

A Changing Profession Changing a Discipline: Junior Faculty and the Undergraduate Major



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Abstract: This essay explores some of the challenges for the discipline of rhetoric and composition implied by the growth in undergraduate writing majors. Through six narratives from junior faculty at five different institutions, this work explores the ways in which these new faculty were, or were not, prepared for the challenges of developing and implementing new writing majors. Finally, the authors discuss ways in which those who are currently working in undergraduate degree programs can help to provide the intellectual and scholarly materials necessary for graduate programs to more thoroughly and specifically prepare future faculty for their work on undergraduate majors.

The following collection of short narratives is the result of a rather unique collaboration that began with an innocent rhetorical question in a search committee meeting and culminated in the gathering of narratives from junior faculty from five different institutions in an effort to answer it. The question that sparked this project related to whether or not the prospect of working in an undergraduate degree program in writing and rhetoric would be an important selling point to a potential job candidate fresh out of a Ph.D. program. Although the answer might seem obvious, the following narratives suggest that the opportunity to work in an undergraduate degree program or to participate in or lead the development of such a program as a junior faculty member is more complicated than the question suggests. What follows, then, are stories that provide all of us who have an interest in the growth of undergraduate degree programs with a better understanding of what is happening and what these disciplinary changes might mean for the material, intellectual, and professional conditions of our discipline, as well as for how we prepare future faculty for working in those conditions.

While each of these narratives suggests in its own unique way that changes in graduate education are necessary to better prepare new graduates for the challenging professional circumstances that undergraduate degree programs represent, they do not tell the whole story. First, it must be acknowledged that each individual story is one of success despite less than ideal circumstances. In that sense, it is reasonable to assume that these authors were indeed prepared well for the work of developing and working in an undergraduate degree program. However, the fact that these narratives indicate individual success does not necessarily mean that the individuals and the programs they helped to develop and run would not have been more successful had they received more direct theoretical and practical graduate instruction in undergraduate degree program development and administration. But this obvious observation oversimplifies a rather complex and not quickly resolved problem.

Scholars examining the efficacy of doctoral training in rhetoric and composition have long bemoaned the lack of professional preparation future faculty receive: from Scott L. Miller, et al.'s challenge for doctoral programs to "take more accountability for educating" doctoral students about the challenges of the job market (403) to Richard E. Miller's chilling observation that "the bureaucratic nature of academic work is always news to a workforce that has been lured by the promise of academic freedom and the unbounded pleasures of the mind" (209). In regards to writing program administration in particular, Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser point out that, historically, new faculty have learned to administer writing programs "via on-the-job training, or, if they have been lucky, through some exposure to administration through graduate assistantships" (161). Rose and Weiser suggest that the very "future of graduate education in Rhetoric and Composition" requires a more formalized and purposeful approach to preparing future administrators, an approach to professionalization that they believe "both complements and supplements other more conventional graduate education in our field" (162).

In response, graduate faculty responsible for training future Writing Program Administrators have taken a particular interest in graduate student professionalization, providing graduate courses in the administration of first-year composition programs as well as increasing opportunities for graduate assistantships in FYC program administration. As the discipline of rhetoric and composition continues to change and evolve, however, so must these efforts to professionalize graduate students to prepare them for emerging disciplinary realities. With the increasing popularity of undergraduate degrees in writing and the need for faculty who can develop and administer these new programs, the problems identified by Rose and Weiser and others (see Peirce and Enos; Taylor and Holberg; Mountford; Phelps; Miller, Thomas P.) concerning the disparity between graduate student preparation and academic workplace realities may only become greater and more complex in the decades to come. Indeed, despite their own successes

with program development, many of the authors of this article admit that their graduate training did not fully prepare them for the various imaginative, rhetorical, theoretical, and bureaucratic challenges that accompany the creation of new majors in this field. For example, in her narrative, Jennifer Clary-Lemon suggests that she “suffered from a dearth of information and preparation about writing majors.” While this may be the case for each of us who tell our stories here, graduate programs would also be hard pressed and underprepared to provide preparation for this sort of work, as there is only scant intellectual and scholarly material available on the topic of undergraduate degree program development.

Research examining the undergraduate major has not been able to keep pace with the rapid, and even unexpected, growth of these degrees; nevertheless, some impressive moves have already been made to articulate and theorize the challenges that accompany undergraduate degrees for both our field and our departments. CCCC has formed the Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition, which is charged with identifying undergraduate degree programs around the country, describing the prototypic majors and methods used to develop them, tracking graduates, and reporting their findings (“Committee”). Brad Lucas points out below that a special edition of *Composition Studies* was dedicated specifically to the topic of undergraduate degree programs, and a forthcoming collection from Utah State University Press titled *What are We Becoming?: Developments in Undergraduate Writing Majors* will examine disciplinary and interdisciplinary issues related to the major and analyze various curricular approaches and possible future directions for these new degrees. There have been a few additional important contributions to the discussion over the last few years as well, such as Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle’s CCCarticle, “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning ‘First-Year Composition’ as ‘Introduction to Writing Studies.’” These contributions represent a strong beginning to a necessary and important disciplinary conversation, but they certainly are only the beginning.

The expansion of writing majors has the potential to alter dramatically the landscape of our discipline; thus, the narratives below are offered as an invitation to a national conversation about how undergraduate degree programs will and are changing the discipline and how we might more systematically engage those changes. They offer a point of entry into a conversation that we hope will establish the shared purposes of undergraduate degrees in writing, the theories that shape these programs, and the benchmarks, practices, and methods for assessing our majors. This conversation must begin, we believe, among undergraduate faculty currently developing or implementing majors around the country. If we expect to provide a shared vision for the major, those of us working in and developing such programs must provide the intellectual and scholarly materials necessary to shape that vision, and graduate faculty must be prepared to adapt their curriculum to prepare future faculty to face the new challenges ahead.

As we consider the following individual success stories, we should also pay close attention to the underlying, collective narrative they are voicing—one that is only beginning, but one that needs to take place. This silent narrative implies that changes are needed not only on the graduate level: broad changes to our collective disciplinary identity are necessary as the field expands on its work with first-year students and graduate students to address the challenges of preparing undergraduates for careers in a variety of writing fields. To harness the potential of this transformative moment in our disciplinary development, we simply must continue and expand the discussions begun in forums like this one.

Greg Giberson, Oakland University

During the early part of the 2007-08 academic year, which was the beginning of my second year at Oakland, I was asked to co-chair a search committee to hire an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric. During that time period, the Rhetoric program was undergoing some dramatic changes. First, the program was being removed from a combined department of Rhetoric, Communication and Journalism to be reformed into a department of Writing and Rhetoric. Second, the program had been working on a proposal for a major and minor in Writing and Rhetoric that had been slowly making its way through governance (it has since been approved by the Board of Trustees and began accepting new majors in the fall of 2008).

During a department meeting in October when we were discussing the tenure track line just approved for us by our dean, a colleague asked what seemed to be a rhetorical question with a very obvious answer. As we collectively discussed what might be included in the job ad, a colleague asked, “Shouldn’t we at least mention our proposed major? Won’t the possibility of developing and working in an undergraduate major program be a big selling point to potential candidates?”

At the time, we all seemed to agree that the answer was obviously “yes.” But when I left that meeting and thought about it some more, that obvious “yes” got a bit more complicated. As I thought about my first time on the job

market, interviewing at MLA and eventually on campus, and my subsequent experiences when I was hired by a department that actually had an established major in Rhetoric and Writing, the answer to the question became even more complex. Ultimately, my two years spent in that first job were very positive, but the interview process and my first year working in the major program were quite difficult.

The experience wasn't difficult because I was confused by the *general concept* of an undergraduate major. However, I recognized pretty quickly that I wasn't prepared to discuss the undergraduate major with any specificity. The notion of an upper-level program was one I had not studied or been asked to contemplate as a doctoral student. Indeed when I arrived for the on-campus interview and was asked questions about the major track, I was comfortable talking about courses I might teach, but beyond that I had little to offer. On the other hand, I had no problem talking about their first-year program. I had a good deal of experience conceptualizing and working with and within the structures of such a program. Luckily, the primary responsibilities for that job were to direct the writing program and mentor TAs in first-year writing, which is probably why I got the job. But I was also expected to teach in the major, which, over time, became more interesting to me for pedagogical as well as intellectual and scholarly reasons.

During my first year on the job, the three rhetoric and composition faculty initiated a re-creation of the undergraduate degree program. Sure enough, I found myself ill prepared to engage in the broader discussions of what the program should look like, what classes might be appropriate, and what students should be prepared to do upon graduating from such a program. Luckily, my two rhet/comp colleagues were very accommodating and taught me the ins and outs of program development from conceptualization to negotiation both within and outside the department, as well as the process of governance in the university.

After a couple of years developing and teaching in the undergraduate writing major at my first job, I interviewed for my current job at Oakland, where one of the selling points for me was the proposed major. Those two years of "on the job training" made me much more comfortable talking about the various aspects of developing such a program. I was able to discuss their proposal and offer my thoughts on program development and the theoretical and intellectual structures that should inform such programs, as well as the nuts and bolts of preparing a proposal for an external audience. The point is, however, that it took "on the job training" before an undergraduate degree program became a selling point for me as a job candidate. So, for me the answer to my colleague's question was an obvious "yes, I would very much like to continue working in an undergraduate degree program," for my second time on the market. The first time around, though, before I had "training" in working in such a program, the answer was a pretty obvious "no, the opportunity of working in an undergraduate degree program was not a selling point." Indeed, it made me uneasy during the interviewing process, though in the end it did not deter me from pursuing the position.

Jennifer Courtney, Rowan University

Lately, in working on this collaboration and in reflecting on writing studies more generally, I have been thinking about the notion of academic specialization. My training as a graduate student followed a fairly typical trajectory for faculty in rhetoric and composition. I majored in English as an undergraduate, then earned a Master's degree in English Literature and a Ph.D. in English on a Rhetoric/Composition track. Like many graduate students, I was eager to specialize. For me, that meant focusing on R/C and developing a concentration in Writing Program Administration. I envisioned myself working as a first-year writing program director, a TA mentor and practicum coordinator, and composition instructor. Other graduate students in my cohort opted to focus on areas such as Digital Writing, Cultural Studies, or Linguistics. Areas of specialization certainly drive hiring decisions, curriculum, and research trends; however, these tidy categories of knowledge that I used to structure my graduate studies and my earlier professional identity got a lot messier, and much more interesting, the more I considered my goals and responsibilities in a stand-alone writing program.

When I began my job in 2004 in Rowan's Writing Arts department, I was very excited to join a stand-alone writing program, which soon became a major. At the time, I largely understood my professional identity as grounded in rhetoric and composition, with some background in literature that I could call upon if absolutely necessary. During my first year in the department, I taught first-year composition, as well as a project-based writing course for sophomore-level engineers, and our capstone course for Writing Arts students, "Evaluating Writing." Despite the inevitable learning curve (new students, new support services, new colleagues), I was largely comfortable teaching my courses; I did, however, struggle mightily to get my head around the fact that I was working in a "writing" department—not a rhetoric and composition department, and certainly not an English department.

My colleagues are from a variety of disciplines—English, rhetoric and composition, drama, creative writing, education, and computers and writing. The faculty backgrounds actually reflect—though they do not necessarily

shape—the learning outcomes we expect of our students. We expect our students to graduate from our programs—both the BA and the MA—familiar with a wide range of genres, rhetorical strategies, and issues in writing. And we see reading as fundamental—not just the reading of texts from a well-established canon but a mix of academic, popular, trade, electronic, historical, and student-authored texts. As a department, we cut “across” disciplines, rather than embody one, offering courses in “Writing Children’s Stories,” “Technical Writing,” “Writing the Memoir,” and “Tutoring Writing.” We do a good job, I think, at modeling the rich and interdisciplinary nature of writing through our publications, courses, and interactions. At first, though, I really had trouble seeing how this range of courses, and this non-traditional mix of faculty backgrounds, and this inclusive and far-reaching definition of writing fit together into a cohesive major or discipline. It all just seemed too *big*, too *much*, too hard to *categorize*.

After working extensively on curriculum-oriented committees and getting to know my colleagues, I began slowly to reconceptualize my understanding of what a writing department can be, and what mine in particular is. It is not rhetoric and composition; it is not creative writing; it is not professional writing; it is not literature; it is not literacy studies. It is, in fact, all of those things, and more. Several realizations, typically during startling 4:00 a.m. epiphanies, led me to conclude that if I were to be successful in this department, and if I were to serve our students fully and make the most of the opportunity to work in an established stand-alone department, I needed to rethink my core beliefs about specialization. Specifically, I needed to stop seeing myself as a “rhet/comp person,” different from and even in opposition to “creative writing people” and “lit people.” Instead, to teach my courses well, I needed to be conversant in composition theory, technical writing, assessment, contemporary literature, rhetorical history, popular culture and current events, WAC, basic theories of education, literacy development, and engineering education. In other words, while I certainly have my own set of “recognized” or “documented” expertise—listed, for example, on our department website or my CV—I now habitually see connections between these related but separate specializations that would have been unfathomable to me without the experiences gleaned in the program, from conversations with students, and from working with colleagues who believe that students can learn about writing, practice writing, and appreciate writing in a rigorous academic setting. And, just as important, I feel responsible for making such connections explicit to my students and modeling for them the intellectual and creative flexibility that our program and, indeed, our discipline of writing afford.

This has not been easy for me. A primary site for teaching and modeling this kind of intellectual breadth is our newest course, “Introduction to Writing Arts,” which I teach with two other instructors. Delivered in module format, the course enables each one of us to speak from our own expertise, but also necessitates that we have ongoing discussions among ourselves and our colleagues about what writing studies is, what it encompasses, and what its future is. This approach to disciplinarity does not allow for pedagogical “stillness” or rest. It has pushed me to take risks in my teaching for which I have little precedent. Largely I have been successful, but not always.

So, what is the take-away? As I see it, working in a writing department with an undergraduate major offers stunning opportunities for considering and transforming disciplinarity. That said, it is work that can be difficult to prepare for using specialized niches typically linked with English graduate education. Puzzling through the intellectual problems associated with writing studies is always interesting, sometimes risky, and, at times, astonishingly exhilarating. Although there are obvious difficulties facing graduate programs interested in preparing students for such work, given the growth of such programs, it seems important that we begin to reconsider graduate curriculum as the professional and intellectual circumstances of the discipline continue to change.

Kelly Kinney, SUNY-Binghamton

As I piece together my experiences working in different academic units that house various levels of study in rhetoric and composition, it occurs to me that the status of our work has as much to do with our institutional location—that is, the academic unit *where* we teach—as it does with *who* teaches and *what* is taught. Because most of us are trained in departments where rhetoric and composition is a sub-discipline at best, but a general education service requirement more frequently, we don’t have a solid perspective on what it means to be housed in a department that has an undergraduate major in writing studies. Sure, we may be trained in a department of English, let’s say, and this department may have a thriving graduate program in rhetoric and composition and a strong undergraduate literature major, but what is it like to join a department with an undergraduate major in writing? What is it like to join a freestanding composition program without a major? What is it like to join a department with several different undergraduate concentrations (say, in literature, creative writing, and rhetoric)? Further, how does institutional location shape a department’s work environment? Finding answers to such questions may help junior faculty create reasonable expectations for their first job experience. As my experiences working in a variety of institutional contexts comes to bear, specialists in writing studies gain academic authority—and their pedagogical initiatives garner more institutional resources—when they join departments that offer undergraduate majors in writing.

When I left my graduate program (housed in a department of English) to accept a pre-doctoral composition fellowship, I was eager to join a groundbreaking independent department of writing at a teaching-intensive university. When I left that position to help direct a first-year writing program, I was excited to be working at an elite, private institution. Now that I have joined a department of English with undergraduate concentrations in literature, creative writing, and rhetoric at a public research university, I can better recognize the advantages of working within a unit that houses an undergraduate concentration in writing studies.

In the fall of 2001, I took a full-time, non-tenure-track fellowship position in the Department of Writing at Grand Valley State University, a regional institution of roughly 20,000 students. A newly formed academic unit that had just broken ties with English, the Department of Writing offered an undergraduate major in writing, with tracks in academic, professional, and creative writing. It also offered me the opportunity to see what a state-of-the-art first-year composition program can look like when it is staffed with a diversity of specialists in writing studies, including a dozen tenure-track writing faculty, several full-time composition fellows in writing studies, and a large group of experienced, credentialed full-time instructors. As Grand Valley's Dan Royer and Roger Gilles describe in their contribution to *Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies*, what a department with a writing major creates is a teaching culture that sees first-year composition as a central part of the departmental mission, rather than an urban "ghetto" connected to—but utterly different from—the "thriving suburban literary landscape" (28). When writing specialists are valued on a campus for their contributions to "general-education *and* majors courses, both lower and upper-division" (29, emphasis mine), writing studies "can finally begin to see itself once again within the context of the liberal arts most generally—rather than as a 'basic skill' relegated to preliberal education. It can now exist *alongside* other parts of the liberal-arts whole, rather than beneath them, servicing them, holding them up" (36, emphasis in original).

Given my positive experiences at Grand Valley, when my fellowship drew to a close, I pursued positions in a range of academic units and institutions, and I eagerly accepted a writing program administrator position in the University Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame, an independent first-year composition program structurally autonomous from English. As would soon become clear, however, the view from an independent program was less satisfying than the view from an independent department.

Indeed, working in a program—even one under the Golden Dome—did not afford the academic status I had become accustomed to in a department. Because the program functioned exclusively as a service unit—that is, offering only first-year composition courses—it lacked the academic cachet associated with an undergraduate major (not to mention a graduate program). What's more, because of the program's subordinate position in the institutional hierarchy, it garnered less financial support from the university, which resulted in few full-time and ladder faculty lines, and—at least from my perspective—a less than satisfying work environment.

A crucial reason the work environment in the program suffered was that it relied almost exclusively on inexperienced graduate students, many of whom were unhappy about teaching composition in the first place. During my time at Notre Dame, graduate student instructors supported more than ninety percent of the program's courses, the vast majority coming from the Department of English, and most teaching composition for only one year—hardly enough time to feel comfortable in the writing classroom, let alone to develop a modicum of pedagogical proficiency. While many of these graduate instructors were enthusiastic about and good at teaching writing, many others were not, no doubt influenced by the negative attitudes regarding composition held by their faculty advisors. Similar to the literature faculty described in John Schilb's "The WPA and the Politics of CompLit," many graduate student instructors were being mentored by literature faculty who "doubt[ed] composition's intellectual worth" (166). Graduate students often perpetuated this attitude, which not only hurt their collective morale, but also negatively affected the quality of work life for the full-time faculty committed to composition. Had the program been a part of a department that valued writing as a full-fledged intellectual pursuit—not merely a service course—attitudes no doubt would have been different.

In retrospect, it seems clear that frustrations with my work environment were a large part of what prompted me to go back on the job market. My current position as Director of Composition and Assistant Professor in the Department of English, General Literature and Rhetoric at the State University of New York at Binghamton has afforded me a department home that offers an undergraduate concentration in rhetoric *and* allows me to continue to expand my administrative experience. Of course, because I hold the title of Director of Composition, I am still highly tied to a "service" identity. Even so, I think it is fair to say that a chief reason I was offered the position was that I was prepared *not only* to discuss my vision for first-year composition, *but also* for the undergraduate concentration in rhetoric. In preparation for the campus interview, I carefully studied SUNY-Binghamton's course catalogue and requirements, fashioning dream courses that I hoped would be valued within the department culture. Having a range of course descriptions at the ready, including "Politics and the Rhetorical Tradition," "Working Class Rhetorics in American Poetry and Song," and "Radical Women Rhetors," I highlighted how my intellectual interests fit within a

department that is home to scholars with a variety of intellectual interests, crafting talking points that would allow me to showcase my expertise in rhetoric and composition, as well as my appreciation for literature, creative writing, and critical theory.

But while my work life at SUNY-Binghamton has been highly satisfying, as a member of a department that bases its scholarly identity in literature first, creative writing second, and rhetoric a distant third, the rhetoric faculty and the first-year composition program struggle for departmental resources: there are less than a handful of ladder faculty in our department who focus on rhetoric or writing studies; we have one full-time lecturer who teaches the bulk of the undergraduate rhetoric courses; and we have a legion of overworked graduate students who teach the vast majority of composition sections. Plus, because of the course release I garner because of my administrative responsibilities, I have virtually no connection to the undergraduate concentration in rhetoric. To make matters even more complicated, given a predicted hiring freeze, an onslaught of faculty retirements, and the responsibility of supporting the largest undergraduate major on campus, the department is debating whether to scale back or eliminate the rhetoric concentration altogether, and the university is considering moving composition to an independent department. Of course, institutionally savvy English faculty are arguing to keep composition, aware that our “graduate assistantships depend on the writing program’s need for labor, [and that] the department benefits materially from the horde of students who take first-year composition” (Schilb 170). In the fight for scarce resources, I suspect that the undergraduate rhetoric concentration and first-year composition will continue to lose out, at least while contained in a department that “continues to privilege literature, at composition’s expense” (Schilb 168).

So, while the future institutional location of both the undergraduate concentration in rhetoric and first-year composition is uncertain at SUNY-Binghamton, my experiences working in an independent writing department, a free-standing writing program, and a department with an undergraduate concentration in rhetoric make a few things clear: an undergraduate major brings an academic unit resources, helps build a critical mass of writing specialists who can support general education alongside an academic major, and in turn affords writing studies and writing scholars the respect of the academic community. As junior faculty weigh their options on the job market, we’d be smart to keep these realities in mind.

Brad Lucas, Texas Christian University

I went on the job market in 2002 with a completed dissertation and administrative-support experience, responding to ads ranging from teaching-only positions at small liberal-arts colleges to WPA positions at research-intensive state universities. Ultimately, I took a position at Texas Christian University, a private and secular university that felt like a liberal arts college, yet had a long-standing doctoral program in rhetoric and composition.

It was clearly a time of faculty and administrative turnover at TCU. That same year, the English department hired a new chair through an external search; at the university level, a new chancellor took office, and the following year, a new provost was in place.

With my hire, there were six faculty members in rhetoric and composition, who referred to themselves, informally, as “the Cadre.” Even though the literature faculty dominated the department roughly three-to-one, the department seemed to be run exclusively by the Cadre. (Fortunately, the lines between literature and rhetoric and composition are fairly friendly ones, and the distinctions serve merely for curricular interests.) The chair who hired me was a rhetoric scholar, who then served as interim Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) the following year. Another rhetoric scholar was Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), and we had a seasoned compositionist who served as Writing Program Administrator (WPA).

As fresh Ph.D.s are usually warned, the vacuum of administrative work pulls young scholars and teachers away from their careers before they begin, yet the naturalized business of the hiring process now suggests that hiring motivations are, in part, fueled by “voids” that must be filled. Job candidates in rhetoric and composition will almost certainly face questions about their willingness to take on administrative responsibilities, usually with the caveat that it is an “eventual” need, happening “later” in their departmental life. Of course, by the time that I went on the market, the managerial trajectories of writing program work had been well articulated. However, in my new job, I was comforted by the fact that I was the newest of three junior faculty in the field, and I expected that the eventuality of my administrative life would, indeed, come later.

The two other junior faculty in the Cadre arrived two years before me, yet at the end of my second year I was strongly encouraged by the new Chair—a literature scholar—to take over as the next WPA, even though I was four years away from tenure and already exhausted from completing a book (amidst an onslaught of personal stressors: I got married and became a step-parent, underwent spinal surgery, managed my father’s death, and was pulled

through several lawsuits). Although I felt prepared to do WPA work, I demurred to my Chair's offer, hoping that I could first regain a steady footing, both professionally and personally, before taking on an administrative commitment.

Throughout those first two years, the department and its new Chair moved slowly, getting to know one another, struggling with plans for the future, and toying with ideas of expanding the curriculum to include creative writing, reviving a moribund WAC program, and offering a wide range of other initiatives that held promise but had trouble getting traction. By the end of my third year, a soon-to-be-tenured Cadre member agreed to take the WPA position, but my other Cadre colleague elected not to renew her term as DUS.

With my book in press and a better sense of balance in my life, I approached my Chair about serving as DUS. He initially wanted to create a shared administrative position in which I would co-direct undergraduate studies with a literature colleague, but I was already spread thin with collaborative workloads (at the time, I held co-editing positions for two journals, a co-directorship of a new media lab, and a co-directorship of a fledgling archive). With some reluctance, he appointed me as the sole DUS, and I initially hoped simply to maintain operations and perhaps increase the number of rhetoric and composition courses our English majors would take, from 3 hours to 6 hours.

But new thinking about the future of a major in rhetoric and composition was circulating and, with some archival research about my departmental history, I was compelled to take on a greater challenge. As one of the editors of *Composition Studies*, I had the pleasure of working with a guest editing team from Eastern Michigan University who developed a special issue on "The Writing Major," and after a few months of surveying the nationwide emergence of new programs, I decided that my one goal for my three-year stint as DUS would be to establish a Writing Major and a Writing Minor at TCU. I knew that it was a long shot, but I figured that even a failed attempt would make it clear to me, and my colleagues, how writing was viewed and valued in my department.

Of course, with a program that had housed the likes of Gary Tate, Win Homer, and Jim Corder (to name a few), the undergraduate curriculum in previous years had reflected the department's interest in writing, but the concrete evidence of this curricular history was rarely part of departmental debate. Information about enrollments, course scheduling, and curriculum often relied on the collective memory of the faculty. Like archivists studying nineteenth-century composition practices, I quickly realized that studying university catalogs would serve as scaffolding with which to construct a history that made sense to me. That work, along with a synthesis of various—and scattered metrics—about enrollments and course assignments, gave me a sense of how the department's curricular life had unfolded in the years before I arrived.

During my first year, the new Chair had suggested that the department could offer a writing certificate, so some information was collected from institutions that offered such add-on programs, but nothing came of it. Interestingly, without Cadre input, the Chair later established a WAC based peer-consultant program independent of the English department, and we heard rumors of the Dean's interest in developing a campus-wide writing institute or "center," but nothing concrete was ever presented to the department. There had been many times when Cadre discussions would give rise to the possibility of a major in rhetoric and composition, but more pressing matters always took us away from developing any concrete plans. As I understood the departmental history, English majors at one time could declare "tracks" within the curriculum and focus on writing as one track, but the track system was phased out because, as some colleagues said, "advising was difficult" and "there wasn't enough faculty to support it" after rhetoric and composition faculty had left or retired. When I started as DUS, though, a few things were clear: there was now a healthy array of courses in rhetoric and composition, and with six full-time faculty members in the discipline, there were more than enough people to support a major.

I got to work during the first month of the fall 2006 semester, and the new programs were approved by spring 2007. I'm still not sure if it was the result of good arguments, dumb luck, divine intervention, or some other set of factors, but it certainly was risky, and I certainly wasn't prepared for the machinery that I had set into motion. The department had been reviewed the year before by a prominent Ivy League scholar in English Studies, who suggested, among other things, that the department offer a minor in writing. We began the fall semester with departmental discussions of this review, and the Chair said that he would like to explore a minor or a writing certificate, but I told him that I wanted to fight for a major and a minor. Fortunately, he neither pushed me into the fight nor prevented me from getting into it—I had the option to take a road of moderation, and I instead took a path of greater resistance.

The process of formulating a proposal was fairly simple, in the sense that we needed to offer a complementary major that would not undermine or threaten the existing major in English. The message was simple: we add another major that the Department of English supports, the courses in the new Writing Major are still labeled "English," yet the name of the degree—and the ethos behind it—is more aligned with a view of writing that extends beyond the merely literary. Because it would take little in the way of additional resources, we argued, it would be worthwhile if only a

dozen writing majors emerged. There were some contentious departmental meetings, some uncomfortable meetings of the undergraduate studies committee, and a few collegial relationships that were strained in the process, but enough of the faculty supported the proposal to endorse it in time for it to appear in the 2007-2008 university catalog.

The details of the entire process are beyond the scope of this discussion, but in hindsight, it is clear that a few variables played, and continue to play, a vital role. First, like so many things, support from the Chair and the upper administration is crucial, yet junior faculty are rarely privy to the conversations at those higher levels. Second, proposing and sustaining a new major requires collaborative buy-in: without the input of the Cadre and their continued support, the arguments presented to the entire faculty would not have been nearly as effective. Third, a careful historical study of the course catalogs, enrollment figures, and reasons for the ebb and flow of interest in writing is a prerequisite for entering such work.

Jennifer Clary-Lemon, University of Winnipeg

When I hit the job market, I had tons of advice given to me by mentors and advisors in my back pocket—"Don't agree to do WPA work in your first year" (even though we offered a graduate-level course on WPA work); "Don't take a full-time job at a community college; it will kill your chances of ever getting a tenure-track gig" (even though they paid the highest starting salary of any institution in the state where I received my Ph.D.); "Research I is the obvious choice" (even though it seemed to be giving people heart attacks). I am now in my second year at a four-year undergraduate institution, having tried hard to do right by the many that were looking out for me.

And yet what I found compelling enough to be here wasn't given so much as a mention by those experts—which only became a problem once I got the job, having answered the call to be a part of "an exciting new Major in Rhetoric and Communications." Once I got here, I realized that I suffered from a dearth of information and preparation about writing majors—who offered them, what was taught in them, and how they related to other programs, departments, and our field as a whole. So while I could rattle off a host of the political ramifications of taking on WPA work before tenure, or how one keeps track of 44 sections of FYC, or how to talk pedagogical FYC shop, or how to structure a graduate seminar, or how to get as many publications under your belt before you have to give your tenure file a go—I couldn't say *exactly* what advice I had been given in graduate school about teaching and designing curriculum in an undergraduate major (or indeed, why I found the prospect so exciting).

Now, this is not the fault of those who wished me well. I think that the writing major is so new that we don't, as of yet, have a lot of advice compiled (right or wrong) about it. What I do wish someone would have told me—and I suppose it wouldn't matter here if we still espoused the "here's your textbook—now go teach" approach—is that there is a big difference between what I was taught in graduate school about *what* and *how* to teach, and what I have learned by doing (or trying to do) in an institution with an undergraduate major. Teaching majors *is* gratifying, and so far, has certainly merited the "exciting" label posted on the job ad that got me here. Still, once transplanted, I was faced with three immediate facts that have since left me unsettled about our current practices of teacher-scholar preparation:

1. Although I had gone through a year-and-three-month TA training course and taught at least ten sections of FYC in my grad program, I had never taught a course that had its own stand-alone content.
2. Although I had taught six sections of upper-level writing courses in that same program (reflective writing, professional writing, persuasive writing), all courses reflected a "writing as universal skills approach," in which students "learned writing" by reading content from a variety of areas—reflective essays, professional documents, or public speeches.
3. Although I was well-versed on the history of rhetoric, the history of composition, rhetorical theory, composition theory, critical theory, feminist theory, cultural studies, and writing research, I had no idea how to construct an undergraduate course that would engage and pass on to students this kind of material. Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle argue that we can make the first-year course one that reflects "writing studies. . . [as] a discipline with content knowledge," one that could pave the introductory way for majors in writing studies (554). While this could stem the "misdirection" (554) of FYC, I'm not sure that it could remedy the larger problems of getting graduate faculty in rhetoric and composition to prepare their students for a career with a different face on it from the one we all know. We champion the state of new undergraduate majors (and often with them, independent programs), but we have yet to acknowledge that, at some point, it has become difficult for us to practice what we *teach* at the graduate and undergraduate level, beyond the bounds of FYC. The whole system, as-is, is set up to honor what we know of writing pedagogy and rhetorical theory, but only so much as it propagates a new generation of graduate faculty and WPA work (and with that, a continuing

system of the problematic constraints of FYC).

There are other issues at stake here as well. In making a case for considering the ecology and sustainability of post-secondary writing instruction, and specifically of writing majors, Tony Scott asserts that it is imperative that we ground the content of what we do in material practices, stressing the historical interconnectedness of “scholarly conceptions of literacy and institutionally-situated praxis” (83). If we are, as Scott hopes, to “achieve a deeper understanding that what we do in writing classrooms is profoundly shaped by the institutional means by which it is done” (82), then we must begin to not only teach our graduate students about what to do with majors on Monday morning, but we also must begin to draw their critical attention to the site of the major as a place of perceived disciplinary stability—and teach them how to do the same with their own students. Our attention should be turned to who is creating what major, why, and to what end. We should be establishing, with our graduate students, the boundaries of core curricula in a writing major—and deciding when and if it is appropriate for those boundaries to shift. Perhaps the most important questions we should be asking of our graduate students, and of ourselves, are these: Are we putting forward the undergraduate major as a new site of action but also, simply, a saleable product—without considering its impact on our material conditions, institutional direction, graduate study, or teacher preparation? If we move toward our end goal without considering how and why we’re getting there, will we, as Scott predicts, only be engaging in business as usual?

It is true that those scholars teaching graduate courses in rhetoric or writing probably received little instruction on how to do so, and we’ve somehow all made out all right. And it seems that we are at the cusp of something very exciting with the formation of so many sites that engage what we love most; it’s nearly impossible to *want* to tug at our own reins. Yet reflective practice is still at the heart of what we do, and remedying this disconnect between what we say we do and what we actually do (and why we do what we do at all) should be a tonic of the highest order. Creating (or being trained to create) a sound and valuable writing program does not necessarily translate into the skill to invent curricula for an undergraduate major. Training graduate students in process or post-process pedagogy, or rhetorical theory and criticism, does not prepare them to explain that pedagogy or critique to undergraduate students of their own. Importantly, neither of these models train graduate students to question the very *content* of what they learn, so that they may make curricular decisions that have some transformative potential on the material conditions of those who labor here (and in literacy work as a whole). It would have helped, immensely, if I had had more of that kind of explicit instruction in grad school, and if I had had someone explain to me that as we create and maintain the idea of the writing major, we are paving a different path for ourselves—which means that we truly need a different set of tools.

Lori Ostergaard, Oakland University

I began working at Oakland University (OU) in the fall of 2006, fresh out of graduate school at Illinois State University (ISU). As Greg Giberson suggests in his introduction, the proposal for a major in writing and rhetoric was not what initially attracted me to OU. My primary motivation for accepting the job was the program’s commitment to first-year writing, which I saw reflected in the fact that all of the full-time faculty teach in the first-year writing sequence every year. In fact, for most of my first year and a half settling in at OU, I thought little about our proposal for a major in writing or about what teaching in an undergraduate degree program might mean.

All of that changed in mid-December 2007 when Greg, Marshall Kitchens, and I were asked to revise the proposal for our writing major so it could be read at the first meeting of our college’s Committee on Instruction (COI) the following semester. During the four months of seemingly endless committee meetings and revisions that followed, I reflected back on my graduate education and the ways I had been prepared for this type of undergraduate program-building. As a student in ISU’s integrated English Studies program, I was constantly challenged to read the discipline skeptically, to analyze even the most mundane assumptions of the field of English, and to imagine things differently. But in many ways, I now see my graduate study as culminating in a failure of imagination: specifically, my own imagination. It wasn’t until I was preparing for my comprehensive exams that I told an advisor, “I think the only thing missing from my education at ISU has been a study of the major.” I was thinking about the English major. At that time, I have to admit that I never imagined the possibility of developing a writing major.

The work of program building requires imagination, certainly, but it is also important to remember that this is rhetorical work that takes place within unique institutional contexts. Arguing effectively for a major in writing to a variety of Oakland University stakeholders—most of whom knew little about the discipline of composition beyond the fact that their students still make comma errors after taking the first-year course—forced the three of us to articulate what we believed were obvious assumptions about the importance of writing, how it should be taught, and how it

should be supported at the university. The minute our proposal moved beyond the halls of our own department of gentle readers, the outside committees we encountered began to significantly and, I think, positively impact our program of study by helping us to view our own proposed degree with new, and sometimes even critical, eyes.

We encountered a number of imaginative and rhetorical challenges throughout the proposal process that spring, but the biggest obstacle we had to overcome was the mistaken impressions some of our colleagues across campus had about OU's writing program. Our department's initial proposal, which drew heavily from our existing upper-level course offerings, was rejected twice by COI before the three of us began our revisions of the document. We suspected that these initial rejections of the proposal may have been, at least in part, owing to other departments' perceptions that college writing "is exclusively skill-based and that it is to be administered only to those with 'substandard' writing skills" (Howard 42). And so we went into this process understanding that our first task was to counter assumptions that writing and rhetoric had little to offer students beyond the first year of college. We had to illustrate the richness of our discipline and, at the same time, convince our colleagues of the importance of advanced study in composition for our undergraduates.

While we bemoaned our colleagues' limited understanding of the field of composition, I have to admit that, at the time, my own conception of the field was also somewhat narrow. I joined the faculty at OU because I respected and understood the department's commitment to the first-year course, but composing this major forced me to recognize that my own disciplinary knowledge was incomplete. I had taught a number of upper-level writing and rhetoric courses before joining the faculty at OU, but up to that point, I think I only really understood this field of composition as existing on two distinct tracks: first-year writing and graduate education in rhetoric and composition. And, like Jennifer Clary-Lemon, what I knew of the field—pedagogical theory, composition history, and program administration—also proved to be of little help in developing courses for undergraduates who would become professional writers after graduation. So the three of us studied majors at other universities, read what scholarship existed on the major, and built a degree program that we believed our student population really needed by designing three unique tracks for our majors to pursue: a track in professional writing, a track in writing for new media, and a graduate school track examining composition as a discipline.

This three-track design for our major made sense given what we understood about careers in writing and what we learned about the interests of the local students we surveyed for the proposal, but these tracks also helped us to illustrate the richness and relevance of composition to our colleagues across campus. The original proposal had employed mostly existing courses and included only one new course proposal, but our three-track approach meant that we had to also propose half a dozen new courses that bridged content, theory, and skills acquisition—required courses like "Literacy, Technology, and Civic Engagement," "Issues in Writing," and "Introduction to Professional Writing," and electives like "Digital Storytelling," "Composing Audio Essays," and "The Rhetoric of Web Design." Thus, our major proposal, combined with the weight of six new course proposals, made it clear to readers on the various committees we went before that we were offering something very different from a simple extension of our existing writing program.

We could have viewed this work as a trial by fire before antagonistic strangers who simply did not understand the field of composition, but instead we recognized the proposal process for what it really can be: an imaginative process, a transformative peer review process, and an opportunity to show the university what the writing program is really made of. The persuasive work we were required to do for the proposal, explaining and defending an advanced program in writing, forced us to imagine what such a program might look like. And as Rebecca Moore Howard suggests in her article on "The Writing Major as Counterdiscourse," the proposal process also provided us with the opportunity to "seize the microphone, and the stage itself, to circulate informed, nuanced, proactive visions of writing, of student writers, and of writing instruction" that challenged and transformed the assumptions of our colleagues across campus (42). In the process, I believed we also constructed a field of composition that was different from anything any of us had imagined before.

Mapping the New World of Composition: Undergraduate Faculty Must Lead the Way

In a perfect world, junior faculty would not be called upon to do any kind of labor and time-intensive program building, but then ours is hardly a perfect world. Ours is a new world of composition, evolving before our very eyes, and we need new faculty and their fresh perspectives on the discipline to help us create our undergraduate degree programs. Each of the narratives in this article argues that graduate education can do more to prepare future faculty for both the material and ideal aspects of undergraduate program development. But this is not something that graduate programs should do in isolation. Indeed, it falls to faculty in undergraduate degrees to lead the discipline through this next

exciting phase. As Greg Giberson argues in his introduction to this collaborative work, we lack the intellectual and scholarly material necessary to prepare future faculty for this kind of program building, and undergraduate faculty must work with graduate degree programs to develop that material and to map this new territory for our field.

Jennifer Courtney suggests that while specialization is a necessary part of developing disciplinary expertise, the newly conceived undergraduate major requires that faculty synthesize seemingly incongruent areas in imaginative ways. Given the complexity of such far-ranging undergraduate majors, graduate programs face the challenge of helping future faculty develop deep knowledge, via specialization, as well as familiarity with related and relevant fields—all while avoiding charges of academic dilettantism. Kelly Kinney's piece reminds us of the powerful and sometimes invisible ways that institutional contexts shape the work we do, and her narrative cautions that new graduates may not be aware of how their own work may be supported or constrained by those contexts.

Brad Lucas's work also reflects on the importance of institutional power, but he emphasizes the importance of conducting institutional research and obtaining buy-in from senior colleagues in developing a successful major proposal. As the contributor to this article who had the most authority to affect institutional change, he still recognizes that his success may have been a combination of "good arguments, dumb luck, divine intervention, or some other set of factors." He is also quick to acknowledge that, even from a position of some administrative authority, he still "wasn't prepared for the machinery [his proposal] set in motion." Finally, Jennifer Clary-Lemon emphasizes the importance of reflecting on that machinery and on the sometimes unforeseen consequences of our program development. She suggests that future faculty need the tools to reflect critically on the majors they propose. Rather than view the writing major as an inevitable disciplinary progression, she argues that we need to slow down and analyze the impact this new work may have on our "material conditions, institutional direction, graduate study, [and] teacher preparation."

The junior faculty contributing to this article, by and large, were educated by senior faculty who took on the challenge of inventing this discipline and its graduate programs. Many of Lori's mentors at ISU and many of Greg's mentors at the University of South Florida, for example, earned their advanced degrees in traditional, literature-based English departments. But they went on to create innovative doctoral programs in composition. In doing so, these senior scholars and teachers worked their way through the bureaucracy of existing departmental and institutional structures to create effective graduate programs in a field that heretofore was marginalized in the academy. Likewise, the faculty contributing to this article, and those designing undergraduate degree programs around the country, were educated in traditional composition graduate programs that emphasized first-year writing, writing program administration, and advanced specializations in rhetorical and writing studies. But these new faculty will lead the way in developing undergraduate degrees that will move the field of composition in new directions.

As each of the narratives included in this article illustrates, program innovation requires something more than a theoretical and historical understanding of the field of composition. The future faculty who will develop and teach in undergraduate degrees in writing need a working knowledge of the machinery of academic production; of the specific institutional, political, and historical contexts where they will labor; of the bureaucratic, imaginative, and rhetorical work of program development; and of the possible consequences—positive and negative—of this work. While graduate programs may help to ready future faculty for these challenges, it is also up to those of us working in new majors around the country to share our experiences and our expertise. As this collection of narratives suggests, the "silent narrative" referenced in the introduction has yet to be fully voiced: we still lack the research and intellectual contributions necessary to shape our undergraduate degrees in composition. As the founders of those degrees, we have a responsibility to share our experiences, our successes and failures, with each other. By doing so, we can more actively guide the inevitable and exciting disciplinary changes that will accompany our undergraduate degrees in composition.

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