The Writing Program and the Call to Service:
A Progress Report from a Land Grant University

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Although a vibrant literature on the social justice advantages of writing service-learning programs has existed for many years, the focus has tended to be on specific projects and courses, often accompanied by an understandable suspicion that entrenched institutions like universities have interests inimical to radical social change. As a result, analyses of the practical possibilities of building and administering well-articulated programs, especially in research universities, remain scarce. I argue for precisely such a systematic, institutional approach—a strategy from the center that underwrites flexible tactics in the field—by considering the case of the writing in the majors program at Cornell University. I survey Cornell's environs in terms of overlapping circles of need, then illustrate how the writing program's three chief resources--training teachers and mentors, funding graduate students, and practicing a flexible, discipline-centered writing pedagogy--have enabled us to construct multiple partnerships in a short time. The example is of use to service-learning theorists as well as writing program administrators attempting to build progressive Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs in their institutions. I argue that although many challenges remain, this type of alliance can combat the chief threat facing service-learning today: not institutional power but rather institutional neglect, which exacerbates what Michel de Certeau calls "the erosion of time."

Imagine yourself in a prison-yard at night. A small square of earth, covered over with cracked asphalt, enclosed by a vile institution. The halogen-lights perched on the prison's roof-tops do nothing to keep track of the hundreds of men pacing about in search of some escape; the lights do, however, succeed at obscuring the nocturnal heaven of its most remote twinkle. The world has been known to deprive men of conjugal pleasures. Even isolate him to the point of abandonment of his family. But has any thought been given of a people who can no longer see the stars?

When you brought the professor of astronomy to Auburn, you returned to us the gift of the sky.

The writer of these words, an inmate at Auburn Correctional Facility in upstate New York, sent this letter to the director of the Prison Education Program (PEP), a privately-funded initiative of Cornell University which, in association with a local community college, grants associate's degrees to inmates. The occasion was a lecture by Yervant Terzian, an internationally recognized radio astronomer, who volunteered to present a slide show on the origins of the universe for inmates at Auburn. The writer was a student in a PEP course, 1 of about 15 who were available to hear the presentation. The questions afterwards ranged from the misinformed (one person claimed Christopher Columbus had visited a council of Egyptian elders before his journey to the New

World) to the expert (one question concerned an inconsistency within Einstein's unified field theory). I was present as Professor Terzian's escort and as a former tutor at Auburn, now director of Cornell's writing program, the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines.

I begin my essay with a prisoner's letter for its obvious impact but also for the issues in service-learning pedagogy it both describes and raises. Were I to describe these issues in the form of a reflective journal, my responses would probably zig-zag. First, I'd recognize the pathos of this inmate's gratitude, a gratitude that could be all but overwhelming for one who'd helped even the tiniest amount to return the gift of the sky to an incarcerated population; at the same time, I'd resist the flattering self-identification as a missionary of learning; the writer's elevation to nearly magical status of a particular type of knowledge; and the implied identification of the client population as deficient—errors often problematized in the service-learning literature (Flower, 2003). At the same time, the quality of the writing would remind me that in this case at least, writing professionals have little to teach a man with such obvious natural gifts, despite certain local struggles with idiom, except for the conferring of a credential. An analysis of his words purely as literature would, among other things, notice the slow development of one concrete situation (the blinding of the sky by floodlights at

night) which, applied to a separate situation in a stunning, single-sentence paragraph, makes of "stars" and "sky" both the literal object of a specific experience and the metaphor for a less tangible experience—the gift of learning in general but also of free inquiry, and the mutual respect accorded to members in a community of learners. The metaphor also suggests volumes about the nature of incarceration as social separation and intellectual isolation: prisoners lack even the common human heritage of the sky (which, in the final sentence, is not "given" but "returned"). The letter (to zig-zag once again) clarifies blindingly the fact that, for prison literacy work, at least, the population does remain in a state of deficit (not a natural but an enforced one), and that in such a condition, exposure to knowledge can feel like a precious gift, or some form of recovery. But what's the status of this knowledge? Is it academic, middle-class, privileged, popular? Well-endowed institutions have the research resources to produce a certain form of knowledge, but that knowledge comes to appear "academic" or class-based only when its access is limited. The same is true of the conventions of "academic" discourse (testing, use of evidence, interchange of ideas). Professor Terzian's truest gift, in my view, was—through his instinctive rapport, graciousness, and refusal to condescend to the men's questions—the gift of respect. The danger in this example, of course, is that the instance of an astronomer appearing behind bars for a single evening wrongly bestows on us, the messengers, the appearance of angelic grace, and wrongly suggests that the most precious knowledge comes from without and not also from within, among the life experiences of the men themselves. My final reactions, therefore, blur some of the conceptual divisions that have structured debates about university expertise and community empowerment.

Although prison teaching is in many ways atypical of the forms of service-learning, I hope my example will clarify the assumptions that govern what follows. On the one hand, we need not apologize for our particular skills and expertise, without which service-learning would have no point; on the other hand, the university is not simply a source of wisdom but a nexus of interchange, an activity with the potential to transform both the institution and the community. The question then becomes one of imperative obligation: not whether but how to give back to those outside the knowledge and skills that belong to all but are funded for a few; not whether but how to transform the university's structure and function. The obstacle to an aim this overarching is not active resistance, still less the overwhelming power of the institution in relation to its presumed clients, but the more formidable challenge of indifference. How in that case can we best preserve our programs at the administrative level, particularly in a time of extreme budgetary uncertainty?

In what follows, I try to show how a centralized writing program, by suturing itself at various points to de-centralized service-learning initiatives, can bolster the security, permanence, and visibility of a land grant university's outreach mission. By describing some new programs at Cornell, I hope also to raise general questions about institutional structure and the place of writing in what Ernest Boyer called the New American College (cited in Parks & Goldblatt, 2000).

Service-Learning and the Writing Curriculum

Less than 30 years ago, a single paradigm still dominated writing courses in the university curriculum. The preserve of vast multi-sectioned courses, Freshman Composition was structured as a hurdle preceding the serious work of university education, unexciting but unavoidable as an induction into the skill (described in the singular) most essential to success at college. This skill, though hermetically sealed off from the disciplines, belonged by rights to the province of English departments, though professors of English were rarely actually eager to teach the skill themselves. The readings were intended as models of writing that in fact rarely resembled what students produced, because (despite the assumption that these starter courses prepared them for all that was to follow in the next four years) students were asked to write in a form that existed almost nowhere outside the freshman courses—a fact registered by its peculiar name (a "theme"). The fundamental feature of this paradigm was compartmentalization: writing ("composition") was set off for pedagogical purposes from all other forms of writing, from disciplines of knowledge, from serious subjects, from an audience, or from engagement with the world. The profound changes over the past 30 years in writing pedagogy can be described most simply as the collapse of these compartments. The most innovative models of college writing today are those that place writing within a discipline, a subject, and serious purpose—and that conceive it not as a single skill but as a variety of discourses. Two manifestations of this change are Writing Across the Curriculum programs, in which writing is located within the disciplines, and writing outreach courses, where college writing meets and fuses with "real-world" occasions and audiences in the local community.

Today, writing conferences regularly include special sessions and the major composition journals regularly publish articles on what Paul Mathieu (2005) has called the "public turn" in composition studies, with at least two new journals, *Reflections* and *Community Literacy Studies*, devoted entirely to the

subject of writing outreach. That's not to say that ser-vice-learning has been institutionalized in writing programs across the spectrum. Even though major essay collections on the composition/service-learn-ing collaboration appeared as early as 1997 (Adler-Krassner, Crooks, & Watters), a recent guidebook for Writing Across the Curriculum programs devoted only two pages to service-learning courses (Bazerman, Little, & Bethel, 2005). There are com-pelling reasons why much of the scholarly work has focused on specific initiatives--innovative courses, local community projects, a successful community literacy center—rather than on administrative struc-ture. The history of community literacy studies also has been a history of worry—warnings about the power imbalance between the bureaucratic universi-ty and the disempowered clients it would serve, about its ability to dominate decision-making and impose solutions. Moreover, the contradiction between the traditional academic calendar and the longer time-frame of a successful community endeavor have pro-duced all-too-familiar instances of what Ellen Cushman (2002) calls "hit it and quit it:" student researchers who drop by and then disappear, their credits finished and their grades earned. In an impor-tant attempt to address these problems, Paula Mathieu (2005) counters what she calls the universi-ty's "colonizing logic" by arguing for what she calls a "tactics of hope" performed outside the "strategic" logic of institutional control. No intelligent approach to community outreach can ignore the fundamental requirement of tactical flexibility, which takes its lead from the expressed needs of community agen-cies and stakeholders.

Yet this sensitive spontaneity cannot by itself pre-vent what Mathieu (2005) calls the "erosion of time." In fact, the horror stories of student arrogance and carelessness would seem to reflect *less* the universi-ty's overwhelming dominance than its underwhelm-ing commitment—the failure, for example, of responsible supervision by faculty, whose daily pres-ence on the scene can greatly improve the continuity and success of community action projects (Cushman, 2002). Nor is it clear that freshman composition courses are the best place to ask a serious social investment from students struggling to adjust to the beginning of college.[1] University schedules, more-over, are even more ephemeral than they are rigid: classes end, students graduate, funding dries up, fac-ulty failing tenure, interest declines, new fashions emerge. It's probably unpredictability of commit-ment, more than a top-down imposition of order, that most threatens service-learning programs, keeping them marginal or isolated. As Mathieu also points out, intelligent institutional strategy must supplement local tactics. It can slow the erosion of time, thereby

enabling tactical freedom; it can identify large con-stituencies and form stable community alliances; but above all, it must issue from a firm commitment to social justice, a goal that, as the night follows the day, will produce learning from service.

But I've begun to speak of strategy as a personifi-cation, rather than an abstraction. In the face of unpredictable community dynamics on the one hand and the indifference of the university bureaucracy on the other, strategy would appear to be the domain of committed faculty and program directors working in partnership within the bureaucracy to "braid" togeth-er (MacLeod, 1997) constituencies inside and out-side the institution into a network that is too interwo-ven to be casually uprooted. In what follows, I take the position of writing program director as an instance and describe a recent re-alignment of the writing and service-learning programs at Cornell. All institutions are different, and some features of what I describe below are peculiar to Cornell's structure and physical location. What I hope can be portable is the process of assessing possibilities in the community and the *structure* of the Writing Across the Curriculum program, which is fortuitously well-fash-ioned to "braid" itself into a variety of other pro-grams.[2] I will concede at the outset that the align-ments are too new to prove they can outlast the ero-sion of time in normal circumstances, let alone in the extraordinary economic challenges now facing us; as I indicate at the end, there are reasons to be guarded-ly pessimistic.

The Mission and Environs of a Land-Grant University

Ezra Cornell founded his university with the vow to provide "an institution where any man can find instruction in any subject." That promise of course builds on the spirit and letter of the Morrill Act, which stipulated that the colleges funded under the terms of the Act would have as their "prime object" promoting "the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes on the several pursuits and profes-sions in life." Cornell became the only Ivy League university that is also a land grant institution, func-tioning as a mix of semi-autonomous state-supported and private colleges. Who the "industrial classes" are today, given changes in the idiom of sociology, remains unclear; yet service-learning advocates are correct to assume that the spirit of the Morrill Act would put outreach at the center of the university's mission, not at its periphery. But research benefits society indirectly, by passing on to government, cor-porations, and patentees the fruit of its useful knowl-edge; the outreach mission requires a wholly differ-ent understanding of the university's relationship to

society and of constituents, a conception based on geographic location. This understanding comes naturally to many Cornellians because of its Cooperative Extension, dedicated to the improvement of agricultural knowledge, which has an office in every county of the state—arguably the earliest form of educational outreach in the American university.

There are actually several ways to think of Cornell's environs, including the rural population served by the Extension. Upstate New York has at present the highest emigration rate of any comparable region in the nation for people aged 20 to 40, a fact that reflects the slow but inexorable decline of farming income in counties stretching from the Adironadacks to the Pennsylvania border. A "bright" spot, so to call it, in the economic picture has been the construction of massive prisons in nearby counties, now the leading employers in some communities. Because Ithaca contains two colleges, the Tompkins County "postage stamp" is the sole exception to the negative immigration rate for the region as a whole, but even in a relatively prosperous community such as Ithaca, there are poor neighborhoods, inhabited disproportionately by people of color who have high rates of unemployment. Occasionally the social stresses of this race-inflected disproportion results in what are called locally outbreaks of "racial tensions" in the high school, though these tensions exist primarily not between haves and have-nots but between the largest have-not populations, the rural and the African-Americans. Several local studies have showed that of the two main predictors for academic failure in the public schools, class trumped race. As for the incarcerated residents of the area, who are largely imported from inner-city neighborhoods in Rochester, New York, and elsewhere that lie at the outer edges of Cornell's human geography, their employment rate is 100%. The rural poor, Ithacans of color, the prisoners: these groups, though not "industrial classes" in any strict sense, provide a good start in thinking about where Cornell's extended constituency lies. A fourth group has a similar claim, though not for reasons of physical proximity: because Cornell recruits low-income youth from the state's large metropolitan areas, particularly New York City, our broadest sphere of concern might embrace our future students.

All these constituencies are currently served by a patchwork of initiatives that continue an older tradition of active social engagement, most of them coordinated by the Public Service Center (PSC), which was founded in 1991 under the directorship of Leonardo Vargas-Mendez. Today some 4,500 undergraduates take part each year in PSC programs, either as volunteers or as work-study students, as do faculty sponsors of service-learning projects, who may apply

for small grants. Students mentor high school children in Ithaca, volunteer in three nearby juvenile detention facilities, tutor Cornell employees in writing, and teach English to migrant farm laborers in the region, through a student-organized program called Friends of Farmworkers. The heart of academic service-learning is the Department of City and Regional Planning, whose outreach programs, until recently directed by Kenneth Reardon and his colleagues, have reached as far as New Orleans. The largest service-learning program is the Cornell Urban Scholars Program (CUSP), which funds a summer internship with various nonprofits in New York City. Finally, faculty involvement in Auburn Correctional Facility began some 15 years ago, when a professor of English began teaching literature and basic writing after the suspension of the Pell Grants—a program that used to fund college degree programs for inmates of prisons.

Even a brief survey of this rich array of programs indicates the anomalies of Cornell's de-centralized structure. Thus, Cornell at Auburn is unrelated to student mentoring work in the juvenile detention facilities; the Public Service Center, which helps support many programs financially, does not sponsor courses; City and Regional Planning, whose programs have broad appeal, is anomalously located in the College of Art, Architecture, and Planning, the smallest of Cornell's seven undergraduate colleges; a brilliant course in radio documentary (that emphasizes oral histories of local residents) is located in the Department of Landscape Architecture. And until recently, none of the literacy initiatives had any connection with the undergraduate writing program—with the single exception I'll note in a moment. This dispersion has obvious advantages, because programs can develop spontaneously in response to specific needs and the energy of individuals, but closer coordination could better pool resources, tighten collaborations, and avoid duplication. Only last year did the Provost approve linking the funding agency (PSC) with an academic unit (City and Regional Planning) under an umbrella program housed in the office of the Vice-Provost for Outreach, which in turn has made possible the creation of a new Public Service Center concentration. But the re-structuring came without funding, and the undergraduate concentration has as yet no academic director. Although research has not found de-centralization to be an inhibiting factor in an institution's commitment to service-learning (Holland, 2007), Cornell has not demonstrated a systematic commitment at other levels, a point to which I return below.

The Resources of the Writing Program

Once the writing program turned its eye to collaborating in community literacy work, we found that our

administrative structure and pedagogical philosophy had equipped us all along for this type of partnership.

As its name indicates, the John S. Knight Institute for Writing Across the Disciplines is a WAC program, which as I mentioned above, carries with it the conception of writing as embedded within specific contexts, as various in its forms and purposes, and as a process that's open and experimental (Deans, 2000; Kells, 2007). Of necessity, we reach beyond the English department, working with a variety of departments (from Anthropology to Neuroscience, from Earth and Atmospheric Sciences to Classics, from Architectural History to Linguistics) to develop the best pedagogies in the various disciplines. We expand this collaboration after the freshman year through the Writing in the Majors Program. Our center for developmental writing (the Writing Workshop) includes peer mentoring and more intensive tutoring by an adult writing consultant; and our faculty development program includes seminars for teaching assistants (TAs) and regular faculty. Our four components therefore correspond to the classic structure of such programs, as described by Susan McLeod (first-year writing, upper-level courses, student support, faculty development), but with some refinements (1997). First, the program is independent of the English department. Although the director has usually been a tenured member of English, the rest of the staff is appointed through the Institute, and the program as a whole is funded and overseen by the College of Arts and Sciences, with a generous multiple endowment from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Second, the program controls a certain number of TA packages, which means that we negotiate with various departments over the support of their graduate students; this gives us the ability to build a coherent curriculum while allowing departments to select their graduate instructors and contribute course descriptions as well as disciplinary expertise. Third, all graduate instructors must first take Writing 7100, the training seminar for teachers of writing; Dr. Elliot Shapiro, the director of that course, also facilitates the annual Faculty Seminar in Writing Instruction, along with various workshops and special presentations as requested. The quality of our teaching writing seminars have generated a reputation across the campus. Our two basic "coins," therefore, are TA funding and training courses. The first is limited by our funding for graduate student support, the second by the size of our staff. In working with departments, we don't impose on preconceived notions of what makes the best writing—belletristic style, for example, or the argumentative essay, though in our training, we stress the kind of general approaches to writing laid out in *The Elements of Teaching Writing* (Hjortshoj &

Gottschalk, 2009) and other books written or edited by members of the Institute.

Toward Structural Coordination

As we looked for ways to link the Knight Institute with the work of literacy outreach, three partnership possibilities emerged quickly, representing three of the broader constituencies I outlined above: the long-distance mentoring component of CUSP, which connects with inner-city youngsters; Cornell at Auburn (now the Prison Education Program), which connects with the local incarcerated population; and the one service-learning course in our first-year writing curriculum, which connects with the local high school.

Bedford-Stuyvesant: The Cornell Urban Mentors Initiative

The Cornell Urban Mentors Initiative (CUMI), founded by Kenneth Reardon, is a partnership of the Department of City and Regional Planning with a charter school in the foundation-supported Urban Assembly group in New York City. Its main component is a Cornell course in which undergraduates mentor middle-school students in Bedford-Stuyvesant through regular computer messaging. In 2007, CUMI offered grant funding to the Knight Institute to design a summer institute for the staff of the charter school. The following spring, we also took part in a weekend visit of teachers, students, and parents from the charter school to Cornell, many of whom had never seen a college campus. For the families, the distance between Ithaca and Brooklyn was far longer than the geographical 240 miles (at least one family had survived a period of homelessness); the purpose of the program was to shorten that psychological distance, making a college education a realistic possibility for children trapped in poverty. The teachers' institute, which had to be re-scheduled for fall 2008, therefore became the third component in the partnership, in addition to the long-distance mentoring and the annual funded visits to Cornell. This time, we reversed direction, traveling from Ithaca to the headquarters of the Urban Assembly in lower Manhattan. Elliot Shapiro, our expert in faculty development, facilitated the two-day discussion, which turned out to be a deeply meaningful experience for both cohorts. As the Cornell faculty laid out some expectations of college writing and gave advice on teaching strategies, we learned an immense amount about the challenges for learners in the inner city and about the creative strategies these gifted young teachers devised for their students. As we began to imagine together a bridge, or set of benchmarks, from eighth grade to college (one participant was an advising dean from the Arts College), we also began to understand more concretely the experiential arc of low-income students, such as those recruited to Cornell, which

deepened our awareness of our mission within the walls of the institution as well as without.

Our best hope is that the Cornell-Urban Assembly program can become a model of long-distance partnering between a university and its future clientele from the inner city—a partnership much different from that between, say, a university and its surrounding community. The obstacles remain formidable (can weekly computer messaging make a difference in the writing of middle schoolers? Can contacts remain frequent enough to preserve the sense of genuine collaboration? Will the soft-money funding continue? Will the collaboration be reflected in standardized test scores?); what's clear is that writing, as both a social process and a set of learned discourses, remains fundamental to educational mobility, and that the flexible participation of college writing experts under undergraduate role models may make a decisive difference in the lives of struggling children.

Auburn Correctional Facility: The Prison Education Program

In spring 2007, the Writing in the Majors program was able to support a graduate TA to teach a service-learning course at Auburn Correctional Facility, which allowed Cornell undergraduates to learn about the condition of incarceration while working as writing tutors with inmates. The undergraduates engaged in a shared educational endeavor, while supplementing their own reading with first-hand experience of the scene of incarceration—the physical location, the psychological and social consequences, the minds and hearts of the incarcerated. We were also able to grant smaller stipends to other graduate students who designed courses of their own. The following year, through the creative efforts of Professor Mary Katzenstein of the Government department and a generous grant from the Sunshine Lady Foundation, Cornell's scattered prison courses coalesced into a degree program under a hired director. (The associate's degree will actually be granted by our collaborator, Cayuga Community College, but with teaching by Cornell faculty and graduates.) In a move both symbolically appropriate and practical, the new director has his office in the Knight Institute suite, where he works with staff to recruit undergraduates to serve as mentors and team-learners in the prison courses. This move does not mean that the Auburn degree program will be based exclusively in writing, but rather that the forms of academic writing—along with the modes of academic inquiry, such as argument, evidence, citation, generalization, judgment—will become part of the intellectual inheritance of our inmate students. Because of my own experience tutoring in prison, I'm in charge of the basic writing course (the one designed for GED-holders who don't

yet qualify for credit-bearing courses). My course for the Cornell undergraduates, "Learning Behind Bars," combines readings in service-learning, literacy, incarceration, social inequality, and autobiography to enrich the tutoring at Auburn; but since most of the students took Professor Katzenstein's course on the politics of incarceration in a previous semester, they're experiencing a year-long immersion in the subject not possible at the level of a first-year composition course. But other possibilities exist at the freshman level, as I discuss next.

Ithaca High School: "Exploring Common Ground"

In 2000, Darlene Evans, a writing specialist with 20 years of experience training graduate students to mentor students in Philadelphia high schools, came to Ithaca as a writing tutor and an instructor in the First-Year Writing Seminars. Her course, "Exploring Common Ground," paired Cornell freshmen with mostly low-achieving students in an English course at the local high school. The most important outcome has been not what the high school students may have learned about writing and research during a single semester but the (spotty but still impressive) transformation of their self-perception in relation to our society's most visible site of class mobility, the university. As undergraduates learn to see their own access to college in terms of the sociology of privilege, the high school students, by studying literary and political texts alongside Ivy League freshmen, speak and work with college students for the first time in their lives. Writing, the skill that more than any other both marks class barriers and also provides the means of surmounting them, therefore becomes the subject of the course as well as its practice. At the same time, undergraduates begin to understand their own immediate past in ways not apparent to them when they were in high school—an excellent reason to place this particular course at the freshman level.

In a booklet from the Public Service Center, Darlene Evans described the "Exploring Common Ground" course this way: "Most Cornell students come believing that Cornell *isn't* Ithaca. What they need to learn are the ways in which Cornell *is* Ithaca—and what constitutes that connection." Moving from the "hill" to the "valley" and back to the hill again, in other words, illuminates the Cornell experience as much as it illuminates the experience of high school youngsters struggling to overcome class barriers (Horrigan, 2007). According to the chair of the high school English department, "this course has marked a paradigm shift from former interactions between Cornell University and Ithaca High School in that usually Cornell comes down here because they think they have something to teach us. Here I feel like we're all learning together" (Horrigan, p. 63). Sharing ideas with college under-

graduates and gaining their respect helps give the high school students a sense of confidence and empowerment that even well-taught high school courses can't typically provide.

"Exploring Common Ground" in turn fits into a larger context. Cornell's community outreach coordinator is also a director of The Village at Ithaca, an organization that advocates primarily for poor students of color, and that is now part of a growing movement of residents, parents, and teachers working toward equity in the school system. This year, Darlene Evans is teaching the introductory course for the Public Service Center concentration; its service-learning component will consist of writing mentoring done in partnership with The Village. Through the PSC, we will soon be coordinating our efforts in the community with courses offered by the Department of Education and with a standing committee composed of representatives from Cornell, the community, and the high school. Challenges remain formidable: the logistics of matching Cornell students' schedules with high school programming remain complex and dependent on shifting priorities within the school, where strong pressure exists to teach in the overarching context of the Regents exams. This conflict between a standardized form of teaching to a test and a more flexible form of engagement—where "block" periods can be devoted to reflection, and where role modeling and collaborating can be understood as having genuine pedagogical value—reflects larger debates in American education. The success of the "Exploring Common Ground" courses will clearly lie in the commitment of school district officials as well as individual teachers and department heads.

The three initiatives I've described have depended in part on the structure of Cornell's WAC program. The Knight Institute was able, first, to share the administrative and teaching skills of our staff by moving them into new positions; second, to fund a few graduate assistantships as part of the endowed Writing in the Majors program; third, to recruit and train undergraduates for service-learning work because of our staff's expertise in training; finally, to make decisions independent of the oversight of a specific academic department. In other words, we're not limited to fielding service-learning courses at the freshman level; just as important is our staff expertise in teacher training, which, depending on resources, allows us to consult for a wide variety of programs. The ultimate goal of these braided collaborations, which is to resist the erosion of time, will by definition take a good while to prove itself. As always, the projects will remain vulnerable to the time limits of soft money; yet because the Knight Institute operates on hard money from the Arts College and a long-term endowment, and because Knight Institute employees have a high level

of expertise and job security, any service-learning initiatives "hard-wired" into the writing program will hopefully be less vulnerable in the future to the vagaries of the economy.

Conclusion: Institutional Power and Grassroots Social Change

My emphasis in this essay has been on coordinating service-learning programs at the administrative level of a large research institution. The question I've deferred is, Can one work within powerful, entrenched institutions and still imagine that one is aiming for systemic change?

Corporate domination of the domestic economy built on an enforced neo-liberal trade system; systematic resort to devastating military power abroad; control of scarce resources; reproduction of a social system built on vast disparities in wealth and power; policing and warehousing of an economically superfluous "underclass"; a semi-official system of mass misinformation that creates the illusion of shared benefit: these in the last instance are driving principles of our political system as practiced today and should form some kind of ultimate context for anyone working for social change today. Universities, especially large research universities, benefit these driving principles in ways too obvious to rehearse here. It would seem naïve, then, to wish from universities any programs that could transform the social conditions from which they benefit. Much of the most influential work on service-learning has in fact theorized the inherent opposition between bureaucratic structure and subversive intent—between a liberal, cooperative model of society and a conflict model, between institutional management and grassroots empowerment, between (among others) the legacy of Dewey and the legacy of Freire, between the university itself (hierarchical, exclusive, socially conservative) and its own service-learners (Coogan, 2006; Stoecker, 2003, among many others).

By the same token, we need to remember that institutional power is never monolithic and unilateral and requires a flexible approach when confronting it and working within its structures that is in many ways more tactical than strategic. We need to understand the multiple and contradictory ways institutions interact within the social process as a whole as well as their own structural contradictions; and of all elite institutions, none are more contradictory and open to tactical intervention than universities. This point was grasped eloquently many years ago, in the document written by students that made famous the phrase "participatory democracy."

After railing at the postwar American university for its stifling conformism and its complicity in the

military-industrial complex, the authors of the Port Huron Statement appear to reverse course by recommending universities as an "overlooked seat of influence" for the renewal of leftwing politics. Some of their reasons remain pertinent:

> First, the university is located in a permanent position of social influence. . . Second . . . it is the central institution for organizing, evaluating, and transmitting knowledge. Third . . . [it is] functionally tied to society in new ways, creating new potentialities, new levers for change. Fourth, the university is the only mainstream that is open to participation by individuals of nearly any viewpoint. (Hayden, 1962, pp. 373-374)

These hopeful statements are followed by a caveat: "But we need not indulge in illusions: the university system cannot complete a movement of ordinary people making demands for a better life." Much has changed since 1962, when the Statement called for an alliance of students and faculty to "wrest control of the educational process from the administrative bureaucracy." Writing program administrators, I flatter myself, are closer to the type of middle-level coordinator who might naturally belong to such an alliance. And yet, to imagine today that an enlightened alliance within the institution will be able to "wrest control" from dominant power brokers seems not only impossible to imagine but difficult to square with the ambiguous history of the past half-century. On the one hand, the educational bureaucracy has since become the academic instrument of affirmative action—the broadest of the Civil Rights Movement's many (uncompleted) revolutions. And student power has subsided long since and gone elsewhere—among other places, to service-learning, where the children of yesterday's radicals work for credit under the supervision of faculty and the (however distant) blessing of administrators. The strongest challenge to progressive action on the part of universities, as I have suggested, is the indifference that keeps programs marginal and underfunded, if praised in the abstract, a fact that reflects the historic self-definition of universities as instruments for middle-class advancement into the professions (Mattson, 1998). At the moment, we face dramatic retrenchment, as the declining economy forces administrators (reasonably, from their point of view) to retreat to their "core" mission, eliminating the "luxuries" and the "inessentials." My guarded pessimism suggests that what I've called "strategic" may take, in the face of coming cuts, a tactical form of under-the-radar institutional planning. "We need not indulge in illusions": service-learning may, with luck and persistence, continue slowly to transform higher education, but it will never be more than a step in transforming the lives of the oppressed. Small steps of this sort may, of course, still be the thing many of us have the most worth doing.

Notes

[1] The affinity between the Writing Across the Curriculum approach to writing and the literacy movement (Kells, 2007; Deans, 2000) may be clearer beyond the first-year level, except for a course like the one described in the essay. First-year writing seminars in a WAC program typically engage students in the discourses and methods peculiar to disciplines broadly construed, which helps students perform the crucial task of "inventing the university," in David Bartholomae's (1985) influential phrase. On the other hand, recent longitudinal studies have begun to focus attention on the development of writing into the later years, when the nature of writing tasks changes dramatically (Sommers, 2008). Upper-division writing courses in service-learning would therefore promote a double educational goal: immersing students in real-life situations and training them to do complex writing tasks.

[2] Well-articulated community literacy programs include those at Stanford, Syracuse, Michigan State University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Temple University. In work describing the program at Temple, which includes the Institute for the Study of Literature, Literacy, and Culture (Parks & Goldblatt, 2000; Goldblatt, 2007), Steve Parks and Michael Goldblatt provide a groundbreaking model for breaking down conventional institutional barriers. ("But why shouldn't future teachers work as tutors in the writing center or as fellows for writing-intensive courses in the disciplines? And why shouldn't compositionists and education researchers be close colleagues? . . . Why shouldn't WPAs [Writing Program Administrators] know about high school writing curricula in their regions?" [p. 592]). Their work has inspired my own efforts and thinking.

[3] The actual wording of the Morrill Act specifies that the interest from the sale of public property "shall be inviolably appropriated . . . to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts . . . in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes on the several pursuits and professions in life." Because he was a practical man, Ezra Cornell's vision blurred traditional distinctions between the liberal and the practical pursuits (a functioning stable was one of the earliest buildings on the central campus).

[4] In a study of 25 pioneers of the service-learning movement, the influence of student activism in the later 1960s and early 1970s on the pioneers' later careers becomes very evident (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Four from this goup—Tim Stanton, Dwight Giles, Michele Whitham, and Ken Reardon—studied at Cornell. Reardon, who later returned as a professor of City and Regional Planning (CRP), was a graduate student in the Field Study Program of the School of

Human Ecology, where he was influenced by William F. Whyte's conception of participatory action research. Whitham was part of a student-faculty group that set up an alternative community school in Ithaca on the Foxfire model (it continues today in a different version). The school was one project of the Human Affairs Program, housed in the CRP, in which students earned credit while working in a half dozen social justice initiatives in the Ithaca community. This pioneering program, largely forgotten at Cornell today, deserves to have its history told, particularly at the present political conjuncture.

[5] The matrix developed by Holland (1997) relates seven "key institutional factors" to four levels of relevance as a way of predicting institutions' overall commitment to service-learning (p. 33). Applying this matrix intuitively, I find Cornell's level of commitment to be concentrated in specific areas, though low overall. Thus, the Public Service Center is "organized to provide service," while an array of courses provide varying degrees of "student involvement in community-based research." Strong supporters of service-learning include the Vice-Provost for Outreach, the Community Liaison Officer, and the Vice-Provost for Land Grant Affairs. On the other hand, the university's fundraising does not have "community service as a focus," despite the urging of a vocal and committed student group, and community-based research and teaching are not relevant to promotion and hiring in most of the colleges. A recent grant from Upward Bound, administered by the Vice-Provost for Outreach, represents Cornell's most extensive involvement so far in the lives of rural youngsters. The grant teams Cornell with low-income students in one inner-city district (Elmira) and one rural district (the Town of Groton), providing funds for regular tutoring sessions during the school year and then for three weeks during the summer, when 30 to 50 students are housed on campus for an intensive learning experience—another opportunity for partnership with writing.

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