigorously engaged through a process of inquiry. And they were beginning to demystify the academic experience. They could see, for example, how teachers developed their lecture materials and course expectations: “They don’t make things up. They analyze them and then make claims based on that analysis. That’s what I’m supposed to do to get a good grade.” Perhaps more importantly, they were transferring the skills of analysis to assignments in other courses. As one student exclaimed, “My Philosophy teacher said my response to the reading was on track and that I wrote a good essay. That’s never happened before!” And as another student wrote, “I get tired of defending my ideas all the time, giving evidence for what I think. My paper grades are going up in my business class [though], so maybe it works.”

The first two segments of the course, then, worked well to fulfill some of the service expectations of the required class in composition. Students learned to summarize information, to facilitate open-ended
discussion in groups, to punctuate more effectively, and to analyze texts rhetorically. As a result, they were better prepared to think through issues of textual production and reception and to complete the activities in some of their other courses. The next phase of the course got more complicated, however, as its goal was to formally introduce ideological analysis, thereby providing the framework for the unit on gender and sexuality. Although some discussions of gender had taken place during the rhetorical analysis activities, students tended to take the category of gender and the associated expectations of the category for granted rather than identifying them as sites of interrogation—constructs revealed in but also produced by texts.

To ease the transition from rhetorical to ideological analysis, I asked students to continue working with texts they already knew well, the advertisements and other texts that they had focused on most during the rhetorical analysis unit. As I explained it, the goal was simply to analyze the text differently by focusing on its engagement with cultural values rather than its efficacy or the strategies it deployed to persuade. The transition was still challenging, of course. Ideological analysis asked students to use a logic with which many were unfamiliar and to think through the ramifications of a text's discourse. And whereas rhetorical analysis was easier to perform, because textual strategies became easy to identify, teasing out the social work of a text's representations and logic was more difficult.

Given their struggles to see how texts tapped into larger systems of belief, the first week of the unit focused on group work and application activities. Ads for things ranging from the Super Bowl to soda to liquor to home security systems were the initial texts-in-common and main sites of analysis. As a group, we discussed the ads rhetorically and then I led them through the process of analyzing them ideologically. By depicting a woman home with children while the man is away on a business trip, for example, we discussed how one ad selling home-security systems deployed a particular image of family—an image that excludes many others. It also depicted the “family” as safe until men are absent, women as vulnerable without the protection of men, and “dark” figures as threats. We teased out each of these ideas to explore the ways that a text, regardless of the creator’s intent, embodies a series of assumptions and visions of the world. We also discussed the potential ramifications of such assumptions and visions. By way of example, in the case of the security system, students interrogated the meaning of the dark figure in terms of race relations, specifically the production of racialized fears based on the association of family life with whiteness and danger with dark figures that they interpreted to symbolize black males. Students also questioned the ad’s representation of the stranger as the threat to women in a culture where violence by intimates may actually be a more legitimate fear.
Students seemed to get the point theoretically, but struggled with actually linking texts to larger discursive and material structures. To extend their experience with ideological analysis, and to illustrate that social texts worthy of study extend beyond advertisements and written documents, we shifted attention to forms of knowledge or literacies, such as sports, cheerleading, musical training, and online gaming in order to interrogate their relationships to issues such as race, sex, class, and, minimally, gender. The initial challenge was likely a common one: to illustrate how the assignment revolved around analysis, not just narratives about their activities or schooling. The goal was to do something with their histories. Rather than telling stories about their experiences, they were to analyze them, asking questions about the social production and regulation of subjectivity evident in those experiences.

A majority of students in this phase of the course linked literacies to issues of race and class, acknowledging how those categories are produced by dominant social practices. But a small group of students was beginning to consider gender as malleable, a socially produced construct. Extending the work she did with diet ads, for instance, one young woman talked about the production of femininity via the culture of dirt-bike riding in her previous school. Her early writing described her regret and anger at being left out. A week of group work and a day of individual conferences later, however, she argued in a final draft that the culture of riding produced masculine subjects fit for a world of adventure, competition, and action. Alternatively, via the avenues of participation available to them in that particular context, feminine subjects were relegated to posing for sexy posters hung in bike shops and to cheering on or taking care of rather than competing against the men—a production of subjectivities that produced women to be sexual objects, caregivers, and service-sector employees. While the logic used to defend her conclusion was sometimes sketchy, the analysis was ambitious in its attempts to link activities or literacies to the (re)production of a gendered and classed social system.

It’s important to note that even the strongest writers in the class struggled to produce clear writing as they were learning the new method of analysis. Their mastery of punctuation seemed to falter, while their usually sound sentence structures got a bit clunky. Yet with nearly half of the class dedicated to hands-on workshops, students were able to revise their work, flesh out the logic of their arguments, discuss the purposes of conclusions, consider potential strategies for organizing introductions, and collaboratively develop transitional phrases that could logically move readers from the contents of one paragraph to the next. As a result, their prose got stronger, exhibiting clearer explanations, better-organized paragraphs, more effective punctuation, and tighter sentence structures.
Even though the shifts from summary to rhetorical analysis to ideological analysis were often frustrating for students because they were so frequently standing on unfamiliar intellectual turf, each segment of the course provided students multiple opportunities to study and write about the relationships among texts—whether written documents, visual media, literacies or social practices—and social values and subjectivities. As a result, they discussed how issues of race, sex, class, gender, and even geography could be linked to activities they were good at, things they had been excluded from, things they were expected to learn (or unlearn), and ways they were expected to participate in the world. This range of discussion points and experience provided a strong base for the final series of assignments, which were dedicated to the more extensive analyses associated with the research process. The final unit of the course, however, would focus much more specifically on issues of gender and sexuality as well as the social production and regulation of categories of difference.

When designing the unit, I took a lesson from David Bleich’s “Homophobia and Sexism as Popular Values,” making sure it aligned well with the others, both in terms of its theoretical framework and its inclusion of social issues. So while sites of analysis may have differed over the semester, ranging from advertisements to forms of literacy, each main unit moved from summary to analysis, and each built on the one before in order to move students from rhetorical to ideological analysis, a shift that I operationally defined as moving from how a text is constructed to achieve particular goals within specific contexts to what socio-ideological effects are produced by that text. Day-to-day activities were also consistent across units: small and large group discussions, peer-response workshops, teacher conferences, short in-class writing, and paper assignments that were taken through a process from brainstorming to editing. But there were several additional goals guiding my development of the final unit. While teaching the research-based paper as a genre, I wanted to focus discussions more specifically on gender and sexuality as socially produced constructs. Doing so would link the class to the regional debates over gay rights and the heterosexist campus discourse I had experienced as well as to issues associated with sexism. Moreover, I hoped the unit would unsettle the dominant logics foundational to such discourses.

The syllabus included a range of reading assignments from Cheryl Glenn’s *Making Sense: A New Rhetorical Reader*. They ran the gamut from fairly traditional materials such as Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl,” Judy Brady’s “I Want a Wife,” and Dave Barry’s “Guys vs. Men” to popular texts such as *Will & Grace* and texts that would create more discomfort, such as Barrie Jean Borich’s “What Kind of King,” in which the writer describes shopping for clothes with her butch partner in the men’s department at J.C. Penney.
As we began with the more traditional texts, students handled the transition to the unit well. Responding to Kincaid’s “Girl,” for example, students built on their previous discussions of gender and began talking about it as a fluid concept based on historical and material conditions, a construct that changes over time and varies across cultures. They also expertly identified mechanisms used to construct and discipline masculinity when asked to re-write the text such that it could be called “Boy.” One student even traced a normative pattern in his family; as his grandfather had beaten his father for growing his hair long, his father had beaten him for getting an earring because both were interpreted as signs that the young men were “becoming faggots.” Many of his peers nodded in understanding as the student described the familial pattern. But when the “becoming faggots” line was uttered, there was a bit of head shaking and some light laughter, prompted according to one student by the notion that you can simply “become” gay by choosing hair styles or accessories. I was shaking my head slightly as well, but not because of the idea that someone may choose to alter their performance of sexuality at any given time in their life, but that the class seemed to be accepting violence as a just form of discipline. To wit, unlike the discussions they had about domestic abuse, when students categorically denied the legitimacy of violence, an overwhelming portion of the class affirmed that physical assaults are legitimate attempts to promote and enforce proper (meaning heterosexual) behaviors.

In retrospect, the discussion at that point could have turned in any number of directions, such as the conflation of gender and personal expression with sexual preference or the purposes underlying the vigilant policing of masculinity. I asserted first what I thought was the most obvious and necessary thing to be said: violence is not a legitimate form of persuasion. I also admitted that I did not want to stifle conversation, but that it was hard for me as a teacher to negotiate a classroom discussion that took for granted the legitimacy of such violence. I could talk about the use of violence if it were a true discussion, based on interrogation and dialogue, but I could not out of hand perpetuate its legitimacy, as that would suggest all students, faculty, and staff on campus as well as members of the general community who happened to be or were perceived to be LGBT ought to be considered potential targets of assault. And as my syllabus asserted in its policies section, while differences of opinion were to be expected, we were also expected to learn to deal with them productively because the physical safety of class participants had to be a given. My comments stifled all conversation about the issue, of course. So I tabled any further discussion about the functions of violence for later sessions and moved on.

Specifically, I asked students to consider how the dirt-bike riding and earring examples related to each other. We moved beyond the obvious relatively quickly, as multiple students broke the ice by chirping, in
unison, that both examples related to gender. Their facial expressions as well as their simultaneous responses incited laughter, eased the tension of the previous discussion, and enabled us to collaborate again. Students ultimately linked the examples as active forms of social discipline that work to sustain gender constructs and the sorts of social relationships that they support. Training females to be sensitive and pretty and to care for others, for instance, sustains particular familial roles as well as hiring practices, pay structures, and social expectations. As one student asserted, “women are supposed to take care of everyone around them, including their husband, but then act like they need that man to take care of them.” And as a nursing student stated, “If gender policing primarily pumped men into heavy-hitting medical research jobs and women into nursing, no wonder you couldn’t get a prosthetic to fit a woman until recently; the male body was treated as the norm, as if its dimensions and characteristics are universal to all people.” Moreover, training males to be rugged individuals who strictly abide by masculine codes of performativity in their most traditional sense upholds the stereotypical behavioral distinctions between men and women, as well as a supposed distinction between men and gay men, and therefore functions to sustain a range of social practices based on those distinctions (such as paying less for women’s labor or bashing males for not fulfilling expectations of masculinity).

It didn’t take long before an us-versus-them tension began to build given the desire of many of the female students to interrogate what they called the unfair effects of gender codes. I guided the discussion away from questions like “Why do you guys try to be in charge of everything?” (they weren’t very effective) to ask the entire class for examples of how women enforce gender codes on other women. Complicating the deployment of gender in that way eased the tension a bit; the men in class no longer felt like targets. But it also revealed how women as well as men are implicated in the maintenance of gender and its related stereotypes, expectations, and unfair ramifications. As a result, I hoped students would consider how dealing with social issues isn’t usually as easy as identifying two sides to be pitted against each other. Issues must be analyzed systemically and people must be willing to explore their own participation in the reproduction of inequitable conditions.

With the notion of complicity—even when unintended—in mind, I asked them to consider several questions for the next class discussion, questions that would bring us back to gender, but also to sexuality and its enforcement in what I hoped would be productive ways: [1] If the image of the negative (that is the gay) is something against which we are consistently measured, by others as well as ourselves when considering how we want to present ourselves to the world, does the construction of identity itself require the existence of a marginalized, denigrated subject? [2] Even when
we are being taught to perform gender so that we will not appear or act gay, doesn’t the centrality of gayness somehow become so internalized that it is, in fact, a part of us? [3] If your neighbor were to argue that LGBT subjectivities were a threat to a person like you, how would he or she explain that stance?

The next class session focused mainly on the relationship between definition and identity, considering the first two questions, reserving the third for a freewrite activity that was linked to a discussion about providing support for assertions. Initially, the most vocal students secured their heterosexuality by suggesting that gayness had nothing to do with them, perhaps with the exception of not wanting people to think that they were gay. I responded theoretically, asking about definition as a concept and a process. The upshot was that to have an identity involves people defining themselves as well as being defined by others. And to be defined requires being understood in relation to something else. Any identity therefore necessarily includes the opposite. Furthermore, an identity position, once established, isn’t fixed. Maintaining an identity, such as heterosexual or feminine, and acting in accordance with the expectations of that category, means (however subconsciously much of it happens) repeatedly defining oneself against and rejecting the performances of other possible subjectivities. Thus, any identity is a dynamic category that is produced according to a process of perpetual performativity, as Judith Butler argues.

Even though most students had a much easier time talking about gender than sexuality, the majority ended up agreeing by the end of the class discussion that gayness, the cultural negative against which the proper was defined and measured, was an important factor in their lives; it was used to establish the parameters of acceptable emotions, clothing, hobbies, hair, attitudes, and friends, for instance. By considering the image of gay identity a commonplace that works to shape culture and their own identities, many students were able to invest in the unit. The theoretical identification they produced didn’t require them to take a stand on the legitimacy of LGBT people, to study gay people as specimens, or to politically (or religiously) debate LGBT rights. Rather, it constructed a cultural commonplace and asked students to identify the assumptions, expectations, social functions, and myriad forms of discipline associated with that commonplace.

This sort of indirect approach at the beginning of the unit may seem problematic. Rather than directly launching into the marriage debates and interrogating religious values or political inequities and reading articles documenting LGBT oppression, I tried to create an environment where all students would feel invested in and less marginalized by the material. I wanted to avoid the sort of confrontation that would fundamentally alter our ability to have productive group discussions. I wanted to assert physical safety as an expectation and a right at the same time that I destabilized
the students’ ideological safety, which relied on LGBT exclusion and marginalization. As did Winans in her work on race at a rural campus, then, I had to find a way to deal with outright hostile discourse as well as a layer of polite yet troubling discourse produced by students who didn’t want to appear homophobic. I chose to focus on some definitional work as a result, defining gender, sex, sexuality, identity formation, and definition itself. Doing so enabled the class to create a link among all subject positions, at least on a theoretical level, and to establish a sense of collaborative engagement. And from my perspective, those were the most productive sessions of the unit because we developed a tone of identification rather than separation—but they were only the first two days of the unit.

The tense, but often productive, discussions we established early in the unit took a turn as we progressed through the material, however; they gave way to student snickering, smirking, and kicking each other under the tables and then to more aggressive reactions. In response to a freewrite activity about what social conditions are threatened by LGBT inclusion and what conditions are protected by the enforcement of heterosexuality, one student explained that I was “working on behalf of sin.” In lieu of an informal in-class writing activity at another point, I was slipped a New Testament. And when I told a student that he might want to reconsider a thesis that asserted the obviously false claim that no straight person would watch Will & Grace, he got so irate that he yelled about how I was “making [him] talk about gays,” slammed his fist into a desk, gathered his books, and approached me with a swiftness that made me wonder if I was about to become his tackling dummy. He continued to yell as he got in my face: “I don’t like gays; they’re not normal! Anyone who wants crap on his dick is not a real man.” The rage evident in these comments was also evident in his paper draft, which made claims about gays not being “real” men, homosexuality being perverse, and diversity being an illegitimate area of college education.

I didn’t go into the course naïve enough to think that all students would be comfortable discussing diversity, or that they would appreciate diverse perspectives, populations, or texts. I expected a number of students to resist the work, either by not participating or by being antagonistic. Some of the materials would be difficult to teach even on larger and far more liberal campuses, after all. But if part of the discipline’s work, and a major objective of the course unit, is to conduct the sort of analysis that leads students to understand language and social practices in new ways, there’s bound to be tension, discomfort, uncertainty. Let’s face it: taking away the safety of simplicity, and revealing how discourse commonly perceived as liberal can be complicit with exclusionary practices, creates cognitive dissonance and asks students to position themselves on new intellectual ground. This movement will often be accompanied by a loss of composure.
because seeing the world in new ways can be painful. Understood in this regard, classrooms based on analyzing discourse ought to be uncomfortable places punctuated by difficult silences, confrontations, and occasional emotional bursts. The ethos of the classroom community based on the notion of everyone getting along in a tranquil apolitical setting just doesn’t seem to fit diversity work.

Because the politics of the contact zone create tension, I was expecting it. In fact, to an extent, I wanted it—but I also wanted to control it, limit it, determine what it would be like. So I had certainly considered options for dealing with heterosexist discourse in the classroom. When I was confronted with the student’s rage, then, I knew I could focus on commas and quotes, paying attention to issues of correctness in the student’s paper draft rather than actually challenging his tirade—something that Richard Miller and David Rothgery both might urge me not to do, and that very much felt like copping out. I knew I could yell back. I knew I could appear to remain relatively calm. I knew I could come out. I knew I could do any number of things. And, even though I was surprised by how quickly my own feelings of physical and psychological safety eroded, I figured I could handle the immediate situation. A majority of the students had already left, as it was a workshop day and they were doing small-group work down the hall, in the cafeteria, and in the student lounge. And if all else failed, there were two doors to the classroom, an administrative office one floor down, and a campus security office nearby.

But what did I actually do? I stood my ground and tried to turn his outburst into a learning moment. Rather than escalating into a shouting match, asking him to calm down, or backing away, I tried to defuse the moment’s intensity and then analyze the discourse (not the student, but the discursive structures that had been presented) in order to model the process of inquiry that students had been asked to engage all semester. While looking him in the eye, and waving off another male student who had moved from the back of the room toward the front in what I thought was going to be an effort to intervene on my behalf, I told him that I understood that he was upset: he had struggled to earn the grades he wanted on the previous assignments; his current paper required extensive revision to earn a passing grade; he had difficult assignments in all of his other courses to worry about as well; and his daughter had been sick, requiring more of his time than usual. I admitted, too, that I would likely be feeling overwhelmed were I in his shoes. But he had just charged at a member of the campus community—and a professor to boot—in a threatening manner and needed to calm down. “If you can’t maintain control and be respectful of everyone in this room, then walk away now and come to my office hours to talk about this incident and your revision strategy. Or, you can participate in the remainder of the class session. Either way, the rest of this session will
focus on what just happened.” He walked away. He never did come back, for reasons I later found out were entirely personal. And when he finally did resurface, months later, he called to apologize.

After he walked out, however, the remaining students didn’t seem to know quite what to do. They looked at the ground, out the window, at each other, never landing on one spot for very long and rarely making eye contact with me. I asked them to look at me, told them everything was okay, and said it was a perfect time for us to talk—to talk about what happened and what it means, to analyze the discourse that had been deployed. So I asked about the rhetoric of threats, specifically its purpose. “In this case,” said one student, “to get a higher grade, to make you lose face in front of us, maybe to get us to confront you too, and to scare you and these sorts of conversations away from campus.” Another student said, “I’m not sure. But threats are used to assert a division, to say what’s normal. And I only know what people around here think is normal, and what they want you to think is normal. And they want you to think it’s okay to be sexist and to hate gays.” On his way out, the young man who I had waved away earlier said over his shoulder, “Him rushing you like that, trying to make you scared, was an attempt to redefine what your class, and college, are allowed to be.”

I may never be satisfied with how I handled the situation. I still think about ways I could have rebounded differently, engaged the class and that student in other ways. But over the course of the next week or so, many students moved from asserting violence is a reasonable way to patrol the borders of gender and sexuality to feeling sorry for people who experience violence or the threat of it. Rather than feeling sorry for people who are attacked, and allowing that emotion to define a liberal stance of inclusion, I suggested that ideological analysis move us beyond emotion to a systemic interrogation of the myriad ways that sexuality is patrolled and regulated so we can determine what is actually being protected and at what cost. And according to their evaluations of the course, some good came from the outburst and my efforts to engage it productively. Students noted, for example, that most conversations end where ours began, and that they weren’t “let off the hook” but had to “keep thinking about hard issues” and how others are affected by their words, beliefs, and votes—by the discourse they participate in.

Because students felt challenged, wrote complex papers interrogating the means by which sexuality and gender are patrolled, and even questioned social regulations, I felt the class went well. They improved as readers and writers. They learned to struggle more productively with difficult issues and to talk about that struggle. They learned to more carefully identify claims, analyze evidence, and respond analytically to texts. They also learned to better craft and substantiate their own claims.
Even given the successes along the way, though, the class was frequently riddled with anxiety. There were days when I dreaded walking into the room. Many sleepless nights before class, I tried to figure out how to respond to a student comment from the previous session, how to address the reading assignment, or what to do about the guys in the back row who wore smirks wider than the brims of their baseball caps. There were stacks of hate-filled papers; even though many weren’t intended to be so, they were. The discourse in these papers was then brought back into the classroom, made integral to the revision process. When a student asserted that she thought gays should be left alone to do what they wanted to do, as long as they were behind closed doors, for instance, we interrogated the assumptions and logic of that stance. When a student said isolation is the only legal response to LGBT behaviors, we discussed it—as well as similar logics based on a “let them alone to kill themselves off” attitude, such as those sometimes deployed to discuss homelessness or inner-city violence. When a student articulated that gay men are pedophiles, we addressed that logic as well. It’s important to note, though, we also interrogated positive assertions, such as civic marriages ought be legalized for all couples.

Given the rigor of analysis, it’s not surprising that students felt the anxiety as much as I did. They admitted that there were days when they didn’t want to come to class, either, knowing it was going to be tense and intense, even exhausting as social narratives, personal values, and cultural logics were assessed, analyzed, and as one student asserted, “thought to death.” So even as successful as the class was in some ways, it was equally taxing. And in terms of altering a campus climate, it was only one class, only one group of 20 students. It was, literally, only the beginning. Although impressed with their writing and their burgeoning analytical skills, I was emotionally drained and unsure I could teach classes like that every semester. I had to face it: I couldn’t be the queer crusader any more than the then-one professor of color could teach the campus to be anti-racist.

Although only one student publicly lost composure in an explosive manner, many students—both in the class and on the larger campus—were likely to identify with the feelings and reactions that spurred his outburst. And the emotional energy required to wage diversity classes in rural areas is remarkable. Therefore, it stands to reason that challenging heterosexist ideology and angry reactions to diversity requires a community rather than an individualist solution. But it’s ironic, really; as it sunk in that the work to be done was immense, and that my composition course can only go so far to alter the hostile climate, it was also becoming clearer how the composition program itself could be integral to, if not a leader of, the campus efforts to create change.
As a program responsible for providing comprehensive education in critical literacy, and as the only first-year course on my campus that engages each and every first-year student, composition is poised to participate in literacy programs that challenge students in and outside of writing classes. In the remainder of this paper, then, I’d like to describe a cultural literacy program that emerged on campus. Many people who became involved in the program did so because they were dedicated to staying in hostile contexts and realized the need for local pedagogies, practical strategies, and holistic approaches that can produce greater levels of access and support for the inclusion of LGBT faculty, staff, students, and experiences. I will not argue that the cultural pedagogy I advocate or its holistic campus strategy is the way to positively affect all colleges. I will not even suggest that compositionists are the best people to do this work. I will suggest, though, that such a systemic approach can be deployed to pre-queer a campus such as mine. I will also suggest that given our contact hours with all students and the size of our programs as well as the role of those programs, we are well positioned to do this work. And the cultural model works to establish the groundwork necessary for productive discussions of diversity that we may wish to generate in composition courses. Moreover, by spreading the pedagogical responsibility across the curriculum, it may more effectively counter the hegemony of heterosexism in regions where “diversity educators” interested in posing questions about subjectivity, power, and the material effects of language are interpreted as ideologues.

The Campus as Classroom—A Cultural Pedagogy Broadly Construed

Disrupting the status quo is easy if it’s understood as producing a loss of composure—a rupture, however minor, in the tranquility experienced by students, faculty, or campuses that have happily sustained exclusive values and effectively patrolled the institution, disciplining others such that they leave, go straight pedagogically, or simply shut up. But systemically altering the heterosexist culture of a campus is not easy. At the very least, it requires a holistic approach that integrates all facets of campus life in order to better address the many factors that coalesce to create exclusion in the first place. A writing course such as I’ve described is only one aspect of such a program.

Perhaps the first question that must be addressed, before even talking about a comprehensive literacy program that integrates issues of diversity, though, may be why composition? Why add to the already time-consuming workloads and the already difficult work of teaching writing? What positions
that disciplinary area and its teachers to participate in the coordination of campus-wide programs such as the one I advocate?

When it comes to diversity, teachers are often masters of theory who need pragmatic strategies to create change, strategies that can create social pressures, relationships, and activities that engender diversity. And I believe compositionists ought to play an integral role in the work for several reasons. Because we engage all new students, for instance, we’re in a position to talk to the administration about intellectual and social trends in the student population. Moreover, we are central to all first-year experiences, not only in terms of retention, but also in terms of establishing an intellectual trajectory for students. Creating a dynamic first-year experience that extends far beyond the walls of a single classroom is critical to campus and student success. And as literacy educators dedicated to strengthening the methods by which people read and write, we’re in a position to create cross-campus partnerships that facilitate that goal. Moreover, as typically one of the largest programs on campus, composition is pivotal to the university mission, and can function as an important site of organization and dissemination. Composition can thusly leverage its institutional size, purpose, and program to generate a local pedagogy and a comprehensive first-year experience in reading and writing that is attentive to issues of diversity and critical thought.

To broadly conceive pedagogy as everything that happens on campus provides innumerable points of potential intervention in the process of social production. Targeting three primary areas of concentration—the administration, the curriculum, and the larger campus culture—can reinforce the initial loss of ideological composure experienced by students, such as the one who yelled at me during class. Moreover, it can play an important role in producing the repeated exposure to diversity education often required to transition from gut responses and reactionary politics to sustained analysis and cultural inclusion.

Because the tone set by the administration profoundly affects colleges and their communities, especially on small campuses in small towns where students frequently interact with campus leaders and where administrators participate on local boards and governing committees, persuading campus officers to make a concerted effort to lead the community toward an appreciation—and celebration—of diversity is critical to altering hostile contexts. In short, the actions of administrators model behavioral expectations for students as well as the local citizenry. Thus, as leaders, they need to both enable and participate in inclusion so that when the actions of the campus and its leaders are “read” by students and members of the community, they read a text that models diversity appreciation. It would be unreasonable to expect that all administrators are friendly to diversity, of course, especially to LGBT issues. However, if diversity initiatives already
exist, then so do the means to hold leaders accountable to those initiatives, whether through annual evaluations, strategic planning, hotlines to report behavior, or other avenues of institutional review. Even loosely organized climate surveys (and online surveys can be created and implemented at very little expense) can make a large impact, generating concern at central campuses and on governance boards.

When administrators appreciate diversity, other strategies to bolster the climate include encouraging them to hire LGBT faculty even if that person may not be retained long term. Although administrators see the financial stake in retention, they also tend to see the stake in campus growth, growth earned by hiring strong faculty (not just faculty that will stay indefinitely) who can make a mark on programs and the intellectual culture of a region. Certainly, however, regions that are fairly hostile to those new hires will require procedures for individual and professional support. Merely settling for the visibility created by out faculty or pointing to policies of academic freedom when confronted with student complaints is not enough. The interests and clout of all friendly administrators can be leveraged to demonstrate the legitimacy of diversity education and representation on campus and in the community. Supporting faculty when student complaints can be linked to backlash, inviting LGBT faculty into the networks of campus leadership, and asking LGBT citizens to serve on campus advisory and review boards are important strategies for setting the tone on a campus, for instance.

While composition instructors cannot make these things happen, we can be advocates of diversity initiatives that hold administrators accountable to quantifiable support. We can lobby friendly audiences in positions of power and consistently keep our issues on the table. And through faculty senate committees we can create policies that ensure diversity advocates are on all hiring and review committees. Moreover, via rhetorical appeals based on campus mission statements, we can articulate the need for comprehensive education and regular strategic planning and follow-through that makes diversity a theoretical and material priority. At an even more practical level, professors can create a cadre of safety for each other as they often strive to do for students—one or more groups of advanced faculty can actively mentor and support new faculty, use their tenure as a shield to advocate for progressive campus change, and challenge peers who use the classroom to denounce diversity or the legitimacy of critical academic pursuits.

In addition to such administrative and professional support, challenging the normalcy of LGBT exclusion requires dedication at the curricular level as well. On campuses with diversity requirements for all students, it’s often easy to pretend that alternative experiences, histories, and cultures are adequately addressed. But this curricular model can actually marginalize diversity education by suggesting it belongs in one or two isolated courses.
rather than in all courses. Rather than relying on a course here and there, an integrated cross-campus model can reinforce the importance of and expectations for diversity, place the responsibility for diversity training on all instructors rather than one or two, coordinate coursework with a cultural series of speakers, movies, and other events, and protect individual faculty members from accusations of politicizing the classroom based on their personal agendas. It’s in this area that composition may have the most promise and influence.

In short, composition instructors are often the only teachers on small campuses who have extensive training in pedagogy. We’re often taught how to teach, not just what content ought to be taught. We often study teaching. And teaching is as much, sometimes more, a concern than research. As a result, we’re sometimes poised to enhance instruction in ways that other members of our communities aren’t. Many of us, in fact, do similar work already via programs in writing across the curriculum; we help other faculty to create assignments and course units for their content areas. As teachers of reading and writing with experience teaching about issues of difference, we can tap into these existing relationships with faculty to generate broader use of writing-to-learn activities, increase student experience with issues of difference, produce knowledge of the respective discipline, and reinforce student abilities to analyze discourse. A teacher of Math, for example, may value diversity but be unsure about how to make it productive and relevant to her course when she already struggles to cover all the material. She could alter her statistics assignment by asking students to go beyond calculating results. A short writing assignment asking them to consider the disparate results that they find, such as those associated with race or class and diabetes or AIDS diagnoses, would illustrate the extent to which mathematical results—a type of language—require analysis while also encouraging students to explore the relationship between race, class, region, and a particular disease. An alternative assignment could ask students to study and tabulate statistics related to employment and salary equity. Students would thusly learn to calculate results while also being exposed to larger disciplinary and institutional practices. Courses ranging from History to Sociology to English to Mining Technologies could incorporate local histories that speak more directly to the politics and demographics of the region and our students, such as issues of gender, sexuality, and class in the contexts of coal mining and unionization.

Treating instruction in diversity as a matter of discourse, as a matter of language, power, and material circumstances, enables composition faculty simultaneously to teach the content, to teach about the discipline, and to encourage critical thinking about issues of diversity. Moreover, it enables faculty in composition to leverage their training in pedagogy
and critical analysis to create a campus community defined by—not infrequently punctuated by—courses inclusive of diversity that train critical readers and writers.

Creating a cultural pedagogy that reaches into all corners of campus life, however, does not privilege the classroom proper; it also makes use of non-classroom spaces as overtly pedagogical spaces—spaces that can teach, spaces to be read, spaces to be written. Office doors, bulletin boards, bookcases, and walls are purposeful sites for creating visibility, establishing a tone of acceptance, and sharing information. They offer powerful opportunities to create a linguistic impact on the campus. An impact, in turn, that illustrates the power of language to affect culture. Blanketing the campus with diversity affirming materials is only part of this pedagogy, though, just as coursework is only part of the picture. It is also important to create the frameworks for understanding and discussing issues of social difference as we would in a classroom setting. To facilitate this work in my context meant joining forces with the Diversity Task Force and strategizing ways to proliferate extra-curricular diversity education across campus.

We began our work by carefully coordinating a speaker series to educate attendees, humanize difference, create an ethos of compassion, and enrich materials being presented in courses. Speakers addressed issues of sexuality, alcoholism, and domestic violence. Then we worked to generate support among the faculty for a Cultural Center. Once we had a population of supporters, we lobbied the administration for their support, presenting a formal proposal that drew on the university and campus mission statements as well as their statements on diversity to explain how a Center would support students, educate members of the campus and local community, and coordinate faculty and staff training opportunities. Given the multiple cultural centers located on the single, large campus that acts as our hub, demonstrating successful models wasn’t difficult. The issue quickly became a matter of what would be housed there, who would do the work on our campus, who would pay for it, and how would we get people to visit.

To address these concerns we knew we must be respectful of local culture while also representing diversity and advocating greater inclusion. As a result, the Center presents histories deemed acceptable by the local community, such as histories of labor in the coal and coke heritage, alongside histories of women, Indians, African Americans, Hispanics, and LGBT cultures. The Center supplements these materials with critical theories of race, sex, class, gender, and sexuality as well as texts about anger management, hate crime, and domestic violence, and links these pedagogical efforts to corporate hiring priorities and the university’s mandate for diversity in order to reinforce how an authority higher than the campus’s Diversity Group deems the material critical to personal, intellectual, economic, and community development. The Center’s theme
each semester is also linked to at least one course being offered on campus in order to supplement the formal curriculum. And Health Awareness Activities often dovetail with our activities, incorporating presentations and testing that align with our themes. Members of the community are invited to attend cultural programs at least once per semester, such as presentations by Chinese Dragon Dance teams, groups that perform traditional African drumming, or gay citizens who were once members of the military. Most of the funds for the Cultural Center materials come from donations at the speaker events and cultural activities that we sponsor as well as student activity fees; we also use a modest chunk of the modest budget allocated to the Diversity Task Force to facilitate the university’s diversity mission.

Although few educators question that the classroom is an important social space full of promise, conflict, and potential, many of us also realize that one teacher, one classroom, one pedagogical attempt to rupture inequitable conditions is not likely to unravel the logic of heterosexism that pervades many of our communities. Certainly, discussions of particular syllabi models and writing assignments are important to the work I advocate. But for some of us, other practical work needs to get done, too; otherwise, we risk being lone voices, sole figures rather easily taken down. Developing a holistic approach of cultural pedagogy can put the onus of diversity education on the entire campus. And published scholarship attesting to this can provide us ammunition as we argue for policy changes, course developments, and professional mentoring programs.

Even with comprehensive literacy programs and cultural pedagogies, we will still have difficult confrontations with students—and perhaps colleagues. With all the changes that have taken place on my campus, there are still times when I feel I can’t be out enough, hidden enough, butch enough, femme enough, confrontational enough, or motherly enough to affect more change. There are moments when I think I can’t yell enough, cry enough, laugh enough, or be strong enough to make a difference because the culture of fear remains profound. But by teaching students to engage language critically, by creating courses across the curriculum that encourage open discussions of difference, and by creating a campus environment respectful of diversity, the work does get easier. After all, if one of the primary forces in the production of culture is language, it is through critical analysis of language, its assumptions, and its material realities that we can alter that culture. And even though many people on small campuses may lament what they lose by teaching in such a context, it is the small-campus environment that provides us magnificent opportunities to alter a climate, to develop a curriculum, and to create social change.
Notes

1. The diversity designation can be given to a class when 25 percent of its materials represent diversity, either in content or authorship. Much debate surrounded the low percentage of materials required to earn the designation, but that line of inquiry is not one that I wish to pursue in this paper.

2. The fact that conference presentations rather than printed articles seem to dominate this era isn’t surprising given the historical context. During the 1970s, for instance, much composition scholarship was focused on legitimating the discipline itself, and cognitive research was a major trend. Moreover, it was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association reversed their position that had hitherto linked LGBT subjectivity to illness. And according to John D’Emilio, it also wasn’t until 1973 that the Gay Academic Union was formed in New York, a broad-based organization interested in addressing the needs and concerns of LGBT scholars.

3. See discussions in Gary David Comstock’s Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men, or Gregory Herek and Kevin Berrill’s Hate Crimes.

4. A thorough review of the history is beyond the scope of this piece. Jonathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson offer a more detailed history in their 2004 JAC essay.

5. Students considered, for instance, how certain knowledges (such as the ability to golf well, to analyze stock portfolios, to follow instructions but not to solve abstract problems) seem not only more accessible to members of particular demographics, but also integral to the social production of those groups.

6. Campuses affiliated with large universities may have more leverage to persuade the administration that access and tolerance are inadequate, and that acceptance and overt support are necessary because even if they are geographically distant from the “main” campus site, the faculty and students often have recourse to the policies and protections established by that campus.

7. It’s important to note that an economy of scale guided the development of the Center. In other words, while a large Research I campus might have several centers, each dedicated to a particular cultural group or category of diversity, smaller campuses may have to start with one center that provides a range of materials. Moreover, that center may have to be developed on a shoe-string budget, borrowing materials from the library or from the personal collections held by faculty, and culling together funds from university diversity initiatives, already established university organizations that offer small grants for programming, local community non-profit organizations, and slivers of student-activity fees that can be used to secure speakers and to purchase textual materials.
Works Cited


Mentoring Peer Mentors: Mentor Education and Support in the Composition Program

E. Shelley Reid

If you work in the field of composition and rhetoric, you have very likely participated in a mentoring program, as a teaching assistant (TA), faculty member, or program director. After all, even fifteen years ago, Allene Cooper and D. G. Kehl found that more than two-thirds of the composition programs they surveyed incorporated a mentoring program for graduate teaching assistants (27). Praise for such programs, both anecdotal and research-supported (e.g., Williams), has continued to be strong enough that Scott Miller et al. argue that mentoring “should become a given in rhetoric and composition programs” (405). While faculty-to-faculty mentoring in composition occurs both in formal and informal situations, and some new-teacher-mentoring continues to be done by full-time faculty, Stephen Wilhoit notes that much of our mentoring is now being done by graduate teaching assistants working with other TAs. Indeed, writing program administrators (WPAs) who supervise TAs can now find plenty of resources recommending that WPAs implement peer-mentoring programs; some even recommending what mentors might do in those programs (see Barr Ebest, das Bender, Hansen et al., Martin and Paine, and Weiser). This scholarship supports mentoring as part of a comprehensive, multifaceted education for TAs who are teaching composition. The literature on teacher-preparation pays scant attention, however, to the task of mentor-preparation. Ironically, while composition scholars adamantly deconstruct the myth that “good writers (naturally, without further study or practice) make good teachers,” the field, given the silence about mentoring, still appears to be acting under the belief that “good teachers make good peer mentors,” or that mentoring strategies will—and perhaps should—develop “naturally” rather than by design.

Yet good mentoring (like good writing, like good teaching) should not be seen as a product solely of talent and goodwill, something the lucky stumble upon. Being an ambassador between one’s friends or colleagues and one’s institution is not a natural state. All institutional mentoring situations, including those involving full-time or part-time faculty as well as TAs, pose challenges that can and should be addressed through explicit attention to mentor preparation. Peer-to-peer mentoring among graduate students is particularly fraught with interpersonal challenges and authority quagmires, as issue I have chosen as the focal point of this article (though
many of the suggestions below apply to other mentoring situations as well). Specifically, I argue that TA peer mentoring programs need more formal support through well-articulated programmatic structures and through multifaceted mentor education that includes time for theorizing, practice, and reflection. In support of that claim, I draw on mentoring scholarship as well as mentoring experience (my observations as a WPA overseeing peer-mentoring and mentor-education programs for four years, along with the comments of ten TA peer mentors I worked with during that time) to describe the resistances and challenges that peer mentors face. I then describe specific steps that we can take to improve mentor education and support in two ways: indirectly, by clearly articulating a mentoring program’s goals and assessing its performance, and directly, by creating opportunities for mentors to investigate mentoring challenges as well as to study and practice specific mentoring strategies.

It’s Not Like Falling in Love: Denaturalizing Mentoring for Peer Mentors

[It was hard] dealing with mentees who felt the mentor program . . . [suggested] they weren’t capable of teaching alone . . . who were insulted by the mere idea.

[How do you communicate] that a mentor is not an assistant DA, poised to prosecute or bring charges . . . ?

[I did not] have the authority to really “do” anything if the situations called for it.

[How could I] be a mentor . . . to someone with whom I was a friend?

—George Mason University (GMU) Peer Mentors

It can be tempting to see mentoring through a romantic lens, in which “[m]entors are attracted to protégés who demonstrate dedication, enthusiasm, [and] intelligence” (Collins, qtd. in Otto 18). It can also be pleasant to hope for mentoring to be as unobtrusive as oxygen: “I didn’t know I was being mentored when I was being mentored” (Marshall vii). Indeed, as Marie Wunsch notes, “Informal mentoring [can rely] on natural selection, personality congruence, and happenstance. It usually evolves slowly over time as pairs learn to know and trust one another” (“Developing” 29). This idea of mentoring outlines a process that can make both mentor and mentee feel special; it seems to require very little effort; and it meshes nicely with US and academic cultures’ emphasis on an individualistic
meritocracy. Thus WPAs, or other faculty, who want to increase the support and education their program provides mentors may face some resistance or reluctance to implement formal structures from people who would rather trust to a “natural progression” of mentoring relationships. Yet while some romantic mythologies of mentoring can initially energize the people who create and participate in mentoring, they can also seriously undermine efforts to sustain a mentoring program, and they do little to help new peer mentors. Program directors may thus find it helpful to start by directly confronting the flaws inherent in overly-simplistic views of mentoring, and by consulting with current or previous mentors about the specific challenges of mentoring one’s peers.

WPAs and TA mentors alike may be attracted to peer mentoring because they see opportunities for developing relationships that are less hierarchical and less institutionally-inflected than those elsewhere in academia. Anything that interferes in the growth of that “natural” trust—such as a formalized program of mentoring activities—can thus seem counterproductive. Yet Wunsch reminds us that “in an academic institution, no relationship is purely personal” (“New” 10), particularly relationships in which one person is assigned a leadership role. Moreover, Melvin C. Terrell and R. Kipp Hassell report on a study (by Mary Beth Rice and Robert D. Brown) showing that students “with the greater need for . . . mentoring. . . . for example shy, less assertive students with lower self-esteem, are less likely to seek enrollment in formal mentoring programs” (37), and much less likely to seek out or take full advantage of informal mentors. Left to grow naturally, then, peer mentoring would be slow (Mary Otto suggests that the “initiation phase” might take two years or more [21]), and it would be haphazard, reaching only some of the people who need it. In addition, such mentoring could reinforce rather than enliven the local institutional culture, since mentors tend to choose and attend to mentees who resemble them. In other words, they might overlook the needs and/or contributions of women, members of ethnic/racial minority groups, or others whose status or work place them outside the mainstream of the organizational, local, or national culture. To create a successful mentoring program for new composition teachers, mentors and WPAs need to acknowledge that peer mentoring is an institutional endeavor, and treat it as such. To provide guidance to all participants, they must design mentoring protocols and describe clear boundaries to guide all participants.

Providing mentor education can be as important—if as unromantic—as establishing clear program structures. It is true that, as Sara Stelzner points out, TA peer mentors already “understand the problems that arise from the student/teacher juggling act . . . [and can be] easier to approach for advice on classroom difficulties” than faculty (5-6). The “natural” position and knowledge of a peer mentor can be an invaluable asset. Yet the varying
degrees to which TAs see themselves, or are seen, as students or professional colleagues, as learners or practitioners, as scholars or workers—or, often, as something between these states—seriously complicates relationships among peer mentors and mentees. Fortunately, research into pedagogical practices, adult education, interpersonal communication strategies, and conflict-resolution approaches show us that some learnable behaviors can improve complex interpersonal interactions. Mentoring programs do not need to rely only on participants’ instincts as they negotiate difficult social waters: nothing need be lost through increasing mentors’ formal education, and there is much to gain.

Finally, while WPAs and mentors may already have moved beyond these romantic views, they may still feel that they cannot afford to invest additional time and resources in yearly mentor education. (The presence of peer mentors often testifies to the insufficient resources of a composition program as much as it represents an affirmative commitment to the benefits of peer mentoring.) Yet these mentors—who may have only a year or two of teaching writing under their belts, who need to develop a constructive mentoring relationship with a complete stranger almost immediately, and upon whom rests significant responsibility for teacher preparation in the program—urgently need explicit education and support for the mentoring program to fulfill its potential. It is not always true that “some mentoring is better than no mentoring at all,” particularly given the time investment and emotional risks mentors often face. Formalizing mentoring and mentor education can make the most of, rather than further deplete, limited resources.

**Home-Grown Mentoring: Attending to Local Contexts**

Mentor education should, of course, be developed to match the needs of local mentors. At GMU, the two-semester first-year composition sequence is staffed almost entirely by 50-60 graduate TAs, about half of whom are MA students who generally enter with no teaching experience, and about half of whom are PhD students, some of whom have taught composition before. TAs with no teaching experience were, at the point when our mentor-education revisions began, assigned to a year (later cut to a semester) of tutoring in the university writing center while they observed the classes of senior TAs and took a composition pedagogy seminar; TAs with teaching experience moved directly to the classroom and, in most cases, also enrolled in the pedagogy class. Even with those arrangements and the guidance provided by common syllabi for each of the composition courses, the two WPAs—Director and Associate Director—would have struggled to provide adequate support for fifteen to twenty new TAs every year, plus support and review for another thirty to forty TAs.
(and a dozen or so adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty). Like many large composition programs, then, we relied heavily on peer mentors to help with teacher preparation and professional development (see Reid).

When I took the survey—which serves as the source for the comments in this article—we had positions for four senior TA mentors at GMU each year to support the teaching assistants; typically, these Assistant Directors (ADs) served a two-year term. The ADs, compensated for their work by one course release each semester, provided formal and informal support to all TAs and assisted with program-wide curriculum development: they facilitated monthly professional development group meetings, gathered or supplied course materials for our website, and helped design and lead our orientation and professional development workshops each August. Perhaps most importantly, they were also responsible in large part for the sustained individual mentoring of our first-year teachers. The difficulties of balancing multiple roles were most evident in this Intensive Mentoring program, requiring each AD to mentor about five new TAs for the year.

Four elements of our local program—elements common in other programs, though perhaps the combination is unique—also affected our ADs in their work with these new teachers. Two elements had to do with the characteristics of the incoming students: their diversity of teaching experience and range of professional goals. While some of our new MA students were fresh out of college, some of our new PhD students had already taught composition for two or more years at another school; each kind of student needed and wanted (or did not want) different things from our mentoring program. Students at GMU were also pursuing a broad range of intellectual and professional trajectories, which influenced their interrelationships with other students as well as their outlook on teaching, on teaching composition, and on being intensively coached in their composition teaching. Some were MA or PhD students studying literature, of course, but many others were pursuing MAs or PhDs in creative or technical writing, often planning for careers that would not involve any teaching at all.

The other two important characteristics were administrative in nature: our use of a common textbook and syllabus, and our not-unrelated need—drawn from personal concern but also influenced by institutional pressure—to have some oversight over what was happening in TA-taught classrooms. For every new (or new-to-GMU) teacher who was deeply grateful to be able to work from a common course-outline—ours presented a fairly mainstream curriculum of academic writing, argumentation, and research—another found the requirement restrictive, counterproductive, or insulting. TAs in that latter group especially often viewed the ADs as playing a policing role; given the program directors’ need to meet expectations of quality and commonality among composition sections, those concerns
were not entirely unfounded. Those of us involved in first-year composition programs know how the institutional challenges involved in staging a highly-visible general-education sequence while relying on some of the institution’s least-prepared instructors can raise the stakes for everyone involved, further intensifying the pressures on anyone with an “official” role to play. So while, as I note below, all the best advice on mentoring insists that it produces the best results when the mentoring is flexible, formative, and separated from evaluative review, our best efforts were not always enough to achieve those goals smoothly within our institutional context.

By sharing their experiences in navigating all these variables, our ADs were instrumental in helping us develop education and support resources for peer mentoring in our local program. The comments reported in this essay, taken from the survey responses of ten current and former ADs, are emblematic of the less formal discussions we had as we designed and refined the mentoring and mentor-education programs. While the ADs’ situations were defined by local contexts at GMU, the complications they identify are commonly noted in the literature on mentoring, and so may provide useful opening insights for faculty at other institutions as they prepare to query their own peer mentors.

Our ADs, not surprisingly, reported a mixture of self-confidence and self-doubt about their work as mentors. Some of the survey responses support a conclusion that peer mentors can contribute strongly to a writing program without specific education or intervention. ADs at GMU had all applied for the position by submitting a teaching portfolio and a letter describing their interest in the position, so it is not surprising that they had ready answers to the survey question, “What part of the AD work came naturally to you?” Some noted that they already felt “naturally” comfortable “taking on a leadership role” or “leading sessions or meetings,” though most of the roles they noted were more passive or social: making the initial contact over lunch, addressing specific questions asked of me, providing advice, being able to simply talk about teaching, and sitting in on classes. They also reported mentoring successes that were primarily social, such as the increased willingness of their mentees to ask their advice or even to “[call] regularly just to chat about comp classes.” And when the ADs were asked specifically, in two separate questions, about what they could point to beyond their own teaching experience that helped prepare them to be good mentors, sixteen out of twenty responses were firmly grounded in their personal experiences prior to becoming an AD, with only a single response noting that the mentoring workshops had been beneficial.

Yet WPAs who hear similar comments from their local peer mentors should not take them as indication that all mentors are intuiting their way to complete success; at GMU, these responses told only part of the story. When
asked in two questions to describe challenges and distressing situations in peer mentoring, only one of nearly fifty items the ADs listed referred to a purely pedagogical or mentee-comfort issue like the ones noted above. The top concerns included: coping with a resistant or unsuccessful mentee (ten responses) and deciding if a program director should be notified in such a case (five responses); balancing what one person called “the ethical dilemma of serving students, the instructors, and the program” (seven responses), along with related concerns about handling the authority of their position (six responses); and managing their mentoring time and boundaries (five responses). Frequently, their worst-case scenarios involved several of these sticky situations twined together:

The most difficult part . . . was when I had a mentee who was simply not cut out to be a teacher . . . . Mentoring became a burden for me as [the mentee] began to rely on me to do [his/her] job. Then I had to decide whether to take on [the mentee’s] work or report [him/her]. Sharing things we discussed or things I saw in [the mentee’s] classroom with program directors seemed to be a violation of our mentor relationship. At the same time, my only alternative was to double my own workload. I guess issues of authority make mentoring difficult.

It is likely that no amount of preparation would have made handling such a situation easy. And not all programs expect their peer mentors to take on all the roles required of the GMU ADs, who did have some responsibility for promoting elements of a common syllabus and policies, along with responsibility for endeavoring to help all their mentees prepare for and improve their teaching. However, even when TA peer mentors are not supposed to have an overt supervisory role, they are likely to face not just personal difficulties but professional and ethical challenges:

I had one mentee who resented my intrusion. . . . I felt bad about it all semester. . . . I wish I hadn’t taken [it] personally.

[It was] distressing [to be] working with a mentee who ignored advice to correct a problem.

As a student (and a peer to many of the TAs I mentored), any instance that required me to adopt a position of authority usually caused difficulty.

I don’t always agree [with] the ways in which the program specifics are structured. . . . I find the [text]book a real issue. . . . All of these combine to make it challenging to support TAs in succeeding in a structured program.

In the mentoring workshops at GMU we came to define our core mentoring challenges as “Crossing the Lines” (see Fig. 1), identifying a series of decision-making points where the ADs had to balance support and critique, authority and camaraderie, and their own needs along with those of the program and of their mentees.
Wait for contact or Initiate contact?

If contact happens, Observe or Intervene?

If intervention happens, Describe or Evaluate?

If evaluation happens, Support or Critique?

And finally,

Reflect for Consideration (confidentially) or Report Externally?

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To help prepare mentors to anticipate these “lines” and solve other problems, including those posed by very local conditions, we focused on improving two aspects of mentor-program support, as I describe below: refining and more clearly articulating the official structures of the program, and developing resources and workshops to enable more practice in and reflection on mentoring strategies. All of our efforts were directed toward helping peer mentors develop confidence and broader abilities as mentors, by becoming more aware of what they could accomplish and how they might accomplish it, as well as what they couldn’t (or didn’t need to) accomplish as peer mentors. That is, we aimed to have our mentors—like our teachers—develop examined expertise, a strong complement to any natural talents they brought to their mentoring work (see Rudney and Guillaume 9-10). While in mentoring, as in writing and teaching, conscious strategizing and increased reflection can sometimes lessen the spontaneity and flow of a really good day, taking steps to denaturalize and clarify the roles of peer mentors can improve the efficacy of the program across many mentoring-days.

**Program Design as Mentor Support: Boundaries and Expectations**

Composition programs that include extensive peer mentoring among graduate student teachers are usually well ahead of the curve in educating university-level faculty. Thus, much of the scholarship that takes the next step and provides specific information about mentor-education and program development comes not from analysis of university-level programs but from the work of scholars focusing on K-12 teacher-mentor programs. While I draw on that scholarship substantially in this article, I also keep in mind that the transience and paraprofessional status of graduate TAs places additional stresses on—and provides interesting opportunities for—TA peer-mentoring programs. In outlining recommendations for program development and mentor education, then, I have chosen and adapted
procedures to best support intensive, short-term mentoring that involves peer mentors who are less experienced than K-12 mentor-teachers. WPAs who are matching advanced-beginners with beginning peers, and who anticipate moving each pair through a whole mentoring cycle in one or two semesters, may find that taking the steps listed below—in order to formalize mentoring goals and boundaries—can help reassure the participants and enable more productive interactions. Faculty and mentors will, of course, need to adapt the recommendations listed in the four categories below to provide the best support possible within their own local contexts; indeed, clarifying the exact nature of local expectations and boundaries is a crucial element in supporting peer mentors.

**Define evaluation expectations.** At the heart of any mentoring program is the relationship between mentor and mentee; defining some boundaries for that relationship is a top priority. From our own experiences with mentoring, we may know, and the literature on mentoring agrees, that mentor–relationships can be compromised when the mentor who is supposed to provide support and counsel—and to whom a mentee should be able to admit confusion or failure—is also a person who provides formal job-evaluations of the mentee. In a composition program, however, the mentoring of graduate teaching assistants may exist as much to help assure the consistency of the writing program as to provide emotional or pedagogical support; peer mentors, then, may need to give their mentees both support and critique. In the same way that we ask peer reviewers in a composition classroom to evaluate and encourage improvement in their peers’ writing, then, we may wish to ask—and empower, and help—peer mentors to evaluate and encourage improvement in their peers’ teaching, though not necessarily always to report their judgments. Distinguishing formative (and/or confidential) evaluation from summative (and/or reported) evaluation, and specifying cases where each is expected, is an important element of program design as well as mentor education and support. (See Appendix A for an outline of these distinctions that we used at GMU.)

**Articulate goals, tasks, and structures.** “Mentoring” is an amorphous term; among TAs in a composition program it may mean anything from providing moral support over coffee to engaging in ongoing professional development to evaluating and overseeing. While it may be tempting to define mentoring only conceptually, WPAs will provide more support to their peer mentors by outlining specific, concrete elements of the program (see Miller et al. 405; Daresh 6; and Portner, *Training*). These might include setting recommendations or minimum expectations for such things as [1] the number/frequency/timing of mentoring contacts; [2] the kind of interactions expected; [3] the overall goals of the mentoring program (primarily affective support? specific day-by-day guidance? improvement
in teaching performance?); and [4] the responsibilities of mentors and mentees, and the support available to each (for the GMU description, see Appendix B; for another model, see Rudney and Guillaume 4).

Setting out task lists can, of course, complicate “true” or “natural” mentoring. As one GMU mentor put it: “No rules. Rules are bad. Each AD/peer relationship is unique. . . . The relationship should be free to develop in ways beneficial to the AD and the peer.” Other peer mentors, though, noted that having expectations “spelled out” helped keep ADs from “[taking] too much on themselves,” and allowed mentors to feel more confident making their own decisions: “[I knew] the administration . . . trusted me to complete [my tasks].” Given that the GMU administrators had specific expectations about what our ADs needed to do to help support teachers and keep the program running, it seemed both honest and practical for us to make those expectations explicit—and then to collaborate on and revise them with the help of the mentors.

In addition to enumerating mentor responsibilities, WPAs and mentors should, working together, prioritize and publicize them. Some of the priorities we delineated at GMU are spelled out in the job description we created (see Appendix B), while others were addressed in our mentoring discussion groups. At the request of the ADs, we also created an official description of the program’s activities and guidelines to give to new mentees; in it, we particularly emphasized both the common expectations and the cooperative nature of the Intensive Mentoring program. This handout helped mentors explain their actions as professional and program-related rather than personally punitive or intrusive and helped mentees prepare to be active participants in the program. Again, in any of these program-design efforts, as with a standardized syllabus or set of learning outcomes, WPAs can and should adjust for local conditions, both academic and social; build in flexibility and anticipate likely “exceptions to the rules” (e.g., TA-mentees with extensive teaching experience); and work to balance mentors’ freedom with guidance and support in reaching programmatic goals. Peer-mentoring programs need not be one-size-fits-all to be consistent and supportive for both mentors and mentees.

Create formal processes for starting each year’s program. With program boundaries clearly established, program directors can ask new mentor-candidates to consider the nature of their mentoring work before they begin it. Certainly, developing and publishing a standard job description helps everyone in the program better predict and adapt to the mentoring process. In addition, even if peer mentors are recruited or conscripted, WPAs can establish a formal peer-mentor application process or require submission of pre-mentoring materials such as an application letter, a teaching vita or portfolio, and/or a reflective essay on mentoring goals and concerns. Mentors can thus begin their work with greater awareness of
how they are and are not yet ready to take on the responsibilities of being a mentor; these documents can also become the basis for early discussions of mentoring.

Scholars and program directors are in less agreement about the best way to match individual mentor-pairs once mentors are selected: John Daresh articulates several elements one could consider when matching pairs, from age to educational philosophy (40-2), while Hansen et al. recommend letting mentees choose mentors within a program (252). Certainly in a long-term mentoring situation, the personal and professional compatibility of mentor-pairs is crucial: some research suggests that same-gender, same learning- or work-style pairs are more desirable, and that any cross-cultural matches should be made carefully. However, in the short-term peer-based mentoring most common to composition programs—as with collaborative learning situations in classrooms—these individual differences may not have as significant an impact. Thus, while some WPAs in small programs may know enough about TA personalities to feel confident in deliberately matching mentees with mentors, it is likely, as Daresh argues, that participants’ “awareness of the values [of] mentoring” and their “mutual respect” and “openness” will be equally if not more important than personality matches (41). Preparing all participants to be open-minded and supportive, helping them define their roles and establish clear lines of communication, and providing clear goals and limits for their interactions will thus be an effective time investment.

**Design tools for program assessment:** Even a small mentoring program will benefit from incorporating program-evaluation from the start. A well-designed assessment process, linked to the stated goals of the program, can provide more than “touchy-feely” affirmations that “mentoring is good.” When actions have been specified as part of the program, mentors and mentees can be queried not just about emotional responses but about whether those elements were completed (see Appendix C for sample questions from a GMU evaluation form). Participants can also self-report about behaviors (keeping a teaching journal or invoking a mentoring strategy) or about specific attitudes (comfort levels in being observed, for instance, or in initiating communication with a mentee) that the WPA and others define as being conducive to good and/or improving composition pedagogy (see, e.g., Liggett). Since peer mentors frequently report that they gained as much from the mentoring as they suppose their mentees did, increasing their own enthusiasm, knowledge, and depth of reflection about teaching (Jonson 122-28), questions designed to assess peer-mentor benefits as well as challenges should be included. Finally, while the ongoing reflective practice and discussion among mentors should provide some feedback, formal assessment of the support program itself can still be helpful. Each piece of program-assessment data helps WPAs revise
the program design to meet the needs of the mentees—and to consider what kinds of mentor-education and support are most needed.

**Mentoring Mentors Directly: The Study and Practice of Mentoring**

With a program architecture laid out and a foundation established, WPAs (and peer mentors) can better assess what tasks and challenges the peer mentors will likely face, and what skills and techniques they may need direct information about, practice in, and time to reflect on. In the last few years, several thoughtful books have focused specifically on how to prepare (K-12) teacher-mentors: among them, I have found those by Hal Portner (Mentoring), Gwen Rudney and Andrea Guillaume, Angi Malderez and Caroline Bodóczky, and Lois Zachary most helpful in thinking about educating TA peer mentors. While many of their suggestions apply to any kind of mentoring situation, my goal in the next few pages is to highlight elements these authors (and others) describe that are particularly useful for TA mentoring-education programs in university composition programs.

To help identify different kinds of mentor-preparation materials, I classify them here into four categories: [1] mentor self-knowledge and goal-setting exercises; [2] content knowledge about educating adult teachers; [3] strategy information about interacting with mentees; and [4] conceptual approaches to encourage mentors’ reflection and integration of new ideas and practices. WPAs who are designing a mentoring curriculum face some of the same challenges as they do in designing pedagogy education. They need to balance pre-service with in-service learning, theory with practice, and the mentors’ need to know everything at once with their ability to process and apply new knowledge. Thus mentor-education programs might start by following the model of workshop-plus-practicum teacher education programs, providing mentors the opportunity to engage in some depth with all four kinds of preparation before (or just as) mentoring starts, and to re-engage, re-think, and reflect on multiple elements throughout the mentoring process. Lastly, for TA peer mentors in particular, it is important to emphasize connections between learning to mentor and continuing to develop skills as teachers, researchers, and professionals.

**Mentor self-knowledge and goal-setting.** In their article on feminist program administration, faculty mentors Rebecca Rickly and Susanmarie Harrington describe their unsettling discovery, midway through a mentoring year, that they each had significantly different assumptions about what their administrating and mentoring should involve. Wanting to help peer mentors avoid such surprises, Zachary adapts Stephen Brookfield’s idea of critical reflection as “assumption hunting,” a crucial part of facilitating learning for teachers (Brookfield 3) and their mentors.
(Zachary 86). She provides heuristics to prompt mentors to consider their own experiences of being mentored (10-11), their own learning processes (17), and their motivations for wanting to become mentors (69-72) as steps toward uncovering their assumptions about how mentoring works and what their roles as mentors might be. Similarly, Malderez and Bodóczky use a diagram of an iceberg to suggest how the visible elements of professional mentoring (and teaching) rest on a less-accessible base of assumptions, cultural pressures, and acquired skills (18). They then describe collaborative iceberg-uncovering activities, such as creating metaphors for mentoring, exploring how interpersonal strengths may also be weaknesses (or vice versa), and articulating (and sharing) personal beliefs in response to prompts such as “I’m a person who . . .” and “Mentoring involves. . .” and “Mentoring will help me. . .” (49-56).

As with any kind of reflective practice, it is helpful to ask TA peer mentors to push beyond their initial memories or immediate impressions, to encourage one another to go deeper into the iceberg where core beliefs lie, and to draw on each others’ reflections to take their own a step further. As they uncover and share assumptions, they can make more informed choices about their mentoring. Similarly, although many programmatic goals should already be clearly stated, peer mentors can individually set some goals for themselves. Portner (Mentoring 4) provides a list of mentor traits, and Zachary (76) provides a mentoring “skills inventory,” either of which could serve as prompts for mentors’ goal-setting reflections. Finally, while goal setting and self-discovery may be most useful to mentors early in a workshop or meeting, returning to these modes as in-service activities can help mentors realize, realign or strengthen their principles during the mentoring process.

Content knowledge about adult education and new-teacher development: TAs whose teaching experience has focused primarily on educating traditional-age undergraduates—and who thus may not have had much exposure to research identifying adult-education requirements, general stages of learning, or change-theory—can benefit significantly from even small amounts of information from these rich areas of scholarship. While peer mentors’ instincts may suffice as long as their mentees are doing well and/or are open to new ideas, mentors often get frustrated and lose confidence when mentees cannot or will not implement pedagogical solutions or new practices. A mentor who is able to identify a mentee's behavior as normal, not idiosyncratic or personal, and who can respond with distinct mentoring strategies, can increase the likelihood that the mentoring relationship will succeed.

Several theories from androgogy scholarship have immediate implications for TA peer mentors. Portner, for instance, explains that adults prefer to “learn something to solve a particular problem” and learn
best when new information can be directly linked to current knowledge; that adult learners may take fewer risks than younger learners; that even small mistakes may significantly undermine adult learners’ self-confidence (Mentoring 53-54). Kathleen Jonson suggests that mentors working with adults need to emphasize mentee self-direction “even [for mentees] initially unsure of themselves and needing extensive support” (100). Despite—and because of—mentees’ maturity, then, TA mentors need to ask their mentees directly about their current knowledge and their own learning-goals; to link new concepts or suggestions directly to concrete situations; to give them room to try (and sometimes fail) on their own; and to be patient and supportive as mentees take small steps toward change.

Moreover, while no stage-theory accounts for all behavior, becoming familiar with general theories about change processes and resistance to change, such as the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM), may help peer mentors anticipate and respond to typical responses. According to the CBAM rubric, for instance, people who are having to adopt new practices move from early stages where they may seek information but do not take action, to middle stages in which they act without fully believing in the benefits of the new actions, to late stages in which they take ownership of the new ideas and begin to improvise and improve upon them. Peer mentors can draw on their own experiences to explore how new teachers move through similar stages of development. Rudney and Guillaume, for example, chart the kinds of processes that teachers at different stages engage in, while Jo Sprague and Jody Nyquist provide a range of models that can be used to help mentors identify issues that might specifically concern new TAs. Peer mentors who are familiar with these stage-based theories may better be able to distinguish—or at least inquire—whether mentees are overtly resisting change, are merely uninformed, or are developmentally not yet ready to move to a new stage; they can then deliberately adjust their approaches to better match the mentees’ needs.

Finally, it can be helpful to know that all teacher-change is difficult. In one study, teacher-educator Margaret Vaughn reports that “describing to a teacher] what needed to be done” and, in a next step, providing individualized instruction on how to do it, resulted in 13 percent and 24 percent, respectively, of teachers she worked with actually implementing changes (117-19). That is, those strategies—the two approaches most “naturally” used by peer mentors—combined for a teacher-change rate of less than 50 percent.10 Sprague and Nyquist caution that most learning happens slowly, particularly if learners are deluged with information: “People . . . cannot learn when they are conscious of everything” (297). Moreover, they remind us, teacher-development does not move “in a tidy linear forward motion” (304). Knowing about the likely needs and limitations of their mentees, peer mentors can set reasonable goals, and
can maintain confidence about their mentoring role even when results are not immediately (or perhaps ever) evident.

**Developing specific plans and practicing strategies for communication and interaction:** One of the GMU peer mentors noted confidently, “One aspect [of mentoring] that came naturally was addressing specific questions asked of me by my [mentee]. A second aspect . . . was sitting in on classes and assessing teaching methods and strategies used by my [mentee. . . .] The third aspect that came naturally involved providing specific feedback concerning such visits in a follow-up meeting.” As we discussed mentoring strategies during our workshops, though, we discovered that while we were all good (and enthusiastic!) question-answerers, we were not always good active-listeners. We needed to develop better strategies for promoting our mentees’ own problem-solving rather than only giving out advice. In the workshops, we were able to role-play active-listening strategies (presenting receptive body language, paraphrasing and reflecting, and clarifying points) with one another before trying out those less-familiar strategies with new teachers. In addition, Portner, Malderez and Bodóczky, and Boreen et al. gave us strategies for asking questions of our mentees, in ways that were neutral (“How did you introduce that activity?”) rather than loaded (“Do you always write new vocabulary on the board?” [Malderez and Bodóczky 161]), and in ways that could “raise the bar” (Portner 46) and prompt reflection from mentees: “Why do you think the [class] went the way it did? How do you know that was the reason?” (Portner 46), and “If you could get beyond day-to-day planning, what areas would you like to work on?” (Boreen et al. 43).

Likewise, while we were all confident that we could spot what was and was not working during a classroom observation, we found it helpful to consider strategies like those provided by Portner and by Beverly Black and Matt Kaplan: having pre- and post-observation meetings; focusing on describing what we saw when meeting with the mentee; asking questions rather than stating judgments; and, eventually, collaboratively designing a few specific steps for the mentee to take in the future. Even more generally, in thinking about engaging mentees in discussions about their teaching, we came back to suggestions from Zachary (91) and Portner (35) that mentors explicitly ask mentees (and share their own answers) about their preferred styles of learning, working, and communicating; about their visions of good teaching and good mentoring; about their goals for teaching and mentoring; and about their specific concerns. While this kind of information might come up “naturally” in a long-term mentoring relationship, it might not—and in a quick-start, short-term peer-mentoring situation, establishing open lines of communication can be crucial.

Finally, in our ongoing discussions about when to “cross a line” with a mentee, we found it very useful to review problem-solving heuristics
and practice them by discussing sample scenarios (see Appendix D for some scenario-based resources we used). On more than one occasion, Malderez and Bodózcky’s conceptualization of the “owl” who “confront[s]” a person or situation calmly to claim a middle ground became a touchstone for our conversations (169). Irene Ward and Ronald Downey’s steps for collaboratively solving a mentor-mentee problem were also useful, prompting us to “ask questions” and “focus on the ‘here and now’” rather than leap too quickly to overarching judgments. We also thought it was helpful to acknowledge, based on information from Rudney and Guillaume, that mentors might face “right vs. right” dilemmas (86-87), where they might have to choose between short-term benefits and long-term benefits, or between the needs of an individual and the needs of a community (or program). Labeling these paradoxes helped new mentors uncover their options and also concede that some situations would have no completely happy ending.

For example, one of the ADs at GMU submitted the following original scenario for us to consider:

Terry is a TA teaching his first college course. When you first visit, you notice he shows great promise as an instructor. As the semester continues, Terry seldom comes to you with problems; you set up weekly meetings, but he rarely shows. When you confront him, Terry asks, “Why do you have to spy on my classes?” You finally set up a time to observe his class again and when you do, it is a mess. Numerous students appear to be having private conversations and some are sleeping. Terry is still showing good promise as an instructor in some regards, but he now seems to have lost control of the class. Afterwards, you approach Terry to discuss these problems. But before you can speak, he tells you to stop spying on him and storms out of the classroom.

In this case, it is “right” to recognize Terry’s need for independence, especially as a peer teacher, but also “right” to recognize that his students need a productive learning environment. It is difficult to confront an angry, defensive peer, but clearly better to “cross the line” here than to let the situation go on with no intervention. We discussed how a peer mentor may need to re-establish communication with Terry through questioning and listening, or may need to contact a program director for assistance. Either way, mentors might conclude that despite his apparent confidence, Terry is operating at an early stage of teacher development, and may require more reassurance than correction. In hindsight, as we noted, it might also have helped to discuss the mentoring program and the mentor’s role[s] with Terry more directly early in the term, and to engage him in setting concrete, reasonable goals for his teaching. Discussing these newly-articulated strategies in the safety of mentor-meetings helped us find our own comfort.
zones (and extend them); moreover, such discussions let us acknowledge that even taking some or all of the recommended steps might not have prevented or even much alleviated this conflict.

Being aware of these strategies can prove particularly important for TA peer mentors who must negotiate overlapping roles of mentor, colleague, and friend. One GMU mentor explained that he or she knew of ADs who “knew their mentee was not doing something . . . helpful to students,” but “didn’t have the courage to say something” about the behavior. In providing TA mentors with concrete skills and techniques—and, as another AD noted, “just the exercise of thinking through the possibilities [. . . which] broadened my thinking and response mechanisms”—we can both build mentors’ confidence and shift their thinking about handling interpersonal conflict. Peer mentors can move from seeing intervention or confrontation as actions that require personal “courage,” to understanding a set of approaches that can be applied reasonably and professionally.

**Presenting mentoring as a reflective practice.** Many of the mentoring-education actions described above promote individual and collaborative reflection; however, new peer mentors may not automatically continue such reflective practices during their mentoring experience. Moreover, a peer-mentoring event may so closely resemble a casual chat by the soda machine that it takes additional attentiveness to keep one’s newly-honed mentoring skills in shape and in use. It is important to set aside regular meeting time with peer mentors specifically for reflection and discussion on the processes and challenges of mentoring in general (not just the management or outcomes of specific mentoring-tasks). Moreover, by mentoring mentors into reflective practitioners we give them the skills to continue their own professional development, and thus increase the value of the time they spend mentoring.

As I noted earlier, one need not divert resources toward scheduling many weeks” worth of mentor-mentoring. While authors like Malderez and Bodóczky, Zachary, and Rudney and Guillaume provide resources that could fill a full-term course on teacher-mentoring, a WPA and a small group of peer mentors could make significant headway in a one-day workshop, with two or three mid-semester follow-up meetings (see Appendix D for one outline). Small things may have significant impact: individual peer mentors in the GMU program often found that a single concept (line-crossing, being a “owl,” reflective-listening strategies) gave them a strong insight into their mentoring practices. Their increased awareness of their work as mentors—their sense that they had or were developing expertise that they could put a name to—seemed to further increase their satisfaction with the work they were doing, and to lessen some of the stress of coping with the inevitable clashes and crises. Moreover, even the gesture of a mentoring workshop communicates not
just a general supportiveness toward mentors, but also that mentoring is a collection of learnable skills rather than an inborn trait that one either has or doesn’t have, can relieve peer mentors of some of the frustration of coping with new challenges.

**Hold On Loosely: Challenges in Mentoring Programs**

Like writing and like teaching, mentoring can benefit from but still not fit entirely within common structures or expectations. Even when everyone is attending to clear structures and thoughtful, reflective preparation and support, participating in a mentoring program like the one we had at GMU can be a little like working with a large, phase-shifting set of Russian nesting dolls. Ostensibly, the mentoring proceeds nicely in a line of decreasing preparation, responsibility, and authority: faculty WPAs mentor senior TA mentors, who mentor other TAs, who teach/mentor undergraduate writers. But our program directors and ADs were about equally new to and responsible for the revised program design; our ADs varied in how much mentor-mentoring they were ready to step into (remember “No rules. Rules are bad”?); and the TAs that our ADs mentored were sometimes better than or more senior to them as teachers, students, or writers.

Moreover, the most structured, institutional mentoring situation is still at base a personal relationship, and so our efforts were always affected by the ebbs and flows of interpersonal relationships in a fairly large but insular graduate program. One year, for instance, several of the Intensive Mentoring mentees formed strong personal friendships with an AD other than the ones they had been assigned as mentors. Much as we wanted to encourage new TAs’ development of more “natural” mentoring relationships, we struggled that year to keep communication lines open and to keep track of official mentoring responsibilities: Who should approve the TAs’ syllabi or assignment prompts? Who should be informed if a TA ran into a problem in her class? What if two ADs gave contradictory advice? That situation in particular also stretched my own abilities to distinguish between my roles as a mentor of mentors, who needed to listen actively to, provide a few concrete suggestions for, and generally encourage individual ADs as they worked through their mentoring challenges; as a mentor-program supervisor, who had assigned specific tasks to specific people within a framework of expectations; and as a WPA, who carried responsibility for the learning and well-being of all the TAs and their students. In some ways, this conflict had its roots in the structures we had imposed on mentoring, in assigning mentors and tasks in the first place. On the other hand, though, as we talked through the issues, we benefited from the fact that everyone involved already
knew what the original expectations were and why, and so we were able to approach our discussions more as professional negotiations rather than as personal attacks or unforeseen interference in private relationships.

And as challenging as those problems were, similar kinds of conflicts seem likely to occur whether or not peer mentoring happens as part of a formal program or peer mentors are prepared for their work. While there are not a lot of journal articles or conference presentations on “The Five Ways Mentoring Failed Me” or “I Had [or Was] a Messed-Up Mentor,” those stories are plentiful enough in hallways and offices. I can’t say whether at GMU we solved sticky interpersonal problems or prepared teachers any better, in general, after implementing our new programs than we had beforehand. However, I can identify several advantages we gained in from the new structures in responding to challenges and unexpected events. Most importantly, because we had worked together to identify and publicize our key expectations, we were able to fairly quickly see and name events—or the absence of events—that fell outside our plans, and then choose how to respond. In a more “natural” mentoring set-up, it can be difficult for both the mentor and the mentee to know whether a situation is problematic, and then whether that problem is personal or structural, short-term or fundamental. In addition, because we were developing a language to talk about mentoring as a common set of tasks and strategies rather than an idiosyncratic romantic interlude, we were able to help each other adapt to and recover from some of the stresses of mentoring.

Week to week, we could ask each other what we had tried and whether it had worked, and develop a range of likely responses to a variety of situations—thus lessening the stress that comes from trying the same strategies again and again while hoping for different results. Across a semester or year of mentoring, we had a sense of a “bigger picture” that we could use to judge the source or severity of a conflict or conundrum, and the need (or lack thereof) for a mentoring response. Finally, anything we had named and tried deliberately, we could repeat, or change, or stop doing, adjusting our actions without so much sense of personal failure. When a new TA had a complete meltdown one fall, for example, her understandably distressed mentor could see both that he had clearly taken the steps we had asked of him (and more), and that her difficulties had been beyond what any of us was prepared to handle (and thus find some professional distance from her situation). Perhaps paradoxically, having a structured mentoring program and mentor education gave mentors more options rather than fewer options, and allowed them to loosen their personal grip on mentoring activities while feeling confident that they were meeting their professional obligations.
Conclusion: The Magic is in the Details

“After studying mentoring for a number of years,” writes Donald Shafer, “I have concluded that there is magic in mentoring that ‘just happens’” (11). He also poses the question, “Can just anyone be a mentor?” and answers “no. Mentors are special individuals who . . . possess several characteristics that support good mentoring. . . . Although many people possess these characteristics, some do not” (11). On the first point, I agree with Shafer, and I have no wish to turn composition peer-mentoring programs into collections of what J. K. Rowling might call magic-less muggles. However, when peer mentoring provides crucial support for TAs in one of the university’s most difficult endeavors, we do not have the luxury of waiting for mentoring to “just happen.” Moreover, as I have argued, faculty who oversee any institutional mentoring program, and wish to support their mentors therein, need to design it as a program, as a formal effort that should be viewed, steadily and unrepentantly, as a professional rather than a romantic undertaking. Although I agree with Shafer’s second sentiment in a large sense—not “just anyone” can immediately mentor well—my response to that challenge differs from his. While a few “natural” mentors may work successfully using intuition and personality, large numbers of institutional mentors can be quite successfully prepared to provide high-quality guidance; can learn strategies that help them build effective, supportive relationships with their mentees; and can practice and improve mentoring techniques to increase their own (and their mentees’) satisfaction with the experience.

Envisioning peer mentoring as a formal, institutional, learnable activity, moreover, can help a mentoring program move past several of the most likely obstacles to its success. Certainly one obstacle is mentees’ resistance (often supported by departmental or cultural cues). There are many valid reasons for resisting or being dissatisfied with being mentored. Mentoring can be, or be seen as, a power-play or a negative comment on one’s competence; it can feel oppressive to both highly confident and very unconfident mentees. One’s mentor may seem too unlike oneself, too unlikable, or too unreliable to make the mentoring experience enjoyable or even worthwhile. Yet many of these objections are emotion-based—not at all invalid, but also not as likely to surface destructively in an institutional relationship where the expectations are clearly articulated and not set too high, where mentees experience a generally equivalent program rather than feeling singled out for remediation, and where mentors and mentees have been prepared to approach the relationship professionally and collaboratively. (Defining the WPA-to-AD relationship as collaborative as we developed the mentor-education program at GMU helped us avoid some of the resistance that can come with “being mentored”; we asked our peer mentors to incorporate
some of that collaborative spirit wherever they could in their own mentor-
mentee relationships.) Formalizing programs and educating mentors can
also reduce the amount of time spent mentoring, where that is a concern,
and may make the mentoring job seem more appealing or achievable where
recruiting mentors is difficult. With a commonsense caveat about “best laid
plans,” then, WPAs and peer mentors should see their work in developing
program guidelines and learning mentoring strategies as work that has
both its heart and its head in the right place.

In fact, counterintuitive though it may seem, I would argue that
the real magic in a mentoring program comes in attention to details, in
attentiveness and planning, in learning and practicing and reflecting. It is
magical when shy or reluctant mentees still get the support and education
that they need to become better teachers; magical when peer mentors and
mentees communicate well enough to know each other’s assumptions and
thus to grant each other space to experiment with a range of best practices;
magical when peer mentors work out a solution to a tricky mentoring
problem rather than writing it off as a “personality clash”; and equally
magical when they realize they face a problem they cannot solve and decide
to ask for help—or to let it go. It is magical, too, when one more invisible
element of the work of writing programs can be made visible and remark-
able. Taking steps to formalize a peer-mentoring program for composition
TAs—and to educate peer mentors in concepts and strategies specifically
required for mentoring—need not deplete either local resources or local
magic. Planning for mentoring programs and for the education of peer
mentors empowers the mentors, mentees, and program administrators all
together, making even a small mentoring program a source of energy and
satisfaction for new and continuing teachers.
Appendix A: Priorities for GMU Peer Mentors

*First, do no harm:* if a classroom becomes a place of or instrument for abuse—of either the instructor or the students—you need to involve the program directors. Teasing, mocking, or capricious disrespect—in any persistent, widespread, or deliberate way from the instructor or students—is abuse when it is either meant or taken to be so. Beyond that principle . . .

*Your primary responsibility is to provide support for the TA.* This is particularly important for TAs who are new-to-teaching, but also necessary for building relationships with TAs who have experience but are new to the community. Your mentees’ confidence—building it and keeping it—and their success are your first priorities.

*Your second responsibility is to be an active mentor,* supporting the TA and his or her students by encouraging better, more flexible, more reflective teaching. You should try to provide suggestions and recommendations to help the TA improve as a teacher in general and as a teacher in this particular composition program. Where critiquing or intervening in your mentee’s teaching seriously risks your ability to connect with and support him or her, however, the support should take priority.

*Your third responsibility is to support the composition program and our students:* to help maintain a minimum standard of pedagogical proficiency and consistency, and to work toward strengthening pedagogical resources across the program. Generally, this responsibility should mesh with the other two; you remain primarily responsible to the individual mentee, however. The only specific information that needs to be “reported” to the program directors in all cases is information about TAs who are facing a crisis or struggling to have their students meet core program goals.
Appendix B: GMU Intensive-Mentoring Program: Mentor Tasks, First Semester

1. Early in the semester, work with each mentee TA (MTA) to set 2-3 teaching goals for the semester: what’s the most difficult or worrisome aspect of teaching (this curriculum)? what would this teacher like to try out or develop? what are you trying out that s/he can help with?

2. Provide models, support, and basic information for the first two weeks of class.

3. Review each MTA’s syllabus and first two essay assignments (this should certainly be a sharing rather than just a supervisory review).

4. Formally schedule “meetings”: weekly or every-other-weekly gatherings or conversations or e-mail exchanges (30-50 minutes? lunch? coffee? IM?) to review the past week’s events and/or plan upcoming classes (another sharing discussion).

5. Schedule class observations: two visits during the first three weeks and 1-2 more before November. Schedule return visits by MTAs to your class (2-4 per semester). Provide written descriptive feedback, even if it’s just an email paragraph or class-observation worksheet.

6. Review each MTA’s comments/grades on 3-5 essays (high, medium, low levels) from Essay #1 or Essay #2. This is not a standardizing session or a giving-permission session (“no, you cannot say that to that student!”), but again a more open-ended discussion: focus on effective responding and evaluating strategies (and time management) rather than on grade-review.


8. Actively inquire about and support reflection, improvement and/or adaptation. Ask “why” and “what next” questions to help teachers move beyond nail-biting survival. Help each MTA consider and take steps toward his/her teaching goals.
Appendix C: Selected Questions from GMU Mentee Year-end Assessment Survey

Likert-style answer-options were provided for most questions.

My mentor provided sufficient assistance to me before the start of the semester

My mentor made his/her role and expectations as a mentor clear to me

My mentor and I discussed how (and how often) we might meet and interact as mentor/mentee

Please describe briefly what you most needed help with or support on as a new (to GMU) teacher. Did your mentor (and/or another person) provide this help?

My mentor provided good support for my daily class preparation

My mentor’s advice was useful as I responded to and graded student writing

The feedback I received from my mentor after a class visit was helpful to me as a teacher

I felt comfortable approaching my mentor for advice or assistance

During the year, my mentor and I have met, talked, or emailed regularly

I felt that a difference in personality, teaching style, or priorities undercut my mentor’s helpfulness to me

Please comment on any changes you would suggest for future mentors, mentees, or the mentoring program:
Appendix D: Outline for GMU’s Mentoring Workshop

Please read through this resource packet, taking notes on any questions or suggestions you have. At the end of each section, there’s a pair of questions to consider; please take a few minutes as you conclude each section to freewrite on one question (or on a related idea). Also, before we meet, please type up and put in my box or email me a brief “Concern Scenario” of your own (see examples in the resource packet) for us to discuss.

Resource Packet Contents:

1. Policies:  Drafts of GMU Mentoring Responsibilities and Activities [see Appendix A]; Draft of Mentees’ Handout; Freewrite, 10 minutes: Elements of the GMU program

2. Articles:  From “Too Cool for School” by Christine Farris; “A Developmental Perspective on the TA Role” by Sprague & Nyquist; From “Feminist Approaches to Mentoring” by Rickly & Harrington; “Icebergs,” from Rudney & Guillaume; Freewrite, 10 minutes: Real and ideal mentors

3. Heuristics:  Structures of Teacher Change [CBAM, Rudney & Guillaume]; Mentor Roles and Approaches [includes Mentor Traits, Active Listening, Owl/Shark]; Interacting with Teachers [includes “right vs. right,” adjusting the tone of questions, strategies for classroom observations and debriefing]; Promoting Improvement, Solving Problems [includes “bar-raising questions,” problem-solving strategies from Ward and Downey]; Freewrite, 10 minutes: Mentoring goals & strategies

4. Scenarios:  A-D. Instructor styles, from “The Problem Graduate Instructor” by Meeks & Hult; E-G. Assignment approaches, from Scenarios by Anson et al.; H. Adjusting to student abilities, From Dilemmas by Anson et al.; Freewrite, 10 minutes: Current Ideas & Questions

Workshop Agenda:

9:30-11:30  Review of Mentoring Responsibilities
12:30-2:30  Discussion of Teacher-Mentor Strategies
2:45-4:15  Discussion of published and local scenarios; role-plays.
4:15-5:00  Goal-setting for mentoring; set up September and November follow-up meetings

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Notes

1. Mentors’ comments come from surveys with participants’ informed consent.
2. Drawing on several other studies, Billie Enz concludes that since “the act of requesting assistance often causes the beginner to feel inadequate . . . the beginning teacher will accept and respond to help more often and more favorably when it is offered” rather than seeking out such help from an informal mentor (66). Brenda Allen supports this claim, noting the additional professional disadvantages of seeming to be unprepared (particularly for mentees who see themselves as outside the institutional culture).
3. See Allen; Boreen, Niday, and Johnson, chapters 3-4; Olson and Ashton-Jones 239-40; Otto 17; and Wunsch “New Directions” 11, for instance.
4. In accepting the need for mentor-education, then, we can align ourselves with research in public school mentoring that shows “having a mentor program to assist beginning teachers is less important for improving teacher performance and commitment than the quality of that assistance” (Portner Mentoring 4).
5. The “or” in each line of this heuristic is nearly always an “and,” or at least an “and/or.” In considering the crucial first response to a question or crisis, though, we decided it was easier to plan to choose only one of these as a primary approach, and to try to do so after at least briefly considering both competing approaches.
6. Zachary’s four-part mentoring cycle includes preparing, negotiating, enabling, and coming to closure (49).
7. Similarly, while many of my recommendations may apply to peer mentoring among adjunct or even tenure-line faculty in a writing program, important differences between the status of TAs and that of other writing instructors would need consideration to increase the success of those other mentoring programs.
8. Boreen, Niday, and Johnson include two chapters on developing successful mentoring relationships that involve age, gender, and cultural differences; Olsen and Ashton-Jones explore the impact of gender and cultural differences on faculty-to-faculty mentoring in composition.
9. Brian Huot outlines steps that can aid in designing an assessment tool or process, including asking questions such as Why are we assessing this? and What actions will we take after completing this assessment? (181). I also like Huot’s idea about using assessment to “describe the promise and limitations of a writer [or a mentor, or a program] working within a particular rhetorical and linguistic [and perhaps institutional] context” (107). Assessing what happens between “promise and limitations” can help WPAs articulate the benefits of peer-mentoring and mentor-education programs.
10. Jonson cites a study by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers showing even lower rates (5-10%) of classroom change among experienced teachers, even when they have had some opportunity to practice a new technique (104). None of these researchers takes these statistics as evidence that teacher-education is fruitless—only that teacher-educators need to adopt a wider range of professional strategies for enabling new teachers and supporting the development of experienced ones, and be willing to acknowledge the value of small steps toward teacher-change.
Works Cited


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Student Writing in a Talent Development Program: Sanctuary and Academic Site of the “Personally Humane”

Karen Surman Paley

In 1995 I attended the CCCC convention in Washington, DC, themed “Literacies, Technologies and Responsibilities.” One of the convention events was hosted by Howard University; it was the first time I experienced being a racial majority in an academic setting. At the time, I was an adjunct lecturer at Boston College teaching a required core literature class of 35; typically only one of these students was a person of color. Such an individual might have been hesitant to participate in class discussion and have appeared to be shy or actually lacking in self-confidence. The situation was just the opposite at Howard University, where the majority of students were people of color who graciously and confidently welcomed thousands of guests and simply took charge of the event.

On another occasion, I had the pleasure of being in an academic setting where students of color were in the majority. That was the summer of 2004 as I observed African-American Literature 1900–Present (ENG 248/AAF 248), a writing intensive class in the Special Program in Talent Development (SPTD) at the University of Rhode Island (URI). This class was a distinct contrast to the majority-white institution that employed me (whereas, in the previous semester, my freshman writing class had written many “reader response” complaints related to having to think about the lack of civil rights described in Audre Lorde’s essay, “That Summer I Left Childhood Was White”).

With these moments in mind, I want to tell the story of the particular class I observed that summer. I want to tell this story because it speaks to me about a way of teaching I want to emulate. It is the story of an African American literature class taught to students who were thought, by their institution, to be sufficiently at risk for college success and, therefore, denied admission through the traditional application process. But this story is also another story—a story about a certain individual’s relationship to teaching, a relationship about caring for the whole student whose higher education experience extends beyond any particular class.

Several scholars in Composition and Rhetoric have explored the issue of dialect in majority/minority school settings. The title of an essay by Rebecca Moore Howard makes the problem clear: “The Great Wall of African American Vernacular English in the American College Classroom.” And David Holmes complains, “For the most part, composition
theory addressing the needs of African American students remains in the same state as African American literary studies during the 1960's” (53). Vershawn Ashanti Young explores the quandary raised by the work of Lisa Delpit: to teach Standard English (or what Young calls WEV, White English Vernacular) so that students of color have access to codes of power, but risk deracinating their home cultures, or to allow students to continue to speak and write in BEV (699, 704). Finally, Keith Gilyard notes how James Berlin identifies race as one of the hegemonic discourses of the academy that must be resisted “in order to bring about more personally humane and socially equitable economic and political arrangements” (qtd. in Gilyard 48; emphasis added). Gilyard’s point here is that if someone as perceptive about cultural codes as Berlin “failed to crack the ‘race’ code for us, it is strong testimony to how potently invisible, or invisibly potent, that particular code signifies” (48). The “race code” was everywhere visible and everywhere absent in the SPTD at URI. By this I mean that the vast majority of participants were students of color, but the issues of their race or home dialect or home culture were not made manifest.

The fact is that my reading about the rhetoric of race did not prepare me for the “personally humane” pocket of the pedagogy of care I found in the SPTD. The feeling from the 1995 convention experience at Howard immediately returned in July of 2004. While the SPTD appears to be a minority recruitment program, fifteen percent of the students are white, according to associate director Sharon Forleo. The SPTD’s mission statement cites the 1968 death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as its impetus: “In keeping with Dr. King’s dream, our mission is to ensure that deserving people, however excluded by historic oppression and life experiences, sit at the table of opportunity.” While Forleo reports that SPTD is neither an affirmative action nor a minority recruitment program, she acknowledges that the program does make a conscious effort to recruit minority students and those impacted by either family or physical trauma. Of the twenty-four students in the class I observed, twenty were students of color, predominantly African-American. Jim Barton, who was a member of the Education faculty at URI and one of Forleo’s former professors, sees the SPTD as more of “a sanctuary for students of color at URI.”

I think the title of the SPTD is reflective of its progressive character: “Talent Development” suggests that the students already possess talent but that they simply need a setting in which to flourish. As Barton explained, “the SPTD staff are looking at the person, and out of that they pull the strong student.”

The connotation and the raison d’être of the SPTD diverges from a program in Florida, Achievement in Mainstreaming (AIM), as described by Sarika Chandra. Instituted at the University of Florida in 1997, AIM is composed of a majority of students of color. These students are labeled
“at risk” in an environment where the governor, Jeb Bush, reported in his State of the Union Address that there are “two Floridas. [The state] is not divided by the color of our skin, our race, our nationality but by our ability to acquire knowledge” (qtd. in Chandra 21). Chandra writes that students of color do appear to be labeled “at risk” because of their race, but it is “very difficult for [her] to distinguish AIM students from non-AIM students based on learning ability and writing skills” (21). Thus the ideological underpinning of the two programs, AIM and SPTD, appears to be very different, one based on a model predating deficiency and the other based on belief in proficiency.

As Forleo puts it, because we are talking about events that change the structure of students’ lives socially or developmentally, “‘disadvantaged’ is a bit harder to characterize than to say a student is from a recognized minority group.” While SPTD “averages 10-12% honors eligible students in its classes,” the students are mostly from urban schools and from “a high need background. Seventy-five percent of our students have English as a second language.” Students in SPTD whom I interviewed as part of my study (Olabisi, Stephanie, Amma, and Solange) graduated in the top 10% of their respective public high schools and were heavily involved in school activities. For example, Solange, a Cape Verdean woman coming from a vocational high school in Pawtucket, RI, won a statewide leadership competition. However, all the SPTD students were declined acceptance through the regular admissions program at URI because of a shortfall in combined SAT scores, a standard fluctuating yearly but averaging 1139 for 2004. Forleo says that sometimes they are a mere 100 points off.

Program participants and staff remain loyal and connected. According to Barton and Alumni Affairs, the SPTD holds annual reunions in which approximately 400 people attend including students who completed the program 30 and 35 years ago. Forleo herself has been involved with SPTD for 30 years, initially as a tutor: “I’ve now had [working] as advisees the children of my early students.” SPTD is a multi-generational academic family that grows through word of mouth across many areas of Rhode Island. Graduates are successfully contributing to the state. When asked what kinds of things the SPTD graduates are doing now, Forleo told me “Many are lawyers. We have one judge. We have another gentleman who is a finalist for a district court judgeship right now. There are many, many, many teachers and principals, lots of business people, and lots of people who are in human services. One of Senator Jack Reed’s top aides is one of our grads.” The current director of SPTD is also a graduate of the program.

Before SPTD, few students of color went into Education at URI and those who did were not particularly welcomed, according to Barton. When Forleo was in the MA in Reading program there, she and Barton talked about the need for more students of color to go into Education and become
teachers, Barton believing that “some of [the avoidance of teaching] is societal and reflects patterns around the country.” At the time Barton was working with some fourth graders in Providence, and he began to bring some SPTD students with him: “Once they started to hang out with the younger kids, they realized this would be a good career. They were highly motivated and very directed. It wasn’t necessarily a receptive environment all the way for them, but once they had a sense of direction, they were really willing to put up with an awful lot to get what they wanted.”

A Pedagogy of Care: Personal Advising with Behavioral Parameters

I have two foci in this exploration of the SPTD: [1] revealing features of a secular version of what the Jesuits call cura personalis, or caring for the whole person, in Professor Gitahi Gititi’s class and in the program as a whole, and [2] the ways writing might be assigned and evaluated in a non-composition class in an English Department. However, rather than providing an in-depth examination of the SPTD’s pedagogy of care, a quick study might highlight the rules in the program. Boundaries, as long as they are clear to the participants and reasonable, may help students bring out their talents and, ultimately, their success. The SPTD approach varies a bit from Nel Noddings’s feminine approach to ethics and education as she argues for “guidelines toward desirable behavior” while also asserting that “we need not enforce these rules with penalties” (200). There are penalties and consequences for infractions in the SPTD, and I admire this approach as I have seen many students drift away from higher education because of poor study skills and weak discipline. In order to enroll as full-time freshman at URI in the fall, summer SPTD students have to complete two college-level courses as well as courses in writing and college study skills with a grade of “C” or better. They live on campus Sunday night through Thursday afternoon for six weeks and must follow strict rules. SPTD participants are monitored very carefully and offered a lot of support services, including meetings where attendance is mandatory. Absenteeism earns “strikes” as does missing a regular or tutorial class, for letting someone in the back door after hours, for noise in the dorms, or for any type of what Forleo describes as “typical 18-year-old crap that we have to control.” There is a judicial board, and after an accumulation of violations students may find themselves dropped from the program. Fear of possible dismissal was a concern that I heard mentioned often. In fact, several students were dropped during the session I observed.

Rather than create a negative atmosphere, however, the rules seem to set up a safe space for the transition to college. Barton says that SPTD provides students with “two blankets. The first blanket is some of the
academic strategies they might not have to succeed in college, and the second blanket is they know somebody is going to be there hassling and bugging them at times, but also being there every step of the way to support them.” He describes the SPTD staff, which has been revising the program with the help of many generations of young people, as sometimes tough and other times very supportive: “They basically become a surrogate family for the students.”

What SPTD has created at URI is a very intimate environment, one other institutions might consider imitating. Forleo describes the program as:

100 percent a learning community . . . Our students are living in three dorms. There are counselors; most of them have actually come through the program and are graduates. So the students are all assigned to a counselor who is strictly focused on their academics and their academic transition to the university, the university requirements. They go to tutoring every night for two hours. They are all in it together. They are sharing every step of the way. These kids are sharing a high pressure, academic community. They start to form study partnerships. They start to meet friends, and it becomes a real reference point for them in the future . . . They have their advisors they have to see every week for the first two years. We send written evaluation forms out to faculty that they send back, and we review with the students privately. . . . By the time you’re a junior, you’re free, but then they come in because they want to. By then you have such a deep connection with them that they come in to meet with you and talk about their next steps.

The SPTD is a stable program, funded by hard money. Forleo first became involved with the program thirty years earlier when she was “an English teacher without a job”—a long-term commitment for an academic.

Although my observation period was only five weeks, I can confirm what Forleo described. Students accompanied each other to classes and stayed together for lunch and afternoon study in the library; they shared dormitory space and tutorial sessions, and they collaborated with each other. For example, I was astounded by the way students in African-American Literature 1900–Present prepared their oral presentations for Gititi’s class. From what I heard, the presenters-to-be would go around the dormitory the night before and ask other members of the class what they thought of the reading—which, in my opinion, was frequently difficult. The course text was The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Students might be presenting on an essay by Frederick Douglass, David Walker, Maria Stewart, Ida Wells-Burnett, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Marita Bonner, Amiri Baraka, or Larry Neal. Or they might have to explicate several poems or short stories by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Robert Hayden, Margaret Walker, Mari Evans, June Jordan,
Maya Angelou, Charles Johnson, or Toni Cade Bambara. There was a lot of required writing for a 5-week class and so I classify it as writing-intensive. Over the course, Gititi assigned: 3 three-page “response” essays, a five-page mid-term essay, and a five-page final essay. Although overwhelmed by the workload and exhausted from late night studying, these students were highly motivated to succeed, so they turned to each other for support. The collegiality was also evident when papers were returned. Students who had done well gave and received numerous high-fives; those whose grades were poor were consoled and typically advised by their peers to, “go talk to Professor Gititi.”

“His Faith is in Us”

From what students told me, Gititi offered something akin to what Frances Donnelly, S. J. calls “consoling encouragement” (46). One of my case study subjects, Olabisi, ran into Gititi in the library the day she received a paper back with 7 out of 10 possible points. As someone who received “all A’s” in high school, she was quite disappointed and caught off guard: “Yesterday I saw him in the library. He saw that I was kind of upset with my paper. And he was like, ‘Don’t worry about it,’ and he asked me stuff about, you know, where was I from, background, and he was really nice to talk to.” Apparently this was not an isolated occurrence. At the end of the summer session, Olabisi reported that she had reached out to him numerous times, and “he helped me understand the concept of the final paper.” He also went over a prior paper with her in some detail, explaining “thoroughly the points where she could have improved.” Olabisi praised the SPTD counselors as well: “One particular counselor, Earl, keeps me motivated and reminds me I’m a young scholar who can accomplish anything I want to in life.” Although Gititi did not know who was contributing to my research, at the end of the summer session he identified Olabisi to me as one of the stronger students in the class. She had, in fact, been accepted at nine colleges, including the highly competitive Boston College, which she would not be attending as her financial aid package consisted primarily of loans (because of her hopes for medical school, her father advised her not to accept the loan package as she “would be in debt for the rest of her life”).

Olabisi was not the only student to describe Gititi’s humanity as a teacher. I interviewed Amma and her friend Stephanie together as we ate lunch at a pizza restaurant on campus. Amma, a graduate of Tollman High School in Pawtucket, RI, is not the first in her family to attend college; one of her sisters preceded her in the SPTD and also studied with Gititi. Another study participant, Solange, noted a characteristic of Gititi which struck me almost daily. She described Gititi as “something like a human version of the software Microsoft Office Assistant; he is always giving tips,
sometimes by putting notes on the board and other times becoming the griot or West African storyteller who carries on the culture of the family or the village. One day he wrote two words on the board in capital letters, blocked in by a chalked rectangle. Over the first, ‘DRUNK,’ he wrote an ‘X’ and over the second, ‘SOBER,’ he wrote nothing. Now this could have led to some heavy-duty annoying preaching on his part, but it did not. He said nothing. A few students began to spontaneously speak. One said, ‘Oh, I haven’t been drunk since last May.’” Neither by lecturing nor by asking questions did Gititi prompt the students to give such subjects thought.

On another occasion Gititi relayed a story about a cow, a calf, and a knotted rope:

The story of the mother cow and her calf. The two animals are in the pasture. It’s the dry season, and there’s not a lot of grass. So the calf is scrounging around for anything she can sort of fill the space in her stomach with. She comes upon a big piece of knotted rope. The mother sees her approach the rope and she says, “If I were you, I would not even think of swallowing that thing or even playing with it.” But the calf persists in playing with the rope and swishing a bit of it in her mouth, and before long she has swallowed the whole rope. And the mother has already said, “Well, I know you have a piece of it in your mouth; you better let it go.” The calf says, “Well what can happen to me?” so she swallows a bit of rope. This bit of rope doesn’t go down easily as she has to gulp through the knots and whatnot. It kind of feels good in the stomach, but, of course, when the rope has to go out . . . So the mother warns the calf not to swallow that rope because it might go down more or less easily, but the pain of voiding it . . . Thus, the story is a cautionary tale; don’t rush into doing things without considering their consequences, especially when there are immediately painful consequences.

Solange brought this story up when I asked her for evidence of *cura personalis* in the SPTD or in the class:

Yes, I do find *cura personalis* in the program. Mostly from Professor Gititi, because I find him, you know, giving us lessons in the topics we’re reading, but also about life. Like, he’s always talking about, you know, you want to be true to yourself and believe in yourself. And, I think I do agree with that, because, in order for you to want to understand material, to want to listen to your teacher, you must first trust that the teacher is telling you good information; that means you guys have a bond. And by having that bond, it can inspire you to do your work, you know what I mean, to do your work more . . . His faith is in us.

On this day he told them that when they become teachers and principals and superintendents, they will able be to change the curriculum to allow a better representation of African Americans.
Gititi’s faith in the students and his far-reaching goals for them show that he is not, as some who have critiqued WAC have noted, covering over “the ideological basis of education” (Mahaffey 13). He acknowledges that some of these students were not taught the things they are discussing in his class in high school because of the constraints on high school teachers. In a discussion of Frederick Douglass, Gititi told the class, “Slave narratives are important because history is so often written by the conqueror.” He wants them to change the world of education, and he wants them to analyze the class basis of racism. Later on he would distribute the text of a speech delivered by the white slave owner, William Lynch, who assures the audience that his methods “will control the slaves for at least 300 years.” Lynch advises “pitching” the old Black male against the young black male and the dark skinned against the light skinned slaves. The handout had a header written by Gititi, “AND THE MESSAGE IS STILL TRUE. . .” He asked the class, “Where do ideas like those of Lynch come from?” He referred them to Orlando Paterson’s book *Hegel, Slavery and Social Death*, which examines how “Hegel argued in favor of slavery which he saw as a civilizing mission.”

Several weeks later as the class discussed June Jordan’s “A Poem about My Rights,” Gititi became more ideological. One stanza of the poem reads,

> I am very familiar with the problems of the C.I.A  
> And the problems of South Africa and the problems  
> Of Exxon corporation and the problems of white  
> America in general and the problems of the teachers  
> And the preachers and the F.B.I. and the social  
> Workers . . .

Gititi asked the class what they knew about Exxon and why Jordan might be citing that company. He told them, “The Exxon Oil Company was attracted to Angola for its oil; they gave money to the so-called rebel side to destabilize the country so they could go in and get oil out.” He reminded them of the Exxon Valdez and the crude oil spill in 1986 in Alaska. One student said Exxon was charged with damaging the environment. Gititi told the class, “They got away with a slap on the wrist because the company gives money to members of the government.” Gititi’s goal is not to seal over “the ideological or gendered underpinnings of WAC” (Mahaffey 3). Instead, it parallels that of some feminist educators, such as Harriet Malinowitz: “The goal of feminist education has never been to prepare students to participate in the world as it exists; the goal, rather, has been to help them develop the skills to deconstruct and transform the world” (qtd. in Mahaffey 13).

How did the students receive Gititi’s attempts to educate them as socially conscious and emotionally and morally responsible individuals? I asked Solange, “So do the students generally like him?” She answered,
“We think he’s kind of funny. I do. A lot of students actually think he’s very inspiring, and that he’s very smart. He’s kind of funny because he uses, you know, ‘a stick in the ocean,’ and ‘the rope and the cow’ and stuff like that . . . Sometimes [the storytelling] catches you out of the blue, and then he’ll say something, and you can’t help but burst out laughing because it’s so not expected.”

Pedagogy of Care

Solange is a very strong student. At our end of the semester interview, Gititi noted her as someone very likely to succeed in college: “In fact, I’ve been asking myself why she was going through this program at all.” In spite of her polished and mature in-class self-presentation, I think SPTD served her well. Solange’s family speaks Cape Verdean in the home. She also speaks Spanish and Portuguese, yet her classroom English is unaccented. Despite numerous experiences with public speaking, she did poorly on her first presentation in a communications class, apparently a case of nerves. She received a “D” with penalties for failing to preview her main points, for not coming across as “fluent and practiced,” for problems with vocalics (enunciation, projection, variation), and for failing to provide a clear explanation of a term. I spoke with Solange just a few hours after her talk, and she knew she had failed; she had simply had not been herself.

The transition to being judged by a college professor was not an easy one for her, yet she was a quick study. After her next presentation, Solange eagerly told me that her Communications professor reported that her group had done really well, with good transitions and voice variation. She was clearly pleased with herself. The week before, she received eight out of ten on a paper in Gititi’s class—she turned to me and flashed me eight fingers and a big smile. Several students in the summer program were initially disappointed with their grades but eventually turned them around and demonstrated pride in their accomplishments.

The pedagogy of care took different forms in Gititi’s class. At times he seemed to mock or tease the students but with the kind of joking tone that Solange mentioned, prompting the class to burst into laughter. In one class he pointed to a student with a cup of some kind of coffee, maybe the very popular Dunkin’ Donuts Iced Latte and said, “Now don’t get hooked on those things. What do you call them? Slurpees?” In a subsequent class he said to a student who seemed to have trouble settling down, “Avoid ordering the drink you just ordered; it makes you too excited.” Later in that same class he would admonish the students with a mock sternness, “Now stop all that high-fiving before you lose all your fingers.” On the other hand, he once chided a student who was not actively participating, one who later appeared to dig in and work very hard in the class. I also noticed he
scolded another student, Geralyn, for insufficient class participation (which she denied at the time), but then observed and supported her efforts. Later in the summer, I overheard Gititi ask this same student how she was doing before class:

She said, “Everything is coming together.”
He responded, “It’s like that when you try to cram 13 weeks into 5.”
A few weeks later he asked her, “Are you trying to develop a different character?”
She asked, “Why, because I am quiet? I am just stressed.”
He replied, “It comes with the territory.”

Gitahi and Geralyn came a long way in terms of a supportive teacher-student relationship. I was interviewing Gititi in the classroom the last day of the term, as students came to turn in their final papers. As the first group of students prepared to leave the room, he asked each one to shake his hand. Gititi, a tall man, was crammed into one of the student chair/desk combinations, as he routinely was during student presentations. Geralyn handed him her paper. He slid his desk over to create some space and motioned for her to come closer to him where Gititi gave her a hug from his seat. Geralyn became teary. First he said, “Oh, don’t cry.” Then he looked over at me and back at her and said, “It’s okay if you want to cry.” She hugged him and then cried a little more. Gititi showed his caring for this student; Geralyn was moved, as was I.

After observing Gititi’s classroom practice and his closure techniques, I was especially touched when I read his own essay on the coldness of the academy, “Menaced by Resistance: The Black Teacher in the Mainly White Classroom” published in Race and the College Classroom. In his article, Gititi discusses several points regarding racial inequities as a professor. One point Gititi identifies is that while white instructors who teach about racism appear to be rewarded, black professors covering the same material are often accused of whining. To further illustrate his point, Gititi offers examples such as how a graduate student did not believe he was the course instructor, and how “the psychological burden associated with the black scholar’s typical ‘one minority per pot’ status gets little press” (183). Gititi informs his readers of a time when he was warned that he needed to relax his grading standards in his African-Caribbean classes to avoid disappointing students who expected “an easy ride” (183). He also tells us that he is aware that a number of his white students often go to white professors for validation of what he teaches. What causes him the most pain, however, “is the intellectual and social isolation [he] experience[s] in the institutional setting and in the outside community. . . . What does one say about a university community where the human problems of black people are not even noticed?” (184; emphasis added). Having experienced such
institutional coldness, Gititi could easily pass it along to his students, but he
does not. Every impression I had of him demonstrated his incessant desire
for these students to succeed based on his identification with them. By
alternating his personality between sternness, humor, encouragement, and
warmth, Gititi creates a space for his students as humans, as individuals:

You asked me whether I am probably more sympathetic [to the SPTD stu-
dents]. I know that’s not the word you used, but I think every teacher does
that. Every teacher has to understand, not to condone or pass off a certain
lack of preparation in a student, but I feel challenged by these students be-
cause ultimately one trains as a teacher in the same way that one trains as a
nurse. When you train as a nurse, your oath requires that you do no harm.
And by the same token in the classroom, you do no harm; you do not put
students down because they do not know [information or conventions] or
lose patience when what they are looking for is approval, perhaps for the
first time really in many years, and direction and someone to believe in.
I think these students more than any other lot are in need of someone to
validate them, to see something of value in them, which gives them strength
because they are waiting to come in September. And I think they would be
lost if they did not go through this six weeks or so and have instructors who
tell them they can do it and that they are just as good as other people.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Gititi trained as a high school teacher as part of his Bachelor’s degree
in Kenya, but unlike the faculty members featured in many studies and
publications about Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), he is not a
graduate of WAC workshops. When asked about his teaching philosophy,
he told me,

Well the thing that I retain from my training as a teacher is 1.) that the stu-
dent comes first; and 2.) that the student is composed of different zones
and the more the instructor responds to those different areas and zones,
the more effective the exercise of teaching and learning can be.

What I mean by zones are the divisions of the human being into the
head, heart, and soul or body and mind. Those are the zones and there
are also zones of experience, based on experiences of gender, experiences
of social class, and experiences even of language. And I am aware that
students in a class like this come from a greater variety of those linguis-
tic and cultural zones than the regular class, especially at URI where the
classes are not particularly diversified. And so responding to the individu-
al is complicated and makes the challenge greater. As the instructor, I am
attempting to not practice the so-called banking concept of education. In
other words students come to me as some sort of empty vessels and I am
here to fill them with something and hopefully some day they are filled,
but rather to think of the student as already made and that my role as
instructor is really one of facilitator of the learning experience or practice, rather than as some sort of dominant figure being the sole possessor of knowledge. This is why I am motivated to seek the students’ contributions to the learning experience itself.

Gititi is clearly interested in the student as a whole person and in helping that person who may be somewhat “underprepared” for college to make the transition from high school and to succeed.

Edward White and Volney White’s essay on the assessment of writing offers a five-point heuristic, adapted from Erika Lindemann’s *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. The teacher is to ask herself a series of questions around five key areas: task definition, writing processes, audience, schedule, and assessment. White and White offer an excellent heuristic, one that I would not hesitate to use the next time I am charged with the task of preparing students or faculty to become writing teachers. However, if one were to take an overview of the process of assigning the five papers for ENG-AAF 248, the teacher would appear to fall short. There was very little advance warning of assignments and almost no discussion of criteria for evaluation of the actual assignments. The assignments were not written into the syllabus. However, one advantage in the process—something not indicated in the heuristic—is that Gititi worked closely with the writing tutors who reportedly knew what he was looking for, and students brought drafts to their daily small group writing tutorials as a requirement of the SPTD.

Since so many of the students were told after their first paper that they did not have a clear focus, I think the communication from the professor to the tutors to the students did not flow as smoothly in the early sessions as it did in later sessions. Yet despite this apparent pedagogical shortcoming, I saw some very fine writing samples. When Gititi returned the students’ papers he gave an overview to the class identifying the problems he noticed overall. And while I expected to see similar types of “basic writing” issues with Gititi’s student writing that I have seen at other state institutions in California and in Rhode Island, I saw instead writing that would have placed Gititi’s students at the upper end of any of the regular freshman writing classes I have taught, including those at the private Jesuit schools, Boston College and Loyola Marymount University. In fact, Gititi believes that about 40% of the class I observed was already writing at the level of the regular URI student.

Excerpted here are my in-class field notes recorded before the first response paper was due. These notes represent the most extensive directions he offered on writing. They primarily direct the students toward possible topics and demonstrate how one literature professor helps his students in the pre-writing phase:
7/1/04 (First response paper due next week . . . Today he is smiling a lot.) Gititi says, “Instead of a basket of fruit for the 4th of July, I am going to give you food for thought. The best time to start is this weekend, so you can get a draft to the tutors. Respond to Douglass’ narrative [Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself]. Start small. Focus on a particular aspect of the narrative, say a chapter, an incident, a philosophical question such as what is freedom. What are the things in American life that he critiques (justice, morality, and truth)? Is a democratic country really what he says? I don’t want you to retell the story, but you could take the incident with Mr. Covey, as it is the most talked about in literary criticism. What doors opened up for him after he learned to read and write even though he was more troubled after doing so? Or [you could write about] the failed escape attempt or the successful one. Or [write about] family life or the lack of family life.

Any of those is suitable or more. Type 3 pages. Double-space. Use MLA format. [He asks if they know it and one student says, “Yes.”] It’s much easier than you think. Once you’ve done this, #2 and #3 are a snap. I have already spoken with your tutors and I am available, too. You can email me questions.” [Some students are talking off on the side.] “Are you listening there, troublemakers?”

7/6/04 [The day before paper #1 is due.] It’s just like prom night or graduation or your first time standing at the podium; you should be nervous. [Regarding their first oral presentations, which also begin the next day.] Do not feel inhibited. These are your classmates. There are no right or wrong answers.

Here I saw Gititi addressing the “zone” of the emotions and student self-confidence, confirming that they would be anxious before turning in their first college paper, but that the experience is something they have felt before in relation to a more pleasurable experience such as a prom.

7/12/04. He hands the papers back. [I heard] some students from the 8:00 a.m. class report that they got 7 [out of 10] points. He asks for questions, four-letter words, resentments. He says, “There is no question that you understand the material, but some write far too much for a 3-page paper, or load up your paper with long quotations of 7-10 lines. So you have to write directly; write efficiently. What is the connection between any two paragraphs? Do you lump more than one quote in a paragraph without saying exactly what it means? What do you underline, the title of books or poems? When you quote, where exactly does the quotation mark come? [He puts an example on the board, and students direct him as to where the quotation marks and the period go.] Use Douglass’ whole title once; then use Narrative later. The short form underlined. Say what you want to say first, and then use a quote. Do not use a quotation at the beginning of a paragraph. 

You did not get penalized for any of these things. I want you to write well.”
“Most people fell short because they have not said it clearly; you can go straight to the point. Maybe some composition teachers direct you to spend a paragraph skirting around with what you intend to do.”

[The class is quiet. Upper bodies appear slumped.] “I know you are not feeling too well now. I promise you that you will do #2 and #3 better, because you have had my comments on #1.” [A student asks what the highest grade was.] “For this class, probably 8. 5 was the lowest. Don’t look so sad Ms. Davies.

Use “Douglass” rather than “Frederick” unless you are personally acquainted.” (emphasis added)

Now Gititi could have avoided some of the sad looks had he not graded the very first paper so hard, and had he told the students some of this information prior to the assignment. As White and White ask their audience, “[W]hy should the criteria not be shared early in the writing process, so students can know from the outset the standards for judgment to which they will be subject?” (265). My sense is that Gititi very much wants the SPTD students to learn some highly visible academic conventions in this summer program before they face a less sympathetic audience in their regular classes. It was later this day that the student with a sad look, Olabisi, encountered Gititi in the library and received some of his “consoling encouragement.”

She received a 7 out of 10 on this paper in which she discussed Negro spirituals. On the second page of her paper she quotes from Douglass’s *Narrative*, “The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by tears” (Douglass 401). Then she comments, “The lyrics to most of these songs reflected the memory of anguish, hunger, separation from loved ones, hard labor, loss and sickness.” Olabisi built her paper around a discussion of three spirituals and gospel songs included in the course anthology but not assigned: “City Called Heaven,” “Soon I Will be Gone,” and “Freedom in the Air.” It was an ambitious approach that showed the writer’s desire to work beyond her assignments and develop something new. Olabisi, who came to the United States from Nigeria when she was six years old, shows promise as an intellectual. She writes,

In conclusion, Negro spirituals sung back from the premature existence of slavery have been carried on through the voices of grandparents, mothers, fathers, and unto children. Each family, generation after generation, has continued to educate their young about the mysterious meanings of many heart-warming and divine lyrics to songs sung by their ancestors. These songs of the past continue to touch the hearts and minds of African Americans as well as those who are beginning to read about the history of Blacks in the United States. The words of these spirituals leave on when the doors of churches are swung open every Sunday morning, with people gathered
in their best attire and voices elegantly welcome them singing, “Over my head I see freedom in the air, Over my head, oh lord I see freedom in the air, Over my head I see freedom in the air There must be a God somewhere (Gates and McKay 23). [sic]

Of course, there is some awkward phrasing (such as “the words leave on”), but I am impressed by Olabisi’s ability to take an open-ended assignment and locate one clear aspect of the text, the importance of spirituals to the slave, to assemble unassigned examples from the anthology, and to conclude by relating it to contemporary life. My main criticism when I read her paper was that she digressed too far from Douglass. Later in her college career, she will be able to quote from the spirituals and develop a stronger link to Douglass’ points.

Olabisi showed me the paper with Gititi’s comments. Right at the top of the first page by the title he writes, “You should state the objective of your paper at this point.” At the end he reiterates the point. “You should state the theme of your essay from the very beginning. Organize your arguments in a logical sequence.” Olabisi would tell me in a luncheon interview with her classmate Stephanie, “I didn’t really understand what he wants from the beginning.” I saw several papers which contained similar comments about lack of focus and, as he said in class after the graded papers were returned, students learn to “go straight to the point.”

About a month after the summer session ended, I asked Olabisi about these initial comments and how she felt about that first paper in retrospect. She wrote,

On my first paper, comments were made by Professor Gititi as to how I should state my objective earlier on in my paper. These comments allowed me to make a transition from high school English courses to the expectations of college English classes. I learned that stating my objection [sic] earlier on in my paper allows me the ability to clearly state my purpose of writing. Also, it allows for the paper to flow much easier and stops me from getting carried away by adding excessive material that may be unnecessary. I used his comments to demonstrate growth in my writing as well as my abilities as a student.

Olabisi is internalizing the critical voice of academic authority. She had initially been leaning toward attending Pace University in New York for work in the biological and medical sciences, but the SPTD experience apparently prompted at least a temporary change of heart, as she planned to start as a freshman at URI in September.

Four papers later, Olabisi and her classmates would have to write a take-home final exam and answer one of four questions. Olabisi chose to write in response to #2: “Citing specific authors and their texts, discuss in
detail the ways in which African American female authors have made their contributions to the body and spirit of African American literature. You may include your analysis of political statements as well as fiction and poetry studied for this course.”

The question is intended to keep the students focused on assigned material in order to prevent their getting lost in the nearly 3000-page anthology. On the same day she turned in her final paper, I interviewed Gititi and asked him who he thought was most likely to succeed in college. He listed several students and made the statement, “Olabisi is a very good writer.”

I looked at her final paper to see if she was actually following the early advice of stating her objective early and staying focused on it. I think she does. In her introductory paragraph, Olabisi referred to the writing of Margaret Walker, Alice Walker, June Jordan, Mari Evans, Zora Neale Hurston, Anna Julia Cooper, and Marita Bonner. She turns to some of the assigned reading: Margaret Walker’s poem “For My People,” June Jordan’s “Poem about My Rights,” Anna Julia Cooper’s essay, “Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Process of Race,” and Maya Angelou’s works, “Still I Rise” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.” This is a lot of material, and in-depth analysis could not be encapsulated in five pages. There is evidence, however, of establishing and highlighting a thesis or two: “These African American writers have been able to use their creativity in addition to their vibrancy to discuss topics such as love, optimism, death, racial equality, the Negro dream, and gender issues. . . . The most noteworthy concept or ideal that these authors preach about is the notion of what it is like to live as a Black woman in the American society.” This point is sustained in her conclusion: “These women have taken the spirit of our grandmothers and mothers as described by Alice Walker, ‘In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens,’ to become ‘Saints’ and historical black figures, who are praised for keeping the spirit of the Black woman alive.” What strikes me as I read Olabisi’s work and that of other students born in Africa and now living and being educated in the United States is that they are really studying literary “reports” or representations of the impact of slavery on people who were connected to their extended and enslaved ancestral families.

**Academic Literacy and the Issue of Voice**

In the preface to her book *Academic Literacy and the Nature of Expertise*, Cheryl Geisler tells us that she moves through many voices, some the “objective and authoritative voice of the researcher and scholar, others the personal voice of someone not yet at home in the discourses of the academy” (xvi). One can only wonder if a faculty member at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where Geisler was at the time, is not yet comfortable with academic discourse, how can we expect students in a pre-matriculation
program to become so in six weeks? We cannot. The writing samples given to me by student participants showed an engagement with the literature of the course, but the voice is frequently that of a novice trying to imitate the language of a new community.

In the passages I have quoted from Olabisi, there does not appear to be any vernacular, only a third person voice of a young scholar. At times this may be the case because, as Geisler tells us, “Schools ask students to leave their personal knowledge at the classroom door and move instead into a world of decontextualized facts” (29). However, Olabisi does draw upon her knowledge of the black church-going community. Gititi expressed a related concern to me, that students compartmentalize what they learn. While he describes his students as being “very good,” he also spoke to me of “deficiencies” because they have not spent enough time on writing in high school: “Their learning experience as people just emerging from high school often shows they have gaps in areas such as the social sciences. They have not been encouraged to think across the disciplines, to bring what they know of the social sciences into the discussion of literature. . . .” He agreed with me on one notable exception. I was very impressed when an obviously bright and capable student named Della spoke at some length about the problems of the Reconstruction, a subject she had obviously studied prior to her summer in the SPTD. (Unlike many of the students, early in the course Della delivered her own presentation without reading from her notes.)

Like Solange, Olabisi, and Della, Stephanie also impressed me with her confidence and competence. Stephanie did not leave her “personal knowledge” at the classroom door. Stephanie’s parents are Haitian, and she learned to speak French while living in Haiti for two years. She was born in Brooklyn and attended Rhode Island middle and high schools. Her classroom presentation, an elaborate writing process, and the extent to which she incorporated personal opinion in her final (take-home) exam show her to be someone who had not yet been restricted by the academy and the notion that writing should simply be the passing on of “decontextualized facts.”

Before her joint presentation with Olabisi on Maya Angelou’s poem “Still I Rise” and Alice Walker’s essay “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens,” Stephanie pulled a pair of three-inch spiked heels out of her backpack and exchanged her comfortable shoes for them. She clearly wanted to appear “professional.” Although such a sight usually creates pains in the fascia of the arches in my feet, I was able to get beyond this distraction to hear one of the strongest presentations of the twenty-four-student class. While Stephanie had notes with her at the podium, she did not rely on them and appeared to speak extemporaneously and with a great deal of confidence. The class clapped loudly when she finished. Later Stephanie paid an
astounding and apparently sincere compliment to Gititi as she stated: “I have a very short attention span, and I listened to every word you said.”

Perhaps her oratorical skills developed from an unusually careful writing process she had been developing since middle school. Based on reviews of studies done on students’ writing processes (Emig, Pianko, Flower and Hayes, etc.), Geisler contends that students spend very little time in planning their school papers, and maintain “a highly cursory process” (41). Amma’s self-report from ENGL/AAF 248 might appear to confirm such a process:

Well, I don’t do a rough draft or anything. I don’t like writing it out on paper. I just type it on my laptop and work from there. And I usually have my writing tutor look it over to tell me if I am doing good so far, cause the last, the first paper, he said my thesis wasn’t clear. . . I have a paper due, a five-page paper, and I didn’t start it yet. [She laughs.] I know what I am going to do it on though. And I like did a paper on this subject [postpartum depression], and so I know what I am doing.

Despite her denial, Amma is drafting; she is simply doing it all on her computer and using word processing to edit or revise.

Stephanie’s self-report differs from Amma’s. There are three aspects of Stephanie’s process that I find remarkable: she begins as soon as she receives the assignment, she allows time for the paper to sit between drafts, and she has—if I am counting correctly—received feedback four times before passing the paper in: a high school friend who carefully attends to writing, the writing class teacher/tutor, the writing lab tutor, and the writing class teacher again. She adds and edits after each feedback session. She is a serious, disciplined, and committed student.

Stephanie wrote her take-home final on question #4, one that seemed to invite the most analysis and personal knowledge. It reads,

Looking back at the material studied for this course, and placing ourselves in the first decade of the 21st century, what issues of personal, community, and national importance have those materials dealt with? Has any progress been made? What problems still need to be dealt with? In what way(s)? Be sure to use clear and relevant examples for each of your answers.

The question immediately reminded me of an essay by Toni Morrison, “A Slow Walk of Trees,” anthologized in a multi-cultural composition reader I used in a freshman writing class over a decade ago and originally published in the New York Times Magazine in 1976. Morrison describes the disagreements between her grandparents over “whether the fortunes of black people were improving” and then the disagreements among her parents over whether “the moral fiber of white people could improve” (78).
Stephanie writes, “But most of us are plagued by a sense of being worn shell-thin by constant repression and hostility as well as the impression of being buoyed by visible testimony of tremendous strides” (79).

After listening to Stephanie’s description of her writing process, I expected a highly polished essay. It was not, but I do not want to itemize the essay’s petty flaws. Suffice it to say, as a soon-to-be collegiate writer, Stephanie is not yet proficient in academic English or with sentence-level editing, but she is able to state a clear point expressively: “As people of color their hopes were drowned in sorrows and burdens while America rejoiced [in] their unfortunate circumstances.”

Her paper begins with general comments about the Black Power movement and the Black Panthers, followed by a tighter focus on black women who “faced double prejudice, sexism and racism.” Drawing on the first example of Zora Neale Hurston, she then discusses how strong African American women have become in the twenty-first century, some choosing to be single mothers, utilizing daycare to enter the workforce, and demonstrating increasing productivity. She tells her readers that there are more women than men enrolled in universities. (And here she comes!) Moreover, Stephanie’s voice and personal knowledge is demonstrated throughout her paper as she includes references to contemporary icons in pop culture:

Another example of dominating African American icons is Russell Simons founder of a clothing label known as “Phat Farm” and of music industry Def Jam incorporated married a model named Kimora Lee. She is also a successful entrepreneur, she owns her successful clothing line entitled “Baby Phat” and is one of the most successful female clothing designers in America today in the urban market. . . [sic]

Perhaps this information is not new to Gititi, but it was to me. Stephanie does not avoid the aspect of the exam question about what remains to be done, and she indicates that all is not well: “However, accomplished you will be, there will still be at least once in your lifetime where you will encounter a stereotype.” This sentence brings to the paper the same type of ambivalence Morrison discusses.

Conclusion

I find Professor Gitahi Gititi to be a man who cares for his students and who works diligently to prepare them to succeed, both intellectually and emotionally, in the academy. He has high expectations for the graduates of SPTD. (Some will go on to be school superintendents with the power to change the curriculum and make it more anti-racist.) He watches them as they make their way through URI, bragging like a parent when they make
the Dean's List. It was a pleasure to see a group of “young scholars” work in an environment where they are clearly expected to succeed. Gititi reflected, “I think their experience of having been inspired to succeed through this period is a greater driving force than anything they have seen before.”

I observed him working in the context of a caring program, one designed to bring students with all sorts of disadvantages into the university and to help them succeed. There is the expectation that a strong, talented student exists. URI's SPTD program avoids the two ways the academy can let students of color down, as appropriately stated by Jim Barton and Lisa Delpit: “1.) We don’t expect enough of them and 2.) We don’t tell them what the rules of the game are.” Like Coach Carter in the 2005 film by the same name, the program works to develop talent on all levels. In both the film and in the SPTD a pedagogy of care can look like the old notions of “tough love.” Carter locks his undefeated high school basketball team out of the gym and forfeits a game when academic progress reports indicate they have not lived up to their contracts to maintain a 2.3 GPA. The school board votes against Carter and orders him to unlock the gym. There he finds his team has set up desks and is studying. As in the true story, six of the players from Richmond, California, end up going to college, five on scholarship; they play basketball and they graduate from college as well.

There is a strong expectation for the students in the SPTD program. Barton witnessed Gerald Williams, program graduate and then SPTD director, pulling students out of a class:

It was such a mixture of being real tough with them, you know, really stern, and letting them know he really cared about them. He was really good at that. I wouldn’t have wanted to be one of these students. They went back into the room thinking, “I don’t want to be doing that a lot with Gerald.” At the same time they didn’t feel like he didn’t care about them. They felt like, “Hey, he’s going to pay attention to what’s happening with me.”

I would love to see the students where I have taught receive the same level of consistent mentoring, writing, and nurturing—in addition to appropriate limit setting. I am sure there are a great many of us who feel the same way and who wish we had the time and energy to provide something akin to cura personalis on a broader basis in our own teaching lives. Junior faculty who challenge and discipline students who are underperforming are often targeted for negative comments in student evaluations, which are highlighted in their performance reviews. Very few students praise faculty who keep them on target with attendance policies, as they don’t know until the end of their first semester that they would otherwise be on probation for low GPAs like many of their friends. Challenging students to work hard while offering extra help and support is good pedagogy. Gititi and the Talent Development Program do that well.
Davies, Olabisi M. Personal communication. July 2004.


INTERVIEW

Returning to the Table: A Conversation with Gary A. Olson

Kyle Jensen and Shelley DeBlasis

In 1993, Composition Studies published “Turning the Tables: An (Inter)view with Gary A. Olson” by Sid Dobrin, in which Dobrin and Olson discuss, among other things, the disciplinary status of composition and rhetoric. Olson energetically promoted cross-disciplinary scholarship that places critical theory at the center of the field’s research agenda. Given that fifteen years have passed since the publication of Dobrin’s interview, and because our field has increasingly produced this type of theoretical research, we wanted to discuss the current state of the discipline with him. In the interview that follows, we ask Olson to comment on a range of topics that include the economics of academic publishing, the future of electronic scholarship, the ongoing problem of contingent labor, and the benefits of an integrated English Studies department. In addition, he clarifies his positions on the difference between agonism and antagonism, on maintaining a crucial balance between teaching and research, and on the need to “abandon the rhetoric of assertion.”

Unlike in “Turning the Tables,” Olson now speaks from the perspective of a university administrator, noting how his understanding of issues in higher education have deepened as a result of administrative work for the University of South Florida and Illinois State University. He remains actively committed to the field, publishing a monthly column in the Chronicle of Higher Education and co-editing (with Lynn Worsham) two collections of scholarly work: The Politics of Possibility: Encountering the Radical Imagination (2007) and Plugged In: Technology, Rhetoric and Culture in a Posthuman Age (2008).

KJ: You have composed a diverse range of scholarly projects, including a monthly column for The Chronicle of Higher Education, numerous journal articles, two web-based projects, and almost twenty books. Has your view of yourself as a writer changed given the unique demands of each genre?

GAO: My view of myself as a writer hasn’t changed, but the scope and range of the kind of writing I do has. Writing a scholarly article is quite different from and more demanding than writing a monthly column. Although the column genre is short and different from a scholarly article in
almost every way, the demands of writing it are still tough. What makes all
genres similar is rhetoric. Rhetoric—your sense of purpose and audience,
addressing an audience for a particular reason—does not change. What
does change is how you approach each different type of writing.

**SD:** At the time of our interview, you are Dean of the College of Arts and
Sciences at Illinois State University (ISU). Before this appointment, you
were the chief academic officer at the University of South Florida in St.
Petersburg. How have these executive positions influenced how you view
the work of rhetoric and composition programs in particular and English
departments in general? Have these positions changed the way you under-
stand the politics of our field, especially regarding the conditions under
which many practitioners labor?

**GAO:** I don’t know that they’ve changed it in a substantive way, but per-
haps my understanding has deepened. One of the main issues of concern
in the field is the use and abuse of contingent labor. For many years, I’ve
been an advocate of more humane treatment of those who are in part-time
and non-tenure-track positions, and I still believe that we need to find ways
to address this ongoing problem. What might have changed given my per-
spective as an administrator is that I can now see that things aren’t quite as
simple as they often appear. It is easy, for example, to caricature institutions
as heartless places that intentionally conspire to exploit people, but that’s a
bit too simplistic. I don’t know of any institution or administrator who sets
out with forethought to exploit instructors.

What’s more in play is that large forces are all competing with one an-
other in an institution. Each institution has to try to meet the demands of
a great many constituencies but with limited resources. Most of us are just
trying to stretch the little we have as far as it will go. For example, students
not only need to take required writing courses, but also introductory math
courses, the whole range of general education courses, and their major
courses. So, what you find is that most administrators are struggling—scram-
bling really—to try to meet as many of those demands as possible given
the resources they have to work with. If you are in a public institution, that
usually means that you don’t have enough resources to work with. That’s
why shortcuts get taken and people resort to placing more burden on part-
timers and non-tenure-track faculty than anyone would like.

So, for me what’s changed is more a breadth of perspective in seeing
that this is a complex question. We, as a society, need to address whether we
genuinely wish to support higher education. For a long time, it has seemed
that higher education is not a high priority in this country. These are the
larger questions that really need to be answered before we can move for-
ward on labor issues.
**SD:** The Department of English at ISU is relatively unique in offering a doctoral degree in “English Studies,” defining its mission as preparing students to examine the “interactions among rhetoric, literature, linguistics, critical theory, writing, and pedagogy.” Recently published books, such as Bruce McComiskey’s *English Studies: An Introduction to the Discipline(s)*, advocate a similar integration of the various sub-disciplines commonly housed within English departments. What, in your view, are the benefits of an English Studies model? And, given your investment in interdisciplinary work, do you think that an English Studies model is the future of English departments?

**GAO:** I have consistently advocated for a thoroughly integrated department. Those who have argued for secession of rhetoric programs from the English department are making a mistake because divided we are substantially weaker than we are if we are united in one department, and that is true on many different levels. Politically you have more influence when you have a larger and more complex English department that is more of a force in the college and in the institution than you do when English Studies is fragmented into smaller pieces. We need to balance the various constituencies within English and avoid Balkanizing the department.

As far as English Studies is concerned, there are different ways to effect that. What is needed for students coming out, let’s say, in a graduate program, is to have a real balance between general knowledge of their field and the narrow specialization that they have chosen to work in. I would say that this is the case in any discipline. You need to have a solid basis of knowledge in your discipline in general. If you have only a narrow specialization, then you’re greatly limited. And, of course, you could reverse that equation and say that if you are all over the map and don’t have any deep knowledge in any particular part of the discipline, then you are at a disadvantage. So, a balance is extremely important.

**KJ:** Throughout your career, you have encouraged the field to forge new connections between the study of written discourse and scholarship in other disciplines. You spoke about this issue in the original interview with Sid Dobrin. Are you satisfied with how our discipline has responded to such challenges?

**GAO:** As a field, we have been at the cusp of some of the most important developments occurring at this moment in intellectual history, and it seems to me intellectually negligent to pretend that these discussions aren’t happening. Given that numerous disciplines are discovering that knowledge production is integrally related to discourse and to rhetoric, I think it is incumbent upon those of us who think of ourselves as rhetoricians and theorists of rhetoric to plumb those connections as deeply as we can.
I believe that this productive tension between embracing our commitment as a field to students, skills, and teaching, on the one hand, and pushing at the scholarly borders of the discipline, on the other, is alive and well. However, there are too few people on one side of the equation. In my view, it is all too easy to opt for the more narrow work of just attending to your students or exploring how you might teach a particular class better. In contrast, it is much more difficult to be concerned with the larger intellectual questions of our day. It takes substantial attention, hard work, difficult reading, and sheer effort to participate in those conversations—but, after all, that’s what intellectuals should be doing. That is our job.

What separates us as university professors from, say, teachers in high schools is that we aren’t just teachers; we are professors: we’re teachers and scholars. We have a scholarly role to fulfill. I would like to see the discipline embrace, more than it has in the past, some of the broader themes in our scholarship. I am not the only one who has made this argument. Fortunately, there are still younger people in the field who continue to make this point, and I am optimistic that the case will continue to be made—perhaps more cogently than I have.

**KJ:** In many of your works, including some of your more recent column essays in *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* you advise scholars to adopt a less polemical stance in their arguments, especially if they hope to accomplish what they desire (see “How to Get”). For example, echoing Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, you have argued for the importance of persuasion and mutual respect as crucial features in any hegemonic struggle (see “Death of Composition”). Still, you have been described by scholars such as Joseph Harris as “agitating for ideological critique” and “polemical.” Do you think you have, at times, adopted a polemical stance? If so, is that stance justified given your project to make composition and rhetoric a more intellectually rigorous and diverse discipline?

**GAO:** Laclau and Mouffe made the distinction better than anyone. There is a huge difference between agonism and antagonism, or between being adversaries and being enemies. As academics, our job is to point out difficulties we see or to correct misunderstandings that we feel exist. The difference is in the execution. If you attack people, if you are antagonistic; that is not productive. I have always said this and still do. Of course, when I contend that we should refrain from antagonism, I do not mean that scholars can’t disagree, that agonism is inappropriate. In fact, we would not be very good intellectuals if we did not take sides and argue issues; that is what we do for a living. In Laclau and Mouffe’s terms, we might be adversaries, but we don’t have to be enemies.
So no, I suppose if Joe Harris or others are saying that I am being polemical, probably what they mean is that they just don’t like what I happen to be saying at the moment. Such claims do not mean that I have adopted an antagonistic stance, especially given that I have argued against antagonism consistently throughout the years. A lot of people refer to my exchange with Wendy Bishop, and this is precisely the point I was making back then: you don’t need to engage in *ad hominem* attack to make a point about the direction that the field is taking. In fact, you have an obligation to point out if the field is heading in a direction that seems unproductive if you believe that is the case. So, again, it is a question of execution. Do you respectfully disagree with somebody and stay on the level of details, evidence, and argument, or do you turn your discourse into some kind of *ad hominem* attack and name calling? The latter is inappropriate and unprofessional; the former is a necessity.

**KJ:** In several of your publications you have characterized the “new theory wars” as being initiated by the expressivist backlash against a two-decade long investment in theoretical scholarship. Having some distance from that conversation, do you think that “war” is an appropriate metaphor for describing this intradisciplinary struggle?

**GAO:** Well, perhaps it was only a skirmish. The war metaphor didn’t originate with me; it was common in the 1970s and 80s to talk about the theory wars in literary studies and then later in rhetoric and composition. I was simply observing that we were witnessing a return of the theory wars in rhetoric and composition. So, I cannot take complete ownership of the metaphor.

In effect, this question harkens back to our discussion about agonism and antagonism. Early in the field’s development there was a great deal of antagonism against scholars who were exploring new forms of theoretical scholarship and engaging in postmodern critique. I suppose that a fair amount of antagonism went back the other way as well. Where this antagonism came from is hard to say. Some have suggested that individuals who have chosen not to conduct theoretical research have felt threatened by this new kind of scholarship. I don’t know the answer. What we were experiencing about a decade ago was a similar kind of tension between the kinds of theoretical discourse and scholarship that we saw a few decades prior and a backlash against that discourse.

As I pointed out in the exchange with Wendy, it is ironic that the very scholars who were advancing a broader kind of theoretical scholarship were the very ones who were closed out for a long time in our field’s early history. In fact, it wasn’t until about 1980 when several new journals sprang up and several presses began to publish books in this area that theorists were no longer disenfranchised or marginalized. It seemed odd to me then that
she and others were claiming to feel marginalized when in fact they were
the people in charge of CCCCs and the large professional organizations in
the field.

So, I will leave it to others to decide whether or not war is a good or
bad metaphor. What was clearly true at the time that I made that claim was
that we were experiencing a return of an unproductive antagonism that got
us nowhere and that prevented us from maintaining a productive agonism
that might have moved us forward.

**SD:** Over the past decade, academic publishing has changed considerably
in response to drastic cuts in university budgets. Peter Givler, Executive
Director of the Association of American University Presses, has argued that
the closing of university presses will not suppress scholarly discourse be-
cause academic writers will find other publishers or other media in which
to publish their work. Givler does state, however, that the university itself
“will be silenced” by such closings. Would you comment on Givler’s state-
ment? Do you think that the U.S. university still values the commitment to
scholarship that the university press symbolizes?

**GAO:** The university, of course, is committed to knowledge-making and
dissemination. That is never going to change; it’s a *sine qua non*. The uni-
versity press may symbolize one kind of dissemination, but certainly not
the only kind. The scholarly monograph is the staple of humanists and
perhaps some social scientists, but it is by no means the standard in many
disciplines. Scientists publish their important work in research journals.
Occasionally, a senior scientist may toward the end of a long and successful
career write a book, but this is not how scientists do their work. The same
could be said of many of the disciplines in the social sciences—or engineer-
ing or medicine, for example. So, the university press symbolizes one kind
of knowledge dissemination, but only one narrow form.

Now, it is true that several mostly economic forces are exerting some
stress on scholarly presses. The cost of paper, for example, has become
prohibitive, so much so that it has forced some smaller presses out of busi-
ness. It is exponentially more costly now to publish books than it was in the
very recent past. On top of that, there has been a marked decline in sales
of scholarly books. People just don’t seem to buy scholarly books at the rate
that they used to. These economic forces cause scholarly presses to publish
substantially fewer books than once was the case, and to be much more
selective in what they publish. Narrow topics are out; topics with broad
appeal are in.

So, these economic tensions are having a tangible effect on the university
presses, which in turn has had a ripple effect on the tenure and promotion
process. As it becomes more difficult for scholars to get books published,
it becomes more difficult for them when it comes time for tenure and promotion, especially if they are in a discipline that had been relying almost exclusively on book production. That will need to be addressed, and that’s what the MLA recommended in its report of 2006. That is, universities—or distinct colleges and departments—need to make adjustments in their tenure and promotion requirements so that they can provide the kind of flexibility necessary for productive scholars to obtain tenure and promotion regardless of whether they have published a scholarly monograph, which at one time was—and still is in some disciplines and institutions—the necessary hurdle. But none of these forces means that the university has lost its age-old commitment to knowledge-making. It simply means that economic forces are coming to bear on that little corner of the process.

SD: Nevertheless, many in the humanities are quite concerned with the current state of academic publishing and its relation to tenure and promotion processes. In 2002 Stephen Greenblatt, then president of MLA, wrote an open letter to members detailing the precarious situation encountered by many departments because of the relationship between the “systemic” economic problems affecting university libraries and presses, and the book publishing requirements of tenure for junior faculty. He wrote, “People who have spent years of professional training—our students, our colleagues—are at risk. Their careers are in jeopardy, and higher education stands to lose, or at least severely to damage, a generation of young scholars.”

GAO: As I said, departments and colleges will need to make adjustments in tenure and promotions requirements so as to introduce some amount of flexibility. Simply demanding a book for tenure may not be the best way to go. Instead, requiring a book or its equivalent in articles in well-respected, peer-reviewed journals (as but one example) would be one way to introduce some flexibility for scholars doing work in the humanities.

On the other hand, I would hate to see these economic forces cause scholars—young or not—to stop attempting to write good, sustained scholarly monographs, because this is a genre that allows you to produce a much more substantive kind of scholarship than you can in a typical journal article. The genre serves a real purpose and therefore needs to be preserved. Choosing not to attempt to write a scholarly monograph (if you are in the humanities) would be the equivalent of refusing to go up for an award because you determined in advance that you wouldn’t be competitive. Not going up for an award would ensure that you never get the award, and, similarly, it would be a mistake not to attempt to produce a scholarly monograph simply because it is becoming more difficult to get book manuscripts accepted for publication.

What you need to do if you are a scholar is to hedge your bets and to engage in multiple kinds of scholarly work so that if, for one reason or

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another, some don’t seem to attract publishers, others of your works will. But that’s always been the case. A productive scholar is always producing multiple kinds of work at any given time—not just one. It was always a mistake (even before all these current economic problems) to put all your eggs in one basket. The person who in effect says, “I’ve got six years until my tenure decision and I am going to spend those six years writing a great book and not producing anything else” is making a serious mistake. This, it seems to me, is a prescription for disaster.

**KJ:** Your “Toward a Post-Process Composition: Abandoning the Rhetoric of Assertion” has drawn a fair amount of critical attention. Nancy Welch writes, “But I’ve also observed my students are reluctant to come to conclusions, and that when they do, they are quick—sometimes too quick—to concede that an opposite conclusion might also be true. They appear to be in agreement with Gary Olson’s (oddly assertive) argument that we repudiate ‘thesis-flexing rhetoric’ and pursue instead a ‘more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive, non-assertive stance.’ But at what cost?” (“Taking Sides” 150). Welch seems to be arguing that assertion, as a rhetorical strategy, is a crucial feature of any activist-oriented discourse and that a resistance to assertion may impede political action and stifle political progress. As someone whose scholarly career has taken a decidedly political focus, how do you read her ambivalence toward your recommendation against assertion?

**GAO:** There is much to be said about what Nancy Welch is arguing, and I agree with her. However, we need to be a bit more nuanced. What I have been arguing is that both students and scholars have too easily fallen into a rhetoric of assertion—that is, a mode of discourse that is dominated by a kind of agonistic and, to harken back to one of your other questions, an antagonistic style of discourse. Antagonism is, once again, unproductive. What Jean-François Lyotard and some of the other scholars I cited in that article were suggesting is that we too often engage in a type of Enlightenment Rationality assertion of Truth (with a capital “T”). It would be more productive to step back and be more exploratory from time to time. With that said, nobody is claiming that you should never make assertions; that would be zany. Obviously, when you write an essay or you answer one of these questions, there are assertions, there is a thesis. I certainly hope nobody is suggesting that I am against that. What I am against is a kind of rhetoric that is dominated by the kind of Truth-asserting that closes off inquiry—the kind of unproductive stance that too many students seem to adopt.

**KJ:** One of the main contributions you make in “Toward a Post-Process Composition,” as scholars such as Nancy Welch (negatively) and D. Diane Davis (positively) have noted, is an argument for the explicit resistance to claims
of mastery that replaces a rhetoric of assertion with a more dynamic, dialogic disposition toward theory—you distinguish mastery with Theory, and a dynamic, dialogic approach to knowledge production as theorizing. However, in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* piece entitled “That’s Your Opinion,” you lament, “We seem to be witnessing the apotheosis of opinion, a trend that has grave consequences for us all in higher education. A generation of students and others are training themselves not to become critical thinkers, not to search for evidence or support of an assertion, and not to hold themselves or others accountable for the assertions they make” and argue that “agreement or disagreement [is] a privilege earned only after having mastered and reflected on the material.” Clearly, assertion and mastery play a role in the type of critical education that you hope to advance. So, how do we as teachers and scholars maintain the delicate balance between the inevitable role of, but necessary resistance to mastery and assertion?

**GAO:** The answer is contained in your question: the balance is what counts. Of course, this question relates back to the previous one. In a way, what I was suggesting in “That’s Your Opinion” is similar to what I was arguing about assertion—that people seem to think they can simply assert something is true and not be held accountable for it. This view permeates popular culture, so much so that it is almost as if people believe that all opinions are equal. So, according to this logic, I could have a racist opinion and that would be equal to someone’s non-racist opinion. That doesn’t make sense.

This view is exacerbated by television news and entertainment when they conduct their countless opinion polls: do you believe Osama Bin Laden is in Pakistan? Well, how could anybody know that? If we knew that, we would be able to find him. Yet, everyone gets to weigh in as if their opinion on that topic really mattered. I’m sorry, but your opinion on where Osama Bin Laden is doesn’t mean anything because you have no inside knowledge: you are not a member of the military intelligence community; your opinion is simply a guess, pure and simple. Asserting an opinion to be true, absent from any corroborating evidence, seems to me to be the supreme anti-intellectual gesture.

What I contend in both “That’s Your Opinion” and “Abandoning the Rhetoric of Assertion” is that we need a kind of balance. You just don’t make assertions without backing—that’s central and always has been central to good writing and good speaking. If you are teaching argumentation in a class, the first thing you do is teach students to support the statements that they make because simply making statements and being assertive is not persuasive. On the other hand, systematically making a case for something, which often means being nuanced and examining the opposite side as well as your own side, is much more intellectual. This type of dialogic activity is what Diane Davis and Jean-François Lyotard and others are really getting at, and it is certainly what I was getting at in these various pieces.
**SD:** In our own discipline there are a few successful refereed electronic journals such as *Kairos*, *Enculturation*, and *The Writing Instructor*, and recently *Composition Forum* transitioned to an exclusively web-based format. In addition, most of the leading print-based journals such as *College English*, *JAC*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *Rhetoric Review* maintain some kind of web presence that in conjunction with electronic journals, blogs, and list-servs provide an important web-based community for those in the field. What do you think is the future of electronic publishing considering the state of academic publishing and library budgets?

**GAO:** It is important that we continue to support traditional print-based scholarly journals, even though as we move into the future there is a good chance that many, if not all, print journals will be replaced by some kind of electronic medium. The key point here is that professionals in any discipline know which journals are the more rigorous and more highly regarded peer-reviewed forums and which are not. Although any given professor may argue about the exact ranking of this or that journal, usually there is a general sense of which journals comprise the top tier, which comprise the middle tier, and so on. Moreover, key to those kinds of distinctions is the rigor of the peer-review process and the acceptance rate of the journal. So, for example, getting into *PMLA* or *Critical Inquiry* or *JAC* is a rather difficult accomplishment given the strong and rigorous peer-review process in play at those journals and given the sheer percentage of rejections when you calculate the ratio of submissions to submissions accepted. What that translates into is that those who have published in top-tier journals such as these have clearly accomplished something special. That’s why publishing an article in a highly ranked journal means a lot in the tenure and promotion process or in the search process when you are looking for a position. People will say, “Well, if she has gotten into that journal, then she is a pretty accomplished scholar.”

We don’t have anything like that tacit consensus right now with the electronic media. This is not a criticism; it’s just a fact. As good as *Kairos* and some of the other electronic journals are (I’m on the editorial board of *The Writing Instructor*), there’s no consensus—there’s nothing even approaching a consensus—as to the rigor of the process to get in those journals. Now, it may very well be that the rigor of one of these journals is even greater than all the print journals—period. But the fact is that there is no consensus; there’s no general understanding that this is the case. And because of that lack of consensus, placing an article in, let’s say, *Kairos* (you can fill in the blank with any title) is nowhere near as important in the usual tenure and promotion process as having something in, let’s say, *College English* (again, we could fill in that blank with any number of journal titles).
Now, you can reply, “Well, that’s not fair.” And my response is always, “It may be true that this is unfair, but that’s the way it is at this moment in time.” When scholars new to the field ask me if I believe it is a good idea for them to publish exclusively in electronic media, I say, “Absolutely not!” I say that because you have to deal with the reality of people’s prejudices (for lack of a better word) about the rigor and importance of the places that you publish in. Until we reach a point where the general scholarly community understands particular electronic journals to be as rigorous and as prestigious as their print-based counterparts, it would be foolish—and, in a certain way, self-destructive—to put most or much of your energy into publishing exclusively in those venues as opposed to the more traditional venues. That’s just a hard, cold reality—distasteful, perhaps, but true nonetheless.

What I say to those who ask my advice is that if you still want to publish in electronic journals, that’s fine—just make sure that your record in the more traditional venues is unimpeachable so that people can easily dismiss (if they want to) your publications in the electronic forums but still would have to admit that you’re a very accomplished scholar on the basis of your print publications. That’s the best advice that somebody could give at this point in time. And that may change. We may get to the point where everyone agrees that having something accepted and published in *Kairos* is far more prestigious than having it in *College English* or *JAC*. Perhaps that will be a good thing. It will certainly mean we’ll use fewer trees. But if you’re an untenured professor, you can’t just say, “Well, this is the wave of the future, and I am just going to publish exclusively in electronic media anyway because I know I’m right.” That is a prescription for being denied tenure one day. So, the best advice is to hedge your bets until the actual consensus about these things changes.

One more point. There’s a big difference between an electronic scholarly journal and then these other forums you list: blogs, listservs, and so on. As scholars, we have got to start making distinctions between these various forums. I am worried about the number of people that spend so much time on blogs and on listservs who then turn around and want to contend that these constitute a kind of scholarly activity that has the equivalence of writing articles in journals—electronic or otherwise. It is simply not the case. There might be interesting discussions going on in your blog, but there is nothing that separates a discussion in the blog from a discussion in a faculty lounge somewhere or in a cocktail lounge over a few beers. Now, you can have stimulating discussions in all three, but these discussions together do not constitute a scholarly activity. They may focus on scholarly subjects, but the discussions themselves are not scholarship. In contrast, writing a formal article in an electronic journal like *Kairos* is a scholarly activity. We’ve got to be able to make those distinctions. I worry about the people who spend their time on the listservs and blogs and thereby push themselves out of being able to produce the kinds of scholarly work that is going to get them somewhere.
**SD:** Well, what about faculty who specialize in new media and multi-modal literacies? What kind of responses do you think the profession needs to make in tenure and promotion processes in light of the increase in electronically-based scholarship from such specialists?

**GAO:** These discussions need to take place first in each discipline. The faculty in each discipline need to work toward a consensus as to what are the most acceptable kinds of knowledge making in that discipline. If, in fact, it emerges as a consensus that in discipline X, let’s say, electronic web sites on scholarly topics are particularly important and should be recognized as such, then I think that should be a compelling argument to bring back, first to one’s department and then to one’s college and institution, so as to make adjustments in the tenure, promotion, and recognition processes that take these things into account.

It has to be discipline specific because disciplines approach their work in different ways. Some disciplines will benefit from their scholarship being more electronic. For example, disciplines that do analysis of art works may be much better off being able to have access to images on the web. In contrast, it may be that certain parts of English Studies still wish to preserve the scholarly monograph as a unique way to make a sustained scholarly argument. These discussions, however, must necessarily be discipline specific; they must be broad discussions in which substantial input and soul-searching transpires, and then the faculty in those disciplines needs to go back to their departments and make cogent and compelling cases for whatever changes need to be made in the requirements for tenure, promotion, and recognition that are in play there. That’s the only way that we are going to make meaningful changes to respond to the forces that are out there.

**SD:** The debate over the Open Access movement has really heated up over the past few years, especially in response to increased budget cuts and legal battles over copyright issues. As Peter Suber explains, “Open Access literature is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions.” Many scholars view Open Access as the solution to two problems that we have discussed: the economic issues faced by university presses and libraries, and the publishing requirements for tenure and promotion. Supporters of Open Access view it as an intellectually productive and responsible next step for scholarship in our current historical moment. As a college administrator and a scholar who publishes on the ethical use of technology, what are your views on the Open Access movement?

**GAO:** Certainly, Open Access is well intended. Having scholarly work easily accessible and free of charge is a great convenience for the scholarly community and will enable scholars to work much more efficiently and effectively
than ever before. The movement seems to be gaining momentum almost daily. From the Budapest Open Access Initiative (early in this decade), to recent attempts by NIH to mandate that federally funded research be made freely available, to a recent report that the Arts and Science faculty of Harvard were committing to the practice, Open Access has become a permanent part of the scholarly landscape. My only concern is the same as it has always been with web-based materials: there must be some way to certify that any given article has gone through a rigorous process of peer review. The problem is that because anyone can post anything on the Internet, we are in danger of losing all vestiges of quality control. How reliable is the article you are reading from the Internet? Was it written by a senior professor? A junior scholar? A graduate student? An undergrad? Did specialists in the field vet it? Request revisions? Did an editor check sources? Exactly how reliable is the piece? We have simply got to devise some way of certifying web-based scholarly materials.

I like, for example, what Indiana University is doing in publishing an Open Access, parallel journal to Museum Anthropology Review. This e-journal is edited by the same editor as the print journal and uses the identical peer-review process, but it is free. Apparently, readership has skyrocketed. I feel much better about experiments such as this that have made serious and transparent attempts to certify the reliability of what is published.

Of course, not all instances of Open Access are desirable. You’ll remember that not long ago graduate students in the creative writing program at the University of Iowa protested against a university initiative to post their dissertations—creative works, in their case—on the Internet. The students—rightly—complained that forcing open access to their creative works effectively rendered them unpublishable in traditional venues. Presses that take a chance on publishing creative works—novels, poetry collections—hope to recoup at least some small fraction of the cost of production, much less a profit. If the material is already available on the web free of charge, who would choose to purchase it in book form for a hefty fee? So, open access might be a good idea for scholarly works under certain circumstances, but we should not embrace it without qualification.

Certainly, open access is a complicated subject. The bottom line is that if it’s clear that the materials being made accessible have gone through a rigorous process of peer review, then I don’t have any real objection to it. Obviously, posting scholarly works on the Internet makes scholarly work much easier for all concerned.

KJ: Recently, you and Lynn Worsham published a web site titled The Theory Project that archives audio-based versions of the scholarly interviews you have conducted throughout your career. What motivated you to make these interviews available in this medium, and what do these audio inter-
views offer composition and rhetoric scholars that could not be had in the print-based versions?

**GAO:** Several graduate students convinced me that these audio interviews would be of value to the field. The interviews were recorded, but not professionally with audio publication in mind. In fact, when many of the interviews were conducted, we didn’t have the capability to post audio versions on a website. They were done, as this interview is being done, with print publication in mind: first recorded, then transcribed, and then edited for intelligibility. The students who were working with some of these issues convinced me that because the oral versions were different from the written ones—in that, the transcribed versions were edited and made to conform to traditional print conventions—it would be valuable to make the originals available so that scholars could make comparisons in what, say, Derrida actually said versus how we might have edited him in the print version.

We then engaged in the laborious process of digitizing the audio interviews. We had some very good people working on a design for the website. Now that the site is available, we’ll see if it is of value. It took considerable effort on the part of a lot of individuals to get this website up and running. Some of the eminent figures we interviewed have passed away, so there is a certain value in being able to hear, say, Lyotard’s or Derrida’s or Freire’s voice. So, I guess in several ways the site may be of value to people doing some of this work in the future.

**SD:** In 2007 MLA published the third edition of its *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, and in the chapter entitled “The Scholar in Society,” Bruce Robbins states, “We cannot afford not to make claims to some sort of social value or purpose to back up those claims as convincingly as possible. The question that must be debated is which claims—which legitimizing statements or strategies we scholars should choose to adopt, which of these extremely different projects of change deserve or deserves our allegiance” (314). Which “projects of change” do you think rhetoric and composition scholars should commit to developing? What is the rhetoric and composition scholar’s responsibility to society?

**GAO:** This connects to one of the questions that we’ve just discussed. In the broad and inclusive understanding of what scholarly work should be in rhetoric and composition that I’ve been trying to champion all these years, I’ve tried to push for the kind of scholarship that connects to important social questions and issues. I’ve done that because I believe—along with Lynn Worsham, Jim Berlin and a host of other scholars—that we have a certain social responsibility as scholars to tackle the difficult questions of our time and our society. Especially if we believe that knowledge is a matter of dis-
course and rhetoric, then we have even more of an obligation as rhetorical scholars or rhetoricians to plumb those areas.

In fact, some people have made a distinction between being simply an academician and being an intellectual. If I recall, that is the argument Lynn Worsham made in a book I edited called *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work*. So, if we believe her and people like her, then we have—if we are truly intellectuals—an obligation not to ignore the key questions of our time. In fact, there are many people in our field who are taking up these subjects. I have noticed an increased activity around questions that have to do with rhetoric and a number of important contemporary subjects, such as terrorism, trauma, disability studies, and so on. These are the kinds of issues and questions that you wouldn't find talked about in this discipline thirty years ago—but people are discussing them now. I think that is a positive development. I believe we need to continue to provide forums for scholars doing that kind of work, to value it, and to try not to close off opportunities for engaging in it in an unfortunate narrowing of the scope of the discipline.

**KJ:** Perhaps, once another decade has passed, someone will come to interview you again to discuss, among other things, your views of the field. What do you expect to say?

**GAO:** If I am still around in another decade, I expect to say the very same things, especially given how the field has worked in the past. I suspect that there will be a small and dedicated group of scholars and intellectuals engaging in the same theoretical and socially aware scholarship that we have been talking about. Alongside them will be many more scholars who are not as interested in that kind of work. My response to this situation will always be the same: there is room for everybody, and we close off parts of the discipline at our own peril.

**Works Cited**


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The Rhetoric and Composition Sound Archives is a national organization dedicated to the collection, production, and preservation of audio, visual, and print interviews that document the history of rhetoric and composition studies.

The RCSA seeks to bring together all persons interested in interviews and oral histories as a means of scholarly research by supporting standards of excellence in data collection, documentation, and uses of oral testimony. Operating in tandem with other archival collections, the RCSA will provide audiotape, digitized, and transcribed materials for scholarly research.

For more details, visit [www.rcsa.tcu.edu](http://www.rcsa.tcu.edu)
English 450: Theories and Methods of Argument
Rebecca Jones

Course Description

Theories and Methods of Argument serves as an upper level course in the Writing concentration of our B.A. in English and American Language and Literature (the only other official concentration is Literature) at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga (UTC), a metropolitan university in the South. Additionally, the course is an option for our minor in Rhetoric/Writing which is distinguished from our other minors in Literature and Creative Writing. The catalogue describes this as “an advanced study in the theories and methods of argument . . . rooted in Rogerian rhetoric, in the Toulmin model of argumentation, and special focus will be placed on the New Rhetoric via Chaim Perelman and Kenneth Burke.” At the 400 level, Theories and Methods of Argument is one option for 3 of the 27 hours of required 300-400 level courses in the Rhetoric/Writing concentration. During this particular semester, it was cross-listed as a “Senior Seminar,” a capstone course required by all majors.

Institutional Context

Theories and Methods of Argument (TMA) was developed shortly after major changes in the English Department curriculum, one of which was to reduce the number of required literature survey courses and instead add the following requirements: “Introduction to Literary Analysis” and “Introduction to Rhetorical Analysis.” After this upheaval, the curriculum committee worked to add separate minors in Literature, Rhetoric/Writing, and eventually, Creative Writing. In 2003, TMA was proposed (along with “Origins and History of Writing: Hieroglyphs to Hypertext”) as a course that was needed to flesh out both the concentration in Writing and the new Rhetoric/Writing minor. Because there are many Rhetoric/Writing courses on the books and only a few professors to teach them, I was the first to teach this course during my second year at UTC. As such, the course had no pre-existing design beyond the few sentences in the course description.

Along with other faculty specializing in rhetoric and writing, Eileen Meagher has spent many years at UTC promoting, developing, and finally
implementing a strong rhetoric and composition program. One tangible outcome of these efforts is a cadre of students familiar with rhetorical principles. After taking the required introductory rhetoric course and a steady offering of upper level rhetoric and writing courses, students in our program are familiar with rhetoric. This allows for a more in-depth discussion of rhetorical theory and principles and makes basic discussion of rhetoric unnecessary—at least according to the students.

While our department demonstrates a commitment to rhetoric and writing, the university as a whole has taken a step backwards in terms of teaching communication skills. Due to the large number of Tennessee students that rely on lottery scholarships to go to college, the requirements for graduation was reduced several years ago to 120 hours, as the scholarship funds only four years of education. As a result, writing intensive requirements were dropped beyond our freshman composition sequence. Likewise, there is no public speaking requirement (though many students still take the course). Also, our Writing Across the Curriculum program has faded into non-existence in the past few years. As a result, our courses with emphases in rhetoric/writing offer only a small space for students to “officially” hone their public speaking and writing skills.

As it turns out, UTC is an anomaly in the number and variety of rhetoric courses on the books. Both Thomas Miller and Brian Jackson have offered surveys that exhibit the dearth of rhetorical education in most public universities. The survey portion of Jackson’s article continues Miller’s previous work in assessing how much rhetoric (written or spoken) is taught in public universities beyond introductory freshman courses in English or Communication. Both surveys report that very little rhetoric is taught. In the category of “English Departments” in “master’s colleges and universities,” only 22.33% offer “at least one rhetoric course” and only 8.4 % offer “Argumentative Writing” (193). While more Communication Departments in the same category offer “Argumentation” (31.07%), only 10.68 % offer “at least one rhetoric course” (193). While more Communication Departments may take up argument or argumentation nationally, our English Department—with its strong rhetorical component—has attempted to take up this rhetorical education.

The students who attend UTC are often from the surrounding area, within a few counties, making the university regional, Southern, and often conservative. Some of the students have a very narrow focus regarding political topics. In a course like “Persuasion and Propaganda” or “Introduction to Rhetorical Analysis,” most of the students leave shocked after learning that most public discourses are not Truths but rhetorical arts suited to particular audiences. They are also shocked to learn that their own arguments are highly rhetorical. Many students first react with cynicism, so we spend much of the semester discussing democracy and citizenship, and how they
can use these newly acquired critical thinking and communication skills to do “good” things. It is very Quintilianesque, but seems necessary to head off a mental shut down. All of the students in my TMA course had gotten over the shock, and most came in with a healthy blend of cynicism and hope (though as juniors and seniors they definitely favored their cynical sides). Most of the students took the course because they planned to enter some form of public service (teaching, law, non-profits, and many undecided) and had already drawn the connection between communication skills and concepts like equality, rights, and success. The students I talked to before the course began were ready to think about the rhetoric of others—and their own—on a more microscopic level. In their writing on the first day of class, nearly all wanted to be able to “argue better.”

On a more personal level, I saw this course as filling a gap in my own pedagogy. I had taught two semesters of “Introduction to Rhetorical Analysis,” a course in academic writing (“Approaches to Composition”), and a summer and a semester of “Persuasion and Propaganda.” The intro course and “Persuasion and Propaganda” work well to teach students to be good readers of rhetoric. A student who has taken both is usually quite skilled at critiquing, analyzing, and recognizing rhetorical strategy. Unfortunately, there is little time in either course to do rigorous work on invention. In “Approaches to Composition,” the focus is on writing, primarily academic writing. Many of the students who take this course need a great deal of work at the organizational and sentence level. This does not leave much time for theorizing about arguments themselves or considering how arguments change through different genres and contexts, though this is certainly addressed. I saw TMA as an opportunity to combine the skills of analysis and invention in a pointed way.

**Theoretical Rationale (In an Ideal World)**

Pedagogies deriving from the rhetorical tradition and those developing out of studies in dialectic and logic create very different classroom experiences. While I favor the rhetorical tradition with its practical nature, emphasis on democracy and education, and awareness of human flaws, I wanted to add something of the discipline of argumentation studies found primarily through logic or argumentation courses in philosophy and some communication departments. Brad McAdon, in “Rhetoric is a Counterpart of Dialectic,” offers a clear demonstration of the intimate relationship between Aristotle’s theories on demonstration, rhetoric, and dialectic by arguing that “his rhetorical theory must be understood, as he seems to suggest, in respect to his concept of dialectic” (114). While I cannot go fully into the details of McAdon’s argument in this space, it is safe to say that there is theoretical grounding for thinking about rhetoric and dialectic in the same course.
In a rhetorically focused course, we teach students how to do rhetorical analysis whether we follow classical Aristotelian models or new models found in Burke or Sonja Foss.

The content of these courses is drawn from real public discourses whether contemporary or historical. As assignments, students are asked to both evaluate public discourse and to create their own. In a logic course, there is usually a particular textbook with idealized models to analyze and very specific rules to apply to these models. The assignments include application of the rules of logic to particular passages found in the text. The goal is to learn the rules of logic and to find errors in logic. Over the years, many of my students have described these kinds of courses as “math with words.” Despite the difficulty of the close analysis of particular sequences of ideas, the students seem to appreciate being forced to think in this microscopic way. These course depictions are quite simplistic and attempt to show the differences in pedagogy, though in reality both kinds of courses might often include elements of the other. The important difference is in the underlying assumptions about audience and the content of an argument. Where rhetoric understands that audiences are not always going to be on equal footing—and variables like time, place, and gender make a difference in the development and reception of argument—traditional logic begins with the assumption that those involved in argument are equal and the parameters of the debate are set. In essence, one pedagogy takes as its content the “real” world and the other an “ideal” one.

So, with the hope of offering both the bigness of rhetoric and the precision of logic (see Schiappa for an overview of the “Big Rhetoric” discussion), I started to design TMA for my junior and senior English majors. The most important objective of the course was to study argument in a variety of theoretical manifestations and practical forms. I also had two secondary objectives: to link argument to democracy and education. These involved asking students to revise a negative view of argument as necessarily confrontational and divisive to a view of argument as necessary for a functioning democracy and as part of a quality rhetorical education. Rather than focusing only on reading and analysis, I felt these objectives needed to be met by a strong writing component.

I knew that I wanted to begin with Sharon Crowley’s Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism, hoping that it would work as a catalyst for discussion about the current state of public argument, especially as it speaks to student apprehension about “arguing.” Crowley contends that America public discourse is currently divided into two camps: liberal and fundamentalist. The interesting part of her discussion, at least for my course, concerns her depiction of the argument strategies used by each camp and their inevitable incompatibility. Where “liberal argument” begins with “empirically based reason and factual evidence” for its claims, “Christian
apocalyptists . . . rely instead on revelation, faith, and biblical interpretation to ground claims” (3). Essentially, she claims it is nearly impossible to have a “logical” argument with someone who grounds their evidence in personal faith. Though she offers a critique of liberal rhetoric as ignoring emotion, most of her critique is of the fundamentalist camp. While my students (in many different classes as well as this one) had issues with the particular divisions she creates because of their religious backgrounds, they did agree that there was a division. For them, the perception of a public communication as having only two “sides” has thwarted not only “good” argument but their desire to enter into the fray. Argument is, really, pointless, they told me. The statements went something like this: “People believe what they believe, so why bother arguing” or “You just can’t have an argument when everyone refuses to listen to the other side.” The models for this despair came from family discussions over the recent presidential elections, the split-screen talking heads on television that babble at the camera rather than talk to each other, and even classroom discussion where students seem to form camps of liberals and conservatives. As a result of these experiences, I wanted TMA to show students that they, actually, argue often; that we all have to get better at arguing publicly to break up the current stalemate; that there are many different ways to argue; and finally that arguing should not be scary and uncomfortable but instead is part of a rich tradition of democracy and citizenship.

In the *Public and Its Problems*, John Dewey defines equality as a community endeavor and not just a right. In his “Great Society,” democracy “will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication” (184). We must practice our arts. If we cannot communicate well, we can not participate as citizens. This idea drives my teaching efforts, especially in this particular argument course. Though the core pragmatists like Dewey, William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and George Herbert Mead are most recognized in scholarship, there are a growing number of academics who recognize writers and model citizens like W. E. B DuBois and Jane Addams as practicing pragmatists. What I admire about DuBois and Addams are their lives as both writers and actors. They tackled the big public arguments of their day and wrote copiously in a variety of prose styles about problems and solutions. DuBois’s *Souls of Black Folk* is narrative, personal essay, song, and rigorous academic argument rolled into one. Addams used her autobiography, magazine article, letters, and many other writing forms to articulate her beliefs about poverty and war. Few of my students can imagine this kind of work—work that takes our “beliefs” about democracy and puts them into communicative action. Though my students write every day in emails, blogs, and even academic prose, few take (or have the time) to write as citizens in serious and rigorous ways. Part of this is due to lack of practice and skill, but another element is
the sense that our problems are too big and too divisive to tackle. Countless students tell me, “I hate politics” or “I stay out of politics.” And I translate this as, “I don’t understand politics,” “I feel uncomfortable arguing—I don’t know how,” and “My voice does not count.” To push my students to move beyond some of these walls, I hoped to infuse a democratic spirit into the course through a variety of writing and speaking activities.

My impulse to show students the connections between argument and democracy is part of a broader discussion concerning rhetorical education. Rhetoric Society Quarterly has offered a series of articles over the past few years titled “Rhetorical Paths in English and Communication Studies” which examine the place of rhetoric in the academy. This discussion was recently revived at the 1996 Rhetoric Society of America conference where participants were asked to continue an earlier discussion about the future of rhetorical education started by the 1971 book The Prospect of Rhetoric. The latest installment in the series by Brian Jackson, “Cultivating Paideweyan Pedagogy: Rhetoric Education in English and Communication Studies,” offers an overview of the rhetorical pathways discussion while adding an American twist through Dewey’s work as well as through a survey of rhetorical education in American universities (adding to Thomas Miller’s work mentioned above; see Miller, “How Rhetorical”). Jackson agrees with Jeffery Walker and David Fleming in their argument for more rhetorical instruction in public universities not only to complement but to buttress the scholarly work in rhetorical theory. Both Walker (“On Rhetorical Traditions”) and Fleming (“Rhetoric as a Course of Study”) trace a history of rhetoric as a pedagogy. Though neither would dismiss the theoretical or epistemic components of rhetoric, both want to see more classroom practice in rhetoric. Jackson adds to this discussion Dewey’s belief about the necessity of communication skills for all good citizens: “Dewey is also one of the first modern democratic theorists to argue that civic communication must be more engaging, poetic, analytical, and deliberative than the mere exercise of the ‘inalienable sacred authority’ of free speech afforded the individual in classical liberalism” (189). In my mind, this work unites the practical wisdom of American Pragmatism, the long history of rhetoric, and the analytical rigor offered by studies in logic.

In response to calls from Jackson, Walker, and Fleming, I wanted the class to get a sense of a classical rhetorical education, so I pulled some of their first writing assignments from the progymnasmata. Fleming comments that in our current institutional setup we have “at one end a fifteen week course on writing for incoming freshmen; at the other, a multi-year program of advanced study for PhD students. Between the two, there is little or nothing” (173). We talked in detail about the fact that these writings were meant to span an educational lifetime and not a semester. However, they served another purpose as well. The assignments allowed students to flex their argument muscle in directions to which they were unaccustomed. As was
the purpose of the original progymnasmata, I hoped that these short papers would focus the students and magnify their vision to look carefully as small tasks. In addition to writing a tale, chreia, praise/blame, and character paper, I asked them to take Carl Roger’s ideas (as well as applications of his ideas to composition studies from Andrea Lunsford and Maxine Hairston) and write a Rogerian argument on a controversial topic. While many versions of this assignment exist in textbooks, this approach was much more rigid. I asked them to choose a topic they cared about so that offering unbiased language on both sides of the issue would be difficult, and I asked them to follow Hairston’s five points of Rogerian argument rather carefully. This made many of the students—used to writing long unwieldy arguments—feel very confined. This is what I wanted; offering these outer parameters, I hoped, would force students to find their voice and their argument at the sentence level, in each word.

I was quite comfortable teaching my students about the theoretical value of argument in democracy or rhetorical education. It’s on the tip of my tongue every day. However, the transformation of theoretical ideas into pedagogical practice is another challenge, especially as I wanted students to see both the expansiveness of rhetorical argument and minute details brought by dialectical approaches to argument. I hoped that argumentation theory would offer this closer look at public argument.

As my class was not called “rhetorical theory,” I needed to think about the differences between the terms if it only meant different readings of the same people. I also wanted to take the class (and myself) out of the comfort zone of familiar analysis and invention strategies such as the rhetorical triangle, the appeals, Toulmin’s warrants, or Burke’s pentad. I wanted to look at argument at the micro- rather than macroscopic level. Frans Van Eemeren’s work with argumentation theory, called pragma-dialectics, offered this microscopic approach as well as a perfect bridge between rhetorical theory and argumentation studies. In a recent article, “Strategic Manoeuvring,” Van Eemeren, along with Peter Houtlosser, argue not only that argument is “essential to democratic decision-making” and so “requires our undivided attention,” but also that their theory bridges the historical divide between dialectic and rhetoric (23-24). They contend that most arguments have dual aims: to be reasonable (dialectic) and to persuade (rhetorical). In essence, a rhetor/arguer generally must perform strategic manoeuvring: “Their dialectical effort to resolve the difference of opinion in accordance with the standards for a critical discussion is usually combined with a rhetorical attempt to have things their way” (27). For Van Eemeren and Houtlosser, a good argument combines the audience savvy emphasis found in rhetoric with the attention to details and rules required by logic.

Like the confluence of many streams into a wide river, the seemingly disparate elements of the course came together quite easily in my mind
(theoretically): argument, democracy, dialectic, rhetoric, writing skills, and education. I envisioned the students making the connection between theories about democracy and theories about rhetoric by reading argument from vastly different rhetors of different age, gender, nationality, and race. I hoped that the close analysis of logic in our argumentation textbook would, by osmosis, flow into their writing making it more critical and more rigorous. Like a steady rain, rhetorical theory and its use in the world would be infused in each reading and writing activity.

Critical Reflection (In Reality)

While all of the theoretical elements seemed to flow together clearly, the practical implementation was not as smooth. The beautiful river in my imagination fed by many different tributaries was faced with several dams, a bit of flooding, and some unwieldy tributaries. Despite the problems, most of the students made their way to the ocean by the end.

Goals

I imagined particular pedagogical manifestations following from the above theoretical components. My primary method for incorporating rhetorical theory was through class readings that provided basic theory and application. I brought in the argumentation theory largely through weekly exercises in our argumentation textbook, Douglas Walton’s Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation, as well as through some readings toward the end of the semester that applied argumentation theory to specific groups. Ideally, I wanted students to take these argumentation “lessons” and apply them to their writing assignments. Finally, ideas about democracy/rhetorical education and its relation to argument were developed in some readings (such as Crowley’s work, discussions of gender and argument, and DeLuca’s work on protest) as well as through prompts in our class discussion that led to vigorous arguments of our own about “democracy.” For example, we debated the “The State of Public Education” both online and in our final exam.

As is the purpose of most course assignments on any syllabus, I wanted the various course projects to apply the theory we discussed as well as take it in new directions based on student experience. By requiring students to perform some of the progymnasmata, I had two goals: [1] to show them that “argument” is not merely either a fight with a friend or a “thesis statement,” but can come in many forms such as narrative (tale) and [2] to apply both creativity and structure at the same time. The last statement may seem paradoxical. While I doubt the Greeks saw the progymnasmata as “creative,” I saw them as creative in the sense that these assignments were outside of the comfort zone for most of these junior and senior English majors. They
did not ask for strict analysis or application of a complex theory. However, they did ask for other kinds of application with very strict parameters. To these parameters, I added a two page limit. While my freshman students would be thrilled to write only two pages, I knew these students (as I had read many of their papers in my other courses) had become accustomed to using long complex sentences and repetition to drive home their points. While the students did write one short analysis paper, an outline/overview of their research presentation, and a reflection on argument theory, their portfolio reflections focused on the *progymnasmata* and how they complicated and improved their writing.

The final component of the syllabus was the oral requirement. While we did not have time to focus on the art of “speaking well,” I knew we could not have a class about argument and democracy without asking students to speak. Much has been written about the power of spoken language in the learning process. The history of Composition Studies tells a sad—at least for me—tale of the split of speech and writing and the move from oral discussions to writing assignments. Ironically, students talk more in their “writing courses” because of good composition pedagogy than in most of their other courses. To put it simply, students should talk more in class. This oral requirement also followed my desire to reincorporate rhetorical education into our current curriculum. In my own experience, once I felt comfortable having an exchange in a safe classroom setting, I began to explore other forms of public discourse with more ease. I hoped this course would have the same effect on some of the shy students. As such, I asked the students to read from their own writing, to report on other student’s writing, to offer a final presentation of a particular rhetoric, and to participate in an open debate.

**Breadth or Depth**

The class met once a week for about three hours. This meant that each class period needed to be divided up into sections to accomplish multiple objectives (writing, reading, exercises). In the beginning, we were able to drift along with the syllabus and did not have difficulty accomplishing the various goals each session. During the second class period, we were easily able to have a typical seminar discussion and then refocus to examine their writing assignment. The students read peer writing and commented on it orally. We had time to make connections between the reading and the writing assignment. However, during the next session, we added an additional component, the argument exercises. Over the next few weeks, we became mired in the discussion of these exercises primarily because they were unfamiliar, both as an assignment and as a pedagogy. This severely cut into the time we had for discussing both the reading and their writing. As a result, some class sessions felt rushed as we breezed over many interesting ideas.
By the end of the semester, my students had a huge stack of readings in their binders. They liked to show it to me toward the end of the semester to remind me of their arduous journey as I contemplated grades. In most classes with readings, I ask my students to write a response each week to ensure that they engage with the text. This makes a course analysis- rather than invention-focused. In TMA, they had writing assignments that did not correspond directly to the readings (as is required by a response or a journal). About midway through the semester, it became obvious that a few students each period were not reading all the texts. While this was frustrating, I was not always surprised. Ironically, the intimacy of the class, rather that exerting peer pressure to read all the texts, sometimes made the students feel comfortable saying, “I didn’t get to finish reading today, but. . . .” This happened more often in the end of the semester and, of course, with difficult readings like the Perelman text.

Despite this problem, the students, overall, enjoyed the readings. Each student commented on several readings that especially engaged them, and these were different for each student. While one loved the DeLuca’s “Unruly Arguments” another found Sharon Crowley and Deborah Hawhee’s explanation for stasis theory the most valuable part of the course. My work with Women’s Studies has played a role in my desire to “include” rather than “leave out” texts. Even though some students had difficulty keeping up, I still think it is important to engage a wide variety of ideas in any course you teach. There is something to be said for exposure, especially at the undergraduate level. While I achieved my goal of offering the students breadth, I still worry that we were not able to fully engage with many of the texts in ways that would make them more practically useful.

While the students enjoyed most of the readings, the exercises in Walton’s *Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation* seemed, literally, painful to my students. As explained above, I wanted to find a way to infuse what would be a fairly standard rhetorical theory course with argumentation theory. I’m not sure this was the way to go about it. An example of an “exercise” is as follows: “1. Review the dialogue on genetically modified foods in Chapter 1, and judge how well the moves made in the dialogue conform to the rules for critical discussion” (179). The “rules for critical discussion” are actually taken from Van Eemeren’s work. The purpose here was for students to critically apply the rules and find both flaws and successes in the dialogue. Theoretically, this is a valuable assignment that asks students not only to understand a set of parameters for equitable communication, but to be able to read the dialogue well enough to critique it. As someone vehemently opposed to real “grammar” exercises, I winced as my assignments took on this quality. While the students voiced appreciation for the ideas in the textbook that challenged them to look carefully at individual parts of an argument, the exercises themselves seemed, well, tedious. Part of this is due to the nature
of exercises (some asked only for one word responses) and part is due to Walton’s repetitious book. If I decide to use exercises again, and I’m not sure if I will, I would use Van Eemeren’s textbook that has more contemporary and compelling arguments to analyze.

Additionally, I think that the students need to have several writing assignments finished to which we can apply the theories. While I certainly did not want the “exercises” to stand alone, that is what happened. (It is well documented that grammar exercises have no real effect on one’s writing; I assume the same is true for argumentation exercises.) The plan was for the students to think through the exercises at home and, after a quick overview, apply them in class to our texts. However, we often got sidetracked by lively discussions coming out of the readings or questions about their writing assignments. For example, after reading from Deborah Tannen’s work and then watching a short part of her film *He Said, She Said: Gender, Language, Communication*, we spent the rest of the class period arguing about the validity of Tannen’s argument concerning the differences between men and women. Nearly all of the students were vehemently opposed to her discussion, a reaction I did not anticipate. When the students brought in their Rogerian arguments, discussion of the assignment rather than the readings was buzzing around the room as I came in. The students seemed amazed by the difficulty of writing in unbiased language. As a teacher who appreciates the unforeseen value of tangents, I often let them run with their critiques or commentary. These tangents helped me to see what the students wanted to get out of this course. Of course, the downside is that one’s imaginary “perfect” design gets tossed.

As TMA progressed, I quickly limited the number of argumentation exercises the students had to do each week, and this relieved some of the pressure. The most popular comment both verbally and in the evaluations was that the amount of time it took to complete the assignments did not equal the emphasis I placed on this work during class time. I attribute much of this, again, to a time issue. At first, we were able to go through the exercises, extract the useful information, and then apply it to our theoretical discussions or writing assignments. But, as the readings became more difficult and the writing assignments more involved, we were not able to take the time for fruitful abstractions. Despite this, there were several students that wrote copious responses to the exercises in the Walton book throughout the semester. These students found the assignments challenging, like puzzles to be solved and seemed to enjoy engaging the questions and Walton himself. It was these students that seemed most able to apply the argumentation theory to their own writing which became more exact.

In my final analysis and through examining the student responses, I believe that the readings and exercises can be pruned and still prove effective. Now that I am more comfortable with the course, I think that I can
achieve variety and depth by letting the students bring in diversity through presentations which will allow the group to focus on a few core texts. This will leave room for more hands on application which was missing from the course. Three hours seems like such a long time while you sit and plan in your office, but it speeds past when you engage with a lively class. I also believe that a complex undergraduate course might work best on a two day per week schedule to allow for better pacing. This way, one class period can be devoted to a particular reading, exercises, or writing assignment. The additional “face time” may also help to circumvent some of the confusion that inevitably develops from a class with multiple goals and tasks.

**Writing/Speaking**

This was a course about building on rhetorical skill, not about learning it for the first time. Those students with a thin foundation in rhetoric had difficulty as our focus was about stretching beyond the basics. Even if a student was not able to accomplish a new skill as well as they wanted to in the 15 week slot, those with a rhetorical background at least knew what they had to do to get there or could see the problems or holes in their writing. These students were able to see what argumentation theory might add to their rhetorical library and how, with practice, it could hone their overall writing and argument skills. The students with a stronger rhetorical background recognized that each *progymnasmata* assignment called for very different prose styles, argument strategies, and approaches. These students took many creative risks. For example, one of my best analytical students tried to use the tale assignment to address racism through the dialogue and narration using two dogs. While the outcome was odd, the attempt proved a good lesson in the difficulties of using dialogue and narrative to argue. Those students without a strong rhetorical background did not flounder but seemed to have a static voice across the assignments. They used the same prose style and/or argument strategies no matter what the actual assignment called for.

A similar problem occurred when it came time to do our final presentations. Because we talked so much about verbal presentation and were highly sensitive to argument strategy in this course, the research presentations took on a heightened sense of anxiety. Remarkably, this caused many students to stumble through the research presentation. There were severe organizational problems and especially articulation problems. Though a few students offered excellent presentations, I was surprised by the number of juniors and seniors who were not able to offer clear and interesting oral discussions. I think much of this was due to nervousness and lack of preparation. The course had a heavy work load, so many put off the final project until the last minute and were, simply, not able to prepare. I am happy to take some of the blame and regret that any students felt uncomfortable. However, I have
also realized that this might be a stage in a process. Perhaps the heightened awareness about argument strategy caused a self awareness that crippled some of the students’ efforts, especially as they tried to incorporate the vast array of new ideas into a ten minute peer presentation.

While I was proud of many students during the oral debate (especially a shy student who offered a great argument about the value of private schooling), it was not nearly as riveting as the online discussion board version of the same topic. I’m a little stumped about how to remedy this in a fifteen-week course, particularly in a university context that does not provide many opportunities to practice oral communication in the general curriculum. Though theories about the value of public debate were central to the course, there was little time to translate what many of us valued in a good public speaker into practice. Quite frankly, I did not think presentation skill was something I would need to address in detail with juniors and seniors. Now I know better. In the future, I will take time to talk about presentation skill and remind them that much of classical rhetoric derives from the study of oral speech. One solution would be to offer a sample oral presentation, of my own, that could be critiqued by the class for according to all aspects of the rhetorical canon.

A final word on orality and argument. I asked my students to perform a debate, first online and then in the class. The debate focused on “the state of public education.” The online discussion revealed some interesting beliefs about ideas of public vs. private, the relationship between governments and citizens, and the responsibility of citizens to each other. Some of the students excelled in this format. Each seemed to take on a particular role. For example, there was an “explainer” who offered background information when needed, a “challenger” who questioned other students’ arguments and prodded them to explain, and even a “ranter” who seemed to feel the need to follow one passionate point no matter what. These are only a few of the roles that developed. Theses kinds of roles are not accounted for in textbooks on argumentation theory. In many ways, they failed to follow Van Eemeren’s “rules for good argument.” However, they were highly aware of their rhetoric or made aware of it through the responses they received. We certainly did not have the time to reach the level of dialectic in this debate. When we tried the debate in an oral format, it was much more sedate. Despite this, the students had done some preparatory work and so the debate was much more interesting and more polished than a typical class discussion on a particular topic. The students recognized this as well. It was especially interesting to watch students attempt to negotiate between beliefs they held firmly and good arguments against or different from these beliefs as presented by their peers. For example, several students advocating private education were pressed by students who had attended very poor high schools with few realistic options for getting a better education.
During this final debate, I regretted deeply that we were not able to get to our final reading. I planned to offer an overview of the pragmatists and Peirce’s discussion of belief as well as excerpts from Reason to Believe: Romanticism, Pragmatism and the Teaching of Writing. However, we got behind. In an exchange with my student Isaac, I realized how essential this final reading was to the class. As we started with Crowley’s text that was highly critical of religious rhetorics, Isaac worried during our email exchange that some “anti-religious” student commentary went unchecked by me or other students he knew to be religious. While I did not receive any other comments with similar worries, I began to think through his perception of our class arguments. Actually, the two students making the most vocal “anti-religious” had personal reasons. One student had recently been rejected by her family and church for being gay. The other is actually a very religious student who attends church several times per week but is highly conscious of the problems with religion as an institution that can silence. She did her final project on the rhetoric of hell houses and offered a scathing critique of this fundamentalist Baptist technique for increasing its flock. These two were quite vocal students. While every class has them, it is important in an “argument” course that all arguments be heard. I was happy to see Isaac being so sensitive to this necessity. Though most of the students spoke during each class session, not all were comfortable or capable of making clear arguments about personal beliefs. However, Isaac did comment, “if no one spoke out against a bias, they only have themselves to blame!”

While there are reasons for this problem, I could have avoided Isaac’s perception by rearranging the course. In our final exchange, I wrote: “The last day of class was to be about American Pragmatism. This discussion would have focused on belief—the idea that one’s closely held beliefs are rarely malleable and that these control one’s argument strategies.” If I could only change one thing, I would begin the course with this idea about belief. Our beliefs about how argument works have deep roots and controlled how many of the students approached the texts and assignments. I think about this every semester when I try to understand my students through their writing and responses, but, in this class, it needed to be a controlling idea that guided our reading and understanding of argument.

Essentially, my expectations for the course and my students’ realistic needs were not always on the same plane. While I wanted a balance between the theory and the writing component, I realized quickly that they needed and sometimes wanted more emphasis on their writing. Don’t get me wrong: this group of students loved to pull apart the texts we read. However, in the end, I think we got caught up in the big questions about the value of argument and did not give equal time to application. This presents an important dilemma: do you redesign the course for more balance or is the course too big? I think both. In considering the latter, I have come to believe that a
public writing course such as the one Paula Mathieu described in her 2006 CCCC’s workshop presentation would be a great addition to our curriculum. In this course, students concentrate on civic writing or writing for social change. While I would never remove the writing component from TMA, I think that the students wanted an additional course that focused on their own writing, especially writing or argument strategies that would be useful to them outside of the academy. A few students expressed the desire to expand their writing repertoire beyond academic papers while maintaining edgy and focused argument. After several discussions about mainstream media and its dearth of argument, some of the socially-minded students wanted to be able to participate in public discourses with the rhetorical savvy of mainstream media without losing the attention to “rules for good argument” that seem to be lost on politicians and news anchors using logical fallacy as a primary argument strategy.

In the end, I feel that I learned more from my students than they did from me. I take this as a sign of good course. They brought in unusual situations and arguments to digest in class and challenged many of the systematic and idealistic theories we read. During the course of the semester, several students went to a protest demonstration outside of the convention center when George W. Bush came to speak in Chattanooga. One student met a Bush supporter (who was allowed near the door while the protesters were forced to stand across the street) who basically accused her of being homeless, leaching off of the welfare system, being unpatriotic, and of “not supporting the troops” simply because she stood on the other side of the street (in fact, she is an honor student from a middle class family who has a job). My student explained that no matter what she said, the Bush supporter would not relent or listen to her reasoning as to why she protested, despite the fact that her father is in the military and that she does in fact “support the troops.” Many of the students took this story as an example of the uselessness of arguing and wanted to throw up their hands in frustration. These kinds of examples challenged, especially, the theories of argument presented in our textbook. These theories assume an ideal world where each interlocutor is actually willing to have an argument. I think this example (exactly what Crowley describes in her book) also challenges the way we teach argument and rhetoric for that matter. Most discussions within the academy, while based in real experience, are often hypothetical. As I think through the course, this notion of the hypothetical has bothered me the most. While I emphasized “the practical” in choosing my readings, the assignments were all hypothetical situations or, as in the debate, merely a beginning to something more tangible. I realize that this is the nature of most academic work in the humanities. However, I think that taking more time to navigate arguments that students have experienced or create a final project that addresses and debates a campus issue in a public forum, would help to make the class feel
more useful and would match up with the theories addressed. While I have been critical of the setup and implementation of the theoretical notions in the course, I do believe the students took away the connections I was trying to make between rhetoric, argumentation, and democracy.

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Theories and Methods of Argument
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Course Catalogue Description:
An advanced study in the theories and methods of argument. Students will review classical rhetoric and an Aristotelian model of persuasion, with special emphasis on epideictic, deliberative, and forensic rhetorical classifications. Additionally, students will review definitional arguments, causal arguments, and proposal arguments. From this review, students will learn theories and methods of argument rooted in Rogerian rhetoric, in the Toulmin model of argumentation, and special focus will be placed on the New Rhetoric via Chaim Perelman and Kenneth Burke.

In addition to the above, we will examine non-traditional and non-western argument strategies. Beyond simply understanding theories of argument, we are going to practice argument on the ground. As a result, this will also be an experimental writing course.

Texts
Douglas Walton. Fundamentals of Critical Argumentation Cambridge University Press 2006. ISBN: 0-521-53020-2 (This has been ordered via the bookstore)
Additional texts via library e-reserve or Blackboard

Assignments
There will be two kinds of writing in this course: analytical and inventive. Most of the assignments will come in the form of short papers (2-5 pages). There will be one longer paper at the end derived from one or more of the previous short papers.

Analytical: In a traditional academic fashion, we will use the theoretical and practical strategies we read to analyze arguments (textual, visual, and material)

Inventive: We will experiment with different argument genres. In essence, you will be creating arguments. For instance, we will be reading about the argument strategies of a Native American tribe. Following our discussion, we will attempt to write our own argument according to these strategies.

Exercises: In addition to writing, we will do some exercises from the textbook. These will be turned in via Blackboard on Fridays by 5:00 pm.
Specifics

In-Class Writing 10%
Argument Exercises (Friday Assignments) 10%
Short Papers 20%
Final Research Paper/Information Presentation 10%
Exam 10%
Portfolio* 40%

* This will be a compilation of your best work both in-class and out. You will be able to revise any previous paper before including it in the portfolio.

Assignment sheets with specific directions will be given for each paper/project

Syllabus—Subject to Change Based on Class Needs

Week 1  Toward a Civic Discourse
Crowley Chapters 1 & 2-On Blackboard

Week 2  Aristotle
“Notes on Aristotle” in Course Readings on Blackboard
Chapter 13 and 17 of Book III Rhetoric
http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/index.html
Writing Assignment: Tale
Friday  Chapter 1 Fundamentals

Week 3  More from the Greeks...
Read: “Stasis Theory”
Crowley and Hawhee on Blackboard
Sophists
Writing Assignment: Chreia
Friday  Chapter 2 Fundamentals

Week 4  Perelman-Olbrechts-Tyteca
Friday Pragma-dialectics-Explanation and Exercise-on Blackboard from van Eemeren and Hootlosser, “Strategic Manoeuvring”
Writing Assignment: Praise/Blame

Week 5  Kenneth Burke
Friday  Chapter 3 Fundamentals
Writing Assignment: Character
Week 6  
Rogerian Argument:  
Maxine Hairston on Carl Rogers: “Carl Rogers’s Alternative to Traditional Rhetoric”; “Using Carl Rogers’ Communication Theories in the Composition Classroom”  
Andrea A. Lunsford on Rogers “Aristotelian vs. Rogerian Argument: A Reassessment”  
Phyllis Lassner: “Feminist Responses to Rogerian Argument”  
Friday  Chapter 4 Fundamentals

Week 7  
Gendered Argument  
Robert Fulkerson “Transcending our Conception of Argument in Light of Feminist Critiques”  
Deborah Tannen from Discourse and Gender and You Just Don’t Understand: Men and Women in Conversation  
Writing Assignment: Taking a standard academic topic, write a Rogerian style argument.  
Friday  Chapter 5 Fundamentals

Week 8  
Material Argument  
Michael Kevin DeLuca “Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation.”  
Selzer and Crowley, “Habeas Corpus.” Rhetorical Bodies.  
Friday  Chapter 6 Fundamentals

Week 9  
Spring Break

Week 10  
No Physical Class  
Chapters 7 & 8 Fundamentals; Online Discussion-See email/Blackboard-“The State of Public Education”

Week 11  
Asian Argument Strategies  
Yasunari Kawabata, “Japan, the Beautiful and Myself”  
Steven Combs “The Useless/-Usefulness of Argumentation: The Dao of Disputation”

Week 12  
Native American/Jewish  
**Week 13**  
John Dewey and the Pragmatists  
*See revised syllabus below.*  
Writing Assignment: Write an argument using the  
argument principles of the Jemez Pueblo

**Week 14**  
Open Day-Make Up/Presentations  
Final Paper Due-Research Assignment-Argument Strategy

**Week 15**  
**Exam Debate.** Turn in a write up of your research and  
argument strategies (2-3 pages); Perform the argument  
in a class debate. We will determine the topic, rules, and  
logistics together

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**Course Texts**

Combs, Steven. “The Useless/-Usefulness of Argumentation: The Dao of  
Crowley, Sharon. *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*.  
First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation.” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36  
———. “Using Carl Rogers’ Communication Theories in the Composition  
Frank, David. “Arguing with God: Talmundic Discourse and the Jewish  
Fulkerson, Richard. “Transcending Our Conception of Argument in Light  
Kawabata, Yasunari. “Japan, the Beautiful and Myself.” Nobel Prize Lect- 


The Journal of Teaching Writing (JTW), now in its twenty-sixth year of publication, is the only national journal devoted to the teaching of writing at all academic levels, from pre-school to the university, and in all subject areas of the curriculum. It publishes refereed articles, book reviews, and professional announcements. Contributors of manuscripts receive signed and substantive reviews from members of our Editorial Board, which is composed of distinguished teachers and writers from all educational levels and geographic regions of the U.S.; approximately 20% of manuscript submissions are published annually. Published by the Indiana Teachers of Writing, the Journal has led the field in its attempts to demystify the editorial review process and to model the teaching of writing as a process of reflection and revision.

EDITORS: Barbara Cambridge, Editor; Kim Brian Lovejoy, Associate Editor; Janis Haswell, Review Editor

TOPICS AND PROFILE OF READERSHIP: JTW is a refereed journal for classroom teachers and researchers at all academic levels whose interest or emphasis is the teaching of writing. Appearing semi-annually, JTW publishes articles on the theory, practice, and teaching of writing throughout the curriculum. Each issue covers a range of topics from composition theory and discourse analysis to curriculum development and innovative teaching techniques. Contributors are reminded to tailor their writing for a diverse readership with interests that are more practical than theoretical.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: Four copies of each manuscript, each including a separate sheet with the author’s name, address, e-mail, telephone and fax numbers, and a short biographical paragraph. Submissions should be typewritten, double spaced, and conform to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 2003. Inquiries may be sent to klovejoy@iupui.edu or jtw@iupui.edu.

SEND MANUSCRIPTS TO: Journal of Teaching Writing, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, 425 University Blvd., CA 243B, Indianapolis, IN 46202. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of one manuscript.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES: Individuals- $20.00 (within United States, $25.00 outside U.S.); Libraries- $25.00 (within United States, $30.00 outside U.S.)
Last spring, I taught a first-year composition and literature course under the theme “Reading and Writing Popular Culture.” In our final writing unit, we studied Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body* as a way of investigating gender and sexuality as fluid, as intangible, and as inherently distinct from images in popular media, where binary gender constructions often pervade western cultural consciousness. Focusing on a genderless narrator’s experiences with love, loss, and transformation, the text led us to examine the power of gender in popular culture. When referring to the narrator, students tended to use gendered pronouns accidentally (a “slip” I was guilty of at times), directing us to broader, global discussions in which we considered why we “need” to “know” the narrator’s gender. As a class, we also posed such questions as “why do we want to know the narrator’s gender?” and “what cultural value do we place upon gender?” In many ways, these inquiries are the most difficult but critically crucial questions we can ask regarding our own citizenship and subject positions.

In *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy: Theory and Practice for Composition Studies*, Jonathan Alexander poses, answers, and theorizes these “why” questions incisively, as he argues for the implementation of “sexual literacy” in the composition classroom, a space, he purports, that has been excluded from discussions connecting sexuality and literacy in our field’s scholarship and pedagogy. For Alexander, sexual literacy is more than simply knowledge, understanding, and inclusion of sex and sexuality in curricular discourse; it is, instead, “an intimate understanding of the ways in which sexuality is constructed in language and the ways in which our language and meaning-making systems are always already sexualized” (18). Through this definition of sexual literacy, Alexander invites us to consider how students write sexuality as both a personal and political space, how sexuality and literacy are interwoven, and how we can implement pedagogical tactics to assist students in composing sex and sexuality as a means of becoming critical citizens.

In his introduction, Alexander extends his conception of sexual literacy to examine how such a literacy might encourage students to proactively “navigate the wealth of information and media that grapples with sex and sexuality . . . to become comfortable in dealing with such material in a mature, reasonable, and rhetorically savvy fashion” (2). In the James Berlin tradition of constructing critical citizenship through rhetorical awareness, Alexander describes the field’s turn toward social conversations regarding race, gender,
and class; however, these discussions tracing thirty years of Composition and Rhetoric do not, according to him, account for the vast array of opportunities for negotiating sex and sexuality. That is, Alexander advocates implementing discussions of the intersections between sexuality and literacy in the composition classroom. Such conversations can serve as a vehicle to extend students’ critical literacy—as well as our own—so as to interrogate the relationship between power, sexuality, and the prospect of agency. Agency, Alexander argues, is crucial, for sex and sexuality represent “a construct of power” through which we come to understand dominant social narratives, power relations, and our own citizenship: “so many of our most pressing social issues are wrapped up in the power/knowledge complexes of sexuality that participation in our democratic project necessitates fluency with discourses of sex and sexuality. Attention to sexual literacy provides such fluency” (19).

Chapter 1 investigates what Alexander calls “the turn in sexuality studies” through which he grapples with Michel Foucault’s and Judith Butler’s influences on our understandings of grand narratives about sex and sexuality. For Alexander, many of the central tenets of critical theory, including queer theory, inform the possibility for sexual literacy through critical citizenship. While this chapter provides a rich discussion of the intersection between critical theory and “productive” citizenship, I wonder if Alexander also might consider not only how queer theory and post-modernism critique grand narratives, but also who has access to these grand narratives—and how the denial of grand narratives for sexuality impacts one’s cultural intelligibility. I say this because a critical discussion of cultural access reflects many of the arguments he makes through this text, thereby extending his discussion not only to a critique of grand narratives for sex and sexuality but a reflection on how these narratives influence material realities for its citizens.

Using chapter 1 as a vehicle for chapter 2’s discussion, Alexander examines student writing about sex and sexuality, revealing the intricacies and subsequent literacies inherent within the ways students compose sex and sexuality. Arguing that sex and sexuality are often overlooked in popularized rhetoric and composition textbooks, Alexander juxtaposes a lack of conversation in our field with concrete examples of the ways students exhibit literacy about sexuality in non-traditional, informal forums such as blogs, web sites, online networking communities, and university newspapers. Alexander’s insightful discussion delves into the ironic juxtaposition of students writing sex and sexuality—without formal instruction—through critical lenses presented by school codes. That is, although Composition Studies may not invite conversations about sex and sexuality into our ideas about critical literacy and citizenship, our students are still having these conversations and still composing sex and sexuality with incisive, politically-astute rhetorical awareness. Such an idea asks us to consider what our students are writing
outside of the classroom, so that we may better address literacy practices within the classroom.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 examine three distinct spaces for critical discussion: queer theory for straight students, transgender rhetoric(s), and marriage discourses. In these chapters, Alexander examines how minority discourses that critique dominant cultures and discourses can benefit the critical citizenship of all students in the composition classroom. For instance, chapter 1 reveals the implications for a queer theory for all of his (our) students, as Alexander probes what it means to bring a critical theory essential to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer (GLBTQ) identity to heterosexual students. Drawing upon his own work, Alexander critiques dominant sexual discourses by addressing how “straightness” is composed. Through an analysis of his own classroom activity, he and his students investigate what it is to be straight—how “straight” is, perhaps, performed—through their careful analysis of a web site Alexander created exhibiting a straight male’s online disclosure of his fascination with a boy band, N*Sync—a seemingly “gay” affiliation. He and his students were able to examine the manner in which “straightness,” while a dominant sexuality, is ultimately unstable, a label often given to “gayness.” In chapter 3, he extends these critiques of cultural “knowledge” and “truth” to transgender rhetorics, through which he asks his students to begin reforming and expanding their—and his own—conceptions of gender through a feminist lens. In doing so, he alerts them to their subject position as a means of enabling a critical citizenship to work against dominant power structures. Chapter 4 recounts Alexander’s discussion with students about current marriage debates which often are masked in “for/against” ideologies in popular media. By complicating the idea of gay marriage as a two-sided issue and by expanding discussions of gay marriage to marriage as a whole, he and students begin to understand marriage not simply as a dualistic political debate, but as an intricately complicated commentary on public access, power, and citizenship. In his final chapter, Alexander faces and grapples with resistances to sexual literacy both within and outside of the classroom, while arguing for the implementation of such literacy that interweaves the personal and the logical for enacting local and global change through the composition classroom. Through both case study and personal account, these chapters delve into, complicate, and theorize the practices that elicit critical thought about students’—and our own—subject positions in cultural contexts.

With rich implications for the composition classroom, Alexander’s proposal for the deconstruction of comfort zones creates rhetorical space for challenging cultural “knowledge” and “norms.” Alexander’s careful balance of theory with practice constitutes his call for the implementation of praxis-centered scholarship. That is, his chapters, while bound to theory, could be taken out of the text and implemented in a real classroom context. For the field of Composition Studies, this text will, without a doubt, shape the
ways in which we understand, negotiate, and discuss sex and sexuality in our classrooms.

East Lansing, Michigan


Reviewed by Halina Adams and Melissa Ianetta, University of Delaware

Women’s Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition should—and no doubt, will—find a large audience of both sexes, for it is filled with useful advice for composition professionals at all stages in their academic careers. In addition to its remarkable value as a mentoring resource, Women’s Ways is further distinguished by the precision of its approach. Many career academic handbooks, like Greg M. Semenza’s *Graduate Study for the 21st Century: How to Build a Career in the Humanities* or Donald Hall’s *The Academic Self: An Owner’s Manual* attempt, with greater or lesser success, to avoid a disciplinary-based orientation in the hopes of reaching a broad readership. By contrast, as their title announces, in Women’s Ways co-authors Michelle Baliff, Diane Davis and Roxanne Mountford not only designate a discipline and biological identity, but also further focus their advice on women interested in “making it.”

While certainly each individual must determine the criteria for such achievement, in the introduction the authors define the women who have “made it” considered in this book: “[These women] hold a PhD; are full professors at an academic institution; are tenured; are well-published; are cited regularly; have contributed a consummate piece in the field; are frequently keynote speakers at national conferences; are actively mentoring other women in the field; are able to have a real life, in addition to their scholarly activities” (7). The book that follows is broken into four sections. Of particular interest to graduate students and their mentors, “Becoming a Professional” focuses on strategies to make the most out of graduate school and effectively search for a tenure-track job. The next two sections, “Thriving as a Professional” and “And Having a Life, Too,” offer insights and approaches to those professional and personal issues that confront both junior faculty and senior scholars. In the final section, “Being a Professional: Profiles of Success,” the authors use biographical data and interview excerpts to explain how nine major figures in the field “made it” and what advice and insight their varied experiences yield. In a sense, then, Women’s Ways offers its
readers access to mentoring from such well-respected and highly successful individuals as Susan Jarratt, Cheryl Glenn and Andrea Lunsford. By thus combining a career handbook with a Profiles in (Composition) Courage approach, Baliff, Davis and Mountford create a resource that should not only be required reading for all graduate students in the field but should also find a place on the shelf of any individual in Rhetoric and Composition seeking professional advancement.

Moving from the universal to particular, however, we have found first-hand that the book is of particular interest to those at transitional moments in their careers. Both of us—Halina, a second-year Master’s student attempting to reconcile her interests in writing and literary studies, and Melissa, a junior faculty member now facing tenure and promotion at an institution similar to those of the authors—found validation and advice within the pages of this book, and both of us have recommended this book to our peers. Indeed, during the writing of this review, a common theme that emerged in our discussion was the extent to which Women’s Ways offers different things at different stages in one’s career.

With her PhD applications looming, Women’s Ways offered Halina a refreshing and reassuring take on advancing in the field of composition—for here is a guide written by fellow rhetors who make suggestions as collegial mentors, not omniscient sages. In “Becoming a Professional,” in particular, the authors demonstrate a realistic awareness of the challenges of entering a field at the bottom of the academic food chain and so provide advice with a certain pragmatic genuineness. Graduate students should appreciate the straightforward treatment of dissertation issues: from selecting a topic—“your job is not to win a competition by brilliantly uttering the last word on a topic and putting it forever to rest” (39)—to firing a dissertation director: “maybe your director—let us be blunt—has turned out to be something of an asshole” (53). Furthermore, the authors stress the extension of rhetorical strategies into the job search, thereby making now-vague terrors of MLA and interviews seem less intimidating by offering rhetorical reading strategies for these professional milestones.

When contemplating a life in academia, Halina and many of her peers ponder how to balance work life and personal life. The mental math is intimidating: teaching plus research plus writing plus institutional service plus family equals nervous breakdown. While Women’s Ways remains cautiously less-than-prescriptive in its definitions of success and happiness, it offers the reader hope by focusing on ways in which to succeed in balancing this formula. From surprising insights regarding gauging institutional support for gender-related issues as early as a job interview (73) to coping with the loneliness of academia (193), the authors make a convincing argument for the feasibility—and, in fact, the pleasure—of balancing out the life equation.
Like Halina, Melissa was initially struck by the book’s tone, for it seemed that Baliff, Davis and Mountford’s colloquial, straight-from-the-hip rhetoric lessened the rhetorical distance between readers and text, providing an experience akin to one-to-one mentoring. Even while the tone seemed intimate, the advice was diverse, which stands the reader in good stead: as the graduate of a large Rhetoric and Composition program, Melissa is well aware of the wealth of perspectives and advice represented by the faculty in such a program, as well as the opportunities for networking its alumni represents. For those individuals working in smaller departments—or simply interested in acquainting themselves with perspectives beyond those of their current faculty and peers—Women’s Ways provides a readerly experience analogous to those casual incidents of daily conversation, or those moments of conference small talk with senior scholars that comprise a crucial yet often-overlooked component of professionalization. In like manner, these chapters will also prove similarly useful to both the newest members of our field as well as those individuals who are mentoring graduate students and so looking to broaden their own perspectives.

As in their graduate school material, in “Thriving as a Junior Professor” the authors also provide a wealth of suggestions and strategies. The material on professionalization, with its discussion of self-promotion, confidence-building, and professional integrity, seemed especially useful to a new assistant professor (83-92). So too, the advice on writing and research—which dispels popular faculty myths about the “ideal” writing schedule and illuminates the journey from dissertation to book—seems notably useful to individuals transitioning from the professional habits of graduate school to those of the tenure track.

These primary strengths of this volume, Melissa notes, suggest its limitations as well. As the focus on research and national reputation in the definition of “making it” rightfully implies, for example, this book primarily focuses on the experiences of women at research-oriented schools where publishing a book is the norm—if not merely a minimal expectation—for tenure. Accordingly, the research-related advice focuses on achieving the standard of the single-authored monograph, rather than the challenges facing women faculty at teaching-intensive colleges and universities where the support for conference and research travel can be negligible. Just as a more expansive definition of “making it” may have been desirable, so too the titular category of women might have been opened further. Additional information particular to working class or queer-identifying women and women with disabilities would have been a welcome addition. Given the success this volume is likely to find, perhaps a follow-up volume is in order, one that addresses additional varieties of women’s experiences in Rhetoric and Composition.

While all works have limits, Women’s Ways nevertheless stands as a much needed contribution to our field, a book which mentors will gift to
their mentees, and which both graduate students and faculty will repeatedly consult. As the authors note, “Women who read always have a line of flight available to them, because they know that other ways of being are possible. Women who write offer a line of flight to others” (194). By offering their readers a resource that is both motivating and useful, the authors have charted one such flight through the profession and, as such, have given a gift to the field.

Newark, Delaware


Reviewed by Tara Lockhart, San Francisco State University

In *Out of Style: Reanimating Stylistic Study in Composition and Rhetoric*, Paul Butler considers the relative absence of style both within the classroom and within the field’s theoretical conversations. He contends that two faulty premises are to blame for this lack: first, style has been wrongfully associated with the part of composition history some call current-traditional-rhetoric, and second, style has been misunderstood as the opposite of rhetorical invention. In each case, style has been jettisoned from nearly all contemporary discussions of composition theory and practice. The result, Butler claims, is the loss of both a significant body of work and significant resources for composition.

To be clear, Butler’s working definition of style combines rhetorical awareness, compositional choice, and habitual patterns manifested at the level of the sentence, although he notes that stylistic effects often extend to larger sections of discourse. This definition allows Butler to move beyond narrow conceptions of style as either fully unique or as naturally organic—able to be controlled solely by the author or outside of her ability to consciously shape—definitions which create unproductive binaries inadequate to describe how and why style works. Instead, *Out of Style* offers a historical context that charts and attempts to explain style’s disappearance. Beginning with classical rhetoric and moving through contemporary composition theory, Butler outlines the definitions and debates that have attempted to pinpoint stylistics and, in so doing, rewrites the history of style into a more cogent and consistent narrative. In this way, *Out of Style* acts as a useful primer on stylistics and its interaction with rhetoric, linguistics, and writing pedagogy.

The most interesting context provided is what Butler deems the “Golden Age” of stylistic pedagogies (1960s to the mid-1980s). Within this period,
he locates a range of stylistically-oriented theory and practice championed by scholars as diverse as Edward P. J. Corbett, Richard Young, W. Ross Winterowd, and Richard Lanham. By paying close attention to this period, Butler works from a familiar historiographic viewpoint to argue that in differentiating ourselves from previous movements within the field we often select particular emphases to remember—while reducing, limiting, or forgetting other parts of our history. Specifically, Butler contends that in imagining itself beyond the heyday of process-oriented pedagogies, the field of composition has misremembered a portion of its history and, as a result, has woefully left behind a rich repertoire of stylistic pedagogies that have been neither fully theorized nor fully implemented for classroom use.

If the first three chapters provide a historical summary of style’s drifts and resurfacings, the second part of the book analyzes this history in terms of Composition’s representation of itself and its interests. Butler’s primary objective in chapters 4 through 6 is to identify the sites where style still exists. Borrowing a term from Janice Lauer, Butler uses chapter 4 to examine the “diaspora” that style has made within the field. He discusses the ways that style has migrated—usually with little acknowledgement—into other areas of composition: genre studies, rhetorical analysis, personal writing, and the study of difference (including differences of culture, race, class, and gender). Butler contends that recognizing the presence of style in these arenas not only acknowledges important work that is already happening, but could also encourage greater use of stylistic analysis which would, in turn, strengthen the theoretical relevance and the persuasive appeal of each of these sub-fields.

Chapter 5 moves outside academia to examine style’s inclusion in public discourse. It is particularly pressing for composition scholars to take the reins from the “public intellectuals” who Butler identifies as shaping the popular discourse that reduces style to questions of grammar and syntax. The exigency that largely drives Out of Style is located here: scholars within the field must wrest back the discussion of style so that students, educators, and the public at large might see the usefulness of stylistics beyond grammatical and syntactical correctness. Moreover, the field and its scholars can then speak with thoughtful authority back to those voices that have too long limited the terms of the discussion.

Butler models this move toward shaping the public discourse in the closing section of chapter 5 when he responds formally to Stanley Fish, Louis Menand, and Heather Mac Donald—the three “public intellectuals” he criticizes for their narrow and ill-informed representations of composition—by countering their claims and situating his own arguments about writing within an approachable and contemporary theoretical framework. At the close of this chapter, Butler illustrates how compositionists might answer challenges and articulate their own researched positions in response. If,
instead, we as a field remain silent or respond only within our professional spheres, Butler contends that we will continue to cede our authority and expertise to those voices that conflate style with prescriptive grammar—and rally publics to demand an educational return to such decontextualized and ineffective practices.

In several places, then, Out of Style registers an activist tone. Along these lines, one of Butler’s most interesting connections is between style and the well-known document “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” authored by the Committee on CCCC Language in 1974. In defending students’ use of multiple variations of language, this statement offers a view of style and stylistic study that Butler deems both “explicit” and “innovative,” yet it has remained largely untouched. The “Students’ Right” document provides another example of a call for style within the field which might be better exploited; the attention to and analysis of style allows us to better determine how particular effects were achieved in writing that moves between genres, registers, or discourses. As Butler puts it, “I argue that the use of style is what reveals how the border becomes blurred” between multiple styles; therefore, stylistic analysis “illuminates the consequences of that blurring” (104).

Beyond such insights that punctuate this quite readable text, what is particularly useful and encouraging about Butler’s project is his agile modeling of stylistic analysis. Logical and clear, Butler performs convincing stylistic readings while simultaneously explaining (or reminding) his audience of terms such as anadiplosis and asyndeton. Whether his audience takes up the precise terminology seems beside the point: Butler hopes we’ll take away the central argument that attending to style allows both writers and readers to better understand how written texts mean as they do. Butler’s explanations shore up the underlying current of the book which contends that even though style is often experienced implicitly, there is great power in making the workings of style visible, explicit, and thus available for both teaching and learning. This is an important point, as Butler clearly not only wants to make stylistic resources available for writing students, but also for writing teachers. Broadening and deepening our understanding of style, he contends, is essential not only for strengthening our students’ repertoires but also for enriching our own knowledge and work—as well as better representing our discipline and our research to broader publics.

Butler’s recommendation, then, is to use style as a fulcrum which can help composition scholars pry open a space and insert ourselves more centrally within public discourse, clarifying the terms and contexts of public debates concerning writing (e.g., unlinking style from its problematic conflation with prescriptive grammar), making recommendations based on our expertise, and thereby garnering greater respect for our field and our work. The text closes with this call to action, encouraging compositionists to reshape style in ways that are meaningful to them and to the field. As promised in the
book’s title, Butler succeeds in taking the first steps toward reanimating the conversation concerning stylistics and the teaching of style—topics to further investigate theoretically, rhetorically, and pedagogically. Since Butler’s stated focus and interest is clearly on the operations of style at the sentence level, this work opens the door for further research concerning the ways that style ripples outward from the sentence to larger sections of discourse.

Similarly, in offering analyses and critiques of the way several “public intellectuals” have portrayed composition in the larger public sphere, Out of Style prompts additional attention to the ways in which composition scholars and others related to—or interested in—style might be productively identified, owned, and persuaded to act as public intellectuals. Butler argues convincingly that we can no longer afford to be left out: we must increase our credibility by confronting and responding to discussions of style in the public sphere, offering our expertise as a valuable corrective, and establishing our field as central to the debates about writing that continue to interest the public. By reclaiming stylistic study and clearly articulating its value to audiences both within and outside the field, we will not only help writers—we will also construct our own greater voice in the dialogues and debates in which we are most implicated and invested.

San Francisco, California


Reviewed by D. Alexis Hart, Virginia Military Institute

From service learning and public writing to new media and composition as a “happening,” resistance is not new to traditional methods of teaching “the research paper” and/or introducing students to “academic discourse.” In Teaching Multiwriting: Researching and Composing with Multiple Genres, Media, Disciplines, and Cultures, Robert L. Davis and Mark F. Shadle strike a particularly hopeful note in their call for a radically open and flexible writing pedagogy. Davis and Shadle describe “multiwriting” as a type of alternative composition in which “authors may use any means to compose effectively” (14; emphasis added). According to Davis and Shadle, this spirit of expansiveness and creativity distinguishes multiwriting from other types of multi-genre writing that more rigidly emphasize formulas for composing. By comparison, their inquiry-based method of writing, they claim, not only
“lights students up” and improves their work, but also “rejuvenates” teachers who may actually find themselves eager to evaluate student work.

Davis and Shadle refer to their pedagogical approach as “practical utopianism,” a useful oxymoron; while some of the student projects the authors describe may seem removed from student “writing” per se (e.g. a tree built of boxes filled with old letters and photographs; a PowerPoint presentation containing maps and satellite images; a triangular stack of corked glass bottles, each with an imaginary story rolled up inside), the authors explain that they have intentionally retained “writing” as part of the description of their pedagogy in order “to suggest [that] this kind of work remains tied to traditions of composition, rhetoric, and discourse studies” (14). So, while they would happily do away with grading, course schedules, and due dates, they recognize that writing instruction takes place within institutional structures that require such practical considerations, and that most of their readers also work within such institutional structures. They recognize, too, the value of teaching their students to assess rhetorical situations and to create unity and meaning within their projects to achieve their desired goals.

Chapter 1 (“A Crossroads in Space and Time”) introduces the first of several metaphors in the text: the crossroads as a place at which one arrives during one’s travels and at which one becomes acutely aware of multiple paths upon which to pursue one’s goals. The various choices available at the crossroads serve to represent the “interconnected inquiry” of multiwriting: that is, the pedagogy’s method of linking public and academic writing (e.g., an official signpost) with private and personal writing (e.g., the writer’s/traveler’s choice). This openness to the personal, to each writer’s motivating curiosity, is the key to engaging students in the multiwriting process. The authors hope that the broad landscape of composing possibilities as viewed from “the crossroads” obviates the “false purity of definition” presented to student writers in traditional composition classes, which tend to offer students only one possible “path,” or way of writing at a time (31). Unlike a traditional student writer, a multiwriter can “wander” and change directions at will; in other words, he or she can compose in any number of styles, languages, and media at any given moment depending upon his or her personal choices and rhetorical goals.

The metaphor of writing as a journey is further developed in chapter 2 (“Research Writing as a Key to the Highway”). This loose, wandering mode of research writing focuses on students’ questions and their exploration, rather than arriving at definitive answers. Multiwriting research projects focus more on the journey than the destination by shifting the aims of research away from “presenting evidence to support or force conclusions” and instead encouraging students to engage in the “spirit of inquiry” (62-63). By shifting the aims of student writing away from “definitive” conclusions or premature “expertise” and toward the ambiguity of open questions and
emerging patterns, Davis and Shadle hope to move argumentation from a “state-and-defend” mode to more of a loose conversation between interlocutors—a conversation that is nonetheless informed by research and the writer’s assessment of the rhetorical situation. Thus, they do not intend to flout academic conventions, but to revise them radically.

Chapter 3 (“The Loose Talk of Persuasion”) and chapter 4 (“The Essay as Cabinet of Wonder”) consider other ways to design multiwriting projects to help student writers resist the certainty and fixedness characterized by traditional research essays and to help them pursue instead a discourse of open questioning and erudite reflection. Unlike essays that follow a thesis/support form, multiwriting projects “trace trails of understanding, where final knowledge is never achieved” and the forms of these projects “emerge in relation to their messages” (141). Images of model projects appear in the Photo Gallery (situated between chapter 3 and chapter 4), which also includes photos of places and structures that might inspire student inquiry and creativity. Not surprisingly, the authors highlight successful student projects: those projects fueled by genuine curiosity and resulting in writerly satisfaction, those that led to conference presentations or gallery exhibitions, those that contributed to the “enrichment” of local communities. They do admit, however, that multiwriting does not inspire every student and some students still do only enough to get by. The descriptions of successful projects are thorough and help readers understand how multiwriting can engage students in problem solving, analysis, collaboration, the ability to adapt to changing conditions—skills that the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has declared necessary for 21st-century literacies (13). So while multiwriting projects are certainly unconventional and eclectic, Davis and Shadle make a reasonable case for the practical skills that students can develop while producing them.

The authors use chapter 5 (“Multiwriting Blues”) to reassure skeptics that their multiwriting pedagogy, while resistant to static templates and predetermined forms, is disciplined. They explain, “As is the case for a blues musician, the writer must also match content and message to form” (175), and must develop “a habit of making meaning . . . worth considering” (173). While the students’ interests drive their open-ended inquiries, Davis and Shadle do: provide students with models; offer exercises to help students focus their questions; discuss the rhetorical considerations of purpose, audience, and occasion; and ask students to compose an end-of-course reflection. As for assessment, Davis and Shadle admit that evaluating multiwriting projects is challenging. They meet this challenge by asking students to collaborate with them on assessment criteria and expectations for the “deadline project” (179).

While the authors do not provide further guidance on assessment, throughout the book they do consider their teacher audiences by includ-
ing references to specific assignments and by providing, at the end of each chapter, some writing exercises and heuristics as well as additional readings and films underscoring each chapter’s theme. They are also aware that not all teachers have the resources or institutional support to open up their own writing pedagogies so drastically, so they occasionally suggest how to adapt their models to fit existing, more structured assignments. These end-of-chapter “Musings” are the most practical and useful sections of the text for those interested in applying multiwriting pedagogies in their own classes.

Yet, in an era of increasing oversight and assessment in higher education, the authors’ over-the-top enthusiasm and boundless optimism for how multiwriting can lead to a utopian learning environment “where there is no need for courses, credits, or lists or expected outcomes” was sometimes wearisome (183). The authors’ digressive writing style was occasionally exasperating as well. Reading *Teaching Multiwriting*, I often felt as if I were listening to the blues. The authors have a habit of “riffing” off of each other and key themes, which frequently leads to digressions. For example, a discussion of formulaic style and content might lead the authors to recall the plot of a Monty Python parody; an explanation of a writing assignment on persuasion might lead to an examination of characters in a local theater production. These wanderings away from the main topic, while sometimes frustrating to me as a teacher of writing looking for practical applications, were generally engaging, and the digressions worked together with the central metaphors to model the open-ended “writing as inquiry” that Davis and Shadle describe throughout the text. In this way, the form of the text follows its function.

While not all readers of *Teaching Multiwriting* may be able to embrace fully the expansive and innovative approach to writing pedagogy Davis and Shadle advocate, the text does provide a range of options for those seeking to incorporate fresh ideas and try some alternative assignments. *Teaching Multiwriting* also provides a useful overview of other challenges to current understandings of writing instruction and other alternative practices in composition. In fact, current research on multimodal learning supports Davis’s and Shadle’s theory that working in multiple genres benefits learning. For example, a 2008 study on multimodal learning sponsored by Cisco systems found that “students engaged in learning that incorporates multimodal designs, on average, outperform students who learn using traditional approaches with single modes” (13). So if readers can get over—or settle into—the eclectic mix of narratives; the numerous references to musicians, authors, and performers; and the improvisations and discordant riffs; *Teaching Multiwriting* can provide them with some intriguing options to reinvigorate their teaching and expand their visions of “writing” assignments.

*Lexington, Virginia*

Book Reviews  153

Reviewed by Alexis E. Ramsey, Eckerd College

Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition seeks to “provide a diverse set of narratives, narratives that [are] thematically and historically connected” in order to “encourage a reexamination of prevailing ideas about disciplinary formation, development, and transmission” (221). Specifically, the text works to “extend, challenge, complicate, and thereby enrich the narrative” (3) of composition history within the American college and university system.

Patricia Donahue’s “Disciplinary Histories: A Meditation on Beginnings,” which acts as a kind of extended reflection on the reification of the Harvard narrative and the role of Albert Kitzhaber’s Rhetoric in American Colleges in expounding this narrative, also works to create another kind of beginning: a pedagogical beginning. The perspective this beginning enables “could ‘disturb’ discrete institutional narratives without having to wrestle with the unwieldy distinction drawn between rhetoric/composition” (234). In other words, a pedagogical perspective can help us speak of composition history not in terms of a decline, but in terms of mismatch between an “emerging subject with a preexisting methodology” (235). This perspective allows for a more positive approach to composition histories. Further, this perspective lets historians look at difficulties not as failures, but as moments to explore, question, and ultimately contend with amidst the multitude of expectations for those involved with composition—faculty, students, colleges and universities, and the larger community. While this chapter is the second to last chapter in the volume, it actually provides a lens through which to read the other chapters.

The ten chapters within the volume respond to the prevailing narrative that situates Harvard’s composition program as the starting place for the development of composition at colleges and universities throughout the United States, challenging the primacy of this narrative in light of normal
schools, liberal arts colleges, historically black colleges, and junior colleges. Indeed, nearly all the authors in this collection repeatedly point to the ways that composition at their subject school did not coincide with the Harvard model. For instance, in “A Chair ‘Perpetually Filled by a Female Professor’” Heidemarie Z. Weidner emphatically states that Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana created an educational environment radically different from that proffered by Harvard. Butler admitted all students, regardless of gender, class position, or race. Further, Butler created a learning environment that was “dynamic, community-centered” and that emphasized “practicality and utility” (60) in education. The aim of Butler’s curriculum was to prepare students for the “task of transforming a wilderness into civilization,” (61) as opposed to creating a new generation of gentlemen. The focus on practicality is a recurring theme among the colleges profiled in this volume, especially because many of the chapters discuss the evolution of Normal Schools and the writing programs therein.

Yet, as Kathleen Welsch reminds readers early in the volume, while students across the United States may have shared textbooks and topics of themes and while schools may have had similar purposes, students “did not write out of identical contexts” (15). Thus our histories of composition must account for the diversity of writing situations and writing pupils. Further, as Garbus points out in her history of writing curriculum at Wellesley College during the progressive era in “Vida Scudder in the Classroom and in the Archives,” histories of writing instruction need not be limited to the first-year writing classroom, but should examine how writing was taught and used throughout the other three years of college.

Another common thread in the book is the emphasis on female writers and female teachers. Chapters by Welsch, Weidner, and Garbus all discuss female teachers, while Lindblom, Banks, and Quay (“Mid-Nineteenth-Century Writing Instruction at Illinois State Normal University”), Fitzgerald (“The Platteville Papers Revisited”), Rothermel (“Our Life’s Work”), and Gray (“Life in the Margins”) rely heavily on themes and letters composed by female students. In particular, these chapters look at the relationship between women teachers and students and writing pedagogy during the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Of note, only one chapter—Jeffrey Hoogeveen’s “The Progressive Faculty/Students Discourse of 1969-1970 and the Emergence of Lincoln University’s Writing Program”—looks at writing during the latter half of the twentieth century. The number of chapters discussing women, as well as the single chapter looking at composition practices in the later twentieth century, suggests that there is still a myriad of research opportunities available for scholars interested in expanding composition history.

In addition to opening the history of composition practices, a major contribution of the book is the expansion of what counts as evidence in the creating of these histories. As Patricia Donahue and Bianco Falbo note in “(The
significant curricular and pedagogical innovation in composition can occur anywhere reading and writing are taught and practiced, but only if our assumptions about what constitutes proper evidence for such innovation are reexamined” (52). Thus, the authors in the collection use a variety of source material to reconstruct histories. These materials include: course catalogs, student papers, lecture notes, grade books, and letters. These sources point to the gaps in the historical record, particularly related to women’s history. Beth Ann Rothermel notes that “in trying to build a complex picture of Westfield [Normal School she] consulted a range of texts… [considering both] the extra-curriculum as well as the curriculum” (136). Even as authors uncover a wealth of new source material, thereby reconstituting what counts as legitimate documentary evidence, they also return to and re-read other sources. For example, many chapters reference John Brereton’s *The Origin of Composition Studies in the American College* and James Berlin’s *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth Century American Colleges*. By combining readings of more widely known texts with readings of newly uncovered texts the authors help to trace the rise of the Harvard narrative, as well as offer modifications to our perceived understanding of composition history.

For historians of composition practices, among the most valuable additions to the book are detailed discussions of archival research methodologies alongside works cited lists that focus on archival sources. Archival research methodologies are often underrepresented in histories and thus these research narratives are perhaps as illuminating as the histories they help to produce. Kathryn Fitzgerald in “The Platteville Papers-Revisted” writes that her chapter, as well as another piece written from material collected at the University, is the result of “a serendipitous, layered, recursive process” (116). Fitzgerald acknowledges the importance of the archivist in helping her find material, but also asserts that even after finding a set of papers, she still had to learn how to approach these papers as source material. She read through each of the papers several times until she understood the papers as a unified set created in a particular historical context, providing answers to questions concerning genre and the consequences of specific genre expectations for writers. These questions remain relevant for current composition teachers. These self-reflective sections will also be helpful for novice archival researchers who may be unfamiliar with the demands of finding and analyzing archival sources.

The narratives also highlight the role of serendipity in archival research—the finding of a particular source or the opening of a specific box that shapes or redefines the course of research. Serendipity also depends upon the knowledge to recognize this find as vital and the patience to keep searching for that next document. This is a common theme used in the discussion of archival research because, as Jean Ferguson Carr notes in the closing paragraphs of the book, serendipity, the thrill of discovery, urges researchers to return to the
archive with different questions and different interests that compel a search for the next discovery.

As Fitzgerald does, Lindblom, Banks, and Quay create a link between current composition pedagogies and those used in nineteenth-century classrooms. In “Writing Instruction at Illinois State Normal School” the authors use letters from student Abbie Reynolds as evidence of the pedagogy of Dr. Albert Stetson. The pedagogy, though progressive, over-emphasized surface correctness, leading to problems for students of lower socio-economic status, such as Reynolds. At the close of the chapter, the authors note that teachers still look for surface correctness, thereby “holding students to discriminating, socially unfair standards” (113). They list other similarities between current composition contexts and nineteenth-century classrooms: standardization, patriotism based upon militarism, and the rise of first-generation college students in the classroom.

As the title of the text suggests, histories of composition must be discovered at the local level—both at the level of the single college or university and at the level of the individual classroom. These histories remain relevant for today’s composition instructors because they trace a myriad of situated pupils, instructors, and learning environments, inviting current instructors to question and analyze their own pedagogical practices and conditions within a historical context.

St. Petersburg, Florida


Reviewed by Lance Massey, Bowling Green State University

You can’t throw a rock at a CCCC convention these days without hitting somebody who thinks—probably rightly—that Rhetoric and Composition is in crisis, that it is at risk of losing its identity as a field devoted exclusively to the teaching of writing on one hand, or to the study of writing in all its manifestations, unfettered by a pedagogical imperative, on the other. It is ultimately to such concerns that Helen Foster articulates Networked Process: Dissolving Boundaries of Process and Post-Process. Foster, however, mercifully eschews alarmist rhetoric. She is less concerned with saving a dying field than with articulating a theory of writers and writing that can help rhetoric and composition take the best advantage of this unique time in our institutional and cultural history.
Her entry into this discussion comes through the process/post-process debate. Wanting to avoid stifling binaries, Foster looks for a point of stasis between process and post-process that can form the basis for meaningful dialogue and, therefore, effectively move the discipline forward. That point of stasis, she says, is a middle ground between process and post-process, represented by socially- and culturally-cognizant scholarship of the 1980s, in which major constituencies of both groups have a stake. Each of these constituencies, then, is invested in theorizing the subjectivity of the writer and the complex of social and cultural forces at work on her. Foster calls this point of stasis networked process. The full meaning of this term emerges over the next three chapters, as she attempts to synthesize a large body of work in rhetoric and composition with postmodern, poststructural, feminist, and Bakhtinian theories of language and subjectivity. Chapter 1 offers an overview of the two “strands” of post-process—those that are not based on Thomas Kent’s paralogic rhetoric and those that are, but in mitigated form. (Kent is in a class by himself.) Foster then finds a “rebuttal” to post-process in the sheer diversity of process approaches, a sampling of which she surveys as evidence. Chapter 1 concludes by positing the social theory of the 1980’s, and the theory of networked process it ultimately enables, as a point of stasis between the two groups.

Chapter 2 aims to provide a focused look at how the social turn of the 1980’s moved us toward a more complex vision of process. Foster focuses on James Berlin’s “cognitive mappings” of rhetoric and composition, examining in detail five of Berlin’s major works published throughout the 1980’s. According to Foster, Berlin’s mappings and, more importantly, his social epistemic method, afford us a critically important vision of rhetoric and composition’s disciplinary landscape as it existed in a kind of in-between space of process and post-process.

Articulating a theory of the subject who is situated in and enacts networked process, chapters 3 and 4 propose and situate what Foster calls “networked subjectivity.” Chapter 3 surveys a wide range of theories before settling on Bakhtinian dialogism as a grounding theory. Drawing on Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia, horizon, alterity, addressivity, answerability, and authoring, networked subjectivity tries to capture the full range of social, political, and ethical forces that constrain and enable the individual subject as she “authors” herself and the world she, and we, inhabit. Chapter 4 further concretizes networked subjectivity by examining it “in relation to a cultural network” of power-saturated, Foucaultian “discursive relations” (112) that include personal, institutional, and cultural contexts. These contexts, in turn, comprise “discursive formations” with their own truth conditions, or epistemologies, whose likely conflicting nature means that subjects are “characterized by multiple and often conflicting subject positions” (134).
Having laid the groundwork for and fully theorized networked process as the entire complex of individuals’ and others’ perceptions, beliefs, desires, and expectations in contact with the full range of social, cultural, and institutional forces that are brought to bear on all acts of authoring, Foster, in chapter 5, extrapolates from networked process a “heuristic” for examining how disciplinary artifacts like composition textbooks and institutional sites like university writing programs “function in the discursive formation of networked process” (141). The heuristic issues from Foster’s appropriation of Bakhtinian dialogism, asking of the artifacts and sites on which it is brought to bear:

- What notion of audience is advanced, relative to notions of self and alterity?
- What sort of understanding is promoted?
- What notion of language and discourse is tacitly assumed?
- What notion of context obtains relative to the notion of horizon?
- What notion of purpose is suggested, relative to notions of addressivity and answerability? (142-43)

She applies these questions to a reading of Joseph Trimmer’s *Writing With a Purpose* (artifact) and to the Writing Program at Cal State Chico (institutional site), information about which she ascertains based on her reading of Judith Rodby and Tom Fox’s “Basic Work and Material Acts.”

The concluding chapter is the most forward-looking of the book. Following the leads of such figures as Ellen Cushman and Susan Miller, Foster argues that the discipline should change its name to “rhetoric and writing studies” (191). One of the main advantages of this name, she maintains, is that its broad inclusiveness is reflective of the broadly inclusive ethos of what is now known as rhetoric and composition. But she also notes that, to counter the dissipating effects such inclusiveness tends toward, we need a “delimiting” metaphor. For this role she nominates “networked process,” which not only includes the broad, densely-populated middle section of overlap between process and post-process adherents, but also “represents the complexity of multiple networked process sites and signals both an intellectual and material (re)negotiation of our professional and disciplinary status” (197). Networked process thus offers the discipline a historically cognizant and disciplinarily advantageous way to move forward as we face the unique challenges posed to us in the early 21st Century.

As I read *Networked Process*, I couldn’t help feeling that Foster has re-invented the wheel. I wondered, that is, whether she couldn’t have borrowed, to greater effect, from the compelling body of largely Bakhtinian, socio-cultural work already being done in writing studies that has inched our understanding of writers and writing processes ever closer to the kind of complexity that Foster calls for, into what Paul Prior has called writers’ “full cultural-historical lifeworlds” (274). Doing so could have helped Foster streamline
her methodological argument, which unfolds over two chapters and relies heavily on summary, often of works whose relevance to her arguments in the last two (and most compelling) chapters seems tangential. This in turn might have given her the space and freedom to explore in greater detail her most interesting and important claims, namely, those in the final chapter about networked process’ implications for disciplinarity. (Chapter 6 is the shortest chapter in the book.)

I also found myself wanting Foster to do more with the heuristic in chapter 5: alongside her critique of Trimmer’s Writing With a Purpose, I would like to have seen what a good composition textbook (or at least a better one in Foster’s eyes than WWP) looks like when read through this lens. And (though I recognize that this restraint has much more to do with time than space) I also had to wonder: What might have been, had Foster not limited her demonstration of the institutional critique this heuristic enables to what she could surmise about Cal State Chico from having read Judith Rodby and Tom Fox’s “Basic Work and Material Acts?” It’s difficult to believe, given Foster’s goal of combining critique of a textbook with critique of the “other situated institutional discursive formations in which the textbook functions, along with the students and teachers imbricated in these relations” (165), that her analysis could approach the thickness this goal calls for without having done her own situated study.

Still, there is much to be gained from a targeted reading of Networked Process. First, and despite my critique of Foster’s tendency toward summary in the early chapters, her discussions of both the process/post-process debate and of Berlin’s work in the 1980’s could be very useful in graduate courses designed to introduce students to conversations, past and present, in the field. Second, the heuristic deployed in chapter 5 could be of considerable interest to anybody involved in assessment of writing programs or individual instructors (others or oneself). It’s certainly easy to see how asking these questions about writing programs, courses, and teachers could yield rich—and useful—results. And, finally, the concluding chapter adds yet another voice to the chorus of those calling for fundamental change in how we conceive of and carry out our disciplinary mission, articulating a broadly inclusive vision of the field as the study of writing in all of its forms and functions. As one who, himself, got his PhD through a unit called the “Center for Writing Studies” (University of Illinois), I can hardly fault her for that.

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Work Cited


CONTRIBUTORS

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Currently the Coordinator for Writing at Penn State University’s The Eberly campus, Danielle Mitchell oversees both the writing and the writing-across-the curriculum programs. She also teaches courses in composition, cultural studies, and literature. Her research, which focuses on issues of diversity, politics, and pedagogy, has appeared in various collections as well as in The Journal of Popular Culture and TOPIC: The Washington and Jefferson College Review.
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