

# Back to the Future: First-Year Writing in the Binghamton University Writing Initiative, State University of New York



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**Abstract:** This essay seeks to explain the history that led to the establishment of First-Year Writing at Binghamton University, a program which offers a set of electives that complement discipline-specific and writing-across-the-curriculum courses while providing first-year students a common experience in and comprehensive introduction to college writing.

Co-founded in 2008-2009 by Kelly Kinney and Rebecca Moore Howard, the Binghamton University Writing Initiative is an autonomous campus unit devoted exclusively to literacy instruction. A central component within the Writing Initiative, [1](#) First-Year Writing was developed in response to the perception that the institution's general education composition offerings were not meeting the needs of students or the desires of faculty. While the State University of New York at Binghamton had endorsed the writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) model it adopted in the 1990s and had subsequently sustained a variety of WAC courses across campus, when Kinney accepted her position in Fall 2007, her home department of English, General Literature and Rhetoric was still offering the lion's share of composition courses and had a scarcity of faculty specialists in writing studies to support them. This essay seeks to explain the history that led to the establishment of First-Year Writing at Binghamton, a set of electives which seeks to complement discipline-specific and writing-to-learn courses while also providing first-year students a common experience in and comprehensive introduction to college writing. True to the genre of the "Program Profile," we also provide a description of the theories informing the program, an overview of its courses and institutional restraints, and a synthesis of the lessons learned during the inaugural year of First-Year Writing at Binghamton.

## A History of WAC at Binghamton, and What Led Us (Back) to First-Year Writing

It may seem counterintuitive that, after initiating a WAC program, our institution chose to establish First-Year Writing (FYW); after all, many see WAC programs, particularly those that stress writing-in-the-disciplines, as a progressive alternative to "generic" first-year composition (Smit 146). At face value, Binghamton's WAC model remains both theoretically sound and pedagogically rich. It was built on the principles that teaching writing is the responsibility of all faculty; that writing development is always "ongoing and lifelong"; that "writing about a subject is a powerful means of learning about a subject"; and that "writing to learn is as important as writing to communicate" (Gay and Tricoli 6). Consistent with Sharon Crowley's proposal to abolish universal first-year requirements (241), another attractive component of Binghamton's WAC model was that it did not force students to take a required first-year course or a mandated series of courses: instead, it proposed a range of composition offerings in a variety of disciplinary contexts, allowing students to pick and choose among electives that complement their educational goals.

But while Binghamton faculty had high hopes for the WAC program given its sound pedagogical promise and diverse curricular potential, these goals were not altogether realized. One of the WAC program's strengths in theory—namely, that it did not compel students to enroll in a required sequence of courses—became a notable weakness in practice. Despite good intentions, lack of sequencing made it possible for students to delay enrollment indefinitely. While Binghamton students do have options in completing their general education composition component (see [Appendix One](#)), nothing in the WAC model compels them to enroll in writing courses early in their college careers, leaving some ill-equipped to take on higher-order literacy tasks as they progress in the majors. Although various campus units developed a discrete range of well-designed writing courses at different levels, prerequisites and curricular sequencing were virtually non-existent. Thus, juniors and seniors routinely flooded 100-level composition courses both inside and outside their majors, leaving few seats for the first-years and sophomores for

which these courses were designed and intended. This vicious cycle prompted the institution to reconsider the value of FYW—and to look to a future that would include it.

Although instituting a required sequence for composition courses already in place—rather than developing a new set of electives—may have been the simplest solution to the problem, there was a second, perhaps more pressing issue: because instructional resources were not significantly increased or reallocated across campus when the WAC program was initiated, the English Department continued to offer the majority of 100-level composition courses. As a result, it was hit-or-miss whether students received the content-based or writing-to-learn instruction the initial WAC model had aspired to offer. Faculty across the disciplines recognized the flaws in the system, complaining that even their most promising seniors were often inexperienced and thus mediocre writers in the major. And while it might be reasonable to attribute some faculty perceptions to the pervasive cultural mantra that “Kids just can’t write these days,” it is also reasonable to attribute these perceptions to the faculty’s knowledge of students’ potential. Binghamton faculty are appropriately proud both of our students’ vast diversity *and* outstanding academic potential: 33% of our undergraduates are students of color, 10% are international students, and all have competed in a highly selective process to gain entry into Binghamton, dubbed by *Greene’s Guide* as a “Public Ivy” and by *Fiske Guide* as “the premiere public university in the Northeast.”<sup>[2]</sup> It became clear that a lack of course sequencing and a dearth of diverse WAC courses resulted in too few students gaining the level of sophistication and facility in their writing that faculty rightly recognize as within their reach. All told, and as we return to below, Binghamton needed a set of first-year courses that would complement discipline-based instruction *across* departments *throughout* the institution.

From our perspective as writing program administrators, absence of faculty development and teaching assistant preparation also influenced undergraduates’ writing performances. Although faculty development across the disciplines is not within the purview of our positions<sup>[3]</sup>, our experiences interacting with ladder faculty, instructors, and graduate assistants alike convinces us that too few writing teachers on our campus have been introduced to basic tenets of contemporary composition pedagogy. Not only has there been no concerted faculty development since the previous WAC Director stepped down several years ago<sup>[4]</sup>, but the English Department suspended formal teaching assistant preparation when the previous Director of Composition left the university in 2005-2006, the same academic year she was hired. Because there has never been a critical mass of literacy-specialists on campus to support WAC, rather than relying on what Anne Herrington and Charles Moran describe as the two central approaches to WAC instruction—that is, the “writing-in-the-disciplines” approach that emphasizes the habits of mind and rhetorical conventions particular to a discipline, and the “writing-to-learn” approach that engages students in a range of activities in order to master course content (7-9)—many Binghamton instructors relied on disparate or ill-informed conceptions of what writing courses should do.

But even given these problems, when Kinney took over the English Department’s composition program in the Fall of 2007, her first instinct was to work to strengthen and modify the 100-level composition courses already in place, courses taught almost exclusively by graduate students in English. At the time, English offered more than 90% percent of its composition courses in two formats: English 115, a course intended to cultivate students’ critical literacy practices in non-literary contexts; and English 117, a theme-based course intended to teach students discipline-based conventions in writing about literature. Students in any major took either or both of these courses to help fulfill their general education composition component, and there was no connection or scaffolding between the two courses or among them and other, higher-level writing courses offered by English or other campus units. We came to recognize that this lack of course sequencing and coherency, coupled with few opportunities for teaching assistant preparation, made it next to impossible for instructors to cogently distinguish between the aims of English 115 and English 117. Most graduate assistants, our classroom observations and syllabus reviews made clear, substituted the primary curricular aims of either course—teaching writing to promote critical literacy (English 115) or teaching the conventions of literature-based writing (English 117)—for the goal of literature coverage. Frankly, this was no surprise; there was nothing in most of our instructors’ pedagogical development that would have prompted them to do otherwise.

To work to reform the system in place, Kinney offered up a three-year plan for strengthening first-year writing instruction in the English Department. It included developing a graduate seminar in rhetoric and composition theory, instituting monthly pedagogy workshops and a multi-day pre-semester orientation for composition instructors, and piloting a new, genre-based 100-level course, seeking feedback from the instructors who chose to take part in the pilot project.

But while Kinney had plans for incremental reform, the university administration was poised to move forward—and fast. Prompted by less than stellar results on the state of writing instruction reported in the National Survey of Student Engagement, the administration hired consultants to make recommendations for change. Enter Rebecca Moore Howard of Syracuse’s Program in Writing and Rhetoric and Paul Sawyer of Cornell’s Knight Institute of Writing. On two snowy days in December 2007, these nationally recognized WPAs drove hazardous Upstate

highways to interview Binghamton students and faculty, dialogue with deans and department heads, and listen to Kinney and other program directors describe their institutional observations, pedagogical perspectives, and plans for the future. Through their investigation, Moore Howard and Sawyer chronicled a range of deficiencies in the institution's support of writing instruction, including the abuse of graduate student labor, the lack of full-time and tenure track specialists in writing studies, the scarcity of faculty development on campus, and the absence of budgetary and hiring autonomy for the writing program.

By the beginning of classes the following semester, Moore Howard and Sawyer had completed a fifteen-page report of recommendations: perhaps its most far-reaching was to move the composition program out of the English Department and to establish what would become the Binghamton University Writing Initiative<sup>[5]</sup>, an autonomous academic unit comprised of First-Year Writing, the Writing Center, and the English as a Second Language Program. The goal of bringing the three programs together was to reorient the foundations of writing instruction on campus and to ground the university's teaching culture in the scholarship of writing studies and language-learner literacy. By uniting the missions of these programs and giving the new academic unit control over curriculum goals and hiring practices, Binghamton was positioning itself not only to overcome its sequencing problems, but—as we detail more thoroughly in the following sections—to develop a FYW program that is: 1) consistent with general education outcomes, 2) committed to teacher preparation, and 3) complementary to the WAC model in place.

Intrigued by Binghamton's newfound commitment to writing, Moore Howard was persuaded to take a year's leave from Syracuse to collaborate with the established directors and—perhaps most importantly—create coherent programmatic connections among WAC, FYW, the Writing Center, and ESL. In an effort to do so, Kinney, Moore Howard, and Kristi Murray Costello refined the common syllabus Kinney had piloted the previous year and built enough sections to offer to all incoming first-year students. Together Kinney and Murray Costello also created a second, co-enrollment course to support first generation college students and English language learners. As a result, in 2008-2009, the Writing Initiative offered two new courses for a combined total of 133 sections of 100-level composition. For all intents and purposes, Writing 111 and Writing 100 replaced English 117 and 115. Like the previous first-year courses offered in English, neither Writing 111 nor 100 would be required<sup>[6]</sup>, but unlike their predecessors, they would both be offered exclusively to first-year students. Both 111 and 100 would also focus on genre-awareness across contexts, a new curricular emphasis at Binghamton and, perhaps to a lesser degree, across the nation. Although discipline-specific composition courses would continue to be offered in various departments across campus, the foundation for writing instruction at Binghamton would now be built on First-Year Writing. By preserving the best of WAC and FYW, we had arrived “back” to the future.

## Theories Informing FYW at Binghamton

Let us be clear, however, to distinguish key differences in our courses from those described in the scholarship above. We are well aware of criticisms waged against what many have come to call “generalist” writing courses; because our 100-level courses are better categorized as generalist than discipline-specific, they do not coincide neatly with the programs that Beaufort and Fishman and Reiff describe. Neither, however, do they undermine discipline-based instruction. While our courses are offered exclusively to first-year students—that is, “pre-majors” who have yet to confirm their disciplinary homes—they are also meant to foster a cohesive learning community that helps students develop an understanding of how writing conventions *vary according to context*. Thus, our courses are consistent with both FYW and WAC instructional models. Far from retrograde, through our reconfigured commitment to First-Year Writing, Binghamton University is moving forward in its efforts to improve writing instruction.

Accordingly, we embrace a model of first-year writing that is purposefully aligned with genre theory, as well as with social-expressivist and civic-rhetorical pedagogical traditions. Agreeing with Doug Downs' and Elizabeth Wardle's perception that writing courses should introduce students to the traditions of rhetoric and writing studies, but cognizant of the problems our campus has experienced by asking underprepared teachers to develop discipline-based composition courses, we instead forged our curriculum within interconnected traditions that embody the pedagogical (rather than strictly scholarly) trajectories of writing studies.

Of the many theories of writing instruction influencing FYW at Binghamton, genre theory is the most influential. Built on the notion that no writing class—no matter how well-designed—can teach students all there is to know about writing conventions, our courses help students analyze and negotiate genres. Consistent with Amy Devitt's *Writing Genres* and Anis Bawarshi's *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, we see genre awareness as central to the development of mature writers—that is, increasingly independent learners who are able to recognize patterns and see similarities and differences across genres and, finally, to articulate their ideas within and against these genres

for specific purposes. In keeping with the notion of genre awareness, however, our courses are not predicated on the *mastery* of the genres we introduce, per se, but on the negotiation of convention and audience across contexts. Devitt explains:

Even if explicit teaching did help students acquire genres, even if teachers could know and articulate every nuanced detail of every genre, no writing class could possibly teach students all the genres they will need to succeed even in school, much less the workplace or in their civic lives. Hence the value of teaching genre awareness rather than acquisition of particular genres. The choice of genres to use as exemplars and assignments then must derive from the place of the course in its institution and the teacher's goals within that institution. (205)

Because we hope to foster the independent learning that comes from teaching genre awareness, and because the students enrolling in our FYW courses will move into unpredictable disciplinary contexts with different (and sometimes conflicting) writing conventions, we believe that teaching genre awareness lends itself well to any writing course, but particularly first-year writing courses. And we believe this not just because we recognize the diversity of genre conventions within the university, but because we hope to prepare students for writing both *in* academic contexts and *beyond*: that is, we hope to prepare writers to move into the always unpredictable future.

Of course, by asking students to examine salient political issues central to citizenship in participatory democracies, our courses are also fixed squarely within the classical Greek tradition. Grounded in a bi-fold conception of the "polis," we see politics not simply as the sphere of elected officials, but the sphere of all citizens, including college students—people compelled to work together for the benefit of their various communities and, by extension, the greater body politic. Focusing on a broad and diverse sphere of personal, civic, and academic discourse, we see First-Year Writing as a practice-ground for broad humanistic expression, a place where students can and should take on increasingly active roles as critical citizens in their various communities. By doing so, we hope to prepare students to be good writers *and* critical citizens, that is, socially-sensitive and politically-engaged adults capable of navigating in increasingly diverse discourse communities.

Indeed, we believe FYW courses should help students "come to voice" not simply as members of a confined academic community, but also as citizens of broader social and political domains. Influenced by Sherrie Gradin's *Romancing Rhetorics: Social Expressivist Perspectives on the Teaching of Writing*, our courses ask students to reflect on contemporary issues central to their roles as citizens in participatory democracies but also stress "writing to discover self and voice, and development of power and authority [in] one's own writing." As Gradin articulates,

In order to be effective citizens and effective rhetorical beings, students must first learn how to carry out the negotiation between self and world. A first step in this negotiation must be to develop a clear sense of one's own beliefs as well as a clear sense of how one's own value system intersects or not with others, and how, finally, to communicate effectively. (xv)

Rather than embracing what we believe to be too narrow conceptions of either social-constructivist or Romantic-expressivist pedagogical traditions, our courses enact a social-expressivism consistent with both genre theory and feminist-critical pedagogy, one that "encourages students to work at coming to voice" even in public atmospheres and unfamiliar genres where they may not feel comfortable or may "see themselves at risk" (hooks 53). To this end, First-Year Writing at Binghamton engages students in what Kurt Spellmeyer and Richard Miller call "the most pressing problems of our times" (para. 12): our aim is to give students practice grappling with complex public problems (world health crises, global climate change, and religious, racial, and sexual violence, for example) in ever-changing literacy contexts (that is, contexts increasingly saturated with new varieties of textual and digital communication). In the ways that it can bridge civic participation with literacy acquisition, we see genre theory as an important extension of writing studies' turn toward the social.

## **Description of First-Year Writing Courses: Writing 111 and Writing 100**

Our signature course, Writing 111—Coming to Voice: Writing Personal, Civic and Academic Arguments—asks students to write in different genres for a range of audiences, engage in intensive revision, and practice critical thinking through genre-diverse writing assignments. These assignments include a personal essay that connects private experience with a salient public issue; a rhetorical analysis that leads to a close reading of a single, complex text; an Op-Ed piece that responds to a local, national, or international controversy; and a researched argument that

synthesizes a variety of perspectives on a salient social issue and integrates the writer's perspectives alongside and against published research. Through its emphasis on genre negotiation, audience awareness, and civic and scholarly participation, Writing 111 reinforces the notion that conventions differ according to their rhetorical situations. While Writing 111 asks students to apply genre awareness through the production of texts, the course also engages students in critical discussion of rich, challenging readings (for a list of our common texts, see [Appendix Two](#)). In sum, the course aims to help students develop the habits of mind necessary to succeed in future course environments where genre and audience expectations will differ, and where decreasing levels of instructor feedback will likely be the norm. By focusing on salient social issues and asking students to both research others' and articulate their own perspectives, Writing 111 is also in keeping with one of rhetoric and writing studies' most time-honored traditions: that is, to nurture in writers a sense of social responsibility as active agents in ideologically diverse discourse communities.

To provide a common first-year experience for Binghamton University students and—perhaps just as importantly—to help students recognize that the expectations of college writing are often quite different from those they practiced in high school, Writing 111 uses a shared syllabus, a portfolio that constitutes seventy percent of the course grade, and a *multi-reader portfolio grading system that seeks to articulate clear community standards for the four basic letter grades*.<sup>[7]</sup> Because of our commitment to process pedagogies, the course uses a deferred grading system: students turn in early and polished drafts for peer review and teacher commentary, but do not receive formal grades until the end of the semester, when they submit a final portfolio to a small group of instructors who come to consensus on an appropriate letter grade. By using deferred but common grading practices, our portfolio system not only ensures that students have plenty of time to get feedback on, re-imagine, revise, and polish their writing; it also reinforces the expectations of the First-Year Writing program for sophisticated content, attentive structure, and purposeful style. In this way, while necessarily modest in scope, Writing 111 seeks to give students a solid introduction to writing and revision processes and to the analysis and negotiation of genre, emphases that discipline-specific composition courses may not accentuate to as large a degree. In other words, the hope is that we are providing students with the practice and reflection necessary to move into discipline-specific writing courses in which they will need to engage in analyses of genre conventions, audience expectations, and revision practices in increasingly independent ways. What's more, because we successfully argued that our course capacity should be limited to sixteen students per section (in an effort to offer both high-quality instruction and reverse the labor exploitation of graduate students noted in Moore Howard and Sawyer's consultant report), Writing 111 teachers are able to give students the kind of sustained feedback and guidance that previous 100-level incarnations of composition at Binghamton were not.

Our second course—Writing 100: The Academic Writing Workshop—is a one-credit co-enrollment course designed to support students who appreciate additional tutoring in Writing 111. In this way, Writing 100 is the nexus of our collective efforts within the Writing Initiative, bringing together theories from First-Year Composition, the Writing Center, and the ESL Program to support Binghamton's diverse student population. Despite their academic propensities in an array of sophisticated disciplines, we recognize that not all of our undergraduates come from educational or linguistic backgrounds that prepare them to write successfully without sustained support. Still, because we are committed to normalizing our instructors' attitudes towards language and educational diversity, as well as our student body's conceptions of what it means to live and learn in an increasingly diverse world, we believe in the merits of mainstreaming. As such, through Writing 100, we offer students who wish to receive additional writing support weekly seventy-five minute workshops with a tutor-teacher and no more than five students. These student-centered workshops are held in computer labs, where students receive mentored help while working on Writing 111 assignments.<sup>[8]</sup> Because students receive independent course credit and participation-based grades in Writing 100, and because we are sensitive to some students' desires to keep tutoring relationships confidential, tutor-teachers do not communicate formally with Writing 111 instructors about students' performance. Instead, Writing 100 tutor-teachers serve as readers of student writing who understand the assignments and goals of Writing 111, but who evaluate students according to their engagement and participation in Writing 100 alone. We believe this is appropriate not only to ensure student privacy, but because students are more apt to develop productive learning relationships with tutor-teachers if they see them as coaches rather than evaluators of their work.

Despite various institutional forces that may have persuaded us to the contrary, and following scholarship in the vein of Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* and Ryuko Kubota and Kimberly Abels' "Improving Institutional ESL/EAP Support for International Student," we also made a purposeful decision *not* to describe Writing 100 as grammar-intensive, basic, or in any way remedial. Indeed, the course is *optional*, not *mandated*. Although some students choose to engage their self-identified grammar concerns in Writing 100, the primary emphases of the course include the development of sophisticated content and coherent structure, and the appropriate evaluation, use, and citation of sources. By characterizing the course as an opportunity to take control of one's learning rather than as a pre-disciplinary enterprise, we hope that students see Writing 100 as a proactive step in their academic enculturation. In the process, we have in large part avoided the stigma and controversy sometimes associated with "developmental"

writing.

## Institutional and Budgetary Restraints Affecting Program Development

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of our program, however, has not been the development of Writing 100, but our decision to abandon literature-based composition courses and require teachers to use a shared syllabus in Writing 111. This decision was influenced by interconnected constraints, including the institution's desire to develop a cohesive learning community for first-year students, the problems associated with offering literature-based composition as the default composition course across campus, and FYW's commitment to ensuring that graduate assistants are not burdened with more work than they are prepared—or paid—to take on. In the old system, because of the labor-intensive work of designing their own courses, the higher course capacities, and the lack of formal teacher preparation, we believe that graduate students were working too many hours and that many first-year students were not getting the kind of genre-based immersion in the writing process that every undergraduate can benefit from. Although the movement away from literature-based instruction and toward a shared syllabus was upsetting to some, we assert it was the best decision given our commitment to strengthening both undergraduate and graduate education.

But while we acknowledge the complications involved in initiating a shared syllabus, particularly because the majority of our instructors—at least for the time being—will continue to come from a literature-centric English department<sup>[9]</sup>, we disagree with assertions that a shared syllabus creates a “rigid” environment where instructors are inappropriately robbed of professional autonomy (Marshall 416). On the contrary, we feel that a shared syllabus is beneficial not only in helping to develop a cohesive learning community for first-year students, but that it is a responsible choice for a writing program staffed primarily by graduate students with limited exposure to rhetoric and writing studies and little experience in teaching process-based, genre-focused composition. Said another way, our shared syllabus unifies our curriculum, providing first-year students opportunities to support each other *as it* provides our graduate assistants the support they need to balance the demands of their graduate coursework with the demands of writing instruction. Although our largely graduate-student staff is an intelligent, capable, and highly motivated group of teachers, because graduate assistantships should not require the same amount of labor expected of full-time faculty experts, we believe that the shared syllabus is not only entirely appropriate, but that it is essential if we are to enact the goals of First-Year Writing, support WAC, and flourish within the limited budgetary and institutional confines we have inherited.

In our efforts to support this common curriculum and the teachers who implement it, we have developed a threefold approach to teacher preparation that is both comprehensive and innovative. First, before graduate assistants enter our classrooms, they are now required to take a four-credit graduate seminar, “Rhetoric and Composition Theory and Practice.” Appropriately, this seminar has a pedagogical emphasis, asking graduate students to develop a teaching philosophy, research current instructional trends, create a series of classroom-based activities, and observe their graduate student colleagues currently teaching First-Year Writing. But the seminar also reaches beyond the immediate praxis of the classroom, giving graduate students a thorough introduction to the major theories and intellectual traditions that inform scholarship and pedagogy in the field. Following Betty Pytlik and Sarah Liggett's *Preparing College Teachers of Writing*, we believe that theoretically grounded teacher preparation must expose new teachers not just to program practice, but also to the histories and theories that influence work in the discipline.

Second, we now require all new instructors to participate in a multi-day pre-semester orientation. Again mixing practical applications with disciplinary theories, the orientation introduces new teachers to our major assignments, demonstrates heuristics to teach core concepts, and compels new and returning teachers to collaboratively articulate, examine, and justify our evaluation practices. We also see our orientation as an important opportunity for teachers to meet, form bonds, and forge the supportive professional relationships we believe are vital to a strong culture of teaching. In the spirit of Bill Hendrick's “Working Alone Together: Labor Agency and Professional Exchange in the Teaching of Composition,” we work to offer writing teachers frequent opportunities for “ongoing professional development [ ... and a] willingness to question old habits and test out new ideas” (236).

Third, and to this same end, all of our teachers gather in small groups for weekly meetings led by experienced full-time faculty or graduate student administrators. Sharing goals similar to Margaret Marshall's “Teaching Circles,” our Pedagogy Groups instill a sense of community and support for instructors through candid discussions among beginning and experienced teachers (414). In sum, Pedagogy Groups allow us to discuss classroom dynamics, share teaching activities, examine scholarly trends and—most centrally—practice effective strategies for responding

to and grading student writing. At the end of the semester, these same small groups come together to collaboratively grade student portfolios, an important opportunity for teachers to reflect on how successfully they have internalized the grading criteria embraced by the program as a whole. More than just weekly meetings, however, we view these small groups as learning communities for our instructors. Reflecting the same kind of social and educational benefits that inform our conception of a first-year learning community, Pedagogy Groups have been an important emphasis in the formation of First-Year Writing at Binghamton. Just as undergraduate “development is enhanced when there is extensive interaction among students who study together, tutor one another, and discuss issues that matter” (Smith et al. 142), faculty development is enhanced through shared work and ongoing pedagogical conversation. These Pedagogy Groups also allow us to better refine and articulate the common learning outcomes of our newly established First-Year Writing courses.

## If We Knew Then What We Know Now

While we are proud of our work during 2008-2009, looking back, there are certainly things that we would do differently. We would now, for instance, vet all our teachers more thoroughly. We would ask them candid questions about their attitudes toward and willingness to support the changes taking place. We would make a deliberate, concerted effort to hire only teachers who want to teach writing, who value composition, who enjoy working with students, and who are willing to embrace the goals we have developed. While we wish to note that all but a small fraction of teachers who taught with us the initial year were supportive of these goals, and that several under-vetted instructors became among the strongest teachers in our program, there were still a few who worked intentionally to undermine the program. As we move into our second year, we have had the time and space to carefully vet all of our teachers, and thus have the benefit of welcoming into our program committed, well-prepared instructors who understand and are supportive of First-Year Writing.

In future years, we also hope to do a better job of introducing new instructors to the materials we have created to support our courses, and of reinforcing the notion that these materials are not meant to close down opportunities for classroom innovation. To be sure, we enthusiastically encourage teachers to augment our tentative schedule of activities according to their personal teaching styles and students’ learning needs. In hindsight, we realize that after our first orientation some teachers—having designed their courses independently in the past—saw the shared syllabus, tentative schedule of activities, and other teaching artifacts as confining rather than supportive. In the future, we plan to do a better job of addressing their anxieties. To this end, in Fall 2009, we created a more nuanced presentation of the goals of our shared syllabus, as well as a clearer explanation of the pedagogical requirements and classroom innovation we hope to foster as First-Year Writing evolves and changes.

While there will always be some teachers who resist a composition curriculum that does not embrace literature as its *raison d’être*, since our first orientation, we have also made important strides to welcome all of our teachers—regardless of their intellectual concentrations—into the scholarly community of rhetoric and writing studies; this is perhaps our most important piece of advice for program directors working with graduate students. Indeed, it is not until graduate students have taken a course in writing studies that they can begin to see the ways in which rhetoric and composition’s theories and pedagogies support their own conceptions of good teaching and their own experiences of learning to write. It is also through graduate coursework that new writing teachers begin to see the ways in which the intellectual tradition of rhetoric and composition coincides with—but necessarily deviates from—their disciplinary specializations in literature, creative writing, or other fields in the academy.

Likewise, by offering graduate students the opportunity to earn Teaching Certification in College Composition (see [Appendix Three](#)), in our second year we are giving teachers incentives to attend professional development forums that can enhance their knowledge of writing pedagogy and rhetoric and writing studies beyond coursework and orientation. To support the Certificate as well as to grow a stronger community of teacher-scholars, in 2009-2010, we are offering both a pedagogy workshop series and a vibrant visiting speaker series (see [Appendix Four](#)).

Finally, perhaps the most successful way we have found to enhance graduate students’ professional engagement in the field is to devote budget resources to support attendance to regional and national conferences. In 2009, with the proceeds from the inaugural publication of *Binghamton Writes: A Journal of Undergraduate Composition* (see “Introduction” to *Binghamton Writes*, [Appendix Five](#)), we were able to give full travel and accommodation support to seven graduate students presenting papers at a regional conference—the State University of New York Council on Writing at Buffalo State—and to eight different graduate students presenting papers at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in San Francisco. We plan to expand this support in 2010. By giving teachers ample exposure to the scholarly discourses and professional opportunities of writing studies, we continue to grow a stronger cohort of graduate student writing teachers—that is, a critical mass of well-prepared writing instructors eager

to engage in the best practices of the field. Participation in such opportunities not only increases morale within the Writing Initiative, it forecasts how much Binghamton University's commitment to First-Year Writing, we hope, will continue to grow in the future.

## Appendix One: General Education Composition Component at Binghamton University

Harpur College Writing Requirement, School of Arts and Sciences [{10}](#)

Students must fulfill one of the following combinations of Composition (**C**)[{11}](#) and/or Writing (**W**) courses.

- 2 C and 3 W courses
- 3 C and 1 W courses
- 4 C courses

**C** courses provide substantial experience in writing and guidance or explicit instruction designed to foster writing performance sufficient to the demands of college-level thinking and learning in the particular discipline in which the course is offered. Written assignments in C courses constitute 60-100% the basis for the grade in the course and typically comprise a minimum of 20 pages (5000 words) of writing.

Students in a C course are given instruction and prompt, frequent feedback on their writing, including opportunities to revise drafts. Therefore, C courses do not usually have an enrollment more than 25 students per section.

**W** courses provide considerable experience in and feedback on writing as a tool of college-level teaching and learning. Written assignments in W courses constitute 30-100% of the basis for the grade in the course and typically compromise a minimum of 10 pages (2500 words) of writing.

Courses which are designated neither **C** or **W** in the class schedule may include any amount of writing the instructor wishes, and written assignments may constitute 0-100% of the basis for the final grade. Regardless of the amount and weighting of written work, what fundamentally distinguishes non-C/W courses from **C** and **W** courses is the absence of either explicit instruction in writing or detailed comments on written work. (Excerpted from Gay and Tricomi)

## Appendix Two: Writing 111: Coming To Voice: Writing Personal, Civic, and Academic Arguments

(Syllabus licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 License)

You have enrolled in WRIT 111: Coming to Voice, which fulfills a Joint (J) General Education requirement in Composition (C) and Oral Communication (O). Welcome to the class. This course is designed to help first-year students become stronger writers, speakers, and thinkers, and it features assignments that allow you to explore your personal, civic, and academic interests. WRIT 111 asks you to engage in different genres written for a range of audiences. It treats writing as a process, emphasizes revision, and gives you practice in critical thinking and research writing, reinforcing the notion that writing conventions differ according to their rhetorical situations. The course's emphasis on pluralistic perspectives is in keeping with one of Binghamton University's central missions: to help nurture in students a sense of social responsibility as citizens in a complicated world.

### Course Structure

On many days this semester, the class will be conducted in seminar format, which means we will engage in discussions about reading, writing, and speaking assignments and examine the rhetorical strategies used to persuade audiences. As a class, we will raise questions, pose problems, interpret readings, challenge each others' ideas, and develop strategies for successfully completing assignments. There will also be many sessions in which we perform workshop-style activities, including peer review, conferencing, drafting, and editing. Although there will be mini-lectures on a variety of writing-related topics, we will spend the majority of class time engaging in collaborative

discussions and activities.

## **Course Portfolio**

This class uses a portfolio system, which means that throughout the course, students turn in polished drafts of writing assignments for both peer review and instructor commentary but do not receive formal grades until the end of the semester, when they submit a final portfolio showcasing their very best work. The portfolio system ensures that students have plenty of time to get feedback on, re-imagine, revise, and polish their writing. In short, it gives students the opportunity to strive for excellence. Instructor comments on early drafts will include an indication of the grade characteristics a piece of writing reflects, and advice on how to make it better. The portfolio system allows you to identify your strengths and weaknesses, improve the overall quality of your writing, and earn the grade you aspire to achieve.

## **Required Texts**

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *“They Say, I Say” with Readings: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: Norton, 2008.

Miller, Richard E. and Kurt Spellmeyer. *The New Humanities Reader*. 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Wadsworth Cengage, 2008.

Ruszkiewicz, John J. *How to Write Anything*. Boston: Bedford St. Martin, 2009.

*Binghamton Writes: A Journal of Undergraduate Composition*. Plymouth, MI: Hayden McNeil, 2008.

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Personal Essay:** This assignment asks you to write an essay that considers the relationship between a memorable aspect of your personal experience and its broader political, social, cultural, educational, or humanitarian significance. The experience can be common, beautiful, intense, tragic, or even humorous, but it must also reveal its relationship to the way we imagine, act on, or negotiate our lives, our beliefs, or our society. In short, a Personal Essay should do more than tell a story; it must also reflect on a significant political, social, or cultural issue.

**Rhetorical Analysis:** A Rhetorical Analysis asks you to examine the strategies of persuasion within a given text, analyzing and assessing the techniques used in the text. A Rhetorical Analysis often also presents a second argument agreeing or disagreeing with the text. Successful writing in this genre involves reading a text closely to know it well, making strong claims about the text, and then mining the text for evidence to support claims for an analysis.

**Opposite Editorial (Op-Ed):** This assignment asks you to respond to a public issue in the form of an Opposite Editorial. Unlike an editorial, which represents the collective views of a newspaper’s staff, an Op-Ed represents the views of the writer alone. Engaged citizens write Op-Eds to give their viewpoints public expression. You will have the option of writing your Op-Ed in response to a text we read in class, or a text you find on your own.

**Researched Argument:** Building on the skills practiced in the first three assignments, the Researched Argument asks you to collect different kinds of research on a political, social, cultural, or disciplinary issue that interests you. In preparation, you will collect a range of perspectives on the issue by performing library research. You will use this research in creating an academic argument, establishing what has already been written and said, and adding your interpretations and perspectives to the conversation. Your teacher will help you identify appropriate issues and develop an academic research question, but in the end, the focus of your research will be up to you. What is important is that you are invested in the issue you research and the argument you make, that you allow your writing to be a genuine form of inquiry.

**Course Portfolio:** In your course portfolio, you will comprehensively revise and resubmit your Researched Argument and two other essays from the course. Because your course portfolio constitutes 70% of your grade, it is important that you revise and polish your writing rigorously, taking into account feedback from peers and your instructor, as well as your own understanding of the grading criteria common to all sections of WRIT 111. Students who fail to integrate significant revision put their overall course grade in jeopardy.

## **FEEDBACK AND GRADING\*:**

### **How Instructors Give Feedback in WRIT 111**

WRIT 111 teachers use a portfolio approach to grade student writing. This means that your teacher not only responds to your writing in various stages of progress throughout the semester, but that you may revise your work until the very last day of class. As a result, you have the opportunity to produce your very best work. You will also have multiple opportunities to get feedback from your teacher and your classmates, and are encouraged to seek feedback from Writing Center tutors, friends in your residential communities, and others. At the end of each assignment unit, you will turn in a polished draft, and your instructor will carefully respond to it, noting what you have done well, possible strategies for improvement, and the grade characteristics your draft currently reflects. This draft grade, however, is not a recorded grade. At the end of the semester, you will resubmit your Researched Argument and two other revised assignments in your course portfolio, which constitutes 70% of your course grade.

### **Portfolio Team Grading**

Your course portfolio will be evaluated by your teacher, as well as at least one additional WRIT 111 instructor. The portfolio “team grading” system brings instructors together for productive small group discussions of teaching and grading. It encourages the development of community standards for the four basic letter grades and allows students to select which papers will represent the bulk of their grade. The portfolio system encourages instructors to coach their students through the term as students draft and revise papers for possible inclusion in the portfolio. The team grading system ensures that the grades students receive are representative of the community standards endorsed by the First-Year Composition Program as a whole, rather than standards developed by individual instructors who grade in isolation. At the end of the semester, students submit a course portfolio, which includes revised versions of their very best work. Course portfolios are graded with a simple letter grade: A, B, C, or D. (Fs are reserved for students who miss class too many times, who do not complete assignment guidelines or do not submit all assignments and drafts, or who do not submit course portfolios.) Classroom instructors then adjust these simple grades (with a plus, a minus, or no adjustment) to reflect students’ improvement and engagement in the course. The course portfolio grade—the grade agreed upon by at least two teachers—constitutes 70% of the student’s letter grade in the course.

### **Class Participation: 10% of course grade**

Includes timely completion of all drafts, homework, and your overall participation in the course.

### **Oral Presentations: 20% of course grade**

Includes two oral presentations.

### **Course Portfolio: 70% of course grade.**

Includes your final revised drafts of three assignments, including your Researched Argument.

*\* The Binghamton University Writing Initiative adapted this model of assessment from one fine-tuned by Roger Gilles and Daniel Royer at Grand Valley State University. We gratefully acknowledge Gilles and Royer, whose ideas have been used and whose language has been modified in the creation of this document.*

## **Appendix Three: Binghamton University Graduate Certificate in College Teaching—Composition**

PhD Transcript Certification Requirements: 2009-2010

*PhD students who wish to earn the “Certificate in College Teaching—Composition” are required to:*

- complete all BU Graduate Orientation requirements
- attend a 4-day WRIT 111 Pre-Semester Orientation
- complete ENG 589

- submit a teaching portfolio prior to graduation
- teach one or more semesters of WRIT 111
- attend three pedagogy workshops or guest speaker presentations sponsored by the Writing Initiative

## AND

Receive an additional three credits from the following categories:

One-credit opportunities:

- attend an additional 4-day WRIT 111 Pre-Semester Orientation
- attend a professional conference dedicated to rhetoric and composition/writing studies

Two-credit opportunities:

- assist at a Pre-Semester WRIT 111 Orientation
- present a paper at a professional conference dedicated to rhetoric and composition/writing studies

**After you complete these tasks:**

- complete the Certificate in College Teaching—Composition Form.
- submit your teaching portfolio to the Director of First-Year Writing for signature
- schedule an appointment with a Graduate School representative to turn in your Form and submit a check for the \$100 transcript certification fee

# Appendix Four: Writing Initiative Visiting Speakers' Series

DEAN'S SPEAKER SERIES 2009-2010

TO: Dean Donald Nieman and the Speaker Series Committee

FROM: Kelly Kinney, Director of First-Year Writing, Writing Initiative  
Assistant Professor of English, General Literature and Rhetoric

SERIES THEME: Writing Studies in the New Humanities: Democratic Education and the Politics of Institutional Reform

SERIES DESCRIPTION:

Because writing is integral to success in all disciplinary fields—and to active and critical participation in civic life—writing well is frequently celebrated as the *sine qua non* of the educated person. As universities negotiate their commitment to students from an increasingly diverse array of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, they have turned to writing studies to address the literacy needs of students and the pedagogical preparation of faculty. But while the field has been called the fastest growing discipline in academe, many are unfamiliar with its educational tenets, scholarly trajectories, and relationship to the humanities. “Writing Studies in the New Humanities: Democratic Education and the Politics of Institutional Reform” seeks to offer an expansive introduction to an emergent field, inviting distinguished scholars to discuss writing studies’ history within the humanities, its commitment to democratic education, and its active engagement in the messy politics of institutional reform.

By highlighting the field’s relationship to the humanities, the series will benefit faculty by offering a cogent explanation and rigorous defense of the value of writing studies to a scholarly community. As Harpur College recognizes, it is uncharacteristic that a public institution of our size and caliber has not fostered a more expansive commitment to writing studies historically. The lively discussion this series will bring will help faculty recognize the importance of fostering democratic education through writing instruction, and showcase the important contributions members of the field are making to address the problems and possibilities associated with humanistic inquiry in the twenty-first century.

The series will also contribute significantly to undergraduate and graduate education. Specifically, it will bring positive attention to the innovative changes the Writing Initiative has made to our first-year composition program, reinforcing how our courses reflect the theories and practices associated with state-of-the-art literacy instruction. Because of writing studies’ close connection to a variety of disciplines, undergraduates taking coursework in

academic units such as Writing, English, Comparative Literature, and Classics will find the series enlightening, particularly those students pursuing concentrations in rhetoric, journalism, general humanities, and global cultures. Likewise, the series will spark scholarly engagement in the many graduate students teaching writing in various departments across campus, and publicize the new Graduate Certificate in Teaching Composition.

In short, the series affirms Harpur College's commitment to the literate arts, demonstrating that Binghamton University is not only committed to democratic education, but to an engagement in writing studies that is on par with other premier publics.

#### POTENTIAL SPEAKERS FOR DEAN'S SERIES 2009-2010

The following is a list of speakers and description of their credentials for the proposed series, "Writing Studies in the New Humanities: Democratic Education and the Politics of Institutional Reform." Descriptions are edited from electronically published faculty biographies, book jackets, and the like. While Harpur College funding and speaker availability will dictate the number and priority of invitations, I hope to bring at least five to campus.

1. **Richard E. Miller, Rutgers University.**

Professor Miller is chair of the Department of English and Executive Director of the Plangere Writing Center at Rutgers. He earned his B.A. at St. John's College, his M.A. at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, and his Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh, one of the premier graduate programs in writing studies. He is the author of two acclaimed books, *As if Learning Mattered: Reforming Higher Education* (Cornell University Press, 1998) and *Writing at the End of the World* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005). He is also the co-author of the *New Humanities Reader*, selected by the Writing Initiative as a core text for WRIT 111. His research interests include writing studies, educational reform, and the essay. Frequently invited to campuses to discuss his work on the connections between writing studies and humanities education, Miller prompts a reconsideration of the role that institutions of higher education play in shaping our daily experiences, and asks us to reimagine the humanities as central to the maintenance of a compassionate, secular society. As chair of the English Department he has forged collegial bounds among faculty in English, the Writing Program, and the Program in American Language Studies, Rutgers' English as a second language program.

2. **Susan Miller, University of Utah.**

Professor Miller, who earned her A.B. from Valparaiso University and her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, is Professor of English at the University of Utah. Her research focuses on the history of writers and writing as cultural and professional phenomena. Other interests include theories of writing; rhetorical pedagogies; and disciplinary and institutional politics. Miller is the author of several books, including (WW. Norton, 2009) *Project Web*  
Site: [http://www.wwnorton.com/COLLEGE/titles/english/nbcs/Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction to Rhetoric and the Writer](http://www.wwnorton.com/COLLEGE/titles/english/nbcs/Rescuing%20the%20Subject%20A%20Critical%20Introduction%20to%20Rhetoric%20and%20the%20Writer) (1989), *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing* (1998), and *Trust in Texts: A Different History of Rhetoric* (2007), which challenges the accepted idea of a singular, logic-driven rhetorical tradition, arguing that emotion and trust are central to the motives and effects of rhetoric. Miller's most acclaimed work, *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition* (1993), is the winner of the Modern Language Association's Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize, the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Outstanding Book Award, and the Teachers of Advanced Composition's W. Ross Winterowd Award: it examines the status of composition in English studies and offers a critique of the social practices and political agenda of the discipline that has been responsible for writing studies' institutional marginalization.

3. **Derek Owens, St. John's University.**

Professor Owens is Associate Professor of English and the Executive Director of the Institute for Writing Studies at St. John's University in New York City. He earned his bachelor's from SUNY-Geneseo and his master's and doctoral degrees from SUNY-Albany. While Owens has been at St. John's since 1994, he began his career in the Expository Writing Program at Harvard, and has worked in the Higher Education Opportunity Program at Siena College. In 2006 he created the Institute for Writing Studies, an independent and multifaceted writing program containing two writing centers, the first-year writing program, and the writing across the curriculum program. His teaching and research interests include composition pedagogy, writing program administration, eco-composition, and experimental writing. Owens' books include *Resisting Writings (and the Boundaries of Composition)* (1994) and *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation* (2001), which argues that, in light of worsening environmental crises and accelerating social injustices, we need to use sustainability as a way to structure courses and curricula, and that writing studies—given its inherent cross-disciplinarity and its unique function in students' academic lives—can play a key role in giving sustainability a central place in students' thinking and in the curriculum as a whole.

4. **John Ruskiewicz, University of Texas at Austin.**

Professor Ruskiewicz earned his M.A. and Ph.D. at the Ohio State University, and has been on the faculty of

the University of Texas at Austin since 1977, where he has taught rhetoric, Shakespeare and Renaissance literature. He has served two terms on the Texas Union Board of Directors, held the position of Director of the Division of Rhetoric and Composition from 2001-2005 and Associate Director from 1993-2001. In 1992, working with Dean Robert King, he wrote the initial document describing the mission and structure of the unit that has subsequently evolved into the Department of Rhetoric and Writing, one of the first independent departments of writing studies in the nation and home of the Graduate Program in Rhetoric and Writing, consistently ranked among the top three graduate programs in the field for more than fifteen years. In 1993, he created the Hairston Prize for Excellence in Teaching to honor Professor Maxine Hairston, one of the earliest advocates of a department dedicated exclusively to rhetoric and writing studies. Ruskiewicz is the author and co-author of numerous books on rhetoric and writing, including his newest textbook, *How to Write Anything*, which the Writing Initiative has adopted as its common handbook for 2009-2010.

5. **Victor Villanueva, Washington State University.**

Professor Villanueva is a Brooklyn-born Puerto Rican high school dropout who has gone on to be one of writing studies' leading scholars. Earning his Ph.D. from the University of Washington, Villanueva is Regents Professor of English at Washington State University. He has worked as an Equal Opportunity Program Director, Writing Project Director, Director of Composition, Director of American Studies, English Department Chair, and Associate Dean. The winner of two national awards for *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color* (1993), Villanueva has also co-edited numerous collections, including [Language Diversity in the Classroom](#) (2003) and *Latino/a Discourses: On Language, Identity, and Literacy Education* (2004). He is also the editor of *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* (2003), a mainstay in graduate seminars in writing studies. Villanueva's research concerns the interconnectedness among rhetoric (in its broadest sense), ideology, and racism, and their manifestations in literacy and literacy practices. To this end, his research takes him through classical and contemporary rhetoric, cultural studies, world-systems theory (as an approach to political economy), critical race theories, and writing studies (particularly contemporary composition theory). A dynamic writer and speaker, he has chaired the Conference on College Composition and Communication, won the Rhetorician of the Year Award, delivered over thirty-five keynote presentations, and been awarded the CCCC Exemplar Award.

## Appendix Five: How to Use *Binghamton Writes*

### An Introduction for Students and Faculty

If you are reading this introduction, you are probably taking or teaching one of the many Composition ("C") courses that help satisfy Binghamton University's General Education Requirement. The First-Year Writing program at Binghamton University designed this journal as a learning and teaching tool: the essays inside model strategies successful writers use to complete different assignments, including genres such as the personal essay, rhetorical analysis, and researched argument. While not all "C" courses use the same assignments, by carefully analyzing these essays, students will better recognize the range of rhetorical choices open to them as they engage in college-level writing. What's more, by helping students critique these essays, instructors will better emphasize our various and varying assignment guidelines, style expectations, and evaluation criteria. Through classroom discussions that focus not just on the content of a piece of writing, but also on its argument, structure, and style, students and teachers voice their assumptions about what makes writing good, and the campus community creates a stronger writing culture.

A useful way to use *Binghamton Writes* is to examine the essays and genres showcased carefully, asking questions and seeking clarification among students and teachers, friends and colleagues. How do successful writers begin and end personal essays? How about literary analyses or researched arguments? What kinds of evidence do writers use in each genre? How do they evoke emotion? Build credibility? Demonstrate logic? Should they use "I"? When and how do they cite sources? Do they always need a thesis statement? What makes for an artful sentence, a strong paragraph, a cohesive essay? By coming to terms with questions like these, and by naming what is effective and what is not, students recognize—and teachers reinforce—an important lesson: different genres and audiences call for different rhetorical choices.

But it is not enough to analyze the essays in *Binghamton Writes*: students and teachers must also examine writing composed in their own classrooms. Are the rhetorical choices represented in *Binghamton Writes* appropriate for your "C" course? What criteria separate "poor" and "mediocre" drafts-in-progress from "good" and "outstanding" final products? Given your assignment guidelines, what priorities should writers set for their next draft? Whether members of your classroom are revising independently, workshopping in peer groups, or performing evaluation sessions in full-class discussions, students and teachers should challenge writers to set revision goals specific to their rhetorical

contexts.

Finally, the editorial board challenges students and teachers to submit essays for the second edition of *Binghamton Writes*. Please send essays written during the 2008–2009 academic year to the Director of Composition, Kelly Kinney, [kkinney@binghamton.edu](mailto:kkinney@binghamton.edu), and the Assistant Director, Kristi Murray Costello, [kmurray1@binghamton.edu](mailto:kmurray1@binghamton.edu). Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis; the deadline is May 18, 2009. *Binghamton Writes* publishes writing in all genres of non-fiction.

Here's wishing you a semester filled with good writing.

## Notes

1. As we explore in more detail below, in addition to being the home of First-Year Writing, the Writing Initiative also houses the Writing Center and the English as a Second Language Program. ([Return to text.](#))
2. See [Binghamton University's "About" website](#). ([Return to text.](#))
3. As Director and Assistant Director of First-Year Writing, our work is focused on teaching assistant preparation in the Writing Initiative, not faculty development across the entire campus. Given our respective ranks as tenure-track assistant professor and PhD student, the scope of our administrative responsibilities is appropriately limited. ([Return to text.](#))
4. We wish to note that the past WAC Director, who remains on the faculty at Binghamton, also remains supportive of WAC and other campus writing efforts, including FYW. That said, the institution has not moved to hire a new WAC Director, and thus there is a large hole in the WAC infrastructure. ([Return to text.](#))
5. The term "Initiative" was chosen as the unit's initial name—rather than "Program" or "Department"—because Binghamton's faculty governance bodies have not yet authorized our status as an official academic unit. Currently, we are moving to seek program status as we expand our undergraduate course offerings beyond first-year writing. Should we receive the institutional support to grow a graduate program and/or an undergraduate major, we may seek department status. ([Return to text.](#))
6. There are at least two practical reasons we have not moved quickly toward a first-year writing requirement, and a third theoretical one. The first is that Binghamton University has a long tradition of honoring student choice and thus *not* requiring courses: we knew that, appropriately, our student body would ruffle should the requirement be mandated without careful planning and consultation. The second reason, again (see footnote above), is that there are lengthy campus governing procedures that must be followed prior to establishing a requirement: while we were eager to offer first-year writing, we were also keenly aware that governance bodies would be hesitant to embrace a requirement without extensive data to support its value. In order to make the best case for First-Year Writing, we need time to collect this data, as well as to consider the pros and cons of establishing a requirement. This leads us to our third reason for moving cautiously: as scholars sympathetic to Crowley's abolitionist argument, we feel no need to rush. We have chosen to work slowly and with discipline in order to gauge the degree to which students enrolling in First-Year Writing value our courses and succeed beyond them. With just a year under our belts, we are happy to report that the vast majority of first-year students *elect* to take Writing 111 and that our assessment measures suggest that they find the course valuable. We see these as strong indicators that our courses are successful—and that a requirement may not be our only option for improving student writing. ([Return to text.](#))
7. As the Writing 111 syllabus notes (see Appendix Two), our portfolio evaluation system is modeled after one fine tuned at Grand Valley State University. ([Return to text.](#))
8. We wish to acknowledge one of Kinney's former colleagues at the University of Notre Dame, Connie Mick, whose writing center and writing program acumen helped inspire Writing 100. ([Return to text.](#))
9. As we expand our course offerings, we plan to diversify our instructor base to include graduate students from departments across campus *and* grow a critical mass of specialists committed to the teaching of writing; in our mind, a crucial step in this process will be the development of a graduate program in writing studies. ([Return to text.](#))
10. Note that Binghamton schools of Management, Nursing, Education, and Engineering have different composition and writing requirements. Many of the students enrolled in these schools, nonetheless, enroll in Harpur College C and W courses. ([Return to text.](#))
11. In Gay and Tricomi, also labeled Writing Enriched (WE). ([Return to text.](#))

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