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COMPOSITION(S) IN THE NEW LIBERAL ARTS

edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Composition(s) in the New Liberal Arts brings a diverse group of scholars together to discuss how composition studies should evolve in the context of ongoing changes related to higher education. These changes include new shifts in student demographics, increasing demands for accountability in educational outcomes, continuing expectations that a university education will lead to a good job, questions about the utility of composition, and more. Such commonly cited changes have been occurring for quite some time, creating the necessity for compositionists to continually re-evaluate their approaches to writing instruction. Indeed, the narrative of the field has moved far into the rising action into what is arguably the climax. There could not be a better indication that the field of composition studies has arrived at a crucial moment than the dramatic title of David W. Smit's persuasive book, *The End of Composition Studies*. Contrary to the title, however, the editors of this volume believe that composition studies has not reached an end, but rather has entered an exciting period of change with opportunities to consider new places and purposes for writing instruction.

The complications in the field's narrative plotline, complications that lead to pessimism about composition studies, are seeming contradictions between the realities of the always changing scene of higher education and our educational ideals. As teachers of writing and rhetoric, these ideals are often expressed through various visions of what a liberal arts education should be and the place within that scheme that writing instruction should occupy. Contributors to this volume articulate what they value from the lib-

THE VERTICAL WRITING CURRICULUM

The Necessary Core of Liberal Arts Education

Sandra Jamieson

My question in this chapter—one that I have struggled with for a long time—is why do teachers of writing adopt similar literacy goals and pedagogies at very different kinds of institutions and with very different student populations? Many people reading this question will find it at best troubling. Am I proposing the teaching of different degrees of literacy to students at different kinds of institutions? Such an idea smells of the elitism the discipline of composition long ago rejected; however, when we¹ rejected (at

¹My concern in this chapter is the influence of context, and I use the word *we* to indicate my membership in multiple, and sometimes conflicting, communities and discourses. I am a member of the discipline of composition and I consider myself a theorist. This first “we” includes others who self-identify in this way. But I am also a practitioner who has not entirely escaped the ideological inscription of my discipline or the larger culture. The second “we,” then, includes others whose practice is similar to mine and signals my complicity in the practices and attitudes I discuss. As a teacher in a small liberal arts college, I am also aware that one of the locations from which I speak is elitist and privileged, and this third location is marked by a “we” that includes other liberal arts faculty who may or may not inhabit the first two contexts. It is the impact of this shifting and highly contextualized identity and our membership in multiple and sometimes conflicting discourse communities that shapes this discussion and prompts the question that begins this chapter.

least in theory) the notion that we might teach different *degrees* of literacy to different populations of students, we also seem to have rejected any substantial support for teaching different *kinds* of literacy. Or for shaping literacy instruction in response to local context. (One could argue that writing in the disciplines is context-specific; however, actually it is course-specific but not significantly influenced by the kind of college in which that course is located.)

To ignore location is to reinforce the fantasy of equality that pretends the education at a community college is the same as that at an ivy league university. To perceive the difference between such institutions as one of degree rather than kind, is to deny the basic reality of higher education and to leave our students ill equipped to understand the hierarchy in which they are placed. I am concerned that although many of us teach students the importance of location—emphasizing the role of audience and purpose and the need for writers to be flexible, and to modify their texts for different situations, contexts, and discourse communities—we do not do the same thing ourselves. Composition teachers and program directors assess the skill level of our students and modify the content of our courses, and sometimes even our pedagogy. We identify desired “outputs” of our courses, develop outcomes documents and program goals, and modify the “inputs” of our courses and pedagogies accordingly. But as we think about how best to achieve the desired “outputs,” I believe that we spend insufficient time considering our own location in the larger context and institution in which we teach.

Only in the last decade have scholars begun seriously articulating the ways that the differences between small and large colleges and universities determine how writing “experts” and programs will be constructed. Those articulations are essential to our discipline and the ways we design programs and prepare writing program administrators (WPAs) and composition teachers, as teachers at small colleges have argued so persuasively (see Amorose 1998, 2000; DelliCarpini 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Hanstedt; Jamieson; Janseth; and Moon). But these discussions have yet to produce serious engagement with the actual content of writing courses and their institutional function. What is the difference between a composition course taught in a small liberal arts college and one taught in a large technical college? Should there be a difference? What should determine any differences that teachers designing courses at those institutions believe to be appropriate? What, in other words, is the interaction between the composition program and the community within which it exists? And what is the effect of this interaction on the students in those programs?

As histories of the field show, although composition theorists have argued a lot about why composition programs and courses exist, who does

and should benefit from them, and how, there have been few substantive changes in the essence of the course generally known as “First Year Comp” (FYC) since the first American college composition course (Berlin, Crowley, Miller). Since that time, scholars and practitioners have learned a lot about how to teach writing, and have gained a deeper understanding of the writing process, indeed, of writing as a process. There have been arguments about the appropriate political, social, and aesthetic role and content of FYC, and movement from one theoretical base to another in what most of us recognize as some form of progress. Yet today, although there are a plethora of theories about the teaching of writing and the acquisition of advanced literacy skills, there is a surprising uniformity in the way FYC is taught and in the status of those who teach it. Although we might expect this of a so-called content course—there seems to be agreement about what should be included in, say, an introduction to chemistry or an economics course—we might expect less uniformity in a purely skills-based course: A course whose content is the acquisition of skills and practical knowledge.

The move by the National Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) to produce a set of “outcomes” for FYC would seem to reinforce the importance of uniformity, even as local programs are encouraged to modify the outcomes document rather than slavishly adopt it. As in the case of textbooks, however, the difference is in degree, not kind. The general emphases of the document are reinforced if it is simply “modified.” As a discipline, we may (perhaps) recognize that one size does not fit all, but we seem to have embraced the notion that one style will fit all. Yet, as with any fashionable outfit, instruction bought “off the rack” will tend to fit the model much better than the average consumer, so even the new focus on student-as-customer does not explain our refusal to engage with the implications of location and context. The fact that FYC has become the most outsourced course in the university does, of course, play a role in this move to uniformity of standard and content (and should also give the lie to the argument that all decisions are consumer-driven rather than in the interests of the corporation controlling the finances). The reasons for this development and its consequences have been ably explored elsewhere (see collections edited by Schell 1997, 2000; and by Bousquet et al.), but I believe they need to be acknowledged whenever we consider the current state of the discipline. This is especially the case when we investigate the implications of one kind of college adopting the practices of a very different kind. Composition developed into the field or discipline we recognize today in large research universities with a large adjunct and graduate student labor pool. As other kinds of schools adopt basic program and course design from those institutions, they run the risk of also inheriting the lack of respect that leads to such outsourcing.

Some of us have learned this lesson the hard way (see Jamieson, 3-4), but I believe it is possible to rethink writing instruction on a local level in ways that bring it back to the center of instruction and so to a status that requires a full-time, fully qualified, and fully compensated professoriate.

Recent discussions of the role of writing in small colleges have confirmed what many of us already know: in many small colleges there is no Writing Program Administrator, and there is no program as such that needs to be administered. Yet there is first year composition. It might occur as part of a first-year seminar or some other form of orientation to college; as an optional course, recommended for those with weaker writing skills but not required of all; or as part of a general education program. Sometimes it is provided through the writing center, or even as a writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) seminar. Sometimes there are junior-level courses as well, but the course is generally something required of students in their first year at the college and no more. It is a skills course, generally separated from the rest of the curriculum even when it is taught by full-time faculty of the college rather than part-time faculty. With a few notable exceptions, this is also the case for writing in that variety of small schools known as liberal arts colleges as well. Even when there is widespread buy-in to the notion of the importance of writing as part of a liberal arts education and of full-time faculty teaching it, most people can point to the specific courses that "teach writing" and therefore should have already taught writing to students who are still not suitably proficient. Until recently, one could predict that the more selective the college, the less likely it was to have created a space for the teaching of general writing skills. Although this is changing, too many of the colleges that decided early to consciously teach writing simply adopted the model developed at larger research or state schools without exploring whether the teaching of writing in the liberal arts context should be any different. Now, as liberal arts colleges are beginning to hire WPAs and design writing programs, it is time to consider what those programs might look like if they do not mimic those at the research universities where most composition theorists were trained.

It is my contention that by failing to consider the role of context and location, teachers of writing fail to fully engage with their students or the institutions within which they work. I do not believe that "one size fits all" in terms of assignments, textbooks, pedagogy, curricula design, program design, or teacher training. Indeed, I think the dominance within the discipline of theorists and practitioners housed in larger primarily research universities has caused problems for our discipline, those who teach in it, and those who learn from it. This dominance has made possible the development of sweeping pedagogical theories and led to the production of even broader-

based writing texts, each designed to appeal to the largest possible audience and to normalize difference into categories based on ability. It has also normalized the wide-scale dependence on contingent faculty and, perhaps, the outsourcing of instruction to other colleges, programs, computer software, and the like. But more important than that, in my opinion, is the fact that it has lulled us into a sense that location does not matter: a sense that the latest theory of composing will work in all situations or not at all. A sense that, postmodern protestations aside, there is a generalizable truth about composition and composition instruction, and we theorists can find it.

Experienced practitioners often instinctively know to resist this kind of generalization, but therefore too often resist all theory along with it, falling back on the kind of "teacher lore" Stephen North has described (1987). Yet although I agree with North's analysis of the problems of a dependence on untheorized "lore," such resistance makes sense. Those who do not teach at the research universities that are the home to most theorists, know that what might work with 15 students per section and a two section teaching load is less possible when the teacher has five sections of 25 to 35 students. They know, in other words, that even on this very basic level, specific local conditions cannot be ignored. They know on a deeper level that the expectations of the students in those small classes are also different, that the values determining institutional decisions are different, and that the values carried within the theories may be different as well. In other words, the experience of difference has informed both their practice and their response to the practice of others, and those of us in the process of developing grand theories would do well to listen to this understanding of the significance of location and incorporate it into our work. The hierarchy that has developed as a result of the theory-practice split carries with it the risk of forgetting the relationship between theory and practice, and as others have pointed out, when theorists spend most of their time theorizing and teachers spend most of their time teaching, each side becomes impoverished.

Failure to even acknowledge local difference reduces the likelihood of practitioners trying to translate theory to their local circumstances—indeed, it seems to deny the value of such an endeavor at all. This leaves teachers who do have the desire to theorize their practice lacking a theory with which to meaningfully do so. And this too often translates into a lack of patience with theory, which theorists too often interpret as the "fault" of the teacher rather than the theory. This complacency is dangerous for our discipline and detrimental to our students; it leads to a simplistic notion of what it means to "teach writing," and too often to a depersonalized practice where the agenda of the textbook and other apparatus supercede the mission of the college and the particularity of the students.

Failure to acknowledge local differences and the significance of locational context is problematic for another reason as well. If we believe that our role as writing teachers is not just to teach skills but also to provide our students with a tool they can use to make meaning as well as record it, to understand themselves more deeply as well as articulate themselves more fully, we need to start where they are, not just in terms of their ability but also in the context of the ideology at the base of the college they attend. Neither we nor they may think much about that ideology, but to fail to engage with it is to leave our students subject to it rather than giving them the tools to become agents and thus, perhaps, to deny them one of the most important products of literacy. When we begin to think about how we can teach composition within the context of specific locations, we also begin to rethink what is at stake when we teach composition in general and the ways our pedagogy interpellates specific kinds of students.

EXPLORING COLLEGE MISSIONS

A brief review of mission statements from a variety of locations reveals several kinds of educational purpose and underlying ideology of the role of education and of educated citizens. In its accepted definition, the college mission statement is a succinct articulation of goals and values. Sometimes these statements take the form of a statement of the (allegedly) shared beliefs that guide decisions; sometimes they simply offer descriptions of what we assume to be practice; and sometimes they offer definitions of specific kinds of education and educational goals, and then offer examples of how the institution achieves those goals. If administrators and faculty really do use the mission statement to guide policy and curricular decisions, the result will be a strong reinforcement of the values embedded in those statements. Even if these documents do not overtly guide practice, they still articulate the general ideology of the institution and therefore provide and produce local context. They also determine who will attend and graduate from the institution in question.

While in the case of the wealthy the decision to attend a specific institution will be limited only by academic ability (and not always that in the case of legacy and other special categories of applicants), in most cases the only real option available is the local college, at best leaving students to select from those within the state that offer affordable education for state residents. Where students have such choice, the kind of college they select will be the kind that they believe will best meet their needs and desires—

those whose mission statements and stated ideologies best match the educational and life goals of the students. They may never read the mission statement, but it will nonetheless determine their choice through the way it pervades the curriculum, campus life, and even the design and spatial geography of the campus. And, of course, these things determine what people say about a college, both its own rhetoric and the comments of guidance counselors, employees, and state residents whose voices help students to select among colleges. Once students select a college, its overt and embedded perception of their needs and desires will be reinforced and even if these were not the initial needs and desires, they will soon become inscribed in the students (or the students will transfer to another school or quit). Where there is less or no choice, students are more likely to be interpellated by the values of the school they attend because they are less likely to be aware of those values.

We might expect to find quite specific subjects being interpellated by religious colleges, whose mission statements tend to emphasize a curriculum infused with religious values, although the impact of these values is far more complex than some have assumed. If writing courses are to serve the mission of such colleges, they need to work from within that mission in some way, although this does not generally require the teacher to reinforce the belief structure of the college. The common emphasis on issues of social justice and truth, for example, provide opportunity for many religious and nonreligious teachers to design writing courses that help to make these values visible in text and practice. An emphasis on community and working with others lends itself to collaboration and peer review. The challenge for the writing course in such colleges is to find a way to show its value to the larger mission of the college as well as to general education. The work exploring the role of composition in religious colleges is important and overdue, and is already producing stimulating discussion.

In contrast, it should be no surprise that the mission statements of state and community colleges tend to offer a more directly functional definition of purpose, and therefore a less visible but no less powerful ideology. They tend to focus on “life-long learning,” professional preparation, and the economic needs of the region and the state. Whether the mission is “to provide students the knowledge and skills needed for full, constructive lives in a rapidly changing and increasingly global environment” (Macon State College)² or to “advance the life-long educational development of students consistent

²All quotations from mission statements are taken from the Web Site of the respective college in Fall 2003 or Spring 2004. URLs and specific dates of viewing are included in the Works Cited section.

with their needs, interests, and abilities while strengthening the economic, social, and cultural life of its diverse community" (Central Piedmont Community College), we see a very different emphasis from that of the religious or liberal arts college. Likewise, research universities tend, not surprisingly, to focus on "student-centered research" and professional development. The writing curriculum of a college that aims to prepare students for "constructive" lives within the local area should inevitably take a different form than that at a college whose goal is to prepare students for professional lives without regard to geography. The former school, in some way or another, acts as "an educational broker to meet the needs of business and industry and to provide opportunities for all persons within its service area to live self-fulfilling and productive lives" (Dalton State College) even if it does not say so directly. The research university, on the other hand, offers preparation and professional training that will serve the needs of the student first—law, medicine, business—and "the state and the nation" secondarily and indirectly. Such an education is not rooted in the local area, or in any geographical area, emphasizing instead the professional and personal mobility necessary for its students to reach professional heights. Literacy education whose aim is to help students live fulfilling personal lives is not the same as literacy education that will further professional careers, and that is also not the same as literacy education that will serve leaders who act on their environments rather than reacting or finding their actions constrained.

Each of these types of school will generally have a required first-year writing course or sequence, and students in that course might even be assigned the same textbook, handbook, and educational software as at different schools; however, the writing the students are doing—or not doing—in their other classes, and the design of those classes will in some way reflect the mission of the college. If those other courses are designed to meet the needs and desires of the students as they are articulated in the college mission statement, they will also reinforce those needs and desires, reinscribing them both in what is offered as well as in what is not. Writing courses designed to look the same as everyone else's and achieve the same basic uniformity of skills will leave this subject position unexplored and therefore strengthened. On the other hand, those designed to unquestioningly reproduce the values and attitudes (and desired outcomes) of the school, will also reinforce them, helping to produce students who are noncontroversial unified subjects ready to articulate those needs and desires as their own.

I do not believe it is the job of the writing teacher to modify the ideology of students or to create them according to our own values. Our job is to teach the skills of advanced literacy; however, within those skills is the need for writers to be aware of themselves, their contexts, and the needs of their

audiences, and if we teach students to see themselves as contextualized writers they will also learn to see themselves in relation to their contexts and in comparison to other contexts. They will learn to do what the mission statements of the school promises, but also to be conscious of that local context and therefore open to other possibilities should their "needs and desires" change.

THE PROMISE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

The liberal arts in general and liberal arts colleges in particular promise a very specific kind of education that emphasizes both breadth and depth and promises personal as well as intellectual growth. By implication, then, personal and intellectual growth must be among the perceived needs and desires of students who pursue such an education. We can look at the mission statements of pretty much any liberal arts college to hear a repetition of these key words, even if the students who select those colleges cannot repeat them. Sometimes those definitions are the same word for word.³ Perhaps from this we might conclude that there is general agreement about the "traditional aims" of the liberal arts college; however, according to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), those aims are by no means fixed. In an AAC&U publication, *Contemporary Understandings of Liberal Education*, Schneider and Shoenberg trace the impact of what they describe as a "period of transformative change" in American higher education. They argue that in response to the conflicts between public and institutional perceptions of the work of colleges and universities, the changing nature of the workplace, the impact of emerging technologies, and our broader sense of our place in the global economy, colleges and universities have been rethinking "their methods, while remaining true to their purposes" (1). Within the liberal arts college, the report finds that these reforms promote "ways of approaching knowledge that expand imaginative horizons, develop intellectual powers and judgment, and instill in students the capacity and resolve to exercise leadership and responsibility in multiple spheres of life, both societal and vocational" (4). The report identifies specific learning goals developing from such reform: the newly defined colleges will help students "acquire intellectual skills/capacities, . . . understand multiple modes of inquiry and

³As is the case with the University of Utah and Sam Houston State University, both of which contain a college that "embraces the traditional aims of a liberal education: a critical understanding of diverse cultures as expressed in their literature, art, ideas, and values."

approaches to knowledge, . . . develop societal, civic, and global knowledge, . . . [and] gain self-knowledge and grounded values" adding that within the achievement of these goals, there will also be a "concentration on integration of learning" (5-7).

We see these values in the mission statements of many liberal arts colleges: Hobart and William Smith Colleges inform readers that they are "a student-centered learning environment, globally focused, grounded in the values of equity and service, developing citizens who will lead in the 21st century"; Mount Holyoke College is "committed to the search for knowledge and the compassionate understanding of humanity and the world . . . [and strives] to graduate independent, critical thinkers, who speak and write powerfully, who are technologically savvy, and who are distinguished by their ability to lead in a complex, pluralistic world"; Bates College "offers a curriculum and faculty that challenge students to attain intellectual achievements and to develop powers of critical assessment, analysis, expression, aesthetic sensibility, and independent thought." Countless other liberal arts colleges promise the same emphases. Even where the mission statements are more descriptive than goal or belief focused, liberal arts colleges are still promising something that other colleges do not.

The sometimes stated, but always bedrock, mission of these colleges is to train tomorrow's leaders. As we can see from the sample mission statements above, students who graduate from liberal arts colleges have generally spent 4 years receiving an education that prepares them not for a specific career or life in a specific geographical location, but for flexibility and the power to think creatively, critically, and independently, and to communicate effectively: to understand and then act on the world. Whatever flux the colleges may be in with regard to self-articulation, the fact remains that although a change in the description of how technology is incorporated into the curriculum might sway one or two applicants to or from a specific college, it is what remains unchanged that draws students (and their parents) to liberal arts colleges instead of large state universities or technical colleges: preparation for a certain kind of leadership. In considering the impact of the location and context of writing in liberal arts colleges, then, the focus of our investigation needs to be not the geographical location as it must be in the case of colleges whose missions focus on the needs of the local area, but on the broader social location—this concern for leadership in a global context. It is my contention that colleges that share such a mission can also usefully participate in a discussion of appropriate literacy instruction for that shared context. So we must ask ourselves how writing instruction and composition programs—where these schools have composition programs—serve and investigate this stated or unstated mission of the college.

For the purposes of this discussion, I do not describe or evaluate the writing programs of specific colleges. Instead, I consider the role of writing in this kind of liberal arts education as a way to rethink composition instruction with reference to contextual location. Before I do this, it is helpful to consider the ways a mission statement and underlying ideology shape context by looking at a specific location. The correspondence between the mission statement and the ideology of a school is not simply one of direct translation. Often the mission is contested or has a low buy-in from faculty; however, interpretations of that mission still shape much of what happens at the school and it is essential for those shaping a curriculum, especially a writing curriculum, to be aware of the impact of this tension.

My school, Drew University, perfectly reflects the identity crisis described by the AAC&U. We do not articulate a strong liberal arts mission, even as we describe ourselves as a liberal arts college. Perhaps more significant is the fact that the college does not attract students purely on the basis of being a liberal arts college. More students say that they select Drew for its geographical location than directly for its liberal arts mission. Nestled amongst the trees of an old growth forest, Drew is surrounded by affluent and safe suburbs, yet is only 45 minutes by direct train line from Manhattan. After September 11, we saw an increase in students who applied to New York University, Columbia, the College of New Jersey, and Drew and ultimately selected Drew. Despite this, Drew is nonetheless a perfect example of the pervasiveness of the liberal arts ideology, and regardless of their original intention, most of our graduates have been inscribed by it to some degree. The faculty of the College of Liberal Arts spent from 2002 to 2004 trying to revise our mission statement to reflect both what we believe we are and what we believe we do, but we did not succeed. We simply do not agree. We hired consultants to help us in this process, and they listened to us and talked to alumni and students and told us what we are and how we should describe ourselves, but we do not agree with them either. Faculty argue against pre-professional programs like business studies and education, yet emphasize the work preparation of academic internships and recently even briefly considered requiring a professional internship of everyone—even those planning to go to graduate school. We also considered requiring a service component, although we rejected as contradictory the notion of requiring students to volunteer. We offer courses in business writing, but they cannot be counted as elective courses in our writing minor, although journalism courses can.

Many schools can tell a similar story, yet the point of this one is that in my specific location, these issues were discussed, but not resolved, and I do not think they will ever be resolved. Nor do I think that is bad. Drew's liberal arts faculty cannot find the perfect paragraph to describe ourselves, and

to an extent we are pleased with that. We reject simple definitions. The faculty consistently place student needs above their own, whether in hard budget years when academic program needs have always trumped salary, or in the ways that teaching and service are expected to take up the majority of our time even though scholarship is the second most important component of tenure and promotion decisions after teaching but *before* service. And in this we model a way of being that cannot be simply articulated—or is too easily reduced to platitudes.

I believe it is these contradictions and acknowledgment of contradiction that helps to set the local context for us and for our students. They shape our attitudes and much of our practice, and they therefore shape the subject positions into which we call our students. We are concerned with training leaders who recognize themselves as leaders, but we are also training leaders who recognize the contradictions and inconsistencies of leadership. Some of our classes are lecture classes; some are discussion. In some the students are expected to “subject themselves” to the knowledge that is delivered to them; in others they are called on to engage in the practice of making meaning. In some there are examinations and quizzes; in others students create extended projects, incorporate experiential knowledge, or produce Web sites or images or music or plays or dances. While some courses focus on delivering disciplinary information, there are many interdisciplinary programs, and students are invited to design special majors incorporating course material from at least three traditional disciplines and generally culminating in an honors thesis. About half of our students participate in our interdisciplinary international programs in countries ranging from Ireland and Iceland to Eritrea and Cuba. About half also participate in internship programs with local corporations and organizations from publishers to political campaigns, from the Red Cross to Homeless Solutions, and from the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra to the Public Defender’s office.

In all of these contradictions and disciplinary differences, both our curricular and our extracurricular activities call on students to understand and then act on the world. We do not expect students to be grade-focused or career-focused—we tell them they will change careers at least three times anyway so they should try to get as broad-based an education as possible. (They do tend to be concerned about grades of course, but nowhere nearly as much as at many other schools.) We expect them to ask for help when they need it and to help those who need help, employing undergraduate tutors, writing consultants, peer health educators, and assistants for students with disabilities. Our Volunteer Resource Center was founded by and is totally run by students, as is a decade-old secular volunteer program in children’s homes in Honduras. Students are big brothers and sisters to middle

and high school students from inner-city Newark; organize “Read for Life” programs; and design and perform community service programs through residence halls, athletic programs, and the more traditional avenues like the religious life council, Habitat for Humanity, and Circle K. They design, administer, and live in academically linked theme houses and special interest areas in residence halls. Others live in more traditional housing, and we have the usual share of problems related to alcohol and substance abuse, although we do not have a Greek system or division one athletics. In other words, our students receive an educational experience that is full of “ways of approaching knowledge that expand imaginative horizons, develop intellectual powers and judgment, and instill in [them] the capacity and resolve to exercise leadership and responsibility in multiple spheres of life, both societal and vocational” (Schneider and Shoenberg, 4)—even if they do not all rise to that challenge. We expect them to be more ethical than peers at other schools, more engaged, and more proactive, and surveys and studies suggest that many are. But we do not expect them all to have the same goals or attitudes and we celebrate the unconventional in ourselves and our students, even under intense pressure from trustees to be codified and countable.

THE ROLE OF WRITING INSTRUCTION IN THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

In this context, I think it is my responsibility to help my students learn to recognize themselves as leaders with the ability to lead, and *also* to try to find ways to make that process of identification visible to them. I believe this vision of leadership that sees from what Althusser calls “the point of view of reproduction” (128) is what most teachers of the liberal arts would claim as their goal, even though it is, as Althusser observes, “extremely hard, not to say almost impossible, to raise oneself” to the point of view from which one can see reproduction at work (128). To see from that vantage point allows one to develop the kind of leadership that acts, but acts reflexively, trying always to understand the motivation for action and the consequences. This is the pedagogical context of the liberal arts college, and the challenge for the writing course that is part of a liberal arts college is to invite students to challenge their practices and attitudes—including the need to challenge and to see the process of reproduction as it occurs in and through language. Although this might be a goal of many composition classes, it should be a primary goal in the liberal arts classroom.

Because this process of understanding language is itself so dependent on language, I find it troubling that many liberal arts colleges do not specifically teach writing or rhetorical skills, assuming students to already be in possession of them upon their arrival at college. Aside from being based on error, this practice actually makes it less likely that students will focus on the workings of language. It also calls them into subject positions that seem to operate outside of language; that appear to transcend ideology and present writing and language use as invisible practices obscuring the ways that ideology resides in those practices. Of course, writing is taught through discipline-based courses, and many papers are required throughout the student's four years, but writing itself and through it the written texts that shape colleges, disciplines, and individuals, tends to remain unexplored. This practice does not help to produce reflexive thinkers, nor does it help students gain any of the learning goals identified by Schneider and Shoenberg.

In some institutions, the first-year writing course has been subsumed into the first-year seminar, but this seems to present as many problems as solutions. On the face of it, the purpose of the seminar is to introduce students to college life and more specifically the nature of liberal arts inquiry. Obviously, writing is a part of this process, but as such—as a part—language and writing become little more than tools and their real power is obscured. Writing may be presented as a tool to make meaning as well as to record meaning, but it is unlikely also to be presented as a tool through which we might question reproduction. For students to “master” this “tool” and learn how not to be “mastered” by it, they need a course devoted to reading, writing, and thinking as “attitudes” and “practices.” For that, ironically perhaps, I believe they need a first-year writing course. Ideally, that course would be taken in conjunction with the first year seminar, as is often the case in programs that emphasize a “first year experience.” However, in the context of the mission statement of the liberal arts curriculum, to try to “teach writing” in a one-or-two semester writing sequence makes no sense. It seems to present writing as a skill to be mastered before the student can fully plunge into explorations of breadth or depth—an image that most writing teachers reject and that runs counter to every tenet of liberal arts education. Such a skills-based approach (even dressed up in challenging readings and thought-provoking writing assignments, service learning, or cutting-edge technology) separates writing from the intellectual agenda of the liberal arts education.

The risk when liberal arts colleges adopt the first-year composition model—required or voluntary—is that they also reinforce the preexisting social hierarchies of the institutions from which they borrow the model of

the course. In those schools (the large research and state universities that developed the course we know today), some students require writing instruction while others do not. Literacy skills are thus reinforced as status markers. When only some students take such a course, its role becomes that of equalizer through which students are then reintroduced into the college ready to be interpellated as liberal arts college students. Or not. Although we no longer want to conceive of the course as a gatekeeper, it still serves that function on a concrete level. Students who do not learn the writing skills required of the college may transfer, or they may accept their lower place in the hierarchy. If a first-year course is required of all entering students, on the other hand, the hierarchy is somewhat challenged—although only if the students in the course actually receive writing instruction rather than being evaluated on already mastered writing skills. Such a model may be sufficient to address essential literacy needs, but alone it is not sufficient to allow teachers to teach students to understand the workings of language and its power to transmit ideology and interpellate subjects. In such a situation, the course can at best simply raise the questions and teach reflexive habits of thinking, but that is an important start.

Too often, the required first-year course also separates the writing teacher from the discipline-based faculty, allowing, among other things, the increased dependence on contingent labor even in the most elite of schools. As more and more services are outsourced, the tendency to see writing instruction as another “service” should make this consequence unsurprising, but it should give all composition theorists and teachers serious pause about the ways we characterize what we do. Similarly, those newer writing programs that are part of student services rather than academic disciplines should raise concern. Of course writing instruction serves students, but instruction in the complexities of statistics and foreign languages also serve them. Writing programs located in residence halls or student centers may increase student comfort levels, but they should decrease the comfort level of the discipline of composition because, as others have observed (see Jurecic), they remove the faculty from the intellectual heart of the college and therefore minimize the significance of writing instruction within the curriculum. We might call this another form of outsourcing, especially when the writing faculty are not tenure track.

Compositionists need to ask some serious questions about how we describe our discipline. If writing instruction in the liberal arts context (or anywhere else) is not an out-sourceable service, what is it? What role does it play in the overall educational program of liberal arts students? What role should it play? Where should it be located institutionally and intellectually? That the majority of outsourcing occurs in the larger schools on which we

base the FYC model should give us pause. If we continue to copy that model even with local adaptation, we will undoubtedly eventually experience its consequences—some schools already have done so.

As I have said, I do not think the way to respond to these concerns is to call for the abolition of first-year composition as have others (most notably Sharon Crowley), nor do I call for old forms of writing across the curriculum or in the disciplines, although at some schools this model has worked very successfully (see Gottschalk, for example). Instead, I want to encourage us to explore ways to clarify and strengthen the role of writing in the lives of all U.S. college students. The problem with FYC is not that it doesn't work, but that it doesn't work the same way in different institutional contexts and locations. Likewise, WAC tied only to disciplinary contexts and divorced from institutional context ignores the ideological mission of the type of college in which it is located. Although one size does not fit all, it is productive to explore whether one size can fit all schools with a similar location, albeit ideological or geographical. As part of this larger discussion, I will explore the ways that writing instruction can serve the needs of liberal arts students from their first year to their senior year, and I hope that similar explorations at other kinds of colleges will produce responses specific to their local contexts. For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss one model in the hope that it will stimulate some of that further discussion and local adaptation.

I propose that instead of offering one or two discrete writing courses, the most appropriate way to incorporate writing into a successful liberal arts program is through a vertical curriculum that builds on other courses and creates learning communities and writing opportunities throughout the student's college years. This may sound obvious to many, but it is not the model adopted by most liberal arts colleges. To some it may sound like another excuse to avoid teaching "the basics" in favor of "content," but it is not. A vertical curriculum cannot shirk skills instruction; however, it cannot limit its focus to skills or free-standing classes either. The vertical curriculum for the liberal arts college will probably include traditional writing-intensive courses, but it should also include three distinguishing features: the creation of learning communities by linking writing courses with other courses at the lower level; the development of courses in which students write and theorize about writing and language in specific contexts at the intermediate level; and the continued existence of creative, nonfiction, and theoretical writing courses at the upper level along with research-intensive writing courses and extended writing projects. Such a curriculum could also end with a senior portfolio in which students explore their own process of growth and development as writers, thinkers, and knowers. Variations on this vertical cur-

riculum, although most easily developed within the liberal arts context, can nonetheless also form a basis for context-specific vertical curricula in other academic settings, allowing those the liberal arts borrowed from to borrow back, if they can find ways to address the prohibitive staffing needs.

A VERTICAL CURRICULUM FOR A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

If a vertical curriculum is to begin with an introductory course, the content of that course needs to be designed so that it encourages students to think about the role of language in their lives and sense of selves. One way to do this is by developing the course as part of a learning community. In the learning community model, students in the writing class are concurrently enrolled in other classes, in this case multisectioned survey courses. This model is not that of linked courses where the writing course becomes the handmaiden of the "content" course. A learning community provokes discourse and encourages students to make connections and explore alternative methods of approaching similar situations and questions. In other words, the connection is on an intellectual level more than a "skill" level—if one can usefully make such a distinction. This is the "concentration on integration of learning" emphasized by the AAC&U (Schneider and Shoenberg 7).

The concept of learning communities is now in its second decade and takes many forms, but central to all is the establishment of connections across disciplinary boundaries, often with the writing class playing a central role. As David Russell observes, students arriving in college are "poised between the discourses of their networks of home, peer group, and mass media and the specialized discourses and activity systems of disciplines and professions" (279). The learning community is uniquely qualified to help those students negotiate such discourses in a way that allows them to develop a voice appropriate for each, but not conscribed by any. Connecting courses from different disciplines with and through writing courses provides students with a space to rehearse these discourses. In such situations as Tim McLaughlin has pointed out, the writing teachers are often the "creators of connective tissue between courses" (7). Terry Myers Zawacki and Ashley Taliaferro Williams describe this as being the case at George Mason University. In what is probably its best-known form, a learning community curriculum links courses around a common theme and includes a common cohort of students, sometimes connecting the experience through common

residential clusters as well. The program is frequently connected to general education or a "first-year experience" and can be fully integrated as in the program Zawacki and Williams describe at New Century College, or the product of individual faculty collaborations as is more common. Some programs have been inspired by and modeled on that in the state of Washington, described by Gerald Graff and by Faith Gabelnick et al., whereas other programs have developed independently.

I believe that the form is less important than the intent: to provide students with the opportunity to use writing to create connections, make meaning, and develop a discourse that allows them to act on information across traditional curricular boundaries; as Ken Bruffee puts it "to join the ongoing conversation of ideas" (635). Simultaneous enrollment in specific courses does not have to be controlled, but can occur naturally, allowing a more spontaneous web of connections to develop and forcing the students to form their own communities within the structure provided. A less formal structure allows more freedom for instructors and less administrative control. Offering several sections of writing at the same time, but at different times than a large survey course, provides the flexibility to ensure a spread of students in different connected courses in each section.

In a less formal model, the connection between the classes can be made through the material the students read and/or discuss in those classes rather than by a shared common theme, calling on survey courses to change pedagogical strategies but not content. In one example, in the writing class the students read *The New York Times* and/or other daily or weekly newspapers or news magazines. They may be assigned to watch specific news shows or documentaries as well. The students write about selected topics of interest to them from this media, using summary, synthesis, and comparison to make sense of what they read; argument, analysis, and definition to respond. They explore the ways different media cover—or fail to cover—their selected topic, and they learn to identify the audience imagined by each media form and the way that shapes the presentation of the story. In this way they are learning how language acts on us and how we can decode it and make connections and assertions supported by what we read. This media focus—not a cultural studies media critique, but a real engagement with the delivery of news in text and image—also begins to fulfill the college mission of global and national education and helps students gain a deeper background knowledge that will help them engage with material in other classes. Students who enter college with less of this essential global and national background knowledge acquire it during the composition course along with the increased literacy skills they need to explore this knowledge, achieving one more step toward the level-playing field we dream of for our students.

In an integrated curriculum it is not enough for students to learn these things in a discrete writing course. They need to also learn to make connections and meaning within a liberal arts framework, and here is where the learning communities come in. At the same time they learn about the larger world and the ways they relate to it in the writing class, students are also learning to view the world through the lens of specific academic disciplines and disciplinary knowledge bases in their survey courses. The goal of this curriculum is to create a context in which what they are learning in those courses becomes relevant in the composition class as a tool for deeper understanding of the world around them through specific local, national, and international news items. They need to learn to make connections between bodies of knowledge by drawing on what they have learned in those surveys to help them understand events reported in the news. Whether they use material from an economics class to help them understand the rise in oil prices, a sociology class to problematize stories about welfare reform, a psychology class to explore the attraction of reality television, or a biology class to help them understand epidemics, the challenge for students is to find those connections and apply their knowledge. There are some obvious connections of course, but there are less obvious connections as well, and the challenge for the student is to find them. Returning to the media with deeper knowledge, perhaps also gained through research, the students can explore what is being explained and what is not, what kinds of knowledge-base consumers of different media are expected to possess, and what this reveals. And this exploration occurs in writing, making writing the locus of understanding and the vehicle through which that understanding is communicated.

Of course, the writing, reading, and thinking skills gained in the writing course will also be relevant to the survey and other courses in which students are enrolled. This is especially the case if the instructors of those courses also assign papers throughout the semester, and even more so if they also encourage students to make connections with current affairs and the larger world outside of the textbook and lecture. In such cases, if the writing course ends with a final portfolio, the students can trace their own intellectual and literacy development through these connections and explore the implications of informed writing in addition to proficient writing. Course outcomes can be assessed based on these same criteria. Electronic portfolios can help students collect, select, and reflect upon their work and also showcase these outcomes more broadly (see Cambridge et al.; Takayoshi; Wall and Peltier; Yancey 1996a, 1996b).

There are other ways to foster this kind of connected learning, of course. Some instructors may prefer a more traditional collection of essays in place of news media, but still make connections with other courses. It is also pos-

sible to use fiction, poetry, or drama to achieve the goals of a connected learning class as long as they are set into dialogue with other courses in ways that allow students to create meaningful connections and participate in a larger learning community. Others may prefer to link the writing course with external "communities" rather than more traditional academic communities. For example, they may focus on political rhetoric, perhaps evaluating rhetorical strategies in election campaigns through text, speech, television commercials, websites, and other electronic sources. I would argue against any form of service learning in the first writing course, however, as engagement with difference is much more complex a process than engagement with different information and I believe there is too great a risk of doing harm if students are not fully prepared for community-based projects. Community-based service learning is most appropriate at the intermediate or advanced level as a capstone in which students can share what they have learned about writing rather than at the introductory-level where they are a place for students to learn more basic skills, sometimes at the expense of the community.

Whatever the specific reading focus of the first writing class, students in such a class should not be expected to experience the kinds of radical ideological transformations some composition teachers speak of. The course is about learning to use writing to explore the workings of language, but it is the *first* course, not the last. As Rebecca Moore Howard has argued, in the vertical curriculum the first year writing course does not have to "do everything"; like any other introductory courses, it simply introduces (xiii). It simply raises questions and suggests ways to go about exploring possible responses. Whether those questions are centered on the media, the ways different disciplines construct themselves and explore similar topics through language, or the democratic force of public or political debate, the crucial factor is that written texts are presented as constituted and constitutive—they are created by subjects and act on subjects and the task of the writer is to try to be aware of this process and his or her role in reproducing value. Such an understanding is essential to the liberal arts mission, or what Schneider and Shoenberg describe as its "purposes" (1), which include developing "ways of approaching knowledge that expand imaginative horizons, develop intellectual powers and judgment, and instill in students the capacity and resolve to exercise leadership and responsibility in multiple spheres of life, both societal and vocational" (4).

Once a base has been created in this way, more advanced writing courses can build on both the literacy skills and the critical and creative thinking skills it has introduced. Such courses can be offered by writing faculty as intermediate-level writing courses or within a variety of disciplines as an introduction to disciplinary discourse communities. Ideally, both options

would be available and there would be broad agreement about the objectives of such courses and their relationship to the rest of the curriculum. One feature of such courses should be that students expand their literacy skills while also continuing to theorize writing and understand the role of writing in the construction of knowledge, academic disciplines, communities, themselves and others. Discipline-specific courses can achieve this as students explore the discourse of major journals in the field, and understand and analyze the expectations of the lab report, ethnography, field notes, or literary criticism. Intra-departmental courses could invite students to analyze the discourse of their own disciplines or explore other constitutive texts such as legal documents or contracts. They might teach theories of discourse analysis or linguistics, focus on lexicography, or even explore theories of language acquisition. An intermediate course could also focus on visual literacy or electronic literacy, teaching students to analyze and produce such textual forms while increasing their overall literacy and language fluency and appreciation.

By listing these options as appropriate for a liberal arts college writing program I am not in any way suggesting that such courses are not appropriate for any other location or context, nor that these are the only or even the best options for a liberal arts college; rather, I offer them as examples of how we might tailor an intentional, vertical writing curriculum tied to the mission of the liberal arts college. Whatever their content and focus, intermediate courses should consciously build on the sense of learning community and global and local connections the students explored in the introductory course. Students should see how they are expanding the skills they learned earlier and the attitudes expected of them should be articulated and explored. Assignments in such courses could build on notions such as social justice, democracy, or global awareness introduced in the introductory course while at the same time deepening or complicating those issues and encouraging students to embrace the ambiguity and contradiction at the heart of the intellectual endeavor.

Many colleges already include upper-level courses that require more sophisticated writing skills than those taught in the introductory course, but without these essential intermediate courses we often find that our students have made little progress with their writing and some seem to have regressed by the senior year. By repeating, deepening, and expanding notions of literacy and literacy skills, intermediate-level courses such as those described here do more than simply prepare students for upper-level courses. They help to develop habits of mind that will last beyond college, making the kinds of connections that our mission statements claim even as we may fail to see where they are specifically demonstrated in our curriculum. Intermediate-level courses in a clearly articulated vertical curriculum send

important messages about advanced literacy: writing occurs in communities; writing is an essential part of the educational process at all levels; writing, reading, and creative and critical thinking occur and develop simultaneously; we acquire and strengthen literacy skills by practicing and by building on what we already know; and literacy acquisition is a life-long process. There are no doubt many others that can be specifically articulated or discovered by the students and teachers. Strong arguments in favor of the vertical writing curriculum as a way to teach writing have already been made (for example, by Shamoon, Howard, Jamieson, and Schwegler; Crowley; and Gallagher), and the challenge for the liberal arts college faculty is to explore ways to make such a vertical curriculum relevant to the local context of the liberal arts college.

Faculty from other types of colleges have developed, or should develop, a different version of a vertical curriculum, perhaps focusing more on professional writing, business writing, or academic writing, or building more service or internship opportunities at the intermediate level. Colleges whose missions emphasize the creative, the visual, or the technical might adopt electronic portfolios to help students make connections. Others might continue the focus on skills building, print media, or visual literacy. Once we focus our attention on the needs and expectations of our students within the larger institutional context we begin to see composition instruction as both local and integrated into the entire educational experience. What is found to be effective pedagogy and practice in one location will probably work in another, but the curriculum of one school may not also serve the broader goals of a different kind of college. Students planning to enter the local economy and continue to live close to the college they attend have different literacy and interpretive needs than those intending to enter the global economy, and this context should shape the emphases of the vertical writing curriculum.

Wherever such a curriculum is developed, once a vertical course structure is in place, upper-level courses do not need to build specifically on the content or intellectual investigation of intermediate-level courses because they will be drawing on skills and attitudes instead. Such courses may be as diverse as research-based courses, community-based or service-learning courses, internship-based courses, capstone courses, or senior seminars. All require writing of a depth and breadth that cannot be achieved by FYC alone. Upper-level writers may produce honors theses or other extended writing projects, or they may develop senior portfolios. They may also produce less traditional electronic documents incorporating visual and technical literacies along with writing skills. Intermediate-level courses may teach them the basic skills they need for these endeavors, whether those skills are the sophisticated research skills necessary for an honors thesis; the electronic literacy nec-

essary for the production of an electronic portfolio or informational website; or the understanding of literacy, context, difference, and interpersonal skills necessary for productive community engagement. However, such skills can also be learned within the upper-level course while students build on other introductory- and intermediate-level skills and literacy practices.

Some students may elect to take more traditional advanced writing courses or even courses designed to help them write in specific professions, or they might simply write term papers. What these experiences have in common is that they require advanced literacy skills and a sophisticated understanding of audience and purpose, and the kinds of strategies one might adopt to create successful texts. These should be the outcomes of any vertical writing curriculum and can be measured much more reliably in the senior year than at the end of FYC. If they are incorporated into and reflective of the mission of the liberal arts college, the upper-level writing projects should also provide faculty (and administrators) with a means to evaluate the outcomes of the whole liberal arts education in its specific contexts, perhaps allowing them to more clearly articulate their mission statements and educational expectations.

The point I am making here is that the writing curriculum needs to be locally grounded and designed rather than a copy of a generic curriculum from a large research university—or any other kind of college whose mission, expectations, and ideology differ from the college in question. As traditional rhetoric teaches us, we write for specific audiences in specific contexts at specific moments in time. Students can only really internalize this fact if they are encouraged to do the same thing by their writing courses as well as by their assignments. If we adopt a one-size-fits-all or a one-style-suits-all model of writing instruction or program design we undermine claims about the significance of context and should not be surprised that our courses do not seem relevant and engaging to all students or intellectually centered in the college. On the other hand, writing curricula that are locally and contextually specific and designed in dialogue with the mission of the college can place writing back at the center of higher education. Liberal arts colleges need to focus more on their ideological context than their geographical context, developing syllabi and curricula that help achieve the stated and implied goals of a liberal arts education. A curriculum that helps students “acquire intellectual skills/capacities, . . . understand multiple modes of inquiry and approaches to knowledge, . . . develop societal, civic, and global knowledge, . . . [and] gain self-knowledge and grounded values” (Schneider and Shoenberg 5-7) will locate writing instruction in a place where it can play a fundamental role in producing the kinds of graduates liberal arts colleges value and their college literature promises.

While at first it could seem as if I am saying that students at non-liberal arts schools should receive a lesser education, I am not in fact saying that at all. Ultimately, advanced literacy requires a sophisticated understanding of audience, context, and content; critical thinking skills; linguistic flexibility; organization and purpose; and surface-level correctness. Any college that advertises literate graduates needs to be able to deliver these skills. My concern is that we learn to do it in a way that is integrated with their whole education rather than separated from it. Writing is the core of any education, not just a liberal arts education, but by imagining how it might be integrated into a liberal arts curriculum it is my hope that we can begin the translation process to other kinds of institutions.

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