Praxis and Institutional Architecture: Designing an Interdisciplinary Professional Writing Program

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This is a story – a story of institutional and programmatic change, a story of faculty and student aspirations, a story of a collective journey. By telling our story – that of a specific institution at a specific time – we hope to start a conversation about how programs develop and how institutions change. Our philosophy of program design presupposes that design is an active verb as well as a noun. As we will explain, while some parts of programs may develop through serendipity or through unrelated events over time, programs are always being designed – both through theory and our actions. It is this planned change, the intersection between theoretical and practical forces that leads us to see design as *praxis*, as situated action.

If you think of the history of programs in your own institution as well as others you know well, you are likely to recognize a variety of ways in which programs can develop. Programs might be created from day one with a clear sense of purpose; we think of this as the "I have a dream" model of program development. A person or group with a clear vision for an academic program sets about to systematically make their dream into reality. Programs driven by such a vision can have a sense of purpose and a guiding force that is not always present in other forms of development. This purpose can often lead to programs that are well articulated yet may not always have a smooth road to completion, as the powerful vision that drives development clashes with a host of local institutional barriers.

Another typical form of program creation is what we think of as programs by default. Over time, needs arise in the institution that create local changes. Perhaps a faculty member is encouraged to teach classes in new ways that are perceived to be important for students. Perhaps a course and a faculty line are added to meet those needs. Eventually, a critical mass of resources develops (students, faculty, classes, computers, funding) and a program emerges. This birth of a program has the advantage of originating from departmental and institutional needs that already exist and are at some level acknowledged. Some of the critical resources for the program are already in place, such as faculty to teach courses, a course or two already on the books, and students to fill the classes. The challenge of responding to local change is then developing a vision and making the program have presence in a more formal way.

Most of us have probably been part of writing programs that embody one or both elements of this genesis in their design and practice. While some programs may be the products of conscious, theoretically driven design, we suspect that most programs are likely a function of institutional histories and time-honored (or worn) practices. This is certainly true at our institution, and so like most, we suspect, we find ourselves within writing programs with all the problems and pleasures of design by default. We don't

think this is necessarily a bad situation. In fact, we think design by history, tradition, or default demonstrates the power of local practices, particularly the power of local practices to justify themselves, and, over time, assume the status of principle if not theory. We want to emphasize that writing programs are *always designed*, whether consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly. Not only, then, do we offer an extremely broad notion of "design," but we foreground it as an essential practice. In fact, we emphasize a rhetorical *praxis* of program design, a sense of program design that takes seriously the power of both theory and situated practice. Stemming from this philosophy of program design is the notion that institutions and programs affect one another in profound ways. Program development must take into account institutional structures and is influenced by local conditions. Alternately, institutions are changed in significant ways by the programs that are housed and developed within their spaces.

This sense of praxis and institutional change can be seen in the ways writing is being promoted at our institution. For us, this development of writing can be traced in two entities that are developing in tandem – a Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative and expanding programs in Professional and Technical Writing housed within our Department of English. These programs are deeply connected on curricular, pragmatic, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological levels, as well as by the impact they are having on our institution. As we begin this journey through program development, we start with the background and philosophy of our WAC program and then develop our vision for an interdisciplinary Professional and Technical Writing Program at the undergraduate and graduate levels. We explore throughout this essay the ways in which both initiatives are shaped by our institution and are challenging institutional boundaries.

Professional Writing Across the Curriculum at Georgia State University

Our Rhetoric and Composition undergraduate and graduate programs have expanded steadily since 1990 from strengths in historical and contemporary rhetoric and composition theory to include many kinds of discipline-specific technical and professional communication. The expertise provided on our campus by a growing Rhetoric and Composition program has paved the way for new interdisciplinary programs – both in technical and professional communication and in a campus-wide WAC program that is rhetorically-informed and technologically sophisticated. While many campus-wide efforts are coming together to focus on the communication experience of students, these programs are being developed and administered by rhetoric and composition faculty members in the English department. Fortunately, all of us have significant contact with both undergraduate and graduate students from other disciplines, and therefore, with their faculty and programs. Thus, in WAC efforts we are fostering and supporting these relationships; in the English Department-based writing curriculum, we are actively pursuing these relationships to other disciplines as part of an interdisciplinary professional writing program at the graduate level.

Our university established the WAC Program in 1996 to promote the use of writing in the General Education Curriculum, the major departments, and the professional schools on

our campus. The primary means for promoting writing is, not surprisingly, to engage faculty members in cross-disciplinary discussion about teaching, learning, and student writing (Walvoord 1996). As a related focus, we want to use WAC as an opportunity to foster faculty-driven assessment of student work and to discuss writing using current models for writing assessment (i.e., Hewitt, 1995 and Walcott and Legg, 1998). The WAC program has thus already become an agent for change at the university. However, as Janangelo (1995) argues, writing program visions sometimes cause discomfort in the institution by advocating for marginal voices (from developing writers to T.A.s) and by disrupting traditional forms and disciplinary boundaries. This uneasiness that he identifies points to the potential for writing programs to transform the institution in powerful ways. We believe we can transform the institution by disrupting the boundaries typically placed around the responsibility for the writing development of students and by disrupting the very definitions of "writing" itself.

We have a rich foundation and a stimulating environment, borrowing from McLeod (1989), for what we might call the "Third Stage" of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs. This new environment recognizes that, as we begin the 21st Century, we find ourselves in an electronic workplace that requires a complex set of communications practices. Addressing potentially global audiences through telecommuting and web publishing, and engaging in collaboration and meetings over electronic networks are just a few of these practices. And these are processes that disrupt traditional notions of writing, editing, authorship, ownership, and collaboration in very tangible ways. Scholarship like *Electronic Literacies in the Workplace* (Sullivan and Dautermann, 1996) and *Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum* (Reiss, Selfe, and Young, 1998) makes clear how just how much writers are engaged in technological processes both in the workplace and, increasingly, in the university. While continuing to promote writing as a primary means for learning, we also need to help our students become successful communicators in highly technological work environments.

A successful WAC Program that is looking toward the future needs key structural components like an innovative interdisciplinary curriculum, an inspiring faculty development program, and a robust use of writing technologies. However, the most important factor for determining the long-term success of any WAC program is adapting to institutional culture and change. For example, the decision to house WAC initiatives and cross-curricular course in wired writing centers best serve both faculty and students at certain institutions (See Palmquist, Keifer, and Zimmerman, 1998; Hocks and Bascelli, 1998). At Georgia State University, the undergraduate and graduate programs in professional and technical communications and the WAC program emanate from the English department, a powerful and well-respected department on the campus. Our programs create institutional change by developing meaningful writing experiences for students. In professional writing courses, these writing experiences must focus on a wide range of writing in both academic and nonacademic settings. They cannot function as isolated entities within one department but must build coalitions within and outside the university in order to be meaningful. These programs share basic assumptions about the kinds of writing (and writing instruction) that are emphasized at Georgia State, and they provide leadership on the campus as well as opportunity for cross-disciplinary

collaboration. To create the interdisciplinary spirit of our writing curriculum, we foster a cooperative relationship between those of us who are specialists in rhetoric and composition and the faculty from across the disciplines. Our WAC faculty development workshops provide the key setting for this kind of productive interchange. We use these cooperative relationships to discuss and identify the contexts and the audiences for projects that help students engage in writing as professionals in all the disciplines. The power and value of faculty dialogue about writing and teaching is hard to overestimate. That dialogue is fundamental to defining our *praxis* because we inform one another about how we construct knowledge within our disciplines, and also how we use writing ourselves and with our students to produce situated types of action.

To foster this dialogue, the WAC Program centers on workshops that essentially operate as interdisciplinary exchanges about writing and teaching, including teaching writing with technology. This exchange increasingly involves faculty from across the university, and also involves graduate students from across the disciplines working as WAC writing consultants. These consultants are typically graduate students who plan to teach or conduct research and they welcome the opportunity for professional development and experience in teaching writing in the discipline. With the support of summer grants from the WAC Program, faculty members are developing assignments in courses that use writing as a tool for learning while focusing students on writing for specific audiences and purposes that are meaningful to their disciplines.

Using the distinction between assignments that emphasize writing to learn and writing to communicate in the discipline, faculty members have developed assignments that focus on writing for specific, professional purposes and audiences. For example, in a senior level Real Estate course, the professor bases all the assignments on an extensive case study of a property. The course includes informal assignments used to learn and synthesize material and techniques, such as a reflective exercise on types of investors. Students write several short formal memos addressed to potential investors and based on research. A WAC consultant and the professor review the memos using clearly defined areas of focus for the content, organization, and style. Those assignments are then used as drafts for portions of the final group case study. In an upper level Biology Laboratory course, the professor creates assignments that help students understand and explain science to both general and specialist audiences. Students write academic reports and summarize published research to learn how to interpret data and to help them explain their analysis to general audiences. The professor then works with students to revise the formal reports written for specialists who would want to understand or reproduce the experiments required in the course. Both the Biology and Real Estate courses use writing and feedback from peers, consultants and the instructor. Ideally, students develop competence through written assignments and feedback over the semester.

As these examples suggest, the primary pedagogical method used for integrating writing into the curriculum is to use sequenced writing with feedback as the heart of courses that involve writing. However, our curriculum is also designed to train all students in specific rhetorical practices and research methodologies that they can carry to a multitude of professional settings. These practices and methodologies are actually implicit in

disciplinary-based knowledge and communication. An attention to audience, context, purpose and stance for communication helps make these discipline-based practices explicit rhetorical practices for students. Courses in the disciplines that incorporate writing have the following goals:

- Use discipline-based knowledge to define appropriate professional audiences and purposes for writing at the university.
- Use multiple modes of investigation and dissemination, including electronic methods that are appropriate to their disciplines.
- Use writing to help students build thoughtful connections between content areas.
- Help students acquire and practice ethics in all forms of communication.

In this way, writing across the curriculum shares broader goals for reinforcing a sound rhetorical and interdisciplinary approach to writing instruction in our departmental programs and across the university. This approach – what we are calling professional writing across the curriculum – does not fit neatly in the traditional definitions of WAC as a generic set of principles, or Writing in the Disciplines (WID) as an exclusive focus on discipline-based academic discourse. Rather, it is a synthesis of WID's focus on professionals writing in disciplines, and Professional Writing's focus on nonacademic contexts and audiences for writing.

In adopting a professional writing across the curriculum (and spawning yet another acronym – PWAC), we assume that the traditional belletristic academic essay or research paper cannot be the only goal for student writing on our campus. The academic essay only represents one form of professional writing – that of academic scholarly publication written for an audience of academic specialists. As Faigley and Romano have argued, the traditional privileging of the academic essay has remained unchallenged in American higher education throughout the twentieth century (1995). They point out, however, that millions of students now bring with them to college the experiences of reading and writing on electronic networks and this kind of electronic communication intrinsically disrupts traditional literacy practices (p. 49). Much of the writing described in the Biology and Real Estate courses was not only composed electronically, but also exchanged and reviewed over electronic mail. We agree that we can better educate our students by drawing upon their electronic communication experience while also making them critically analyze these new writing and communication technologies. With this in mind, we need to encourage the development of this critical awareness – what Cynthia Selfe (1999) calls critical technological literacy – in multiple courses and disciplinary settings until students develop appropriate sophistication with electronic communication.

More important still, most of our students will have to write in multiple forms for many public audiences, both specialists and non-specialists. As a fundamental principle, then, we promote the design of writing assignments that ask to students to consider specific, identifiable contexts and audiences for their written work. Furthermore, our emphasis on understanding and intervening in the process of producing effective written communication means that we pay much more attention to informal forms of writing – from field notes to flow charts. In practice, this often means extending the definitions of

what constitutes writing and moving beyond (without completely excluding) the traditional, academic essay or research paper as the only genre that our students master. This approach, we believe, best serves our students' interest and takes advantage of our urban setting and university culture of working professionals.

Our approach to developing writing within the campus curriculum is part of a broader change and transformation of the academy toward interdisciplinarity. The increasingly narrow specialization of the academic disciplines in American universities over the last 100 years, for example, has given way in the later part of this century to renewed interest in cross-disciplinary and theoretical inquiry (i.e., geomorphology or cultural studies) about science, culture and human experience. Increasingly, we recognize that interdisciplinary inquiry and methodology, as well as cross-disciplinary exchange are essential to solutions to problems and meaningful learning experiences. In English Departments, areas like composition studies, critical theory and professional writing not only help reinvigorate the curriculum, but they foster a fundamentally interdisciplinary approach to the analysis and production of texts and of knowledge.

Our concept of integrating professional writing throughout the curriculum is based in part on Prior's (1998) observation that, as students move into specialized professions, they engage in "literate activity" that constructs the discipline and also makes them part of that academic community's culture (p. 32). What writing courses based in the disciplines can do is help students see and represent themselves as professionals who write, and therefore create knowledge and enact change. The grounding in rhetoric helps students recognize how knowledge, methods, and forms are constructed historically and for different purposes, as well how their stance can be modified to accomplish change. A variety of real audiences in direct contact with students helps focus their awareness on the contextualized nature of all communication, and provides them the opportunity to engage in cross-disciplinary inquiry.

As specific requirements for writing are discussed by the faculty and the administration, our programs will promote courses that integrate undergraduate writing in the disciplines with professional writing. Courses that focus on writing for professional contexts and as a means for accomplishing specific, rhetorical tasks will, in turn, promote institutional change. Thus, we will have students take courses that reinforce rhetorical approaches to specific writing and research methodologies, using new information and communication technologies where appropriate. As a capstone experience, students will also develop electronic writing portfolios that emphasize reflection, methodology, and interdisciplinary writing/research.

The WAC program supports the model of professional writing courses for writing in various disciplines. Specific outcomes for professional writing courses include:

- Students write informally in all their coursework, with an emphasis on reflection and cross-disciplinary connections in what they are learning.
- Students develop documents / pedagogies in their disciplines that define professional audiences and situate forms of knowledge.

- Students use case-based assignments that are resolved by research and action through writing.
- Students engage in learning experiences that link them directly with audiences outside the university.

Our goals in professional writing courses across the curriculum overall are to emphasize interdisciplinary approaches to writing as well as the use of new technologies. The success of these courses will come from their epistemological fusion of these two precepts, a fusion that makes them radically different from traditional notions of academic writing, and ultimately more useful to our students as professionals.

The "P" in PWAC: Connections between Professional Writing and WAC

When we write of a "fusion" between interdisciplinary notions of writing – by which we also mean writing outside academic disciplines yet tied, like those disciplines, to professions – and new writing technologies, we are again talking about something that is not quite WAC and not quite professional writing. We are talking about writing program development that exists at a boundary within our institution. And so, since we want WAC to exist at this boundary, the development of this program can be enhanced by a strong professional writing presence. The links between WAC and professional writing are potentially deep and multiple, ranging from very concrete curricular and methodological links to the history and pragmatics of their origins and growth to shared theoretical perspectives.

Our Vision of Professional Writing

Professional writing can be a writing major but is also, and perhaps often, a service course or sequence of courses offered by English departments. The Professional Writing programs we are referring to here are partially in place and partially under development within our institution. One component is an existing track of specialization within our Rhetoric and Composition concentration inside the undergraduate English major. This specialization allows students, after taking basic university and departmental requirements in the Liberal Arts generally and in English language and literature, to take a series of writing courses designed with workplace applications in mind. They take up to six courses from the rhetoric and composition offerings that include Technical Writing, Business Writing, Electronic Writing and Publishing, Technical Editing, a Senior Seminar in Rhetoric and Composition, History of Rhetoric, and History, Theory and Practice of Expository or Argumentative Writing. An internship for those interested in corporate settings is also an option.

The major component under development is a new two-year, (36 hour) master's program based in an English department, but with separate requirements and curriculum from the master's programs already in place. We envision two types of students in this program – those treating it as a terminal degree planning to return to, continue with, or enter a professional writing position and those wanting to continue for the Ph.D. The first

audience we see as primary, although we certainly encourage the latter to work within this framework.

One of our most fundamental commitments is to ensure that this degree is focused on workplace applications of writing. In other words, while students with academic aspirations might take our courses, we want the requirements to be appropriate for someone becoming a professional writer in industry. For that reason, in addition to the major segment of courses being directly from professional and technical writing course, we wanted the additional offerings of an internship course, thesis research hours dedicated to professional writing project work, and elective hours of graduate work that can be taken from a related field (sciences, communication, computer science, public administration, etc.). In addition, our core course offerings would reflect writers' needs and important philosophies about writing. These include: Empirical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition, Technical Writing, Electronic Writing and Publishing, Usability Testing, and Multimedia Authoring. These requirements reflect our commitment to and interest in interdisciplinary work, community-based or corporate writing experiences, and practice with writing projects that reflect skills needed in industry.

Ultimately, we are attempting to articulate a program that is based on rhetorically sound principles, is closely (and dynamically) linked to industry, is attentive to community-based professional writing, and understands that professional writing, really, crosses the university as well as the workplace and so must be interdisciplinary. This structure is flexible enough, we think, to accommodate diverse student needs and to allow necessary programmatic change over time.

Curricular Connections with WAC

The vision of Professional Writing at GSU and that of WAC on our campus are inspired by the same vision of curricular transformation. The curricular emphasis in our WAC program is focused on the writing of professionals through courses that promote various genres and styles of writing, informal and formal writing, situated action and real-world assignments, and interdisciplinary inquiry. The Professional and Technical Writing curriculum incorporates a significant amount of collaboration with other disciplines such as communications (especially in the areas of video and multimedia production), information technology, computer science, and urban planning/public policy. On a practical level, the required courses for each program will be institutionalized separately, with WAC ultimately defined by the faculty in the University Senate and The Professional and Technical Writing curriculum by the Department of English. However, both programs seek to incorporate more productive connections with the Atlanta community and a broader range of experiences with writing than is currently available to Georgia State Students.

In our undergraduate and graduate level writing curriculum, we are envisioning requirements that would allow students to take advantage of industry and community partnerships. These requirements are taking the form of internships and service-learning

and corporate client-based projects in our courses. Developing a corporate component to an urban professional and technical writing program seems like an obvious task. With a rich array of businesses and government agencies literally steps away from campus, some of the work needed to make connections is easy. Our goals for developing corporate partnerships include providing rich, real-world writing experiences for our students, teaching students about the process of doing business, developing a curriculum that keeps pace with industry trends, and encouraging collaboration between industry and academia. The knowledge gained from these interactions will impact and transform our collective understanding and cross-disciplinary conversations of what constitutes "writing" at the university.

A common perception about academic-industry relationships is that they move in only one direction – that corporate settings provide students with knowledge about "the way it is out there." Yet these partnerships can be mutually beneficial if structured in appropriate ways. One crucial function of corporate-academic liaisons is to provide interaction between students and practicing professionals. This is perhaps the most common and simplest form of partnership employed by programs around the country. Such partnerships happen very simply at a course or project level, where students are asked to find corporate clients and work on real company writing needs. Students may find the initial contact daunting, but they often rate the worth of the project higher than others in the course when finished. The gains in terms of real-world writing experience are immense. They not only learn how to write within an organizational setting, but also how to work with clients and deal with other factors in the rhetorical situation that a textbook or case assignment cannot provide.

A second benefit of establishing corporate connections within a writing program comes at the level of course and program development. As writing and rhetoric faculty, we certainly have many ideas about what students need to learn, what assignments to give, what courses to offer, and what broad requirements we want in place. Many of us also work or have worked in industry as consultants or full-time writers and this experience enhances our understanding of where our students will work and what they need to know. However, the job of keeping pace with a variety of industries can be difficult when there is other work within the academy to be done (our own research and writing, teaching, program development, and service to the university to name a few). Our connection through an advisory board can enable us to keep the curriculum timely and up-to-date for our students.

In addition to corporate connections, we see liaisons with community-based organizations as having great potential. Researchers in professional writing are very much concerned with the relationships between writing and work. Much of the research in professional writing focuses on professional workers – engineers, bankers, and the like – and ignores the relationships between writing and work in a number of other workplaces and community contexts. We maintain this focus in professional writing for good reasons; our universities prepare students to become professionals and to occupy certain class positions. Yet we maintain this focus in the face of evidence that locates plenty of sophisticated "professional writing" in more diverse contexts. As Bernhardt and

Farmer (1998) point out, we find workers in workplaces not currently recognized by the professional writing community engaging in complex writing practices that were once only found in "white-collar" workplaces. We also find workers learning new work-related literacies in community-based literacy programs that once did not need to incorporate and teach these writing practices.

We see another example of this change in our local downtown Atlanta community. Around our university we find many community-based organizations and community-based non-profits. In fact, we get a number of our students from these organizations. Once we began to pay attention to these organizations and their writing, we began to see writing practices and needs that we were used to seeing in corporate workplaces. So we share communities with organizations that must write well in order to serve the community, and we prepare workers who may, in fact, return to these organizations to work after graduation rather than move into corporate positions. We may actually produce students who choose to write as professionals for community-based organizations. But none of this will ever happen if our program chooses to ignore the community that we share with people and organizations. We have begun to integrate these connections to our communities into our writing major, and we hope these courses inspire other departments to do the same.

At the undergraduate level, our response to our community has been to develop a service learning program. We have discovered that community-based work can be a compelling and sophisticated way to teach professional writing. Service learning in professional writing takes the form of working with community-based non-profits to help them determine and solve organizational problems. Nearly all such problems involve writing, and so these are excellent writing projects for our students. Our efforts are focused on building solid and *long-term* relationships between our programs at Georgia State and various communities around the university. Service learning allows students and teachers to move into community contexts in structured, meaningful, and potentially long-term ways in order to solve problems. We hope that our projects benefit those people that the organizations serve. Sometimes we can see this quite directly, sometimes we can't, but we hope it happens. These projects have greatly enhanced student learning and our sense of program identity in relation to the communities around us.

At the graduate level, we consider community-based writing and work somewhat differently, as a site for us to investigate and better understand through our students. The questions we are currently asking ourselves include "who are professional writers in Atlanta – where do they come from, for whom do they write, and what are the contexts in which they work?" In addition, we are asking ourselves where these workers get their training and education. If we look at the non-profit and community-based organizations around us, again, we see significant professional writing activity: grant writing, marketing, Web and information technology (systems) writing, database writing and management, and the full range of report-writing and documentation found in any corporate organization. Similarly, we actually learn more about writing through the interdisciplinary links we are making to professional programs on campus like public policy or urban planning. We know professional writing in community contexts is

common, but we understand so little about it that we are hard pressed to say much about it. Still, we believe we have a responsibility to the communities around the university, and this responsibility plays a key role in the program design.

Finally, we acknowledge the importance of a wide range of perspectives in guiding the development of a Professional Writing program that involves interdisciplinary work and curriculum development in conjunction with industry and community partners. A diverse and active advisory board drawing from private business, government, and community (especially non-profit) sectors would help us to draw on the strengths of each of these groups. An advisory board would serve as a welcome addition to our faculty time and talents, providing advice and guidance about where our program is headed and how we can best develop it to train students. The advisory committee helps provide a forum for equitable exchange of ideas. Faculty from various departments in the university can contribute names of working professionals who are potential employers of our students. This board can increase our understanding of the work of professionals who write, as well as professional writers. Faculty, in turn, can gain better public recognition for their work educating students. Ideally, this board should serve our institution, but we can also serve some of the needs of potential employers. Employers can hire professionals who have experience that they value and understand: writing that reflects professional activity inside and outside the university.

Methodological Connections with WAC

We also see clear connections in the methods each program is using to consciously develop connections within the institution and create support for its goals. Faculty development workshops, for example, are often successful in garnering institutional and individual support for WAC programs. Our initiatives to build a professional and technical writing program have mirrored this strategy to some degree. While the curricular need to teach service courses within the university made our presence known and accepted much more quickly, we have relied on informal and formal meetings with faculty and administrators across the university to allow for exchange and learning about what professional and technical writing is and could be at our institution. We have also used the faculty development workshop model to initiate a mentoring program for all those enlisted to teach within the Professional and Technical Writing program in our undergraduate-level Business Writing course. These workshops become fruitful exchanges for those teaching the course and help us all develop as teaching professionals.

Pragmatic and Historical Links with WAC

While there are clearly curricular and methodological links, the deeper connections are theoretical, institutional, historical, and of course, pragmatic. The pragmatic and historical relationships between WAC and professional writing will seem familiar to most, but still, they don't result in a necessary relationship between the two programs at any institution. At Georgia State, WAC is physically located in the Department of English although it is based in the College of Arts and Sciences. Furthermore, the director of the WAC program is a faculty member within the rhetoric division of the department,

also the location of professional writing. The faculty who teach in and are developing the professional and technical writing program are similarly in the rhetoric division of the English department and have training and interests in rhetorical theory and writing in various disciplines in addition to their technical writing experience. This division, and the professional writing component in particular, has a strong connection and commitment to its service courses (First-year Composition, Business Writing, Technical Writing) which serve students from all disciplines. In fact, all of us have significant contact with both undergraduate and graduate students from other disciplines, and to some degree, with their faculty and programs. And in professional writing, we are actively pursuing these relationships as part of our program design efforts to send our students to courses in other disciplines as part of an interdisciplinary graduate professional writing program. In short, what we are calling "pragmatic" links between WAC and professional writing constitute the basis for a compelling relationship between the two programs, largely because these issues structure much of our day-to-day lives as teachers, advisors, and program administrators. We work together, have similar interests, and come from similar backgrounds.

Theoretical Links with WAC

The most meaningful relationships between our two programs are driven by theoretical issues. The first is the issue of the use of computers and networks for writing, learning, and communication. Professional writing has long understood the importance of and utilized computers for writing, learning, and communication, and on many campuses, including Georgia State, it is the professional writing program that has in place the material, intellectual, and pedagogical infrastructure necessary to support meaningful PWAC work. Our vision of PWAC at Georgia State is framed by the widespread and deeply integrated use of writing technologies. Essentially our position is this: technology is not simply a tool to be used in neutral ways. It is also not the only facet of how we develop our programs and assignments (technology for technology's sake). Employing a critical view of technology means that we incorporate technology into our work in rhetorically situated ways. Our focus is always on the writing or learning tasks important for students. Technology is increasingly an integral part of how professional writers get their work done, but it is not the overriding factor. In other words, technology does not drive the pedagogy; it works in service of it. Integrating technologies into disciplinary work in a meaningful way requires that we deliberately design technologies and technology use to enact the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the discipline.

But more to the point, professional writing is not deeply rooted in traditional "English Studies" as a literary tradition. For historical and institutional reasons, most professional writing programs are situated within English departments, but their epistemological relationship with English has always been tenuous. Our position is that this uneasy relationship is not primarily a function of conflicting intellectual histories and prejudices. Rather, we believe this uneasy relationship is largely because epistemologically and methodologically, the work of professional writing teachers and researchers is situated, and highly valued, within disciplines other than English. This is a position that at the

same time makes professional writing an odd fit for English but a nice support for and ally of the WAC program.

Professional writing programs, in contrast to the textual, aesthetic, historical, and reading focuses of English, draw from rhetorical theory and history, pedagogies and processes from composition (particularly its focus on production), writing research methodologies drawn from linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and education, and are deeply concerned with the world of work, and increasingly, public life. What counts as knowledge, then, is drawn from diverse sources and is constructed in similarly diverse ways. This makes professional writing an intellectually interdisciplinary program, and therefore, professional writing teachers and researchers on many campuses typically have meaningful relationships with faculty and programs across campus. Professional writing programs fit oddly within the university; they occupy ambiguous institutional space; they work between spaces and within gaps. They are much like WAC in this regard.

The development of a tangible entity called professional and technical writing on our campus is having a similar impact on the institution to that of WAC, both in terms of challenging current boundaries and occupying new institutional space. The development of any new academic program that is accompanied by a curricular presence necessitates a change in the institutional hierarchy and organizational structure in terms of resources. Faculty lines must be created and filled, administrative positions need to exist to run the program, student advisors must exist, and these new duties all lead to shifts in faculty responsibility in terms of service, teaching and research. Space must be made in the current structure of the degree-granting department to allow for a degree/concentration/emphasis in professional and technical writing, including all of the apparatus that goes along with requirements for admittance, matriculation, and graduation. These changes in turn lead, hopefully, to shifts in budgets, physical classroom space, technology allocation, and other institutional resources.

On a more theoretical level, this form of program development leads to an increased awareness of the importance of writing both within the academy and outside it. Fundamental questions raised by this work include:

- What is English? Does professional writing belong there? What are English majors?
- What is writing? How does a Department of English address non-verbal literacies of various kinds?
- How can we accommodate an interdisciplinary program in an institution that is structured around distinct academic units?
- What is the purpose of undergraduate and graduate education anyway? How much of students' work should be academic training versus skills to directly feed into specific workplaces?

These questions and the debates that accompany them lead us into very productive conversations with others in the university, but also cause tension. Through this praxis of

program development, we are challenging institutional assumptions, boundaries, and values at some very basic levels.

Program Design and Institutional Change

Our assertion that writing program development challenges institutional orders is where we want our conceptual journey to end. We see the development of PWAC and professional writing degree programs at Georgia State as actions located in boundaries between disciplines and institutional systems, and particularly because these programs are located in a boundary space, we see their development as mechanisms for institutional change. We also see change as a necessary component of the design *praxis* we have discussed throughout the article. Therefore, we see *praxis* as a powerful way to situate program design, we see writing program design as a mechanism for institutional change, and we see this change as a good thing, largely because most university institutions aren't hospitable places for meaningful writing programs. In fact, our programs won't continue to exist if change doesn't continue.

Our assertion rests on the claim that institutions can be changed. We are accustomed to thinking of institutions in the abstract, but institutions are also localized manifestations of larger systems: local public schools, community literacy programs, and writing programs within larger university institutions. David Harvey (1996) writes that institutions are "produced spaces," or relatively stable "domains of organization and administration" (p. 112). He also writes that institutions are composed of "semiotic systems" (e.g., writing) that organize practices that affect people subject to or active through a particular institution. Institutions are the systems that we are subject to and through which we act every day. Institutions are the universities where we teach, the schools our children attend, and the locations of a great number of public interactions (the department of motor vehicles; social service agencies; parent-teacher groups; neighborhood committees). Institutions are local, concrete spaces (discursive and architectural) that are written. They are given life discursively through the writing that makes them possible (e.g., legislation, regulation, business plans, curricula), and they act through other forms of writing (e.g., policy, procedures). Institutions, in other words, are written. And our position is that if institutions are written, then they can certainly be rewritten by finding the discursive gaps and ambiguities and working in these gaps to change day-to-day practices. Finding and naming these gaps, of course, is the difficult part and involves a certain sophistication and experience and skill to read one's home institution.

So how does one intervene in an institution? First, the process involves an act of reading in an effort to look for gaps and ambiguities. Then the process moves to revision: rewriting institutions through these gaps and ambiguities. This effort of reading and writing is productive. It constitutes the heart of a design *praxis*. The gaps and ambiguities to which we have been alluding constitute the places where institutions are most unstable and therefore subject to change. What this means depends on the situation, but generally speaking, we are thinking of things like processes, definitions, lines of organization and funding that can be used for unintended purposes or that can be altered to achieve new purposes. These processes orchestrate the very structure of the institution itself. It is

within these processes that people within an institutional space, talk, listen, act, and confront differences. Finding these spaces is a necessary interpretive step. At Georgia State, like many universities, the WAC program is located at a boundary between both disciplines and institutional systems (e.g., between departments and colleges; sometimes as its own institutional entity). It has a budget, it is part of the university's strategic plan, and it is organizationally "different" from other writing programs on campus. The professional writing program, for its part, has had to create space by leveraging its value as a service course (e.g., the ability to generate credit hours) and its credibility outside the university. Once in place, even marginally, writing programs can continue to use existing institutional systems of decision-making and value to create their own space and legitimacy. In our case, movement is possible in the boundaries between more stable institutional entities. Our theory of institutional change, then, seeks to use rhetorical means to improve institutional systems. And this change can happen (1) because institutions are rhetorically constructed, (2) because their construction and operation is a function of design processes, (3) because key processes (like decision-making) can be places of interaction and difference, and (4) because such places are potentially unstable and open to change.

Without question, the most powerful practice to our design and change efforts has been our sense of program development as *praxis*. One of the strengths of work in rhetoric and composition and professional writing is the long-standing and thoughtful embrace of the concept of *praxis* as useful to the enterprise of understanding and teaching writing (see, for example, Phelps, 1991; Miller, 1989; and Herndl, 1993). Generally thought of as an articulation of thought/action or theory/practice – but never a "middle ground" between the two – *praxis* occupies a different place with respect to thought, action, and the construction of knowledge. As Sullivan and Porter (1997) see it (glossing Donald Schön, 1983), *praxis* is "a kind of thinking that does not start with theoretical knowledge or abstract models, which are then applied to situations, but that begins with immersion in local situations, and then uses epistemic theory as heuristic rather than as explanatory or determining" (p. 26). *Praxis* is a type of procedural knowledge, a concept that deserves some attention because it suggests that *praxis* is at one and the same time both a verb and a noun. *Praxis*, in other words, is a type of situated action – informed, reflective, but unquestionably kinetic, people acting to change conditions in some way. But the concept of *praxis* suggests a type of knowledge as well – a deep understanding of local situations, if you will. And this is the power of the concept in terms of its usefulness for program design: Our sense of design *praxis* ultimately produces new understandings along with new programs (or features of programs). We should learn something about where we are, who we are (and who our students are) and about the enterprise of understanding and teaching writing. The list of questions presented earlier in the article about how professional writing program development has caused us to reconsider basic issues related to the meaning of writing and writing instruction and its place in the curriculum are good examples. Such a design *praxis* is serious intellectual work that produces something that didn't exist before – intellectually, ethically, politically, and institutionally. It produces both a writing program and powerful knowledge about a host of issues related to that writing program.

So what new understandings have we generated? First in our minds are the cooperative relationships with faculty to understand writing in their disciplines, but more so, to develop with them a fuller notion of what professional writing in their disciplines might look like. This includes our shifting notions of what the professional writing program ought to look like based on our conversations with faculty, people in industry, and those associated with community-based groups and non-profits. The very identity of WAC and professional writing is changing for us because of our local experiences, and we believe that these changes have implications for our home disciplines. Second is our developing understanding of institutional systems. We see this as indispensable to effective program development, particularly for those interested in changing institutional systems. We have learned the importance of mapping our place in relation to larger institutional systems. We have learned the importance of funding formulae and lines, decision-making systems, and the powerful role of certain institutional documents (e.g., our attempts to place professional writing in the university's strategic plan). Third is our new understanding of the communities around the university and from which our students come. This may be perhaps the most exciting development for us because in taking the community seriously, we are shifting the identity of our writing programs to encompass in concrete ways its contribution to civic life and its extraordinary relevance to writing in numerous contexts. In short, we are coming to a new understanding of our professional selves and how we fit into the university where we work and the communities where we live. And we believe that this new understanding – fragmented and tentative though it may sometimes seem – both comes from and changes the climate at Georgia State University. We believe as well that, like others working to understand writing in their own contexts, we contribute to more general disciplinary changes.

Program design, particularly when seen as *praxis*, is hard work that forces an acknowledgement and examination of personal interests and biases, local practices and beliefs, institutional contexts, and broader notions of what education and student learning are all about. What we have learned about our institution and our program in this process of design is very useful knowledge about who we are and what we want to do. We are producers of a program that blends a variety of interests and practices into a coherent whole (we hope). This work of program design is rewarding when it serves the needs of students, our faculty, our institution, and the broader business world and community. However, this work does not come easily or without a price. We liken ourselves to birds who look over the rock face of our institution for gaps in which to build our nest. Not all are agreeable to finding out about gaps, much less to having us build our program there. Yet ultimately, using these opportunities created by institutional change for our program leads to a more unified vision and a deeper impact on our students and on our institution.

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