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Intractable Writing Program Problems, *Kairos*, and Writing about Writing: A Profile of the University of Central Florida's First-Year Composition Program

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Abstract: At three different institutions, public and private, in varying roles, I have found the very particular problem of how to inform micro-level classroom practices with macro-level disciplinary knowledge to be centrally important to our field's development and our students' learning—and singularly difficult to overcome. In this program profile, I outline how we have worked (and are still working) to overcome this problem at the University of Central Florida and describe some of our successes in reducing reliance on contingent labor and gaining support and resources for the elements of a vertical writing education (writing center, WAC program, minor, and certificate) beyond first-year composition.

First-year composition programs, both large and small (but particularly large), have long faced a seemingly intractable set of problems. In my experience as both a writing program administrator (WPA) and writing program researcher, I have seen those problems play out this way: Macro-level knowledge and resolutions from the larger field of Writing Studies are frequently unable to inform the micro-level of individual composition classes, largely because of our field's infamous labor problems. In other words, composition curricula and programs often struggle to act out of the knowledge of the field—not because we don't know how to do so, but because we are often caught in a cycle of having to hire part-time instructors at the last minute for very little pay and asking those teachers (who often don't have degrees in Rhetoric and Composition) to begin teaching a course within a week or two. Often these courses are far larger than the class size suggested by NCTE, likely because of the high cost of lowering class size and of widespread misconceptions about what writing is (a "basic skill") and what writing classes do ("fix" writing problems). In addition, composition courses continue to be housed largely in English departments, where they tend to get the least attention and funding of all the low-funded English programs and where sometimes faculty with little interest in or training to teach writing are nonetheless required to do so. Sometimes entire composition programs are staffed with brand new graduate students, many if not most of whom are graduate students in fields other than Rhetoric and Composition, and who have taken, at most, one graduate course in how to teach writing before walking into a classroom.

Contrast this situation with any course taught in any other field, and the difference is stark: no administrator would ever send untrained faculty members or graduate students from another discipline to staff an entire segment of courses in, say, biology or history or mathematics or economics. Yet this happens every day in composition programs. Because of these and other entrenched practices, locations, and labor conditions{1} [#note1], and despite our field's advances in how best to teach writing, we can still find composition classrooms where the students are learning modes or grammar or literature in formalistic ways, or are learning popular culture with little to no attention to writing itself, in courses sometimes if not frequently taught by faculty or graduate students with little to no training (or even interest) in teaching writing.

The fact that research has suggested for many decades now that students in composition courses often do not reach desired course outcomes or improve as writers in measurable ways in one or two composition courses is not an unrelated problem. It seems reasonable to assume that if we staffed any set of courses in any discipline with teachers who had little training or interest in teaching them, we would likely see a problem in student achievement. Of course, lack of student achievement in writing courses can exist for a variety of reasons beyond labor and training that others have outlined quite comprehensively; for example, writing development is not linear or necessarily fast, tools used for measuring improvement are not necessarily reliable or valid, and so on. In addition, research clearly tells us that no single writing class can serve as a writing inoculation, and thus composition courses are more effective when they are seen as entry points to writing in the university, the beginning (not the end) of an ongoing rhetorical education. Such vertical and comprehensive writing structures do exist but are not the national norm; where they exist, it can be difficult, time-consuming, and expensive to soundly assess writing development longitudinally across and even outside of courses (see Wardle and Roozen).

The fact that composition courses often do not seem to achieve desired outcomes is made more complex because our field does not necessarily agree on what appropriate outcomes are or should be for first-year composition. Despite the valiant and important efforts of those who worked (and continue to work) on the WPA Outcomes Statement, beliefs about what outcomes should be for composition still seem to vary widely. Should composition courses help prepare students for what they will write later? If so, what counts as "later"? School settings? Which school settings? Work settings? Personal settings? If transferable knowledge and skills are not the desired outcome, then what do we focus on instead? Self awareness? Cultural awareness? Artistic and creative enjoyment of writing?

So we have a tangled set of longstanding problems and questions surrounding first-year composition: What should it do? How can it do that? How can well-prepared teachers be appropriately employed to undertake this work? And how can we assess our efforts there? The historical circumstances surrounding this set of questions have led to and perpetuated systems where writing program administrators often have no choice but to hire (sometimes at the last minute) teachers who know little about our field's research, to teach classes that are often too large, and to achieve outcomes that can vary wildly from classroom to classroom, program to program, state to state. In turn, these teachers are often treated as expendable, and institutions tend to invest very little in either their remuneration or professional development and advancement.

Many sorts of resolutions have been attempted to address this set of problems; eliminating first-year composition altogether has been the most dramatic solution posed. Most of the proposed solutions are less dramatic and more the responses of WPAs who face practical problems that need to be solved and reported to stakeholders tomorrow if not sooner. For example, because labor is unstable, some programs attempt to ensure programmatic consistency by giving part-time teachers and graduate students (some of whom teach even their first semester as MA students) program syllabi and specific and fairly rigid assignments to teach. Many programs make efforts to provide ongoing professional development for adjunct instructors and graduate students, but these supports are in constant tension with material conditions related to pay and time constraints, including the fact that such underpaid adjunct instructors are often teaching numerous sections at multiple institutions, leaving them little time to participate in the life of any one department.

While solutions like consistent program syllabi do result in similar assignments across sections, they do not necessarily resolve or even address the underlying reasons why such solutions are necessary in the first place: that many composition teachers in many composition programs have little to no background in writing studies or training in the teaching of writing beyond one TA training class, and

that the labor conditions and pay for those teachers often preclude them from gaining further expertise and preclude programs from employing teachers who already have that expertise.

This set of problems can be paralyzing, preventing composition courses and programs from moving forward and acting on the knowledge of our field in both their curricula and their employment practices. How can we act on the knowledge of our field in our composition curricula, particularly when that knowledge suggests multiple paths forward, and when so many of those actually in composition classrooms are not necessarily familiar with any of it? How can we work against entrenched labor practices and material conditions in order to make changes? The problems appear to be unsolvable, yet we know that they must be solved. Until all composition teachers have relevant theoretical and research-based knowledge about writing and teaching writing, and are treated as expert professionals by their institutions, any attempts at programmatic consistency seem bound to be reductionist. In other words, until composition faculty themselves have enough knowledge about writing research and theory to make their own informed choices about curricula, and to make informed arguments for changed material conditions, how can we move beyond a managerial mode in composition programs? There may not be one model for teaching composition that we can agree on across the country, but models that are informed by research and theory and that have been created, assessed, and revised by expert teachers themselves rather than director/managers (and driven by textbooks) would feel like a big step forward from where we have historically found ourselves.

If teachers are passive recipients of curricula they didn't help shape and philosophies they don't share, it seems likely that they can only enact them in a formulaic fashion, if they enact them at all. Such formulaic teaching (which our legislative bodies seem intent on pushing us even further toward) simply reinscribes all of the problems I have been outlining above: composition teachers are not seen as professionals with specialized disciplinary knowledge, and stakeholders assume that anyone can teach composition; and, thus, anyone can be hired to do so at the last minute, since there must not be much to learn or prepare for in teaching a composition class. The teachers most willing to teach composition for $2,000/course and no benefits are often (but not always) least involved in the field's discussions about writing and writing pedagogy; in turn, the composition courses they teach may not be informed by the knowledge of the field, and students are then less likely to achieve desired course outcomes, all of which set composition courses and programs up to be viewed as anything but academic or scholarly. And the cycle continues.

I have outlined this set of problems, as I understand them, not to be discouraging or overly pessimistic, but because I have researched writing programs and served in some administrative capacity in those programs since I was a graduate student. At three different institutions, public and private, in varying roles, I have found the very particular problem of how to inform micro-level classroom practices with macro-level disciplinary knowledge to be centrally important to our field's development and our students' learning—and singularly difficult to overcome. In this program profile, I will talk about the ways we have worked (and are still working) to overcome this problem at the University of Central Florida, and how we have succeeded in limited and often surprising ways, surprising most of all to me, given my general cynicism about the problems associated with first-year composition (see "Mutt Genres" and "Can Cross-Disciplinary Links," for example).

"Writing-About-Writing" Claims For Addressing These Problems

Doug Downs and I have been among the growing number of compositionists who are arguing that composition courses need to directly embrace and enact some of the research and theory about writing by:

1. Teaching students about writing in ways that can enable them to be more successful later, and

2. Explicitly and publicly making the case that composition courses can only serve as entry points to writing in the university and the larger world and cannot serve as inoculations.

This view of composition has led to an approach that has come to be known as "writing about writing" (or "WAW"). Writing-about-writing pedagogies vary widely, but their basic philosophy is that composition courses should teach both declarative and procedural knowledge about writing (declarative knowledge, for example, might include considering how writing works, how revision happens, how communities influence genres and conventions, and so on; procedural knowledge might include knowing how to revise for audience concerns or how to effectively use a semi-colon) and place a strong emphasis on metacognition (Charlton "Forgetting" and "Seeing"; Robertson; Taczak). {2} [#note2]

Writing-about-writing advocates argue that this approach to teaching composition is not only theoretically sound, but that it also brings into clear and unavoidable focus the labor issues long associated with composition, thus potentially forcing a resolution to them. The arguments for such an approach go something like this:

- To teach a writing class informed by writing studies research, teachers must be or become familiar with relevant research in Composition Studies and then enact this knowledge in their classrooms.
- In gaining and enacting this expertise, those teachers enact a professional identity with disciplinary standing, which in turn might raise their status and the status of composition courses and programs themselves.
- If teachers must know the research of the field in order to teach composition classes, large groups of adjuncts can't be hired at the last minute and treated as expendable; rather, potential teachers must have some training (whether formal or informal) in rhetoric and composition.
- When composition teachers have this sort of disciplinary knowledge, they can teach to informed outcomes without being forced to a prescriptive and reductionist consistency, and they can be engaged and rewarded as expert colleagues, rather than "labor" to be "managed."
- This *should* result in better achievement of student outcomes related to writing. And better student outcomes with professionalized teachers *should* raise the status of composition courses and programs themselves.

In sum, teaching declarative concepts about writing requires *knowing* declarative concepts about writing, which requires some familiarity with the research of Writing Studies. There are two ways to assemble a faculty with such familiarity: hire all Rhet/Comp specialists (an expensive and difficult proposition) or implement sustained, scaffolded support for composition teachers from all backgrounds so that they can gain familiarity with some composition research. Doing the latter requires changing some material conditions for teachers, so that they have time to engage in professional development and are rewarded appropriately for doing so. Debra Dew has written about her successful attempts in this regard at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, explaining their shift from a "writing with no content in particular (W-WNCP)" model to a "writing with specific content (W-WCS)" model that made their ENGL 131 class a content course with "rhetoric and writing studies…as content matter" and "reconstituted their instructional labor by aligning ENGL 131 with other content courses across the disciplines" (88). In this profile I will outline our own attempts to make such changes at the University of Central Florida (UCF).

At UCF we encountered and were able to take advantage of a kairotic moment to use a writing-about-writing approach to address the set of problems I outlined earlier. Our experience demonstrates how a programmatic writing-about-writing approach with timed implementation and training improved professionalization, informed micro-level classrooms with macro-level disciplinary knowledge, and,

through both of these, improved student outcomes. For these changes to occur, particular institutional supports had to be in place, and an advocate in upper administration needed to serve as the catalyst to ensure the attempted changes came to fruition. Our experience at UCF demonstrates how deep cultural shifts and changed material conditions can be effected through a combination of *kairos*, piloting and assessment, advocacy, and laying bare our practices so that they are visible to stakeholders.

Our Institutional Context

The University of Central Florida (UCF) is the second largest university in the country, serving a diverse population of over 45,000 undergraduate students and 60,000 students overall. Because a large number of our students are transfers from local community colleges, we serve only about 4,000 first-time-in-college (FTIC) students in composition each semester. When I was hired as the Composition Director in Fall 2008, the composition program had problems fairly endemic to most large programs, including a large number of adjunct instructors, large class sizes, and no recent incarnation of a professional development program for teachers. However, I was hired in with tenure, a positive sign that the nature of WPA work was understood as labor intensive and potentially politically fraught.

Housed in the Department of English where composition had not been a priority, the composition program had seen three different tenured or tenure-track Directors over a ten-year period. These Directors worked with one or two instructor-line (permanent, non-tenure track) Composition Coordinators and an administrative assistant. The Writing Program employed eighty teachers each semester to teach around 140 sections. Composition sections were capped at 27 students, and the composition teaching faculty consisted of approximately 15% permanent, non-tenure-line instructors; 19% visiting instructors (full-time, limited contract non-renewable after four years); 19% graduate student instructors (mostly MA students); and 47% adjunct instructors (part-time, one-semester contract with no benefits). When tenure-line faculty taught composition, it was usually honors composition (to fulfill a longstanding and complicated salary debt that the English Department owed to the Honors College).

ENC 1101 (part of a required two-semester sequence for all Florida public college and university students) at UCF had been taught for many years as a process-focused and assignment-based course, with a focus on revision and developing critical reading and writing skills. The four papers typically taught in the course were a memoir, a political or social commentary, a review, and a public argument. Students in this curriculum read models of the texts they were being asked to write.

The composition program had long experienced a chronic lack of resources for compensation, professional development, and hiring. The overwork of the Directors and Coordinators, along with the reliance on a large and ever-changing adjunct labor pool, had a predictable impact on how the curriculum came to be implemented. Although the curriculum was designed by Rhet/Comp faculty to focus on outcomes, in practice over time, the daily focus came to be more on teaching the four papers as rigid modes for which students supplied the written content. To be clear, this emphasis came about not because of a lack of awareness on the part of the directors, but because of the working conditions of the many teachers who moved in and out of the program each semester (adjunct instructors who might be teaching up to 8 classes a semester at three different schools). The Composition Coordinators told me they spent most of their training time helping new teachers teach the specific papers (and also responding to the sorts of crises that arise when so many people are teaching a course for so little compensation and with no guarantee of future employment). Teachers were provided with descriptions of the four major paper assignments and given rubrics with which to grade them. The coordinators reported that as the years progressed, a great deal of the program administrators' time

came to be spent helping teachers follow guidelines in order to try to attain some programmatic consistency in the face of few resources and a large, ever-changing staff.

When I came to UCF in Fall 2008, I asked for volunteers willing to try a writing-about-writing curriculum. I hoped that engaging some interested teachers in such an approach would open a door to shared reading and discussion and consideration of alternatives to the "core" papers that had become so ingrained in the program. Several teachers took up the challenge in Spring 2009. This was a very loose pilot staffed by willing teachers who "figured it out" as they went. The curriculum they tried was based on the belief that writers need both declarative and procedural knowledge about writing, including a deep understanding of writing-related concepts such as rhetorical situation and genre. For example, they talked with students about discourse communities and their impact on how writing comes to be and is understood, and about writing processes and how they differ across situations and genres. The approach did not specify genres or "modes" that must be written, or even particular assignments, but rather focused on declarative course outcomes and encouraged teachers to draw on their own expertise to teach toward those outcomes. In this very early stage, the piloting consisted of a lot of informal conversation, suggested reading, and syllabus sharing. The teachers who "tried it out" that first year looked at my syllabi and built on those and then talked with each other. My primary goal at that time was simply to engage teaches who were looking for a change and begin to encourage and facilitate a way for them to become familiar with Rhetoric and Composition scholarship.

Kairos

During my first year at UCF, while this initial loose pilot was going on, our Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, at the request of the UCF President, turned her attention to composition, the writing center, and the college algebra course as sites that might make demonstrable differences in undergraduate student learning outcomes. In her position, she was charged with helping UCF meet one of its strategic goals, to provide the best undergraduate education. Although she had always had this charge, a new tuition increase provided some resources with which to innovate. Because the State of Florida had created specific guidelines about how the money ("tuition differential") should be used (primarily for undergraduate education and advising), composition and algebra were natural sites for early innovation. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies' role as an advocate for changes in the institutional structures around the writing program (as well as the math program, which is a story in itself) cannot be overestimated. Knowing that some new funding was going to be available through a tuition increase, she made a proposal to the President for reducing composition class size from twenty -seven to twenty-five and conducting a three-year study of smaller class size, providing comparison groups of nineteen. She also argued for six new full-time instructor positions, four in 2009-10 and two more in 2010-11. The President agreed to what she proposed, launching the President's Class Size Initiative (PCSI), with the understanding that everything we did would be audited, assessed, and presented to stakeholders at any time. Our Dean of Undergraduate Studies understood how funding worked, knew what funding might be available, and had access to one of the few stakeholders who could effect structural change immediately. Without her advocacy for improved writing instruction, and without the interest in and support of change by our president, the opportunity to change the writing structures might not have come—at least not so dramatically or suddenly.

The Vice Provost's actions initiated a moment, *kairos,* what Carolyn Miller has described as a critical occasion for decision or actions. Miller notes that, although "[t]he ancient Greek term is most often translated in temporal terms, as 'the right time' or 'timeliness,'" it can also be understood as a "spatial metaphor, that of a critical opening. The earliest Greek uses of the term, in both archery and weaving, referred to a 'penetrable opening, an aperture,' through which an arrow or a shuttle must pass (Onians, 1951/1973, 345)" (84). Eric Charles White shares this view, understanding *kairos* as "a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force if success is to be

achieved" (13). Rhetoricians like Miller note that these "passing instants" can be both constructed and discovered (Miller 84), and *kairos* can be understood as either continuous (linked to a history wherein a rhetor can always create an opportunity) or as discontinuous and thus appearing as revolutionary, breaking with the past (Miller 84). Our Vice Provost's intervention illustrates how *kairo*s can be both continuous and discontinuous simultaneously; her efforts built on years of efforts by writing faculty at UCF, but also created an opportunity to make headway where previous efforts had stalled out. Previous arguments had been made that relying on part-time faculty was unethical and full-time faculty should be hired for that reason; this argument, despite its merit, was not effective. Previous committees had been formed to outline and push for best practices, few of which were supported outside the department. Yet previous victories had also been won: the College of Arts and Humanities dean had previously held off an attempt to raise composition class sizes beyond 27. Thus, efforts to improve the material conditions of the first-year composition program had been continuing and ongoing, though not widely successful. New efforts could not necessarily build on what had previously been attempted unsuccessfully, but they certainly continued those efforts.

Our opportunity with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the tuition increase created a kairotic opportunity but did not define it or ensure that it would be acted upon fruitfully. Instead, her intervention helped create a moment in which our writing program could test claims made for writing about writing with the possibility of changing the constellation of problems facing our composition program; it was a moment when we had an advocate and our president's attention. The president wanted to make changes that impacted student outcomes, so it seemed that if we could show results of some kind, the president would be listening, and open to action.

The first unofficial mini pilot (Spring 2009) had engaged some teachers and garnered interest with other teachers. The Composition Coordinator (with a degree in creative writing) had piloted a writing-about-writing approach with what she felt were positive results—students were engaged, the curriculum was challenging, and she felt a direct focus on writing enabled her to act out of her own expertise in ways the previous curriculum had not. Given these results, we were ready to hire the first four presidential instructors to be the official guinea pigs for the changes we wanted to investigate, starting in Fall 2009. We hired the smartest, most enthusiastic, most flexible people we could find, none of whom had rhet/comp degrees. Two were recent MFA graduates, one was an adjunct with a literature MA, and the fourth was ABD in literature. The current and previous Composition Coordinators (the latter of whom had a graduate degree in library science) agreed to *officially* pilot with this group in Fall 2009. Their involvement was central to the success of the official pilot, since they had longstanding credibility with the teachers that I, as a new hire, did not. So we all took a deep breath and ran into the opening with force, as White suggests must be done for *kairos* to result in change.

Preparing, Piloting, & Assessing

We had hired smart, enthusiastic, willing, good teachers without graduate training in rhetoric and composition. Here was an opportunity to find a way around what Doug Downs and I called "the elephant in the room" in our 2007 *CCC* article about describing our writing-about-writing approach. There we had argued that only faculty with Rhet/Comp training could teach a writing-focused composition course. Yet, here as a WPA of a large program, I was faced with the impossibility of such staffing conditions. If we wanted to move forward with a writing-about-writing pilot, we had to find another way. So what to do?

As we prepared the pilot curriculum for ENC 1101, I pulled together some seminal articles that provided a relevant rationale for a WAW approach and gave the teachers a very rough draft of the *Writing about Writing* textbook that Doug and I were at that time in the process of writing. That

summer the new teachers plus the current and previous Composition Coordinator read all the materials, and we together discussed outcomes and possible units and assignments. The coordinator and I brainstormed some sample assignments and took others from the developing textbook, but we encouraged the teachers to design their own units and assignments according to their expertise and instincts. (See Appendix 1 [#appendix1] for current sample syllabi, including assignments and calendars, from three of our instructors: Matt Bryan, Scott Launier, and Laura Martinez.{3} [#note3]).The units these teachers ended up teaching addressed concepts such as how texts are constructed, how writers write, how communities shape writing, and so on. Assignments included genre analysis, rhetorical analysis, autoethnography, writing memoir, discourse community ethnography, and analysis of science accommodation.{4} [#note4] The declarative concepts covered were those that seemed relevant to all of us and also teachable for people from different backgrounds. It seemed to us that the genres assigned should help achieve the goals of the assignments and help students learn the declarative concepts under consideration. For example, as students studied their own writing processes, they might write about what they learned in the form of a research report, or they might write about it somewhat reflectively. Both types of texts could help students learn the declarative concepts about writing under consideration. The teachers met regularly to plan and share goals and sometimes chose to teach similar assignments. However, no assignments or genres were prescribed, and teachers made changes to plans and assignments as the semester progressed.

These teachers, in addition to piloting a WAW approach, were also the President's Class Size Initiative (PCSI) study guinea pigs, each teaching two sections of nineteen and two of twenty-five (all four sections were taught as writing about writing). They were observed frequently, gave their students pre and post surveys, and turned in all of their students' portfolios at the end of the semester. We gathered all sorts of data from their students, including grades. These teachers read extensively, tried new things, critiqued their own practices, and took suggestions willingly. They laid bare their teaching practices for the possibility of structural improvement, and their willingness to do so can also (like the Dean of Undergraduate Studies' advocacy) not be overestimated. Had they been less flexible, less open, or less willing to change practices, our experiment could have ended as quickly as it began.

At the same time, the Composition Coordinator agreed to also train the new Teaching Assistants to pilot the WAW curriculum, all of whom had previously taken ENC 5705: Composition Theory and Pedagogy.{5} [#note5] The new resources being invested in the program allowed us to provide much more professional development for all teachers in the program than was previously possible. Instead of providing teachers with a common rubric, for example, we sponsored workshops on responding to writing and grading, in order to educate teachers in the research of Rhetoric and Composition so that they were empowered to create their own grading rubrics (or not). Regardless of whether we ultimately moved to a writing-about-writing curriculum, I wanted to start to move toward a program in which all teachers had the expertise to participate in decision-making about curriculum and assessment. For that to happen, we had to start making cultural shifts, such as providing teachers direct access to knowledge and resources in the field; setting an expectation that conversations would be about research, theory, and innovation rather than complaints about students; and demonstrating that questions about pedagogy would always come back to program outcomes (see Appendix 2 [#appendix2] for our current program outcomes) rather than to rigid discussions regarding how exactly to teach a specific mode. These changes happened in stages and primarily through peer example. As the pilot teachers became engaged in research and theory, and as they tried new ideas, they shared their experiences with their colleagues, some of whom then became interested in reading and exploring new ideas themselves.

This was a stressful but rewarding year. As a result of their experience reading and implementing the scholarship of the field, the new instructors engaged in careful reflective practice, adjusting their assignments and activities as they progressed, and they indicated that they found the curriculum and

the reading rewarding. For example, they enjoyed talking about ideas and research with one another, rather than relying on a textbook or a set curriculum to show them what their class would look like. They indicated that the new curriculum challenged their students, and thus made their own experiences in the classroom more engaging (see Appendix 3 [#appendix3] for a response from one of our teachers, Adele Richardson). Yet the changes in the pilot were making ripples in the larger program; while some teachers became interested in new ideas, others became concerned about the possible changes in curriculum, culture, and criteria for evaluation. Some teachers had been teaching the same way for many years, with little oversight and little expectation that they would be involved in a community of teachers/scholars. Some were uncomfortable at what they perceived to be higher expectations and more scrutiny of classroom practices. For example, there had long been a cultural norm in the program that teachers did not share assignments with one another because they were concerned that doing so would encourage similar assignments and increase plagiarism. The developing new expectation that teachers would talk about and share ideas (and that they could do so without creating the same assignment) challenged many parts of this long-standing practice (including the apparent belief that preventing plagiarism is the most important aspect of assignment creation or that students would surely plagiarize if given the opportunity). In addition, teachers had not made a practice of observing one another's classrooms, and we were encouraging this as a basic way to get feedback on practices and to learn new ideas from colleagues. Some teachers saw their classrooms as their domains and did not welcome the prospect of having their colleagues ask to attend. We were asking teachers to read research, assess their practices, share their ideas with others, and be observed—all new expectations. We were expecting that professional teachers would want to engage in ongoing professional development. And we were doing this with very little change in material conditions, with only the hope that we would be able to change material conditions down the road. Some teachers were invigorated by these changes; others were unhappy enough about them to leave our program (see Appendix 4 [#appendix4] for a response from a teacher, Scott Launier).

When the pilot began, we immediately began assessing student work. Portfolio assessment had been conducted before, but not in recent years. We instituted portfolio assessment in Fall 2009 to learn how the program was achieving outcomes, overall, and how the pilot sections were achieving outcomes as compared to the "regular" sections. We created a portfolio assessment team of full-time, part-time, and graduate student teachers, and we trained them to assess portfolios. We read sample portfolios together and created a rubric based on our current program outcomes, those shared across both pilot and existing curricula. Two raters read each portfolio independently, and a third rater read if the first two disagreed by more than one point. Portfolio assessment of the first pilot was encouraging (full results are included as Appendix 5 [#appendix5]). On every item measured, the WAW sections of 19 had higher mean scores than the other groups, with the WAW sections of 25 scoring second highest on most measures. The findings suggested that the WAW curriculum (regardless of class size) had a positive and significantly different impact than the traditional curriculum on teaching students about writing as a process, rhetorical analysis, and integration of outside sources. On two other measures, higher order thinking and correct in-text citation, class size may have either played more of a role than the WAW curriculum or enabled the WAW curriculum to have a greater impact.

Taking It to the President

In March 2010 (not even a full year into the new initiatives), the Dean of Undergraduate Studies asked me to present the portfolio assessment findings to the President and his advisory board. Again, her assertive advocacy for improved writing instruction enabled access to decision-makers we may not have had otherwise.

Although we were undertaking a three-year study, this sort of access to powerful stakeholders was unusual and unlikely to happen again. In the presentation I began by focusing broadly on the

composition course itself—what it is, why it exists, and why it is not sufficient to meet the needs of students. I did this in order to try to situate our current pilot efforts into a larger context and to emphasize that, no matter how successful our composition pilot might be, the composition course by itself would never be enough to "improve student writing" in the ways that stakeholders desire. Toward this end, I described how rhetorical training historically evolved into the composition course and why this one class was not sufficient. I suggested some reasons why Harvard's nineteenth century composition design was ineffective and how that design became institutionalized nationally despite this lack of effectiveness. But, I noted, the model had started to change at UCF, thanks to the president's funding, which enabled the work of our new instructors and led to the results of our portfolio assessment. I argued that the key to meaningful change in writing instruction, based on early results, seemed to be smaller class sizes, plus new curriculum, plus well trained and supported teachers. However, these changes, while important, would not be sufficient because one or two writing courses will never be enough to show measurable change in student writing. To provide a truly distinctive and sound writing education for students, UCF as an institution needed to embrace a comprehensive, vertical model of writing education, with rhetorical training across all four years. Our view of our new writing-focused approach to first-year composition was that it would provide a useful entry point into writing in the university, which other writing courses across the university could build on. In creating such a model, UCF would be at the forefront of national best practices. At the end of the talk, the advisory panel asked numerous questions and brainstormed strategies for more effective writing structures.

Within two months, funding had been set aside to convert all of our adjunct lines to permanent instructor lines (18 instructor lines over 3 years), fully fund our long-ignored writing center and hire a tenured writing center director, and begin and fund a new writing across the curriculum program with a tenured director. The decision was made to invest in these writing initiatives outside of English, in a new Department of Writing and Rhetoric that would also include undergraduate and graduate writing degrees. This new department and its initiatives came into existence on July 1, 2010. I cannot speak to the reasons why we were moved out of English. I can only speak to the material changes that such a move effected.

Fully Implementing the WAW Curriculum

In the 2010-11 year, we began fully moving to a writing-about-writing curriculum across our program. Teachers who had already piloted the curriculum led small reading and discussion groups with willing faculty (see Appendix 6 [#appendix6] for the teacher training curriculum{6} [#note6]), and we provided small stipends for teachers who completed this training. Because we were hiring full-time instructors as a result of the President's investment, there was fairly widespread motivation for people to participate in this training. By the end of the training, they had begun to establish some familiarity with Writing Studies research, had seen examples of the WAW curriculum, and had created their own syllabus.

By the 2011-12 school year, the program (http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/composition.php [http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/composition.php]) looked very different than it had only a few years before. We employed only a few adjunct (part-time) and visiting (full-time, benefitted, but limited term) instructors. Most of our teaching staff were permanent instructors, tenure-line faculty in Rhetoric and Composition, or carefully trained graduate students (second-year MA students or PhD students, all of whom completed a graduate course in Composition Theory and Pedagogy before being awarded an assistantship). By this point, we were hosting 6-8 workshops or reading groups each semester, many led by instructors and graduate students. (See Appendix 7 [#appendix7] for last year's workshop and reading group schedule). Portfolio assessment had become a normal part of our yearly activities and attracted a large number of volunteers (12-14), many of whom said they saw portfolio

assessment as a way to get good ideas from other teachers, rather than an onerous rating task. Instructors had begun to attend and present at national conferences. One instructor was the founding editor of our in-house, peer-reviewed journal of first-year writing (http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/stylus/ [http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/stylus/]), while another edited an in-house quarterly newsletter. We had begun hosting a large annual celebration of the best student writing from composition (http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/showcase.php [http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/showcase.php]), which our president and provost attended. UCF President John Hitt read all the student pieces published in our journal and began awarding a book scholarship to the best piece (http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/stylus/hittprize.php [http://writingandrhetoric.cah.ucf.edu/stylus/hittprize.php]).

All of these changes meant that, when the time came to begin looking at the second of our composition courses, ENC 1102, we could engage in this work very differently than we historically engaged in curricular change. ENC 1101 had been our primary writing-about-writing course, teaching what we considered to be foundational declarative concepts about writing. ENC 1102 was historically a research class. Although most of our teachers had begun adapting their 1102 practices in light of what they were doing in 1101, we had not undertaken a formal examination of 1102.

The 1102 revision committee convened early in Fall 2011 and consisted of instructors, visiting instructors, tenured faculty, and tenure track faculty. The discussions were both theoretical and practical, and wide-ranging. Every person on the committee shared ideas, submitted articles for thought and discussion, invented new syllabus ideas, and pushed us in new directions. We discussed several difficult questions, including which kinds of declarative writing knowledge students needed to work on further after 1101 and what the implications of genre theory are for designing and teaching assignments. In Spring 2012 we facilitated a series of lectures on rhetorical theory and genre theory, coupled with reading groups and hands-on workshops, so that teachers across the department could further explore what 1102 can do. At the end of the year, we had generally agreed on principles and outcomes for 1102 (see Appendix 2 [#appendix2]) but had not agreed on what specific practices should be in the 1102 class. As a result, we decided to solicit pilot proposals for Fall 2012. In Spring 2013 teachers who have piloted new approaches in 1102 will share them at an open discussion. We are not in a hurry to make radical changes, but instead feel that the reading, discussing, and piloting are themselves important parts of improving our practices and ensuring that we continue dialogue about research and theory across classrooms. The discussion and planning can be open and collaborative in this way instead of managed from the top down (Strickland) because of the changed material conditions of our teachers. Our teaching faculty members have permanent jobs with security and benefits; they know they'll be here next semester to take up the discussion where we left off and to help pilot any initiatives that make it to the next stage. They also have expertise in writing studies because they have been reading the research and teaching it to their own students.

Where Are We Now?

The material, intellectual, and teaching conditions of our lives have changed dramatically over the past few years. In Fall 2012 we employed only seven adjunct instructors to teach composition (three of whom have full-time jobs but like teaching a night class for us, and two of whom are new MA graduates who are preparing for national job searches or doctoral programs), down from the thirty-three adjuncts we employed in Fall 2008. We have hired fifteen new, full-time permanent, benefitted and unionized instructors. We also hired tenured Writing Center and WAC Directors, both of whom participate actively in the activities of our First-Year Composition Program. So far we have hired four tenure-track assistant professors, all of whom teach composition each year and participate in various aspects of maintaining the composition program (including course revision and assessment), in addition to their duties with the upper-level and MA programs. This gives us a composition program

with courses taught by ten tenured or tenure track Rhet/Comp Faculty; twenty-nine full-time, benefited instructors or visiting instructors; seven adjunct instructors; and twelve or so Graduate Teaching Assistants (none of whom teach until they have eighteen hours of relevant graduate credit). Many of the instructors and visiting instructors received small equity raises when we became an independent department.

Our program also feels very different than it did in 2008, in ways that are much harder to quantify. The conversations in the hallways and copyroom are about ideas, assignments, and texts recently read. When teachers come to see me, it is usually to discuss and get feedback about new ideas. Most telling is what teachers are **not** coming to see me about: they don't come by to complain about students or working conditions or their colleagues. I receive very few grade appeals or teacher complaints of any kind. We have new problems: there are more teachers who have ideas for leading workshops than there are workshop slots to be filled; there is no time in the day when everyone's schedule is free to attend a workshop or reading group, and people don't like being left out; there are more people who want to pilot new technologies or attend conferences than there is money. These are much better problems to have.

It is not hyperbolic to argue that reading and teaching the knowledge of the field changed the culture of our composition program. However, reading composition theory and research did not *by itself* magically bring about these changes. This was not a "moment of miracle," as Miller argues that *kairos* understood as discontinuous can sometimes appear to be (83). Rather, this was a result of continuous work resulting in cyclical, positive, and self-perpetuating changes. Teachers who read and enacted composition theory and research changed their classrooms, and the measurable results of *that* change, in turn, quite literally changed the teachers' professional positioning and our entire program by helping us convince our administration to essentially eliminate contingent labor. Having full-time permanent jobs and being treated as members of the field changed the material conditions and intellectual orientations of our teachers even further. The composition program now feels like—and *is*—a professionalized group of expert writing teachers and scholars instead of what it had always previously felt like, Harry Potter's cupboard under the stairs.

The Lessons

I think there are at least two, but likely three, lessons to be learned from our experiences.

First, our experience illustrates that sometimes there are moments when change is more possible than usual, and as rhetoricians and writing program administrators, we can and must be prepared to take advantage of them. We might fail, and the passing opening might close. But it is possible to leverage our field's knowledge and narrative to work with our good teaching faculty and make changes. Often our field's narratives about composition programs are about the forces at work that keep change from happening. But change is possible, and structures are created, destroyed, and recreated by human beings. And we, as rhetoricians, can engage with our stakeholders in ways that can effect structural change. Here, our attempts to engage in positive ways usually entail starting a conversation by talking about exciting ideas for change and considering ways these new initiatives can help achieve current university goals or solve problems shared across programs, departments, and colleges.

Second, our experience also illustrates the necessity of advocates. Without advocates in positions to bridge or broker boundaries, we may never know about potential resources or make our way in front of the presidents and provosts and deans who have the power to enable structural change. Cultivating relationships with potential bridge builders and boundary brokers seems to be an essential part of our role as writing program administrators. One way to cultivate such advocates is to consider administrators as partners rather than adversaries, and to consider what solutions we might be able to

offer to problems they are facing from their stakeholders (legislators and parents, for example). By drawing on our own expertise to help find solutions to shared problems, rather than always playing the role of supplicant and asking for resources, we are more likely to be seen as colleagues who are wanted at the table and to be included in conversations.

Finally, I think our experience illustrates that welcoming our part-time faculty into our field—and engaging with them around the knowledge of our field—is a possible way to break the logjam I described when I began this program profile. Reading and teaching the knowledge of the field can change the culture of a composition program, affect its measurable outcomes, and impact the ways that writing teachers view themselves and the ways they are viewed (and compensated) by others.

Would we have done anything differently in retrospect? The factors we were able to control—piloting, assessment, implementation over time to facilitate buy in—all worked well. Several of the factors we could not control made life difficult at times: the fast pace at which we were asked to pilot, assess, and present was stressful; the suddenness of our separation from the English Department, and the fact that we received resources for new programs at a time when resources were limited, strained some relationships. Despite the difficulties of being in the spotlight for a sudden and high stakes change, the benefits for students and teachers continue to outweigh the drawbacks. Our students are better served now than they were four years ago, and our teachers have a better quality of life, both materially and intellectually.

More important than what we might have done differently is what we must continue to do in order to protect our program and ensure that it continues to thrive. Even as our own institution has provided increasing support for writing instruction, our work is threatened at the state level by a governor and legislature who are unfriendly to a liberal arts education and to a meaningful general education component. The general education requirement in Florida has recently been cut by six hours, the consequences of which are still to be determined for writing courses. Our university saw a budget cut of $52 million this year alone, with more cuts expected. Despite rising numbers of enrolled students, actual credit hour production is flat (likely because more students are forced to attend part time). Due to increasing emphasis on helping students "test out" of composition and other gen ed requirements, enrollments in our composition courses are decreasing. All of these changes, combined with our governor's tendency to look to Texas for models of how to influence higher education, suggest that we have many battles ahead as we fight for the ability to provide an excellent, research-based writing education to our students.

The experiences of the past few years have reminded me repeatedly that we are a discipline with a body of knowledge. At UCF we have learned that when we can find ways to inform micro-level classroom practices with this macro-level disciplinary knowledge, we can change the structures that have for so long controlled us and our programs to the detriment of our students and teachers. As rhetoricians, we do have the tools for empowerment. With the help of our advocates and stakeholders, we can pick up those tools and use them to construct, discover, and respond to kairotic openings.[{7} [#note7]]

Appendices

1. Appendix 1: Current sample syllabi and assignments
    - Syllabi from Matt Bryan and Scott Launier [ucf-appendix1-bryan-launier.php]
    - Syllabi from Laura Martinez [ucf-appendix1-martinez.pdf] (PDF)
2. Appendix 2: Current program outcomes for ENC 1101 and 1102 [ucf-appendix2.pdf] (PDF)
3. Appendix 3: Teacher Response from Adele Richardson [ucf-appendix3.php]
4. Appendix 4: Teacher Response from Scott Launier [ucf-appendix4.php]

5. Appendix 5: Portfolio pilot assessment results for Fall 2009 [ucf-appendix5.php]
6. Appendix 6: Teacher training curriculum [ucf-appendix6.php]
7. Appendix 7: 2011-12 workshop and reading group schedule [ucf-appendix7.php]

Notes

Notes

1. Of course, there is a rich intellectual tradition in our field discussing labor issues, which there is not time to review here. Interested readers might look to Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola; Robertson and Slevin; Schell; Scott; Sledd; Slevin; and Strickland, among others, for more on this topic. (Return to text.) [#note1-ref]
2. For more detailed information about how such curricula are enacted, see Wardle and Downs, "Reimagining" and Downs and Wardle "Teaching." (Return to text.) [#note2-ref]
3. Matt Bryan and Scott Launier were two of the first four PCSI instructor hires; Laura Martinez was an MA GTA who taught the curriculum early in its piloting, studied it for her thesis project, and is now an instructor in our program. (Return to text.) [#note3-ref]
4. This accommodation assignment drew on Jeanne Fahenstock's work considering how descriptions of scientific studies change depending on the genre, audience, and media outlet. Our accommodation assignment (now viewable in the *Writing about Writing* textbook) is largely a rhetorical analysis. (Return to text.) [#note4-ref]
5. ENC 5705 provides a history of the field, an overview of approaches to teaching composition, and some deeper exploration of some of the field's underlying knowledge and beliefs about writing and the teaching of writing. At the end of the class, students create a teaching portfolio that includes a syllabus, assignments, and rationale for their approach to teaching composition. (Return to text.) [#note5-ref]
6. As our program has developed, we have continued to think about what such teacher preparation and support can and should look like and have continued to modify these materials. Our most recent discussion about this matter leads me to believe that identifying our field's "threshold concepts" (Meyer and Land) and working through those with teachers new to Rhet/Comp might provide the best preparation for teaching a writing-focused curriculum. For example, threshold concepts such as "writing is an object of study" could be important for helping those new to Rhet/Comp understand some of our underlying principles, values, and beliefs about writing and language. However, we have not gotten farther than speculating about what this sort of discussion would look like. (Return to text.) [#note6-ref]
7. This article, and the changes it describes, would not have been possible without the hard work of numerous UCF faculty members and administrators. I want to particularly thank Deborah Weaver, current Composition Coordinator, and Lindee Owens, past Composition Coordinator and current Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator, for their leadership in the pilot initiative. The first four PCSI instructors are largely responsible for the assessment results that so impressed our upper administration: Adele Richardson, Scott Launier, Laurie Uttich, and Matthew Bryan. Our former Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Alison Morrison -Shetlar, is largely responsible for putting this chain of events in motion. Our president, Dr. John Hitt's, willingness to invest in the writing initiatives that serve our undergraduate students has changed the face of writing instruction in Central Florida. And our dean, José Fernandez, has worked to support, protect, and extend the changes to writing education. Truly, changes like those we have experienced really do "take a village." (Return to text.) [#note7-ref]

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