CHAPTER 16.

THE INTELLECTUAL WORK OF WRITING PROGRAM REVIEW

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In this chapter we honor Anne Ruggles Gere's contributions to the field of rhetoric and writing studies through her work as a member of the Council of Writing Program Administrators' (CWPA) WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service since 1985—nearly forty years. We offer a set of reflections on the intellectual work of writing program review as colleagues of Anne's who know her contributions to this work and understand its significance through our participation in it with her. Anne has been a member of the Service since very nearly its beginning, shaping the Service through each of the visits she has made and through years of participation in the panel members' annual workshops and policy discussions.

Since its establishment in 1980,[1] the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service[2] has offered colleges and universities the opportunity to assess and improve their writing programs using processes similar to those of accrediting agencies and

1 For a history of the Consultant-Evaluator Service, see Shirley K Rose's "Creating a Context: The Institutional Logic of the Council of Writing Program Administrators' Development of the Consultant-Evaluator Service."

2 Additional information about the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service is available on the Council of Writing Program Administrators website: https://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sp/consulting-services.

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academic program review, including self-studies conducted by the programs under review, brief on-site visits to the programs, written reports of findings and recommendations, and suggested steps for follow-up.

Much of the work of the Consultant-Evaluator (C-E) Service is difficult to identify, because it is conducted confidentially.[3] Despite this relative invisibility, however, it has contributed to the development of the field in important ways. In each of our contributions that follow we provide some insights into the work of the Service by sharing some of the lessons we've individually and collectively learned from working with Anne. Deborah Holdstein begins with a discussion of the process and criteria for selecting consultants for a particular visit; Chris Anson tells a story about what he learned from Anne's style of taking notes in meetings during a visit; Chris Thaiss shares an anecdote about what he learned from Anne about drafting a report and recommendations; Shirley Rose offers a vignette from a visit schedule that illustrates the multiple rhetorical situations that constitute a C-E visit; and Kathleen Blake Yancey reflects on the impact WPA C-E visits have on individual writing programs and on writing studies as a field. We hope that this chapter will be useful to stakeholders in writing programs that are preparing for reviews, to scholars who are interested in engaging in this intellectual work, and to scholars of institutional culture and field history.

DEBORAH H. HOLDSTEIN

To say that Anne Gere is a go-to, a supreme C-E among other expert C-Es, is an understatement. But first, something of an explanation. For over a decade, I had the privilege of co-directing or directing the C-E Service. One of the many responsibilities of the director—organizing and leading the annual workshop for C-Es, working with and reporting to the CWPA Executive Board, reviewing with colleagues the criteria for the self-study process that proceeds a campus visit, communicating with and facilitating the nuts-and-bolts of the visit as organizational point person, consulting with the campus representative to delineate the schedule for the visit, and the like—involves the director's all-important decision of who will be most appropriate as part of the two-person team that will visit the campus and generate the final report with recommendations.

That said, I was always aware that the initial purpose of the visit as stated by the campus writing program administrator (WPA), or whoever organizes and/or commissions the visit, might only be the tip of the proverbial iceberg. For instance, a WPA might write to me in the initial request for a visit, indicating

3 A copy of the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service's "Ethics Guidelines for CWPA Consultant-Evaluators" is available as a PDF file on its website: https://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/asset_manager/get_file/377903?ver=13.

that the campus would like an evaluation of the writing center. The ensuing self-study from the campus might focus on issues related to that campus writing center, again, the ostensible purpose of the visit. However, after reading the self-study and arriving on campus, the team members might find related issues that make the visit about much more than the writing center, whether related to staffing, part-time faculty members, tenure-track lines, writing center practice that interfaces (or not) with first-year writing, or writing across disciplines. It is essential to best serve the campus as a student-centered institution and to best represent the CWPA and the profession that the director and WPA C-E Service leaders keep in mind the importance of including on the panel of consultants, and sending to a campus, those who are ethical, well-versed in the field regarding administration and its constraints, and nimble in intellect and in practice. C-Es must be willing and unafraid to address issues of importance that for whatever reason the visited campus itself might not "see."

The invitation to become part of the C-E panel is not given lightly. That is, it is a capstone type of experience for those in the profession; for its credibility and in service to the profession, the organization sends to campuses not only those who are experienced teacher-scholars in their own, respective areas of rhetoric and composition, but also those who have held leadership positions in or who fully understand departments and administrative roles writ large. I have always liked to say that the best C-Es are "educated generalists," colleagues who are prepared to work and address constructively whatever they might find during a campus visit and, accordingly, to decide what (and what not) to delineate and recommend to the campus in the final report. As one might expect, it is also helpful for the C-E to bear a type of gravitas (a quality unrelated to age) in case, as often happens, one is scheduled to meet with, say, a president or provost.

Anne Gere's attributes as a scholar and teacher reflect and enhance her excellence as a C-E: Anne is intellectually nimble, analytical, highly informed, ethical, practical, result-oriented, and tirelessly accountable. I would say, in fact, that the qualities that have made Anne the outstanding scholar that she is also contribute to her standing as C-E *par excellence.* Having worked with Anne on her contribution called "A Rhetoric of Pen and Brush" for my recent volume *Lost Texts in Rhetoric and Composition*, I saw yet again how Anne's scholarly reach in an essay about the little-known work of Angel DeCora makes visible the otherwise invisible, a quality of importance as one sifts through myriad forms of evidence while visiting a campus. As Anne writes, "Given [DeCora's] audience" her work "required both courage and skill" (33). Work as a C-E requires informed skill and, often, appropriate forms of courage; Anne's work on literacy, giving voice to those without, readily extends to her analytical work as a consultant.

CHRIS ANSON

A scene: Anne and I are sitting in a meeting with some higher-level administrators while conducting a review of a writing program. The discussion is animated. Attendees respond to our questions quickly, sometimes almost interrupting each other with eager thoughts, bits of program history, and reflections entangling the issues we've raised. It's interesting, dynamic, and complicated, requiring us to sort through rapid-fire information to reach something approaching a considered, fact-based analysis.

I have found a seat near an electric outlet so I can plug in my battery-compromised laptop. Handwriting notes is out of the question because inevitably I'll hastily scratch material that later I can't decipher. Decades of typing have left me with a second-grader's scrawl, and besides, it's just too slow. I'm a fast typist, and I've developed the ability to look at people in a meeting while almost silently keystroking comments and thoughts, glancing at the screen only very occasionally. I've perfected this process to the point where attendees are unaware that I'm actively taking notes; I want them to know that I'm listening carefully and being present in the meeting, not giving all my attention to a keyboard. I can always fix the small typos later if I want, and usually I don't need to because I know exactly what I was writing. Once in a while, during a pause in the discussion, I'll add some thoughts in brackets about what I'm hearing. But essentially I'm playing the role of a court reporter, creating a raw transcript of the proceedings. Analysis, synthesis, and assessment will come later. During a full-scale C-E visit, I usually generate 30 or more single-spaced pages of typed notes, which serve as both the general and detailed support for what I contribute to the report.

At this meeting, I become aware for the first time in our years of shared contexts that Anne, sitting a few seats away, is listening attentively to the attendees, adding questions or asking for clarifications … and *writing almost nothing*. Every few minutes she jots down some notes on a pad for later consultation. It occurs to me that we're using entirely different processes to reach similar conclusions about the complex administrative, instructional, institutional, and employment-related issues surrounding and infusing the workings of a busy writing program.

And the differences in those processes point to something remarkable about Anne. Whereas I'm unable to recall some details of our meetings without a textual record of them, Anne is *already* analyzing, synthesizing, and assessing aspects of the program we're visiting. Whereas I can't process all the back-and-forth, all the quick comments and occasional non sequiturs that characterize the way faculty and administrators often interact, Anne is sorting through it all at lightning speed and reaching significant points to include in our report, much of it from memory. Whereas I am *deferring* some of our thinking, Anne is already thinking it.

Later, during the time set aside for us to initially compare our thoughts and impressions, I'm glued to my laptop, scrolling through hundreds of lines of text. Anne flips through a page or two of her handwritten notes, using them to jog her memory of specific details and information. We compare impressions, formulate judgments. Although I have conducted dozens of program reviews over the years, I'm in awe of Anne's calm way of unraveling everything we've seen and heard and reaching highly insightful conclusions about what the program we're visiting is doing well and where it might improve.

Then, when the visit is over and we've returned to our homes, it's time for the two of us to collaboratively draft our report. I create a Google Doc for us and write some introductory boilerplate, customizing it with the specific details of our visit. The next part is hard. We've divided up components of the program for initial drafting, and I'm working between my extensive notes and my analysis and recommendations. It's a slow composing process, requiring some of the highest-level thinking that C-Es do in their professional work. Returning to the Google Doc later, I see that Anne has added sections, elegantly written, brilliantly insightful, highly diplomatic. And I can almost see that process at work as she consults her concisely handwritten material and goes back to the ideas she had already formulated in situ.

Scholars argue that writers employ different cognitive processes when producing text. It used to be thought that there were "better" writing behaviors that generate writing of higher quality with greater efficiency. Further research has shown much greater variation in those processes without a loss of quality. About efficiency, I'm less sure.

Anne and I produced a terrific report from that visit, but there wasn't much question that Anne brought to that process a finely tuned, highly significant way of working that is clearly tied to her immense success as a scholar, administrator, and teacher.

I'm trying to learn from Anne. So I came up with an idea, jotted down a couple of sentences of notes, and a month later knew exactly what I would write about her. Now if I can only make it work this way during a program review.

CHRIS THAISS

Writing for this Festschrift for Anne Gere is a true pleasure for me, as Anne has been an exemplar of public service in literacy and writing for so many years. In particular, I'd like to focus this brief reflection on her help to me after I became a newly elected member of the WPA C-E Service in the spring of 2011. During my 35 prior years as a writing teacher and as an administrator of writing programs, writing centers, WAC/WID programs, and National Writing Project

sites, I had always admired the C-E Service for the conscientiousness, thoroughness, and fairness of its members' work in responding to calls by colleges and universities for advice and assistance in resolving difficulties and aiding writing program development.

In preparing for my new role, I studied the extensive documentation of the Service's principles, rules, and procedures, and I took part in the workshop for all new members. A key part of this readiness for the actual work of program consultation is being paired with a veteran C-E on the first campus visit to which one is assigned. Now, it is a rule of the C-E Service that all consultations are done in pairs; there is constant participation by both team members in all events of a visit and ongoing communication between the two team members toward the writing of reports and the giving of oral advice to the stakeholders of the institution which has contracted with the Service. In the case of newly elected members, such as I was in 2011, this pairing facilitates having the new member observe, ask questions of, and learn helpful practices from the veteran member.

I was most fortunate to be paired with Anne Gere on my first campus visit in fall 2011. Anne had already been a C-E Service member for a number of years, so I studied carefully her interactions with the administrators who were our primary contacts with the university as well as how we created a schedule of meetings for our visit and then conducted those meetings in order to hear from as many people as possible. I could go into detail on all these facets of a C-E visit, but what stood out most sharply to me in our precious two and a half days (the C-E Service standard) on the campus was Anne's determination to have us *craft a full first draft* of what would become our final report on the evening of our second and only full day on the campus. Achieving this goal would require us to spend hours of evening and late evening time on this task—after a full day of intense meetings that had begun with a breakfast meeting just after 7:00 a.m.

Here I'd been assuming that our intensive discussions and note-taking on that Monday with many groups of faculty, students, and campus administrators—plus a campus tour—would have earned us a bit of evening down time to begin our sorting of the many inputs from the day's meetings—mostly with concerned people we were just meeting for the first time. Since we still had ahead of us a half day of more meetings, with fresh inputs, I figured that putting together all this complex information into a coherent presentation could wait until the scheduled "consultation team discussion time" on Tuesday, leading up to our formal presentation of our *preliminary* findings to our hosts on that afternoon. Then we would have a week or two of time back on our own campuses to revise the presentation into a solid multi-page report that we would send to the campus.

But Anne's justification of this seemingly draconian schedule for Monday night was convincing, so much so that I've mostly adhered to it since in all my

visits, including those in which I have been the mentor to newer C-Es. She argued, first, that by the time we finished that only full day of meetings we not only had (1) our notes from those meetings on which to build a draft of our report, but we also had (2) our study of the program documents that the client institution had provided us well in advance, as well as (3) the long self-study report that the school had provided in response to our lengthy questionnaire, which detailed many program elements and which gave background on the issue that had led them to request a consultation. So all that remained of new information we'd yet to receive would come in the meetings the following Tuesday morning—and that new information we could use to revise our draft in preparation for the exit meeting with our hosts that afternoon.

Second, she counseled, our putting in the time to write on that Monday evening would allow us to begin to consolidate our thinking after all that study and actually help give us a framework for the questions we might ask the following morning. Third, we would no doubt find that whatever time, say two hours, we had after the morning meetings the next day and before the final exit meeting would be too brief to bring together the mass of information from the weeks during which we'd been preparing. So we had better put in the evening hours Monday, no matter the length of that day, to set us up for a more productive Tuesday.

While that part of my introduction from Anne Gere to the intense work of a campus visit by the C-E Service was dramatic for me, my really enduring debt to her example has been her absolute professionalism, her concern to listen to and respect everyone on a campus with whom we come into contact, and her always mutually respectful collaboration with her fellow consultant to do the best job possible for the people who have hired the C-E Service.

SHIRLEY K ROSE

Scene: It's around 10:00 on the second morning of our visit to the writing program of a large public university. Yesterday, we had meetings with the department chair and graduate program chair, administrators for the first-year composition and upper-division professional writing programs that are the focus of the visit, the college dean, the writing programs' teachers, and the administrator of the campus writing center.

But our schedule for today has been revised overnight because a snowstorm has prompted the airlines to change both Anne's and my reservations and put us on earlier flights. Over a long dinner in the hotel restaurant the evening before, Anne and I developed and outlined our six main recommendations for the program that we had planned to present in the exit interview that had been scheduled for the

close of the visit. Our recommendations are based on what we've learned from the institution's website, our review of news items about recent higher-education-related legislation in the state where this campus is located, our careful reading of the self-study prepared by the WPAs of the writing programs that are the focus of our visit, and what we've heard in yesterday's meetings.

We assigned three recommendations to Anne and three to me, and after dinner, in our respective hotel rooms, we worked on drafting several paragraphs of support for each of these six recommendations for inclusion in our written report and prepared a few notes to guide our discussion in the exit interview that would close the campus visit.

However, the schedule the WPAs have carefully put together no longer works. Instead of the planned exit interview with program WPAs and department chair, we're having coffee with the WPAs, then we will go to lunch with the chair before the short trip to the airport to catch our flights. At coffee in the morning, Anne glances at her notes, then gives a quick summary of five of our six recommendations, to which the WPAs nod in response. When she comes to the sixth recommendation—that the department hire a third tenure-track faculty person with a specialization in rhetoric and writing studies—she pauses before saying, "This last recommendation is the most important one … ," then goes on to caution the WPAs that, without another tenure-track faculty person to share leadership responsibilities for the multiple aspects of their first-year composition program, upper-division professional writing program, undergraduate writing minor, and graduate program in rhetoric and writing, they should scale back expectations for implementing any of our other recommendations. "Take care of yourselves" is the gist of her advice.

In a few minutes, we head over to the cafeteria in the student union for lunch with the department chair. Once again, we begin with a quick summary of our six recommendations, and the chair nods at each, acknowledging that none comes as a surprise. Then Anne zeroes in on the sixth and asks what might be some strategies for getting funding for a third tenured rhetoric and writing faculty position. We spend the next few minutes brainstorming with him about some arguments he might be able to make to the college dean about re-assigning a newly opened position in the college to the English department.

When the meeting is over, Anne and I are rushed to the airport to catch our respective flights to Detroit and Phoenix, and each of us spends the time waiting for our repeatedly delayed flights at our respective gates revising our written report on our shared Google Doc to reflect the morning's conversations. The specifics of the arguments for our recommendations will align with what we've heard and said in the two meetings, though they will be phrased in more tentative language than we used in the morning's conversations.

As this vignette illustrates, C-Es encounter multiple rhetorical situations in the course of a visit; some follow a conventional format and are highly predictable while others are less so. Listening to Anne as she has nimbly shifted from the planned presentation and discussion of our six recommendations in a formal exit interview to the more spontaneous mentoring session with the WPAs and brainstorming session with the chair has reminded me that, while the purpose of our C-E visit—to help writing programs serve their students as effectively as possible—is a constant, our rhetorical strategies vary in response to audiences and always-unpredictable events. C-E work is rhetorical work.

KATHLEEN BLAKE YANCEY

The C-E Service provides two kinds of assistance, both signaled in its name. The first is a formal program evaluation, which, drawing on multiple contexts—and more about this, shortly—describes issues and makes recommendations. The second, and as important, is consultation, a kind of guidance and advice shared sometimes in the report itself and sometimes informally with program stakeholders during the visit. Critical in providing both kinds of assistance is the set of contexts that C-Es engage with; briefly outlining those gives some idea as to why and how Anne has exemplified the best of the C-E Service.

As suggested in the previous narratives, the review process itself is multi-contextual by design. Program stakeholders—sometimes the WPA requesting the visit acting as a single author but more often different stakeholders playing different roles (e.g., the director of first-year composition, the writing center director, a library services liaison)—complete a detailed self-study keyed to the heuristic for reports provided by the C-E Service. This report, thoughtfully describing, analyzing, and interpreting the institutional context, is, of course, based on local expertise, a collective knowledge about the institution and its programs that is often tacit but which writing the report helps makes explicit. The visit itself, which involves interviews and discussions with students, faculty, staff, administrators, and occasionally even alumni, is an opportunity to bring the context to life, enriching it through multiple voices while also allowing the C-Es to trace differences and tensions across and within them. In this process, the local context becomes pluralized.

Each of the C-Es brings another kind of expertise to the C-E review process, not the deep local institutional knowledge developed by the program stakeholders but rather a deep and wide knowledge about writing programs generally, about how writers develop, and about structures that support both. The C-Es' task, then, is to work together in two ways, bringing the context of local knowledge into the larger context of C-E knowledge and then, as this chapter's co-authors

explain, bringing together their different individual knowledge sets into a kind of synthesis. Engaging in multiple contexts so as to understand both past and present of the writing program, the C-Es then plot a possible future for the program, one sensitive to and compatible with the institution. Plotting that possible future is a somewhat kaleidoscopic process of identifying other programs with model features, structures, or practices that, if adopted or adapted, would be of use and value to the program in question. Not least, the process itself contributes more generally to what we might call the C-E funds of knowledge. Having reviewed this program, for example, the C-Es themselves have another program to think with. Similarly, after removing identifying information and under the guidance of the C-E director, they may share aspects of the program and/or its review at a C-E workshop with other C-Es, thus contributing to their knowledge. Likewise, if a provocative, troubling, or laudable aspect of the program resembles one that has appeared in other program reviews—for instance, the proliferation of online writing programs or the development of career ladders for non-tenure-track faculty—the C-E Service may investigate that aspect more formally, for instance by inviting experts on the topic to share their knowledge on it, thus assuring that all C-Es bring knowledge on that topic to future visits. In addition, should a topic be understood as critical for all program reviews, it is added to the heuristic that guides self-study reports.

As suggested, each C-E brings multiple contexts to the review process, including their knowledge about writing programs. Much of this knowledge is based on research, of course, while some of it has been developed through C-E professional development, as noted previously, and some results from their own writing program activities. In this regard, Anne's experience is unique. At one time a high school teacher, Anne well understands the transition into college composition that many college students make in the fall following high school graduation. As a long-time director of the University of Michigan's Sweetland Center for Writing, Anne saw firsthand a full range of writing programs as she provided leadership for first-year composition, advanced writing, the writing center, and writing across the curriculum. In addition, under her leadership, the Sweetland Center created an ePortfolio-based writing minor, which also provided a foundation for the University of Michigan longitudinal writing study she coordinated, *Developing Writers in Higher Education*, with chapters authored primarily with several of her then-current or former graduate students and published in a digital format. And collaborating locally and nationally with colleagues in writing and in STEM fields, Anne has led an NSF-funded project focused on supporting student writers, especially in large lecture classes (Schultz), an especially challenging environment given the numbers of students enrolled in them. Put generally, based on these

experiences, the depth and breadth of knowledge that Anne brings to C-E visits, and the C-E Service itself, is extraordinary.

CLOSING

As each of us has shown, our experiences working with Anne have been opportunities to learn in the process of making significant contributions to the college writing programs we have visited as members of the WPA C-E Service. We are grateful to Anne for the many lessons we've learned with her along the way as we've undertaken the work of the C-E Service together and for all she has contributed not only to the CWPA but also to colleges, universities, and writing programs around the country. We encourage our readers to seek out opportunities to engage with the work of writing program evaluation—both as WPAs of programs inviting evaluation and as potential program reviewers.

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