EDITORS' COLUMN

We began working on this issue with the awareness that 1998 is the 20th anniversary of Mina P. Shaughnessy's death and that 1998 may also be the end of open admissions as we have known it at CUNY. At a time like this, we feel the need to be reflective but also to be looking toward the future. So this issue is a special issue: an examination of the legacy of Mina Shaughnessy and an examination of our field at a crossroads. We are deeply aware of the rift in our field that puts on one side those who believe that basic writers are best served by identifying them and providing classes and resources for them at their entrance to college and, on the other side, those who feel that they are better served by unqualified admission and placement in mainstream classes, believing that special designations provide an easy target for those trying to outsource, downsize, eliminate, or "improve" our programs. We think of Mina Shaughnessy and recall that, in the first issue of *JBW* in 1975, she wrote about the "young men and women who want to be in college, who have enough intelligence to do college work, but who are not skilled enough when they arrive on campus to survive in a rigorously academic environment." She also wrote about how the teachers who "teach across such a range of skills and experiences can expect to confront more questions than they will ever be able to answer and abandon more strategies than they will ever finally accept." It was her belief that *JBW* would offer a place for "the exchange of observations and theories among such teachers." And so this exchange continues.

We begin with an essay aptly titled, "'The Dilemma that Still Counts': Basic Writing at a Political Crossroads." In it, Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner look at basic writing in this "pivotal moment," recognizing that this is the time when we need to define, or re-define, basic writing by examining past research and by making suggestions for future research. Referring to Shaughnessy, they ask whether it is error that defines students as basic writers and, if it is, how we can better understand errors and the students that make them.

Jeanne Gunner's "Iconic Discourse: The Troubling Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy" attempts to historicize Shaughnessy's contribution and to examine what it means that her name has come to be the "symbolic representation of the basic writing field, its students, teachers, and pedagogy." Using Foucault's concept of the author function, Gunner examines how Shaughnessy has become the primary coordinate for the discourse of our field and what that implies.

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Using a rhetorical analysis of Mina Shaughnessy's scholarship, Laura Gray-Rosendale counters recent charges that Shaughnessy's work was essentialist, accommodationist, and lacked focus on material conditions. In her "Inessential Writings: Shaughnessy's Legacy in A Socially Constructed Landscape," Gray-Rosendale identifies the contradictions, self-differences, the very inessentiality, of Shaughnessy's work and argues for a closer examination of both the texts and the historical-political context of her writing.

Howard Tinberg, in "Teaching in the Spaces Between: What Basic Writing Students Can Teach Us," presents the voices of his students telling the importance of education in their lives. While he is speaking to all of us who teach basic writing, his perspective is that of a teacher in a two-year college; from that perspective, he rejects the move to transform the mission of two-year colleges into one of narrowly defined developmental endeavors. In questioning the identity of basic writing, he reminds us that the responsibility of higher education must be with the two-year, four-year, and high schools, all working together.

In "Technology, Basic Writing, and Change," Jeffrey T. Grabill, also questions the identity of basic writing programs. He believes that program identity is a function of the larger institution, and writing teachers must focus their efforts on working with those institutional processes. Participating in technology design can provide a wedge for basic writing faculty to engage in the decision-making process and to ensure that knowledgeable writing teachers will remain in control of their curriculum and pedagogy.

We end the issue with what may seem prescient and strikingly relevant, although written as long ago as 1976, Mina Shaughnessy's extraordinary "The Miserable Truth," in which she forewarns us that we "had better keep learning how to teach writing because the brothers and sisters and cousins and children of our students will be back." In this piece, she reminds us of the inequity of public education and the young people who have been failed by these "savage inequalities." Shaughnessy tells us that the social change individuals gain through education has a power that once begun cannot be stopped. She writes, "But once the possibility of change touches their imaginations, once a right has been extended to them and they have felt its power to open and enrich their lives, they cannot got back."

Trudy Smoke *and* **George Otte**