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The *Journal of Basic Writing* publishes articles of theory, research, and teaching practices related to basic writing. Articles are refereed by members of the Editorial Board (see overleaf) and the Editors.

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 10-20 pages on topics related to basic writing, broadly interpreted.

Manuscripts will be refereed anonymously. We require five copies of a manuscript and an abstract of about 100 words. To assure impartial review, give author information and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page *only*. Papers which are accepted will eventually have to supply camera-ready copy for all ancillary material (tables, charts, etc.). One copy of each manuscript not accepted for publication will be returned to the author, if we receive sufficient stamps (no meter strips) clipped to a self-addressed envelope. We require the MLA style (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 4rd ed., 1995*). For further guidance, send a stamped letter-size, self-addressed envelope for our style sheet and for camera-ready specifications.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic writing theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing, social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory, grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; English as a second language; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening. The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in nontechnical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy.

A "Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award" is given to the author of the best *JBW* article every two years (four issues). The prize is $500, now courtesy of Lynn Quitman Troyka. The winner, to be selected by a jury of three scholars/teachers not on our editorial board, is announced in our pages and elsewhere.

EDITORS' COLUMN

"Let's get specific." That seems to be the dictum driving the authors in this issue. Our field has seen more than its share of general discussions and polemics about basic writing's right to exist. Even in the popular press, we are regaled with accounts of how, where, and especially whether basic writing should be taught. Calls for an end to basic writing emanate from both the left and the right, creating a strange kind of squeeze play, with basic writing caught in the middle. Whether the call is for mainstreaming in the name of fairness or restricted access in the name of higher standards, the strong suggestion is that what basic writing instructors have been doing shouldn't be done at all.

When principle-based arguments from such different premises come to basically the same conclusions, it's time to look past principles to facts and specifics. If what basic writing instructors have been doing is something worthwhile, that ought to be demonstrable. It ought to rest on results and not just reasoning, on evidence and not just arguments.

That's an idea the authors gathered together in this issue have taken to heart, and they give us richly authoritative ways of saying what basic writing students are capable of (not least of all over time). They show us what they are doing, what they need, who they are, what becomes of them in the long run. Not all of the evidence is inspiriting, but it is real evidence, impossible to ignore or dismiss.

The entire field of composition has come to acknowledge what a powerful body of evidence Marilyn Sternglass has amassed in her longitudinal study of basic writers *Time to Know Them*. Recipient of the most recent Modern Language Association's Mina Shaughnessy Prize for the best book in composition, *Time to Know Them* also won this year's Outstanding Book Award from the Conference on College Composition and Communication. While these awards were still pending, Marilyn Sternglass returned to her former home, the City University of New York, to deliver the keynote address at the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors conference in October. The CUNY Board of Trustees had recently passed a resolution to phase out remediation at the CUNY senior colleges, one of which, City College, was the site of the study that produced *Time to Know Them*. From that work, Marilyn plucked the compelling story of Joan, who persisted against enormous odds, both at home and at school, but who also discovered key kinds of support, above all that offered to her by her own writing.

Because the CAWS keynote and the revised version of it that became Marilyn Sternglass's contribution to this issue of *JBW* focused on a single (if particularly compelling) case, we decided to break precedent and publish a review essay treating Marilyn's book. As regular readers of *JBW* know, we do not publish book reviews, but when one

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came to us treating a *Time to Know Them*, we realized we had something we needed: an essay that helped to contextualize the importance of this extremely consequential work, not least of all by noting the state of the debate it contributes to. For this, we have Daniela Liese to thank.

The next two articles treat the hard facts of how basic writing is working at two universities. Tracey Baker and Peggy Jolly — who take Ira Shor's demand to see "hard evidence that BW courses shelter more than they shunt" as their starting point — document a study they did to show their administration that their developmental reading and writing program was working. This meant exploding some myths subscribed to by administrators and policy-makers, but it was also not without surprises for the authors. Such a surprise gave Eleanor Agnew and Margaret McLaughlin the basis for their entire article: though they gathered evidence that basic writers were in fact successful in general statistical terms, a hard look beneath the evidence revealed that this was far less true for African-American students. Like Baker and Jolly, Agnew and McLaughlin are not content simply to present the information they have gathered; they wish to use it to recommend changes as well as raise awareness.

Then we have two articles that look beneath the generalizations and speculations about the use of computers in composition and basic writing classrooms. Sibylle Gruber uses the case-study method to show how complex and transitional matters of individual identity can be in the basic writing classroom, particularly when computer-mediated discussion helps to bring about a re-negotiation of multiple positions clustered around issues of insiderhood and outsiderhood. Laurie Grobman keys in on a different sense of outsiderhood, using web-based research to show how basic writers can use web texts outside "academic discourse" to negotiate authority, individuality, positioning — including their own.

We conclude with Beth Counihan's "Freshgirls," another essay based on case-study research that makes a fitting conclusion to an issue that begins with Marilyn Sternglass's work at City College — and does so precisely because it has a far less happy ending. Situated at a sister college in CUNY, Lehman College, Beth Counihan tracks three "freshgirls" who do not outlast their first year. Ironically, it may be a kind of toughness they have been conditioned to — a determination not to care too much or invest too much — that makes them especially vulnerable. Heartening as it is to hear of Marilyn Sternglass's Joan and her story of remarkable persistence, it is important to attend to Beth Counihan's "freshgirls" as well. They are especially striking examples of what makes us feel our Spring issue is especially rich: replete with specific, research-based accounts of what is working, this issue, in every article, also uses "hard evidence" to fix our attention on how much we still have to do.

George Otte *and* **Trudy Smoke**

Marilyn S. Sternglass

STUDENTS DESERVE ENOUGH TIME TO PROVE THAT THEY CAN SUCCEED

ABSTRACT: Public higher education, in particular, is being brought under intense political pressure to demonstrate that students are proficient in basic skills before they matriculate or by the end of their first semester. Through longitudinal research, it is possible to demonstrate that students acquire the necessary skills over time to succeed academically and professionally. A case study of a basic skills student at City College of City University of New York, who was followed throughout the six years of her academic studies, reveals that through persistence and instructional support, such students can successfully complete their studies and become contributing members of society.

Teaching in areas of language development is often a frustrating enterprise because the time frame for an individual instructor is frequently very short, most often one semester, occasionally a year. Because we know that language development is a long-term enterprise, we chafe over not knowing what will happen to our students when they leave our classrooms. We also want to know what kind of instructional support we can offer in their first-year writing classes that will be most useful to them in meeting the academic demands that will be made on them in succeeding years. A six-year longitudinal study that I recently completed at The City College of City University of New York can encourage us that under proper instructional conditions of support, our students can transform their potential for success into actual success.

In my book, *Time to Know Them: A Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the College Level* , I bring together aspects of composition research not duplicated in any previous studies: 1) examining writing and learning from a true longitudinal perspective; 2) studying a multicultural urban population; 3) investigating the relationship between writing and learning by examining papers written over time for regularly assigned academic courses across a range of disciplines; and 4) taking into consideration non-academic factors that influence

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***Marilyn S. Sternglass** is Professor Emeritus of English at City College of City University of New York. Her latest book,* Time to Know Them: A Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the College Level, *received the Mina P. Shaughnessy Award of the Modern Language Association in December 1998 and the CCCC's Outstanding Book Award in March 1999.*

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academic performance. The book presents an argument that, given sufficient time and support, students who start at basic writing levels have the potential to succeed and do succeed.

It is fitting but sad in a way that my book has been awarded a prize bearing Mina Shaughnessy's name by the Modern Language Association because my book makes essentially the same argument that *Errors and Expectations* made 22 years ago, that students who begin at basic levels of writing instruction do have the potential and the capability to succeed at their academic tasks. That we all have had to continue to fight this battle for such a long time reflects the resurgence of conservative educational and political policies that were so evident in the criticism of open admissions at City University of New York in the early 1970's.

Since that time, an extraordinary amount of evidence has accumulated that demonstrates that the open admissions students were successful not only academically but professionally and personally, but it took more than the conventional four-year time slot for the students to complete their studies. In a retrospective study of the first cohort of students admitted under the open admissions policy at CUNY in 1970, Lavin and Hyllegard found that "[n]early half [of the students] needed more than four years to complete their bachelor's degree, 10 percent needed more than five years, 8 percent took more than seven years, and 5 percent went beyond nine years" (57). Lavin and Hyllegard went on to emphasize that ethnic differences in the length of time required to graduate were striking. "Among the senior college-entrants, only 15 percent of whites but almost 40 percent of blacks and a third of Hispanic graduates needed more than five years....Among open-admissions students,....one quarter of Hispanic degree holders and almost a fifth of blacks went beyond nine years, compared with 7 percent of white open-admissions graduates" (57).

In 1998, Bowen and Bok cited research that 26 percent of all BA recipients and 32 percent of African American BA recipients earned their BAs more than six years after matriculation (Nettles and Perna, 277 cited in Bowen and Bok, 56).

The students in my study, carried out between 1989 and 1995 at City College, followed a similar trend. As of December 1996, of the 53 students who started in my study, with two-thirds enrolled in basic writing classes, 17 (32%) had graduated, 10 (19%) had transferred to other colleges, 18 (34%) had dropped out, and 8 (15%) were still enrolled in the college, seven years after they had begun their studies. What these somewhat dry figures reveal is that after seven years, 66% of the students in my study had either graduated or were continuing in higher education. Too often, students who transfer to other college are lumped together with the true dropouts, thus inappropriately inflating the dropout figure.

The significance of these extended years of matriculation is that they strongly suggest that a combination of factors slowed students' progress: beginning in basic level classes in reading, writing, and/or mathematics; changing majors, especially, for example, as frequently happened at City College when students discovered they did not have the requisite mathematics background for engineering or the sciences; and having to work from 4 to 40 hours per week, as the students in my study did, thus requiring more part-time study for students who were both economically and academically disadvantaged when they began their college careers. Recently, Wallace and Bell pointed out that an implicit form of racial discrimination occurs "if the educational experience offered to African American students in primary and secondary schools result in these students not being as well prepared for the demands of higher education as are other students" (313). Similarly, "the financial requirements of higher education may pose a greater problem for minority students who come from low-income households or who are first generation college students" (312). This is the reality for most students who begin their studies at City University of New York and many other public institutions of higher education.

In 1989, when I began my study, I felt that it would be essential to document precisely the ways in which students use the time frame to gradually acquire the skills they need to succeed academically. It was already clear to me in 1989, as Lavin and Hyllegard pointed out in their 1996 book, that increasing educational attainment and narrowing ethnic inequalities were not current priorities in the nation's agenda (240). And, clearly, the proposed educational policies for CUNY that eliminate remediation or limit it to one semester will most harshly impact the students who benefit from an extended time frame to demonstrate their capabilities.

For my study, I decided to teach three sections of composition in the fall of 1989, one section of English 1 (the lower level of basic writing), one section of English 2 (the second level of basic writing), and one section of English 110 (the freshman composition course). I asked the students in these sections if they would be willing to participate in my study, to let me interview them twice each semester, to collect or make copies of papers they wrote in all their classes, and to allow a research assistant to observe one of their classes each semester. I also collected copies of their transcripts each semester and copies of their attempts to pass the Writing Assessment Test and the Proficiency Test required of all graduates of City College. Of the 53 students in the classes who initially agreed to participate, 21 identified themselves as African-American, 26 Latino, 4 Asian, and 2 White. Thirty were males and 23 were females. Twenty-five were born outside the continental United States, including 3 born in Puerto Rico. At the end of the six years of the study, I had complete data for nine students and partial

data for the others.

There are two issues I would like to consider in this paper: the development of complex reasoning skills, but not in a neat, linear pattern, and the importance of appropriate instructional support at key moments in a student's academic journey. I think it will be best to examine these issues through the experiences of a real student as she encountered the demands of the academic setting. You will see from the case study I present that I am not arguing that the students in my study achieved the highest academic levels; what I am arguing is that they achieved sufficient expertise to become productive, contributing members of the society, and they acquired the self-esteem they deserved from their extraordinary efforts.

In his infamous book, *City on a Hill*, James Traub documented what he perceived to be a hopeless but well-meaning cause at City College, true educational attainment by students who started with extreme educational disadvantages. One of the chapters in his book was titled, "A Miraculous Survivor," and it was about one of the students in my study, an African-American woman I called Joan, who started in the English 2 class. (Traub had access to the work of the first four years of Joan's six years at the college.) Joan was truly disadvantaged in many ways: she had had a poor educational preparation for college studies; she was visually disabled, having lost 70% of the vision in her left eye as a result of an accident when she was two years old; and she was the youngest child in a single-parent household where most of her older siblings were addicted to either alcohol or drugs. She had not been taught how to take notes in high school, and her writing tasks had been mainly creative ones. In her college writing, Joan's papers were not laden heavily with grammatical errors, but she initially lacked depth in her responses to the academic demands, depending heavily on definitions and regurgitation of received knowledge. Traub denigrated her achievements in his book, stating that by his standards, Joan had not become an "educated person;" she had not developed "intellectual discrimination and she certainly knew virtually nothing of philosophy and history" (132). Some of his accusations may ring true from his Harvard-educated perspective, but Traub failed completely to recognize that as Joan gathered more knowledge in her major field, psychology, she became able to make connections between the insights of that field and other discipline areas and to apply her insights to real-world problems. Although she continued to struggle with abstract areas such as philosophy, she developed the capability to bring significant understandings from her own experience to the needs of others. Joan's writing over the years revealed that she learned from the instruction she received and she was able to apply new insights to both academic and practical problems. Joan's troubled family background gave her "empathy," in her words, with the people who came to the

methadone clinic where she first had an internship and then a permanent position after she graduated.

Joan told me in her first semester at the college that she found the college demands extremely different from the high school requirements "which made things a little difficult to adjust to, but I can say it was a challenge for me." She had not been asked to do much writing in junior high school. In high school, in her English classes, she had written summaries but not much else. She received 90's for her work. This led her to believe that she had been properly prepared for writing demands when she came to college. "But I really wasn't," she said.

In her writing placement test, Joan presented a traditional organizational pattern, an introduction, two paragraphs of development, and a conclusion. The best guess for the reason for failure, and her placement in English 2, was that there were a few grammatical and punctuation errors. Missed by the readers were Joan's thoughtful comments on the topic of whether students should be expelled from courses if they are late more than three times. Joan noted that students become disadvantaged when they are late because "most lessons given by teachers or college professors are started out with an aim which sometimes revolves around the lesson itself. By the student being late, he or she is totally lost because they have missed the whole meaning of the lesson which could be the beginning of the end for a student." Although the idea is not stated as clearly as it might have been, Joan had identified an important reason why students should be prompt in attendance, one unmentioned by most takers of the Writing Assessment Test (WAT). Joan easily passed the WAT at the end of her first semester.

In the English 2 course that first semester, Joan wrote several drafts of a paper comparing her experiences with those of an anthropologist in a foreign country. In her final draft, she wrote: "As I walked through the college doors, I began to feel more and more uncomfortable because I was surrounded by many people who were much different than me.... People sensed my fear as soon as I walked through the doors. They knew that I was a freshman who know nothing about college life." Reminiscent of the stage of "silence" in Belenky and her colleagues' *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Joan seemed strongly intimidated by the college environment. But, in an earlier draft of the paper, she had included a section suggesting a hope that she might be able to overcome these fears: "At City College, I also became angry and frustrated because I felt a sense of isolation and self-consciousness in the college atmosphere. Also I felt very afraid and lost. But, later on, I began to realize that as I learn a little more about college life at City College, it will be much easier to adjust." A pattern began to emerge in her writing that suggested that she dealt more fully with ideas and emotions in early drafts than in final papers. Perhaps she felt constrained to deal more narrowly or neatly with ideas in her final papers.

Admitted into the freshman composition course the next semester, Joan found the course not very helpful to her. She felt that too much time was spent on grammar rather than on discussion of the assigned readings. She also had difficulty understanding the comments made on her papers by her instructor, an adjunct in the English Department who at that time had little preparation for the teaching of composition. Although her instructor made copious comments on her papers, he used terms that were either too "jargon-laden" and complex for her to follow or that failed to lead her to develop the necessary insights. For one paper, students were assigned to revise the summary of an essay by J. Black on Kafka. Joan wrote: "'A Report to an Academy' by Franz Kafka is about an ape who wanted to become a human." The instructor wrote in the margin: "Why did either Kafka or Black state the ape's first wish was to become human?" This "why" question was a good comment, and if left alone for emphasis, it would have been useful to Joan. Joan's paper continued, supplying some reasons as follows: "Along with this, he wanted freedom The ape did not want to be caged up. In order to become successful at being human, he had more steps to follow." The instructor's next comment was as follows: "You could take the first sentence of this, remove one, and by fiddling a bit with punctuation, transition words (conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs), sentence length (perhaps combining 2), and most of all sentence order, make this opening make sense. Try." The advice in reworking these introductory sentences was far too complicated for her to follow. At the minimum, the instructor might have rewritten these sentences to provide a model for Joan and to show her the possibilities. As a summary comment, the instructor wrote, "Overall, you really don't get at the essential problems with Black's essay in terms of the reasoning, though you do smooth out his grammar in some places." Extensive as the instructor's comments were, they did not address the specific places in the paper where Joan's analysis of Black's reasoning was lacking.

At the beginning of her second year, Joan told me that in the previous year she had learned to use writing to better understand the material in her courses by "taking notes in all classes, taking out the important terms from those notes, and using them as the basis for study." She underlined definitions and important terms in her books. This strategy of referring carefully to authorities was also implemented in her writing, where she underlined key terms. She had cut back her working hours to 13 per week so that she could try to get better grades.

In the writing in her sociology course, Joan's papers were full of definitions, with authorities for each carefully provided. Although this approach was initially successful for her, in examinations her instructor wanted more analytical responses, particularly when differences between concepts were asked for. Received knowledge could not carry

her very successfully when analysis was required. She received a "D" in this course. Citing authorities, providing definitions, and discussing causes of problems were more successful for her in her psychology class that semester. Joan liked the readings and found the class discussions helpful in clearing up ideas presented in the lectures. She received a "C" in this course. By the end of that semester, Joan felt that writing helped her remember ideas much more, the first phase of using writing as a way of learning. She said: "If I write when I'm reading, it sinks in more." Her work load had increased and she was working double shifts from 7:15 AM to 11:30 PM three days a week. "I'm tired," she said. She had learned the importance of planning ahead, and she "liked it when teachers gave a syllabus and advance notice." Clearly, such materials help students like Joan, who have time-consuming outside commitments, to handle the planning of their academic work in a better way.

Joan had more difficulty with courses that required multiple choice exams than those in which she could write papers. She found multiple choice exams difficult because the answers were "debatable" and she had difficulty choosing among the options. She was starting to plan ahead more for her courses and beginning necessary research sooner than she had in the past.

In the spring semester of her second year, Joan was taking a psychology course, an art course, a speech course, and the world civilization course for the second time. (She had dropped this course during an earlier semester.) The psychology course was the hardest one and she found the language "very technical with difficult words." She was concerned that she was having so many problems in understanding and carrying out the assignments since this was her major field, but she passed the course with a "C."

By the end of her second year at the college, Joan had passed three psychology courses, had started to fulfill the core course requirements of the college, and, of the three skills assessment tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, she still had the Reading Assessment Test and the Math Assessment Test looming before her. She had learned how to use periodicals for research, and she was committed to continuing at the college with a major in psychology.

In the fall semester of her third year, Joan felt that her writing in her psychology courses was improving. She was able to apply insights from a psychologist's model of child development to observations of a particular child, and the instructor approvingly wrote "very good" or "good" five times on her paper. She received a "B+" on this paper and the instructor remarked at the end, "Your thinking is rather scientific and systematic," an acknowledgment of the approval that received knowledge garners. But Joan was having problems with her world civilization and French courses. Having failed the first two pop quiz-

zes in the world civilization course (multiple-choice and objective questions), Joan finally asked for the official designation of "disabled" that she had avoided for so long. She realized that she needed to take more time for the reading in the world civilization course, and she was troubled because she "forgets what [she] is reading" and her "mind wanders in class." She managed to pass both courses with "C" grades, but she received a "D" in French the next semester and eventually asked for exemption from the final required fourth semester French course on the basis of her disability.

Joan's predilection toward presenting "received knowledge" in her papers prevented her from accomplishing her professors' demands for more analytic writing. In the second level world civilization course, Joan wrote a paper on a novel by Chinua Achebe. The instructor commented on the paper that she had "recounted much of the novel rather than analyzing it."

By the end of the semester, Joan said that having to work long hours had made her sluggish, and she was not eating well. The day before our interview, she had worked from 7 AM to 5 PM, getting up at 4 AM to fulfill all her responsibilities. But she had become more committed to her psychology major.

In the spring semester of her third year, Joan was writing papers in her abnormal psychology course that her professor liked, commenting, "Terrific job," at the end of one of them and giving her a "B+" on the paper. But her grade in the course was dragged down by her performance on the two examinations that counted for two-thirds of the course grade, and she received a "C" in the course. Once again, where exams were weighted more heavily than papers, students who benefited from the reflection provided in writing were disadvantaged. The major writing assignment for the course was the review and analysis of pertinent articles in the field of abnormal psychology. Students were expected to apply theories learned in the course to the situations described in the articles. Joan's paper for the course presented a variety of cases with psychological interpretations grounded firmly in research that she had studied. In her analysis of the first case of a doctor who inseminated his patients with his own sperm, Joan described this condition as "an individual having a superiority complex about his/herself. These individuals believe that they are so perfect that he or she has no thoughts or consideration of others. These individuals suffer from low self-esteem and may go through great lengths to demonstrate their self-worth by making themselves the center of attention." Joan had clearly understood the parameters of this assignment and was capable of fulfilling them.

At this stage, Joan recognized that writing helped her understand where she stood "with theories and materials as well as grades." She felt that exams do not show everything without writing assignments.

She told me, "In a writing assignment, a teacher can point out problems and misunderstandings." In other words, she could learn from the responses of her instructors to the writing. In exams, students only found out whether they were right or wrong but not always why.

That same semester, Joan was enrolled in the first level world humanities course. She was very much impressed with the professor, describing her as a "warm and worldly woman." Although there were stringent reading requirements, eight books during the semester, Joan did not complain about these assignments. There were no papers required for the course; the only writing was essay questions on the final examination. Joan said that she had learned to define a word in a sentence to help a reader understand her meaning. This professor appeared to become a serious role model for Joan. She received an "A" in the course.

Thus, at the end of her third year at the college, Joan had acquired a certain kind of academic competence. She could take insights from research and theory and apply them to individual psychological cases. She felt that responses to her writing assignments were much better guides to increasing her understanding of the materials she was working with. Simultaneously, her relationships with her professors had grown in the spring semester, and this had had a very positive impact on her.

In the fall semester of her fourth year at the college, Joan was taking courses in biology, psychology, the third level of world civilization, and the second level of world humanities. She felt that her most difficult course was the world humanities class, and she was having problems "shifting from one type to another type of reading." In a paper for this course, for the first time, Joan began to build relationships between what she was learning in one discipline to another. She applied concepts from psychology to her analysis of Voltaire's *Candide*. She wrote: "Pangloss inspired Candide's Optimism because he attributed what we would call in Psychology, a Halo-effect to every experience in life, meaning there is good in everything and everyone." In another paper, on whether Nora was entitled to divorce her husband in *A Doll's House*, Joan began a thoughtful analysis of the relationship "Torvald not only stripped Nora of her pride and dignity as a person, but he also assisted in the degrading of her character by taking advantage of her child-like ways." The instructor admired this insight and wrote "nice" in the margin. Joan had moved to the second stage of using writing as a way of learning, the analytic stage.

Joan had an acute sense of what she could pick up from her professors that would help her. She learned to use transition words from listening to her professors. She had discovered that professors love it when students mimic them. Because her psychology professor said "moreover" and "in that," Joan learned to use these terms in her writ-

ing. She also applied this insight to papers she wrote in other courses. She told me, "I understand something when I write it. I like writing because it gives me a chance to elaborate on a subject, not being limited in any way." Again she reiterated to me that she felt she was better able to explain and elaborate in writing than on multiple-choice tests, where she felt it was more difficult for her to show what she had learned.

At the end of the semester, Joan told me more about her family life. She and her mother (who was disabled and received supplementary social security funds) lived in public housing. Joan received assistance for books from the SEEK program at the college, a Pell grant to help cover her living expenses, and tuition support from the Tuition Assistance Program. Any spending money she needed, she had to earn. Clinical psychology had started to attract Joan, and she thought she would like to help troubled teens, especially those addicted to narcotics. She had promised herself that she would never turn out like her brothers and sisters. "Being at college is my life," she said. "I will not let anyone take it away from me."

The next semester, the spring semester of her fourth year, Joan was taking a required astronomy course, two psychology courses, and a course on U.S. society. Her first paper for a psychology course on theories of personality was not very successful, but the teacher's comments and suggestions provided the kind of help that Joan needed in order to improve her papers, evidence of the learning she felt could take place in response to writing that did not occur with short answer examinations. In the paper, Joan had attempted an analysis of a young man suffering from what she called "anti-social personality disorder." Joan had written that the subject's behavior "is demonstrated by this individual many times in the many schools and facilities where he was placed." Her instructor cited specific details from the case study that Joan should have considered and analyzed more carefully (e.g. "information that this [moving around] should have explained some of the truancy and misbehavior and alerted them to get the mother in and interview her carefully"). From these comments, Joan could see that she had not used the evidence from the case study to provide the required in-depth analysis.

Joan's next paper in the course was more productive, as she speculated on the causes of the behavior of the individual she was analyzing. In a paper titled, "The Man in the Shell," she combined her former predilection for citing authorities with her own analysis of the subject's problems. She wrote: "Here is a man with many negative thoughts, a slim build, and extremely low self-esteem. One does not need a scholar to figure out that this individual has an intense phobia or fear of people, activity, and/or pleasure." She followed this with a series of speculative questions about how the subject might behave in situations not

described in the case study data, in conditions that she postulated. Even though the instructor had a different view from the one expressed by Joan, Joan was not punished for taking a risk. She received a grade of 8 out of a possible 10 on the paper, and the instructor wrote "good" beside the grade marking. Whereas in the past, Joan had talked about writing primarily as a means of helping her remember the material better, now she saw writing as giving her an opportunity to elaborate on ideas and to give her personal opinion. She was also moving toward the third stage of using writing as a way of learning, the creation of new knowledge, new to the learner even if not new to the discipline.

In Joan's other psychology class that semester, Introduction to Human Development, the class observation revealed the instructor helping the students prepare for the mid-term examination that they would be taking at the next class meeting. The professor offered advice about how the students could best learn for the exam: "First read the introduction, second the summary, then, the chapter. Never read the whole chapter at one time. At the end of the chapter, take notes. Reading alone does not work." This was the only time in the 74 classroom observations made in 20 disciplines in this study that a professor explicitly recommended to students that they combine writing with reading as a way of learning.

By the end of her fourth year, Joan had finally passed all the Skills Tests required by the college. She had passed the Writing Assessment Test easily at the end of her first semester. She was given extra time to take the Reading Assessment Test after she received the designation of being disabled, and she passed that in her third year. But the Math Assessment Test had continued to bedevil her. She had a tutor for three weeks and she reviewed previous tests carefully. When she took the actual test, she managed to finish the questions five minutes early. Thus, at the end of her fourth year at the college, Joan would now be permitted to register as a Junior and would be removed from the "Skills Assessment Test-Warning" designation. It is all too obvious that if the proposed policies on passing the Skills Assessment Tests at CUNY are implemented, requiring students to have passed all the Skills Tests by the end of their first semester, students like Joan will never have the opportunity to proceed this far.

When asked in what ways she felt she was now a different person from the one she was when she started at City College, Joan said that she was really starting to understand that "business is business.... Now I am into concrete things that the college offers, like films, or things that will help me get extra credit for my classes." She knew that she had to get her grade point average up. She said, "I'm really here to obtain a degree and get a job. I started to wake up in '91 [her third year at the college]. My GPA was higher at first, but now I'm taking more difficult courses."

Recognizing that her visual disability slowed her down in undertaking complex writing tasks, Joan had learned by the fall of her fifth year at the college, when I collected a writing profile from her, that she had to try to start her assignments a week before the due date. If she needed to do research for the paper, she went to the library. If she already knew something about the topic and she was interested, she would do an outline and introduction. With what she called these "easier" papers, she wrote one draft and then made corrections. But if the paper was on a more technical topic, she found all the information she could and took from it what she needed. She then wrote one or more rough drafts. In these more technical papers, she had to be sure of the facts. These papers continued to reflect a strong reliance on outside authorities. Joan said that the writing process became distressing if she could not find the necessary information; she did not want to write from hearsay.

Joan wrote her papers at a night stand in her mother's room where the lighting was bad, using a blue ball-point pen. She said, "Black is blah and makes me uncomfortable." She used paper with big lines, probably because of her vision problems, but she said the "college ruled paper makes me feel cramped and prevents me from loosening up." She took her handwritten draft to a computer at the college and typed it in. She noted that as she was typing, "something may not sound right or I find a better way to say it. I do some changing at the computer or type in different stuff." So, although Joan may not formally call this process revising, this is what was occurring.

Although she had passed the Math Assessment Test, Joan found the required statistics course in her psychology major her most difficult course in the fall of her fifth year. In her world arts course, Joan talked with another student in my study who had also been in her English 2 class, Delores. Delores, a Latina student from the Dominican Republic, had been very successful at the college and had been accepted into the combined BA/MA program in psychology. Delores offered to tutor Joan in statistics. Joan managed to pass the statistics course with a "D" and her philosophy course with a "C," having made a conscious decision not to argue with the instructor when she found her own beliefs questioned. During this semester, she was working three days a week in an internship at a health center, doing counseling and clerical work.

Joan recognized that writing served to alert her as to how well she understood the material in her courses. She said, "I fear that if I don't get writing, I don't have a grasp of where I'm going in the course. I have had more trouble with courses that don't require writing." She was using mapping, a strategy she had learned in her basic skills reading course, to help her with her writing. She said, "Mapping helps me find my thoughts. I use one word and look for another word that

relates to it."

In her writing during this semester, Joan once again drew on her knowledge of psychology to assist her in the analysis of materials. In a paper on the film version of *The Joy Luck Club* for her world arts course, Joan wrote: "The filmmaker wants us to empathize with the mother, by observing her, not as an antagonist, a victim of the circumstances, as she had no choice but to abandon her children, hoping that someone would have the heart to return them." Had Joan taken this world arts core course earlier in her academic program, she would not have had these psychological terms and perceptions to assist her in her analysis. Her instructor was pleased with this insight and wrote "good" in the margin of the paper.

In the spring of her fifth year, Joan took the next level of world humanities required by the college. This course focused on Black American studies. Her professor, a woman, talked about slavery and stereotypes in the course. Joan had read a good deal in this field, so she did not find the course difficult. In one of her papers, Joan asserted a prime value of education for herself: "In closing, reading *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, one can conclude, education was, and still remains, the key element involved in overcoming oppression. One should never forget that knowledge is the one tool that can be used to overpower the white man." Inside Joan, not evident in her quiet demeanor, resided the pride that had carried throughout the difficulties of her personal life and her college life to this point of achievement, within grasp of earning her undergraduate degree in the next year.

Joan came to another realization about the role of writing during this spring term. She said, "Writing helps me put ideas into my own words--makes me think how things can be put more simply than in textbooks sometimes." This conscious realization of the value of putting ideas into her own language was a crucial insight for Joan. It was an insight mentioned by most of the students in my study, although the insight occurred at varying times in the students' academic experiences.

Thus, by the end of her fifth year, Joan had successfully completed most of the required core courses. She was passing her courses with "B's" and "C's." She had missed the final in her French course when she developed a throat and eye infection at the end of the semester, and she failed this course. Writing had become the way she kept her grades up, as she continued to experience difficulty with short-answer examinations. She was increasingly able to apply the insights from her psychology classes to readings and concepts in other courses.

In order to graduate, Joan needed to pass the English Proficiency Test, another writing test similar to the WAT but requiring higher writing standards. She took this examination in the fall of her sixth and

last year at the college. One of the options of the test allowed students to pick up a reading which would serve as a basis for some of the topics on the test. Students could select a question based on the reading or one of the other questions presented "cold" to them as had been the questions on the WAT. Joan selected a topic about the hardships facing arrivals in a new country either as immigrants or students. She wrote an outline, including in the introduction the three aspects she would develop in the paper. In her outline, she set out in the second section to consider why these were hardships, a significant cognitive move for her. This would be followed by a conclusion. In the exam paper, Joan focused on the hardships of Asian immigrants, drawing from the reading she had been supplied with. In each paragraph of development, she stated the point she wanted to make, established its significance, using words like "because" and "in order that," and concluded with an example to illustrate her point. These points were followed by a summary paragraph. Despite her difficulty with comma use and an occasional verb-form lapse, the organization and content of Joan's exam carried her to a successful conclusion. She had waited until her senior year, her sixth year at the college, to take this exam, and her exam book noted on the cover that she was a "graduating senior."

Passing the proficiency test was an omen of the generally good semester Joan was having. Although she was under a lot of pressure, she told me that she "didn't feel extra anxious." She said, "I go through motions one day at a time. I see other people with problems." During that semester, she was working 2 to 3 days a week in 4-hour stints at her internship in the drug and alcohol unit of the hospital that eventually hired her full-time. In the internship, she conducted group therapy sessions and she felt very dedicated to her field work. She was also working 10 to 14 hours a week at Radio City Music Hall. She was enjoying courses in family psychology and speech. In the latter course, she was polishing up her diction and articulation. She found it interesting to give presentations and the experience was useful to her when she had to speak to groups of individuals with drug and alcohol addictions in her internship.

By the time I saw Joan again at the end of the fall semester, Traub's book, *City on a Hill*, had been published. When Joan first read the chapter Traub had written about her, she was deeply depressed. Joan told me that first she had worried about her family's reaction to his dismissive comments about her achievements, but, she said, "they didn't have much of a reaction." She felt that her degree was confirming for her that she was capable of doing what she wanted to do. The most important thing she had learned from her experience with Traub was, "You can't just be nice to everybody. You can't trust everyone." She had been surprised by the book, apparently expecting a more sym-

pathetic treatment of her experiences and accomplishments. Furthermore, she told me that Traub had been inaccurate in some of the things that he reported about her life. Since the book was published so close to the time that Joan would be graduating, it probably had less of an effect on her than it might have had had it been published earlier. She had gained enough pride in her accomplishments that she could rather quickly overcome the immediate distress she felt when she first read the book.

In her last year, Joan was more conscious than ever of the ways in which writing had helped her to learn. She said, "I used to have trouble getting my thoughts together--how to get away from paraphrasing and putting thoughts into my own words. I stick to my concepts; it helps keep the thoughts well organized, in a structure. When I write papers, it helps me get better grades. I might have a mid-term 'C+,' but a paper gives me a chance to develop my own thoughts and prove myself more." This constant reiteration by the students in my study of how writing gave them a opportunity "to prove themselves" reinforced the significance of including writing opportunities that allowed students, first of all, to learn for themselves and, second, to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding to others.

In her last semester at the college, Joan struggled with the required experimental psychology course, in which use of statistics was essential. The course was evaluated on the basis of short laboratory reports and final examination. With a great deal of help from her professor and the laboratory assistant who corrected and commented on the lab reports, Joan passed the course with a "D."

Joan had not come to City College as a very confident student. Burdened with complex physical, family, and economic problems, she slowly strengthened her resolve to complete her academic studies successfully. In her early years of study, she depended on authoritative knowledge to support her assertions. While this approach brought her enough success to pass many of her courses, she increasingly found a demand for thinking that was more analytic. Like other students who had started in basic skills classes, Joan found that writing gave her better opportunities to demonstrate the learning she had achieved than did short-answer examinations. When given the opportunity to write research papers, Joan became able to apply psychological principles and theories not only to cases presented in her psychology classes, but also to literary works she was asked to interpret. Quantitative studies plagued her throughout her years at the college, and she struggled to pass required college skill tests and academic courses like astronomy, statistics, and experimental psychology. Because she had to work many hours at outside jobs to earn spending money, Joan forced herself to bring better planning skills to her commitments and to organize the time needed to fulfill her academic assignments more care-

fully. Over time, she came to see her professors as her allies, and she became comfortable seeking out their help. Writing became an essential means of learning, as she recognized that reading alone was not an adequate tool for understanding the complex materials she was encountering.

So, here was Joan, graduating after 6 years, hired as a full-time counselor in a methadone clinic, reveling in her achievements after long and difficult years of stress and hardship. She told me in a telephone conversation in September 1995 that she was earning $ 25,753.36 (she knew this amount to the last penny) in a union job with full benefits, including 20 days' vacation, 12 sick days, 8 holidays, and 4 personal days. After 90 days, she expected to get a raise, and she would get annual raises after that. Her brother helped her realize that was "making more money than anyone else in the family has." She would be using the money to move her mother out of the projects and, for the first time, she said she would have "a room of my own."

After six years of arduous school responsibilities, work responsibilities, and family responsibilities, Joan was not a "miraculous survivor" as Traub had called her. There was no miracle that accounted for her success. Her accomplishments stemmed from hard work and dedication, her most important trait, tenaciousness, and the support and encouragement she had received from her instructors over the years. She has become a contributor to the society through her own efforts.

And that is exactly one point of this long retelling. Students like Joan are willing to put in the extraordinary effort to overcome the difficulties imposed by their poor academic preparation, and their difficult family and economic conditions. They do not want to become drains on the society; they want to become contributors. We must join together to persuade the political forces who want to deny such opportunities to students like Joan that it is in their interests, as well as the individuals' interests, to support CUNY and other institutions of higher education in their efforts to help students reach their full potential as contributing citizens.

Another point of describing this student's experience is to illustrate the benefits that can be derived from longitudinal research that combines in-depth interviews and analyses of written work to follow the conceptual development that occurs over the entire period of the undergraduate education. Such research emphasizes the critical role that writing plays in developing complex reasoning processes that allow students to bring personal experience and knowledge to bear on their assessment of "accepted" knowledge to foster a critical stance that incorporates their perspectives and that leads to re-thinking and re-shaping this "accepted" knowledge.

Longitudinal research is not easy to undertake nor does it lead to quick rewards or frequent publication. By its very nature, longitudi-

nal research requires patience and persistence, but the understandings gained from it cannot be replaced by any other methodology. For example, only through such an approach is it possible to document the growth in complexity of thinking and analytical reasoning that occurs over the college years. Instructors of basic writing courses and/or freshman composition often feel frustrated as they are confronted with the demands of teaching purpose, organization, audience, sentence structure, grammar, and revision in a one or two-semester course. To this is added the requirement to analyze complex texts so that readings are frequently incorporated into the writing classes. That excellence in all of these areas cannot be achieved in such a short time frame is evident, but the demand is placed there by the instructors in other disciplines as well as by the institutional tests that judge students' abilities to progress to advanced levels. When our field has enough longitudinal studies of students' experiences of different backgrounds and from different kinds of instructional institutions we will be better able to make the argument that these writing abilities develop over time and under the appropriate instructional prodding. Such demands imply that at all levels of instruction, whatever the format--sequences of basic writing classes, mainstreamed classes, or freshman composition--students should be practicing analysis of complex reading materials just as they are practicing the conventions of essay writing.

Seeing the students mature and develop increasing self-confidence over the years reinforced my view that it was essential to take a long-term perspective to evaluate the potential that they have for academic success. It seems appropriate to ask if this type of research is particularly meaningful for the perception of minority students and second-language students? My answer would be yes, because it shows how students who may not have had the requisite academic preparation when they began their college studies have the potential to succeed and do succeed when they are given the appropriate time and support. Competence does not occur instantaneously, especially for those who have not had the appropriate preparation, but over time students do reach their true potential. Research over time is an important way to validate that success.

There is a concerted effort at the present time to reduce the possibility of students who need basic level instruction to succeed at the college level through eliminating what have been called admissions preferences and then, in a more insidious policy, making it less likely that those who are admitted have the possibility of succeeding and continuing on with their education. Much of this latter policy is directed at the first semester or the freshman year as a make-it or break-it time. What I hope is that my research and the research of others that will follow will demonstrate that the freshman year should instead be looked upon as the first step in a succession of steps over the full years

of a college education. That first year should provide the opportunity for those students who have been inadequately prepared for the college experience to begin to acquire the skills and knowledge they need that will grow as they continue their studies. In order to demonstrate that this growth will and does occur, we must have more longitudinal studies that will provide the evidence needed to persuade the decision makers—administrators and politicians—to provide the financial and educational resources the students deserve. Time is on the students' side, but they need to be given the requisite time.

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Daniela Liese

MARILYN STERNGLASS'S *TIME TO KNOW THEM:* A REVIEW ESSAY

ABSTRACT: *This paper critically examines Marilyn Sternglass'* s Time to Know Them *in light of the troublesome trend in decreased funding for remedial programs that is emerging in colleges across the nation. Sternglass' s work is the first longitudinal study of writing and learning at a college level that takes into account not only students' academic lives but also their personal lives. Sternglass uncovers a complex network of factors contributing to the development of students as complex thinkers and mature writers and paints a clear picture of students struggling but succeeding despite societal constraints, family and work responsibilities and decreased government funding.*

Education as Commodity

Twenty years after the publication of Mina P. Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, Marilyn Sternglass's *Time to Know Them* is the first book to comprehensively examine how the writing performance of college students is "influenced by their experiences outside the college, in their homes, in their workplaces, and in their communities" (xi). Sternglass's work is a landmark of sorts, as it is the first longitudinal study of writing and learning at a college level that takes into account not only students' academic lives but also their personal lives: "The students' subjective lives are shown to be essential components of their objective lives, so that it is impossible to comprehend the nature of their academic experience or to contemplate educational approaches that will meet their needs without understanding how integrated these aspects of their experience are" (xi-xii). Several factors differentiate Sternglass's study from other work (e.g., Emig [1971], Chiseri-Strater [1991], Lavin and Hyllegard [1996], etc.) that has attempted to gather data on the thinking and writing processes of basic writers. Sternglass looks at both writing and learning through a longitudinal lens by surveying students' papers written for various courses

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during their academic pursuits. The students included in the case studies also represent a multicultural urban population: Of the nine students remaining at the end of the six-year study, only one was White, while four were African-American, three were Hispanic-American and one was Asian-American.

Despite the comprehensive nature of her study, however, Sternglass has no hard and fast conclusions to offer her readers: "Writing development is shown to be neither neat nor linear . . ." (xiv). Ultimately, Sternglass's study, by delving into the very issues that surround the college performances of students who are written into the system as having always and already failed, exposes the troublesome trend in decreased funding for remedial programs that is emerging in colleges across the nation. Students are being denied the opportunity to succeed despite Sternglass's "central finding . . . that students with poor academic preparation have the potential to develop the critical reasoning processes that they must bring to bear in academic writing if they are given the time" (296).

We cannot help but remember Mina Shaughnessy when reading Sternglass, since it is Shaughnessy who first pointed out that the 1970 open admission policy of City College of The City University of New York was "the one available route to . . . [empower] large number of students . . . to *choose* to go to college . . ." (3; Shaughnessy's emphasis). Because most students entering City College in the 1970s were unprepared to deal with college academics in general and college writing in particular, mass education convinced many teachers that the writing problems of the students were "irremediable" (3) and that the students themselves were "ineducable" (1). But Shaughnessy attempted to persuade teachers that basic writing students "write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes" (5).

In light of Sternglass's findings, Shaughnessy's explanation, while seemingly simple, is inadequate, as it does not take into account the various complex social factors that affect students' lives. The multifarious nature of Sternglass's students' non-academic and academic histories makes it impossible to pin-point one factor that influences them as thinkers and writers. All of Sternglass's students "evidenced strong feelings about issues of personal and cultural identity, assimilation, stereotyping, and racism . . ." (80). Their papers demonstrated that they "grapple[d] with bringing their cultural heritage into a meaningful relationship with the academic culture" (81), and only when students learn to analyze in light of the social issues that plague them as individuals can they be successful in the academic medium.

The students in Sternglass's study were beginning writers, but they were not cognitively dysfunctional. They had to learn, write, and survive within a dominant hegemony. Patricia Bizzell points out that basic writers, particularly minority students, are often unfamiliar with the academic discourse community. But unfamiliarity does not a deficiency make. Sternglass contends that "issues of race, gender and sexual orientation, class, and ideology . . . affect [students'] approaches to undertaking academic tasks" (60) but do not limit students. These students are not frail. Indeed, their "lived-through experiences enhance their ability to assess the frequently unquestioned assumptions of the larger society" (60).

Composition instruction and institutional settings also play a role in students' academic achievements. Sternglass carefully analyzes various comments that teachers wrote on the papers of the students in her study and finds that the more pedagogically-oriented the comment, the more likely the student was to improve his or her writing. Comments that focused on both content and form were helpful, as were comments that pointed out errors but still encouraged the student to perform better. Sternglass concludes that teacher comments are important in the development of students' writing skills, and her findings regarding instructor involvement should give many a writing teacher new hope. Although many variations within an instructional setting need to be accounted for, the settings that provide "support and encouragement" (196), the very settings all of us as writing teachers should strive to create, help students mature as both writers and thinkers.

Students entering City College today have much greater financial difficulty than those entering City College in the 1970s. In the last two decades, "the poverty level increased for minority students in the New York City area [while] the costs of a college education increased substantially" (xiii). Sternglass's work, while focusing on the complex social and personal lives of the students, also unstintingly criticizes a system that sets students up for failure. *Time to Know Them* cannot be read simply as a series of personal stories about several City College students. It is certainly that, but it is also a political commentary and a cry for change. Bruce Herzberg points out that the curriculum of any particular academic institution "represents a commitment to a set of values concerning the uses of culture and the uses of people . . . the curriculum of a modern school is a battleground . . ." (97).

Sternglass justly laments the decrease in funding for public colleges and universities. She quotes New York Governor George E. Pataki who in 1996 began questioning the effectiveness of CUNY colleges' remedial programs. Only 5% of CUNY community college students graduate within two years, a dismal number, yet, as Sternglass points out, "the amount of time needed to complete degree requirements con-

tinues to grow as the economic support for poor students declines . . ." (296). The very system that decries the lack of remedial program efficiency, in light of the "problematic" student population, is, ironically, the problem itself. The less funds that are available for students to continue their education through remedial courses, the more likely it is that students will drop out of college. But Sternglass's study illustrates that students supposedly doomed to fail can succeed given the right opportunities, and student success has immeasurable "social and economic benefits" (296) to society.

One of the main curriculum problems at City College is the administrative insistence that all students successfully complete a test of writing, the WAT (Writing Assessment Test), before they take classes above the 60th credit. The problem, according to Sternglass, is that, at best, the WAT rating system is arbitrary and, at worst, it sets students up for failure by making it nearly impossible for minority students, or students whose first language is not English, to pass the test the first time around. Many students from non-mainstream backgrounds take the test four or five times, and the test, understandably, becomes a great source of fear and anxiety.

Students whose first language is not English have even more difficulty passing the WAT and succeeding in an academic setting. The writing of ESL students, instead of being rated on content and organization, is often rated on grammatical features alone. This, of course, creates an environment where students, stifled by the grammar of a language they cannot and should not be expected to control perfectly, are afraid to express themselves in writing. Sternglass convincingly argues that content is more important than appropriate grammatical forms, especially when considering a student's non-native English background. Ironically, students not allowed to enter upper-division classes (or regular freshman composition courses) because of second language interference do not have the opportunities to improve their grammar. Indeed, "the institution ignores issues of language development . . ." (160). Sternglass justly laments an establishment that forces students to "have their academic progress stifled by the appearance of language features in their writing that they demonstrate they know but do not yet control automatically. Institutional testing should be an indicator of the type of help that students need at a particular time, not a hindrance to their advancement" (161).

Time to Know Them is an important book, and its poignant and sincere presentation of students' academic and non-academic lives is commendable. Sternglass uncovers a complex network of factors that contributes to the development of students as complex thinkers and mature writers. She rightly criticizes the New York State higher education system for expecting students from minority and second language backgrounds to pass a test that truly does not measure their

ability to succeed in college. She also paints a clear picture of students struggling but succeeding despite societal constraints, family and work responsibilities and decreased government funding. With college drop-out rates at an all time high, it is admirable that any student from an environment that does not emphasize education would remain in college for any amount of time, much less long enough to graduate.

One of Sternglass's case studies, Joan, persevered despite various obstacles. She grew up in the projects with drug- and alcohol-addicted siblings, was seriously unprepared to deal with college-level reading, writing, and mathematics classes, and was disabled (having lost 70% of the vision in her left eye). Despite all this, she graduated after 6 years and was hired as a full-time counselor in a drug clinic, earning more than anyone in her family had ever earned. Sternglass calls Joan "tenacious" (265) and harshly criticizes James Traub who in his book *City on a Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College* wrote about Joan under another name, calling her "uneducated." Joan was discouraged after Traub's book was published in 1994 but later realized that Traub's opinion did not matter and that she could succeed despite his statements, since "her degree would confirm her capability to herself" (68).

Sternglass effectively concludes that Joan's "difficulties and her life experiences, combined with her college learning, prepared her to contribute meaningfully in the larger society" (242). In other words, it takes time to know Joan. It takes time to know all of Sternglass's case studies. Joan, in one of her college papers, sums up Sternglass's work better than I ever could: "[O]ne can conclude [that] education was, and still remains, the key element involved in overcoming oppression. One should never forget that knowledge is the one tool that can be used to overpower the white man" (68).

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Tracey Baker and Peggy Jolly

THE "HARD EVIDENCE": DOCUMENTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A BASIC WRITING PROGRAM

ABSTRACT: This manuscript demonstrates and presents the program evaluation of one basic writing program. Based on a two-year study that targets 685 basic writing students, we hypothesize that these students achieve similar or higher retention rates than those of regularly- admitted students. The authors, who studied four variables which are nominally rated – retention rate, current classification, grade point average, and writing course sequence completed – discuss how each contributes to the successful retention rate of these basic writing students.

"I want to see hard evidence that BW courses shelter more than they shunt." –Ira Shor (96)

"If only things were not the way they were, then they would be different." –Richard E. Miller (7)

In the Spring 1998 issue of *JBW*, Harvey S. Wiener asserts that basic writing instructors have neglected an important factor – researching program data – as they react to bureaucratic measures to reduce and cut basic writing programs. In a discussion identifying how we have failed, at least in part, to deter such drastic measures which have led to abolishing basic writing programs throughout the country, he says, "The point here is the lack of research: it is a complaint I have made many times before, urging mainly to the indifferent the need to document the effectiveness of what we do. Instincts, sixth sense, and anecdotal reports: these never serve the policy makers and money holders who want only evidence" (Wiener 100). As basic writing instructors and program directors who count themselves among the decidedly *not* indifferent, we began an on-going study of our basic writing

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In response to questions about the efficacy of the basic writing program at their university, Tracey Baker, Director of the UAB Writing Center, and Peggy Jolly, Director of Freshman English and Developmental Studies, conducted a retention study focusing on 685 basic writing students. Baker's and Jolly's work has appeared in various academic publications.

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program in 1997, involving 685 students.

Our interest in studying basic writing students grew out of our work with at-risk students enrolled in our freshman writing program. As Writing Center Director and Director of Developmental English, we find ourselves situated in the center of the on-going debate at our university concerning the questions of retention, especially among basic writing students. The work we do and the students with whom we work lead us to agree with Bruce Horner:

> The success of Basic Writing in legitimizing the institutional place of basic writing courses and students cannot be separated from the ways in which it works within the framework of public discourse on higher education and Open Admissions, particularly its silence about the concrete material, political, institutional, social historic realities confronting basic writing teachers, students, and courses. (200)

Because of the work we do, both programmatically and with individual students, we have relied, primarily, on the scholarship of others in the field of basic writing to help determine our goals for our courses and for our students. But we also rely on our own research, experience, and even our intuition as instructors—Wiener's "instincts, sixth sense, and anecdotal reports" (100)—for this information helps us understand our students, their strengths and weaknesses, even as we also study the "hard facts." One without the other tends to distort the picture—at least within individual institutions.

Impetus for our study was spurred by a university-wide initiative to accomplish two goals: to assess retention rates for the student body in general, and to assess the value of individual programs (such as basic writing) in order to determine whether to retain or abolish them. One concern expressed by the administration was the *purpose* of an urban research university offering developmental programs, such as those offered by both the Math and English Departments. Within this larger concern were posited a number of subordinate questions: does the university have an obligation to admit marginally-prepared students into its program; if the university chooses to admit such students, does the university have a further obligation to offer remedial work to help prepare those students for future academic success; is the prospect of admitting and providing instruction for those students fiscally feasible, given the diminishing revenues available to the university; and finally, what is the efficacy of the existing developmental programs? A committee was formed to answer these questions—appointed by the Provost, chaired by a member of his office, and rounded out by us and the Chair of our department.

Background information about our university and the basic writ-

ing course will help situate our study. Our school is an inner-city, open admissions campus. The average age of undergraduates is 26, and most are first-generation college students who come from low-income environments. Over 80% of our student population commutes to campus, juggling work, school, and family responsibilities, and they encompass most of the qualities for at-risk students cited by Otherine J. Neisler in "Access and Retention Strategies in Higher Education: An Overview":

> financial need and lack of financial aid; lack of academic success; personal, emotional, and family problems; feelings of isolation; adjustment problems; lack of commitment; inadequate potential for success; inadequate high school preparation; inadequate language skills; definition and attitudes about success; responsibility for learning/motivitation; maturity; lack of student services, counseling, tutoring, etc. (6)

The university attempts to cater to this commuting population, almost by design, in that we offer semester credit for classes held during 10-week quarters, schedule classes from six in the morning to ten at night, seven days a week, and offer two 4-week mini-terms each year. In addition, our university belongs to a local consortium designed to help students move seamlessly among our schools and to help faculty and administrators understand the programs available at each school. The consortium consists of city and county, public and private 2-year and 4-year universities, and it includes the public school system, as well. Within the English Department, we offer our placement exams on computer so that students may take them when convenient, given the time constraints of classes, work, and family. We have both a Writing Cener and a Reading Center which offer free tutorial help to any student in the university by appointment and through drop-in hours. The faculty concern for the writing program is so encompassing that all full-time, regular faculty teach at least one freshman writing course each year. Our students are historically under-prepared to take on post-secondary education, particularly the population with whom we are most familiar, the students enrolled in developmental courses.

The Developmental Program offers two courses, College Reading and Fundamentals of Writing, each a three-credit hour course which offers institutional credit. While the course credit is not transferrable to other universities, it does count toward full-time status at the university, an important consideration for students on financial aid, historically the largest percentage of students enrolled in such courses. Within the curriculum itself, basic writing students complete referential writing assignnments, beginning with sentence and paragraph structure and moving to essays. Each writing assignment is designed

to go through a multiple drafting process, during which instructors both read the drafts and confer with students so that they are clear about how to make each draft more effective with respect to audience, purpose, content, and context. The students are retained or passed into freshman composition based on a portfolio they assemble which represents their most effective work from the quarter. When these students move on to the first half of the freshman composition sequence, they write essays, learning to incorporate outside sources into their thinking and their writing. The second half of the sequence introduces them to the rhetoric of argument, and the final courses in the English program sequence, the sophomore surveys in literature, focus students on writing literary criticism. Throughout these courses, the assignments and drafts become increasingly complex, as does the textual material covered. A major element of the entire sequence, no matter the course, is to help students learn the process of writing and, most importantly, the process of revision. The grade basic writing students receive for the course is non-punitive; although the customary range of grades applies, the grade is not computed into the students' grade point averages. While basic writing is open to any student who wants to review writing basics before attempting freshman composition, it is required for students who score below a pre-determined minimum score on the university's entrance exams.

The Developmental Programs have been in place for a decade. During that time, the students' progress has been periodically tracked and their performance has been found to be competitive in upper-level English courses with that of initially better-prepared students who were not required to take basic writing. But retention rates have never been analyzed until now, and thus no data existed to support our "sixth sense" that basic writing students achieve similar or higher retention rates than the university's published third-year and fourth-year retention rates of 54% and 34%, respectively, for the general enrollment (Minter Associates). Back to Wiener's challenge: "But only individual colleges and departments through focused investigation can determine successful instructional paradigms—and these institutions have not attempted the studies or, if they exist, broadcast them" (102). The following represents our broadcast.

We chose to prepare a summative evaluation of a select number of students by subjecting them to a qualitative descriptive study. The sample is inclusive, rather than exclusive; it includes all students enrolled in basic writing sections offered during the fall terms of 1993 and 1994. We chose those two terms for three reasons. First, students enrolled in fall are more likely to be taking the course for the first time rather than repeating it. Second, many more sections of basic writing are offered during the fall term than during subsequent terms, making the observations more reliable. Third, we wanted to track the students'

progress over a three- and four-year period (to 1997). In the fall of 1993, 342 students enrolled in basic writing courses; in the fall of 1994, 343 students enrolled, for a total of 685 students. Our findings are given under the following headings: variables, data collection, retention rate, current classification, grade point average, writing course sequence completed, and conclusion. Under each heading we describe how we did this research which, in turn, explains how we made our argument to university administration. We offer this study as one model for demonstrating the effectiveness of a writing program.

Variables

Because we believed that retention rates could best be found by looking at several related factors, we identified four variables to analyze for each of the two groups over four and three academic years, respectively: (1) retention rate, (2) current classification, (3) grade point average, and (4) writing course sequence completed. Since the variables are nominal (GPA recorded as A, B, C, D, F), data consists of frequencies of occurrence in each category. While we did not really know what to expect—especially of the inter-relationships among these variables—we felt that we could arrive at a clearer picture of retention than that presented by the administration. This instinct proved to be right.

Data Collection

Our greatest challenge in the study proved to be gathering data because they had to be collected individually, student-by-student, taking many weeks to complete. As the weeks passed, we developed a pattern of ranking the variables, based on the chronology of the students' progress through the entire sequence of English courses. We reviewed university records including course grade sheets, students' transcripts, and the Student Academic Records System which provides access to historical and personal data. We initially charted data by course, but as we accumulated more data, we transferred them to a more refined chart indicating identifiable patterns within the variables, patterns which led us to some surprisingly gratifying results.

Retention Rate

The retention variable was the most important construct to the study since we were told that most students who left UAB did so after their freshman year and that the attrition rate for this time span was, the administration believed, approximately 50% for conditionally admitted students contrasted with 37% of regularly admitted students. To support their claim, the administration supplied a copy of the university's latest retention study of the general enrollment, a 1996

survey analyzing cohorts from 1990, comparing UAB's first and fourth year retention rates with those of schools comprising the "Urban 13," urban universities with demographics similar to those at UAB: Georgia State, Indiana University-Purdue, University at Indianapolis, University of New Orleans, University of Illinois-Chicago, University of Missouri-Kansas City, University of Akron, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Wayne State, University of Louisville, University of Central Florida, University of Missouri-St. Louis, and University of Houston (Minter Associates, 1996). Retention rates for the two reflected categories of UAB students, "Full Time Freshmen" and "Part Time Freshmen," as reported in Section 4.2 of "Retention, Graduation Rates Special Study" (Minter Associates), appear in Table 1.

Table 1-A: Overall Retention Rates for General Enrollment

	Full Time Freshmen	Part Time Freshmen	Average
1st year retention	73%	53%	63%
2nd year retention	61%	43%	52%
3rd year retention	54%	40%	47%
4th year retention	34%	12%	23%

(Minter Associates, 1996)

Table 1-B: Retention Rates for Sample Population

1st year retention	69%
2nd year retention	60%
3rd year retention	58%
4th year retention	50%

Our study reflects retention rates for the entire population of 685 basic writing students, not distinguishing between full and part time sub-groups as the Minter study recorded for the general enrollment. These figures held our first important discovery. Our basic writers had first year retention rates of 475 (69%)—6% higher than regularly admitted students not required to take basic writing courses—second year retention rates of 411 (60%), and third year retention rates of 395 (58%). In addition, 343 (50%) students were retained or had graduated by the fourth year, as compared to 23% of the total UAB general population as reported by Minter (1996). The 17% difference in these two retention rates confirmed what we could only hope for—that basic writing students fared better than those in the general population. It is safe to say that these findings were even stronger than we had expected.

A second hypothesis the administration forwarded was that the

largest number of students who leave the University do so within one year after their initial enrollment (Minter Associates, 1996). Our own instincts and anecdotal evidence from our own basic writing classes led us to believe this assumption, but we wanted to confirm it. Thus, we noted the time at which students in the remaining 50% of the sample population failed to enroll for further classes. Excluding 48 students in non-matriculating status [Transient: 3; Special: 33; Temporary: 11; Non-degree Seeking: 1], Table 2 indicates at what point in their studies the students in the sample population left the university.

Table 2: Attrition Rate for Sample Population

N = 294

	Number	Percent
1st year	210	71%
2nd year	64	22%
3rd year	16	5%
4th year	4	1%

Of the original 685 students in the sample population, 18 earned degrees and 325 were still registered at UAB four years after initial enrollment. In this case, then, our instincts proved to be accurate, for most students who leave the university do so within one year after initial enrollment. A curious corollary we found is that students—all students, not just basic writers—who survive this critical first year are in as much or more danger of leaving the university the second year; thus, the second year retention issue becomes equally crucial.

When we compared the fourth year retention rates between the students in the sample population and UAB's general enrollment during the same period, we were especially pleased to discover the percentage of retention for each group. The fourth year retention rates for the 685 students in the sample population and the 2,978 students in the general enrollment are reflected in Table 3.

Table 3: Fourth-Year Retention Rate

Sample Population	50%
UAB Full-time	34%
UAB Part-time	12%
UAB Overall	23%

Once again, our results proved to greatly exceed our expectations: sixteen (16) percentage points higher for full time students and thirty-eight (38) percentage points higher for the part time students.

Taken together, this comprised a full twenty-seven (27) percentage points higher than the average for all students in the UAB study. Therefore, although the conditionally admitted students are initially at greater risk of withdrawing from the university than students not required to take basic writing courses, those who remain past the one-year period are more than twice as likely as other students to be retained. In fact, the study indicates that, for the students in the sample, second- rather than first-year retention is the crucial factor in determining whether or not students will complete their studies through a fourth year. This finding did not surprise us, given the increased complexity of work required from our own second-year students, a level we expect is required from these students by their professors across the curriculum. From conversations with other faculty, we understand that students under prepared in English are under prepared in other disciplines, as well. Students who remain in the university two years after initial enrollment risk only a 6% chance of non-completion; those who complete the third year fail to return at a rate of 1%.

Current Classification

We were also interested in discovering how much progress these basic writing students had made toward graduation by noting current classification the fourth year after its 1993 or 1994 enrollment in the Developmental Writing Program. Of the 325 students still registered with the University, the majority had attained only sophomore or junior standing rather than the optimal junior and senior levels. A breakdown of specific current classification is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Current Classification of Sample Population
N = 325

Current Classification	Number of Students
Freshman	38 (12%)
Sophomore	123 (38%)
Junior	114 (35%)
Senior	30 (9%)
Other*	20 (6%)

*Transient: 1; Special: 10; Temporary: 6; Doctoral Candidates (ESL): 2; Master's Level (ESL): 1

Current classification four years after enrollment revealed that seventy-three (73%) percent of the students retained past the first year had achieved only sophomore or junior status. Ideally, the students

should have been ranked as either juniors or seniors. Although members of the sample population are approximately one year behind their expected ranking, eighty-eight (88%) percent of the 343 retained students have remained enrolled more than one year, thus surviving the crucial first- and second-year attrition threats.

Grade Point Average

We were curious to discover what impact, if any, grade point average had on these students' retention rates. In February 1997, we recorded cumulative grade point averages of all 685 students in the sample population, noting the differences between those who left and the retained sub-groups throughout their registration. Since UAB uses a 4.0 grading standard [4.0 = A], we grouped the students' averages to reflect the university's general grade point average ranges:

(1) = 0-1.00; (2) = 1.01-2.00; (3) = 2.01-3.00; (4) = 3.01-4.00.

While we guessed that the grade point averages of retained students at UAB would be substantially higher than those who had left, Table 5, which also indicates the grade point average at which the greatest number of students in each classification was either retained or lost, proved us wrong—surprisingly so.

Table 5: Most-Frequent Grade Point Averages of Sample Population

Current Classification	Grade Point Average	Retained	Lost
Freshman	(1.01-2.00)	55%	43%
Sophomore	(2.01-3.00)	63%	50%
Junior	(2.01-3.00)	79%	56%
Senior	(2.01-3.00)	63%	75%
Graduate	(2.01-3.00)	72%	—

While the percentages varied from 12-23 percentage points between the retained and lost students, the grade point averages of the two groups remained similar. We were quite surprised to note that, apparently, grade point average is not a variable which predicts whether students will continue university studies. Once again, the transient nature of the student population seems to override many factors, including this one which would seem to influence retention rates. In the future, we plan to compare these results both with those from a larger sample of basic writing students as well as within the larger context of the general enrollment.

Writing Course Sequence Completed

Another important consideration, we believed, was the number of times students attempted each course in the required English core. This includes a six or nine credit-hour writing sequence, depending on admission test scores: EH 099 (Developmental Writing), EH 101 (Exposition), and EH 102 (Argument) as well as a three or six credit-hour sophomore literature sequence which consists of one or two classes at the 200 level, depending on the student's major course of study. We also noted both persistence throughout the entire sequence and the point of attrition for students who withdrew from the program. We hypothesized that the longer a student is retained in the sequence, the more likely he or she is to complete each course as well as the entire core. Results of this study are presented in Table 6.

. The figures in Table 6 indicate that of the initial 685 students in the study, 511 enrolled in EH 101; 410 in EH 102; and 276 in EH 200-level courses. Thus, 40% of the sample population fulfilled the entire required sequence; 32% remained registered throughout the study, while 8% were lost. At the conclusion of the study, 79% of the entire population had completed EH 101, 55% had completed EH 102, and 38% had completed sophomore literature.

In addition to observing the number of times these basic writers attempted each course, we also noted how many had completed each course in the sequence. We hypothesized that as students progressed through the sequence, their completion rates would remain stable. These figures are presented in Table 7.

These figures are crucial since they reflect that the number of basic writing students who completed courses in the English sequence remains within a six-percentage range from 89-95%. Specifically, of the 685 students who enrolled in EH 099 (Developmental Writing), 611 (89%) completed the course; of the 511 students who enrolled in EH 101, 477 (93%) completed the course; of the 410 students who enrolled in EH 102, 376 (92%) completed the course; and of the 276 students who enrolled in EH 200, 262 (95%) completed the course(s). While these figures disregard the number of times students took each course before completing it and sharply contrast with the percentage of the sample population who completed the sequence (90% completed EH 099; 70% completed EH 101; 55% completed EH 102; 38% completedEH 200), it nevertheless does strongly demonstrate a consistent and stable completion rate throughout the courses in the sequence. But these figures still had little to do with retention rates. At-risk commuter students hampered by financial concerns, employment conflicts, and family matters tend to drop out, stop out, or at least to need more time to graduate than we might expect. Part of our future work will be to look at the general enrollment to determine whether this is true for all UAB

students. This study does, however, support the conclusion that conditionally admitted students' retention is enhanced by enrollment in a basic writing course and demonstrates the efficacy of our Developmental Writing Program. This finding alone supports the need for offering developmental course work as part of the university curriculum. In this study, developmental writing courses appear to enhance the retention of these students, shutting the revolving-door that many universities have become for at-risk students.

Table 6: Persistence Rate of Course Enrollment

Course	Times Attempted	Retained Percentage	Lost Percentage
EH 099			
N = 685			
	1	277 40%	278 41%
	2	60 8%	55 8%
	3	5 <1%	9 1%
	5	1 <1%	0 0%
TOTAL		343	342
EH 101			
N = 511			
	1	268 52%	176 34%
	2	42 8%	16 3%
	3	4 <1%	4 <1%
	5	1 <1%	0 0%
TOTAL		315	196
EH 102			
N = 410			
	1	255 62%	101 25%
	2	32 7%	16 4%
	3	4 <1%	0 0%
	4	0 <1%	2 <1%
TOTAL		291	119
EH 200-Level			
N = 276			
	1	203 74%	51 18%
	3	16 7%	4 1%
	5	1 <1%	0 0%
	8	1 0%	0 0%
TOTAL		221	55

Table 7: Completion Rate of Course Sequence

N = 685

Course	Enrolled		Completed	
EH 099	685	100%	611	89%
EH 101	511	70%	477	93%
EH 102	410	55%	376	92%
EH 200	276	38%	262	95%

Conclusion

Did we save the basic writing program with our results? For the moment, yes. Beyond the university administration lies a conservative state legislature who traditionally underfunds higher education. In fact, a bill sits in the legislature this moment which, if approved, will take all developmental courses out of the state's 4-year institutions, placing them exclusively in 2-year junior and community colleges. Our arguments to the contrary, politics may be the decisive factor. However, we are clear-sighted enough to know that, if the bill is passed, we will still be faced with under-prepared writers who will be unable to take basic writing but who, we know, will need developmental work nonetheless. Perhaps, then, it will all become a matter of semantics and clever course numbering. What will this next generation of basic writing students be called and what sort of course can be devised to give them the help they will inevitably need? A competition between the discourses of bureaucrats and intellectuals, as Richard Miller points out, is patently futile. Basic writing instructors trying to hold onto their programs, he would argue, operate from bureaucratic notions, albeit not generally using financial decisions as decisive factors. While discussing the fact that teachers complain that the world of the academy is increasingly being treated as a business—though the academy has always and will always be a business—Miller says:

> Consequently, those who have been willing or have been compelled to do the work of setting admissions standards, designing curricula, establishing appropriate modes of assessment, and generating adequate grievance procedures—those people, in other words, who have had to choose between one set of bureaucratic practices and another—have been left to labor in a kind of critical darkness. (203)

Miller suggests that "the best strategy available to anyone seeking to enter or remain in the profession may well involve fabricating for oneself and for the academic community at large some inhabitable version of the intellectual-bureaucrat" (216). As writing program directors strive to do just that, to figure out how to work within the system while, at the same time, to labor for improving (or in the case of basic writing instructors to labor for retaining existing) learning conditions for students, we must also do something equally vital. We must research and record data to support our claims.

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Eleanor Agnew and Margaret McLaughlin

BASIC WRITING CLASS OF '93 FIVE YEARS LATER: HOW THE ACADEMIC PATHS OF BLACKS AND WHITES DIVERGED

ABSTRACT: *The results of this five-year longitudinal study of 61 basic writers suggest little correlation between the first-year course and overall success in college. The most startling finding, however, is the much lower long-term success rate for African-American basic writers who passed the basic writing course. The article suggests that reading, not writing, is a stronger determinant of college success for at-risk students and that institutions should strengthen first-year reading programs. Furthermore, at-risk African-American students may need stronger non-academic support.*

In "Basic Writing Reconsidered," Peter Dow Adams raises the question, "What percentage of our students *do* succeed in our basic writing programs?" (28). He also wonders "just how many students who take basic writing courses actually graduate or make it through English 101, for that matter" (25). Adams' article, published in 1993, prompted us to initiate a longitudinal study that year to explore this question and others. After all, at most colleges and universities, the tacit assumption which fuels the very existence of first-year basic writing programs is that underprepared students will not be able to succeed in regular college courses without first becoming proficient writers. Yet the results of our five-year longitudinal study show that, in the long run, success or failure in the first year basic writing course was not at all a predictor of future success or failure in other college classes.

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The most startling finding, however, was how much the academic paths of African Americans and whites diverged over the five years of the study. White students who did *not* pass the Developmental English class the first time still had a higher retention and success rate than African-Americans who *did* pass it the first time. While the literature raises questions about the efficacy of basic writing programs for the general population of underprepared college students, we wish to look also at its relevance for African American students.

Developmental Writing Programs: A Current Educational Controversy

Whether colleges and universities should be in the business of offering remedial programs is a current educational controversy. More than one million academically underprepared students are entering our nation's colleges and universities every year. According to *USA Today*, 13% of all college students took at least one remedial class during the 1992-93 academic year (Kelly 1D). Statistics tell that only about 3% of the students who begin college in remedial courses graduate in four years; in five years about 11%; and 34% in eight years. Students who enter college in regular classes, however, graduate at the rate of 39% in five years, so even when remedial students take courses for three additional years, some 5% fewer are graduating than those who were unconditionally admitted (Walker). Recent media attention has focused upon the high numbers of students in remedial classes, the low graduation rate, and the high cost to taxpayers.

As Carriuolo notes in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Remediation—because it connotes time and money wasted in re-learning—has attracted unfriendly fire from legislatures, administrators, students and mainstream faculty members" (B2). Of the 28,751 freshmen entering Georgia's public colleges and universities in 1994, 43% required remediation. At our own school, a regional university in southeast Georgia with 14,000 students and an approximate 75% European American to 25% African American ratio, the percentages become somewhat higher: 52% of the entering freshmen were placed in developmental classes in 1995, and in 1996, the number was 45.3% (Salzer). According to Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust at the American Association for Higher Education, "States are paying the price—or sometimes three times the price — for the same learning and it never seems to take" (qtd. in Walker).

The underlying question at the heart of the debate seems to be the issue of whether underprepared students really are "college material" after all. If they need extra help, in the form of remedial courses,

just to be prepared for early college work, will they succeed in the long run? Is it worth it for millions of taxpayer dollars to be poured into these courses? The chairman of Georgia Board of Regents believes the state is spending "a lot of money correcting something that should have been done in high school" (Walker). Wolcott states, " . . . the central issue has always been whether our efforts on students' behalf at the beginning of their college careers make a difference in enabling them to cope afterward" (14).

A review of the empirical studies which attempt to measure the effectiveness of developmental writing classes yields mixed findings. A 1983 study by Palmer reports that "reading comprehension and writing mechanics skills do not improve as students [take] reading and writing courses" (27). Another study, completed in 1987 by Purvis and Watkins, found that although experimental students who were placed in basic writing courses did perform better *initially* than did the control group who entered regular classes, when the experimental students advanced beyond the courses for which developmental studies had specifically prepared them, the two groups showed virtually no difference in performance, and there was no significant difference between the two groups in persistence towards a degree.

And yet, Boylan and Bonham's 1990 study of developmental education at 116 two-year and four-year institutions, sponsored by the Exxon Education Foundation and conducted for the National Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State, appears to validate the effectiveness of developmental education programs. The researchers found that although it may take underprepared students longer to graduate, "those who participated in developmental programs were about as likely to persist and graduate as those students who were judged to be better prepared for college" (3). A longitudinal study quite different from Boylan and Bonham's but with similar findings was recently published by Marilyn Sternglass . Although her research is limited to 53 students who were enrolled in two levels of basic writing and one regular freshman English class that she taught at City College of the City University of New York, Sternglass believes that her descriptive study "allows educators to see that even the apparently most educationally disadvantaged students have the potential to achieve academic success if they are given the time and support they need to demonstrate their abilities" (299).

Within our own discipline of composition and rhetoric, there is also controversy as to whether we should be tracking at-risk students into basic writing courses. In 1992, the National Council of Teachers of English approved a resolution "to support curricula, programs, and practices that avoid tracking, a system which limits students' intellectual, linguistic and/or social development." And in response to the article, "Remediation as Social Construct," Peter Elbow bluntly asks

authors Glynda Hull et al., "What justification do you see, really, for remedial classes at the college level . . . ?" (588).

At the 1992 Fourth National Basic Writing Conference in College Park, Maryland, a number of speakers debated the mainstreaming issue, and the following spring, the *Journal of Basic Writing* published the plenaries. The keynote speaker, David Bartholomae, questions whether it is the profession or the students who are best served by basic writing programs, programs which operate by maintaining a distinction between "normal and abnormal" writers (8) and work to standardize student voices (12). In the second article, mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Peter Dow Adams presents data from an informal study he conducted at his institution which suggest that the disadvantages of basic writing classes may outweigh the advantages (33). Jerrie Cobb Scott explores factors which she believes contribute to a "recycling of deficit pedagogy" in many basic writing programs: a narrow definition of literacy as simply the ability to read and write, a definition which results in skills and drills pedagogies.

Karen Greenberg, however, argues that most basic writing classes provide students with an opportunity to succeed academically, an opportunity they would not have if they were mainstreamed. To support her contention, Greenberg cites average pass rates of basic writing students at her institution as ranging between 80% and 93% as well as a 36% graduation rate of basic writers within five years and a 55% rate within eight years (69). And, at the "relatively open-admissions" General College of the University of Minnesota, Terry Collins reports that 100% of the students who complete the Basic Writing sequence successfully transfer into the University's degree-granting colleges and students who postpone or do not take the Basic Writing sequence "drop out at elevated rates" (97). Ira Shor contends, however, that the percentages Greenberg and Collins cite mean almost nothing unless there is substantiating proof that "these students could not have graduated without BW" (96). Shor argues that basic writing programs not only waste students' time and money but also serve to maintain the social and racial inequities in our society (106), and he "wants to see hard evidence that BW courses shelter more than they shunt" (96). Harvey Wiener also notes the paucity of "reliable inquiry and research on the impact of remedial programming" and calls for more empirical research on the effects of basic writing (1998, 100).

Background of Our Study

The conflicting reports about the validity of tracking students into basic writing classes provided the impetus for us to examine our own program. During the 1993 fall quarter, we decided to follow the aca-

demic progress of the 61 students who had been placed in the two basic reading/writing classes we were teaching. We formulated our principal research question as "What happens to our developmental writers after they leave Developmental English?" Among our related questions were the following: 1. How many of these students will graduate and in how long a time period? 2. Are there correlations between the attrition rate and students' first quarter writing abilities?

To address these questions, we followed the academic progress of our students through personal interviews, interviews with their subsequent English instructors, a classification scheme based on three possible levels of academic success, analyses of student writing, and analyses of academic transcripts.

The Subjects

As experienced teachers, we recognized that the students enrolled in our classes for the 1993 fall quarter were quite representative of developmental students at our university. Virtually all of our subjects were recent high school graduates; two-thirds were African American; and SAT Verbal scores ranged from a low of 220 to a high of 410 with a mean score of 350. Questionnaires revealed that most were first-generation college students who entered our classes highly motivated to get out of remedial classes, get going on regular college courses, graduate, and get a "well-paying job." Few of the students had ever read a whole book, and their writing backgrounds were often limited to high school research papers, which they told us they could copy from reference books and get by.

The Class

The subjects of this study were in a team-taught developmental reading/writing class in which a modification of the Bartholomae/Petrosky *Facts, Artifacts, Counterfacts* model was used. The students read a book approximately every two weeks and kept a reader response journal. They also wrote personal experience essays, an autobiography of about 1500 words, summaries of articles about the subject of the course, "Growth and Change in Adolescence," several essay exams about the books they were reading, and, finally, a documented opinion paper.

At our institution, students must earn a C in the developmental course before they are eligible to take the state mandated exit exams which they must pass before they can enroll in regular college classes.

The exit exams are alternate versions of the placement tests that put them in the basic writing course in the first place: an English basic skills test and an impromptu timed essay. Exit essays are anonymously evaluated by two English faculty other than their own instructors. If students are successful in each of these three challenges, they are eligible to enroll in Freshman English I. Those who are not successful at the end of the first quarter may take as many as three more quarters of these developmental classes before they are excluded from the university. Placement and exit criteria for all remedial courses in Georgia are mandated by the University System Board of Regents.

Results

After five years in college, most of our students have not done well in college *overall*, suggesting that their performance in the Developmental English course was not a predictor of future success: for example, some students who did not pass the developmental writing course the first time have had successful academic careers whereas some students who passed the developmental writing course on their first attempt did not perform well in subsequent courses. Probably the most startling finding, however, is that, of those students who were *not* successfully remediated in one quarter, white students have more than twice the success rate in subsequent college courses as black students who *did* pass the course. Although it is impossible to predict what any of these students' experiences would have been without the Developmental English course, the fact that "successful" remediation resulted in a much lower success rate for African American students than for white students caused us to make a closer examination of the academic progress of both groups of students.

Five years after matriculation, 19 of the students (31%) have graduated, and 4 more of these high risk students are making steady progress toward a 1999 graduation date. These percentages compare favorably with our institution's average 35% graduation rate for all students. When we looked below the surface of these figures, however, we found disturbing discrepancies: 57% of the white students have graduated but only 22.5% of the black students.[1] Moreover, the 61 students' overall academic progress did not correlate with their verbal SAT scores nor with their ability to pass the developmental writing class.

When students' progress is assessed according to race, a distinct difference in academic histories can be seen. Although a handful of African-American students have had uneventful educations over five years, the majority of records display "P's", "S's", "E's" and "D's",

which stand for Probation, Suspension, Exclusion and Dismissal. While certainly not free of "P's", "S's", "E's" and "D's", the academic progress of white students has been smoother. A few had an occasional probation or suspension or exclusion, but none were dismissed from the university for academic reasons.

Table 1
Comparison of Blacks' and Whites' 5-Year Academic Histories and Success with Basic Writing Course

TOTAL STUDENTS WHO PASSED BW 1st TIME	**TOTAL STUDENTS WHO DID NOT PASS BW 1st TIME**
Whites: 68%	Whites: 32%
Blacks: 56%	Blacks: 44%
FIVE YEARS LATER: WHITE STUDENTS	**FIVE YEARS LATER: WHITE STUDENTS**
Successful: 53%	Successful: 43%
Rocky History: 13%	Rocky History: 29%
Gone: 34%	Gone: 28%
FIVE YEARS LATER: BLACK STUDENTS	**FIVE YEARS LATER: BLACK STUDENTS**
Successful: 18 %	Successful: 6%
Rocky History: 18%	Rocky History: 23%
Gone: 64%	Gone: 71%

To discover whether we could find any relation between academic success and the students' first quarter writing abilities, we compared their academic success rates over the five year period with their ability to pass the Developmental English class. In Table 1, we used a simple classification scheme to collapse the four-year academic histories of both African Americans and whites. "Successful" refers to students whose academic histories show no probations, dismissals, suspensions, or exclusions; "rocky" refers to students who are still currently enrolled but who have been on probation, dismissal, suspension or exclusion; and "gone" refers to those who are no longer enrolled. The academic histories of both races are compared with their first quarter writing abilities as measured by their success in exiting remedial English at the end of the first quarter. About three times as many whites (53%) have had "successful" academic histories as blacks (18%). Further, of those students who exited and were therefore theoretically ready for regular courses, about twice as many blacks (64%) as whites (34%) are no longer enrolled at the university.

Low Success Rates for African-Americans

According to a recent national study, African-American college freshmen are placed in remedial English courses at over twice the rate of white students, yet they comprise only six percent of the graduating population (Gray). Astin reports college attrition rates for African-American students at 49. 5% and Cortina reports the rate at 73.4% (qtd. in Fidler and Godwin 35). Referring specifically to the Georgia system, Presley writes "Developmental English courses . . . apparently pose the most difficulty for minority students. Black students do not exit the developmental English classes in as high a percentage as other students do. And, once in a regular English class, a lower percentage of black students pass than the passing percentage of other students" (51).

In 1993, the year we began our study, 48% of the 828 entering black students at our university were placed in Developmental English classes. At the end of four quarters, 15% of the black students were dismissed from the university for failure to exit Developmental English. In contrast, 22% of entering white freshmen had to take Developmental English classes, and at the end of four quarters, fewer than 1% was dismissed from the university for inability to pass the course. To explore possible causes for the disparity between the percentages of black and white students for whom Developmental English barred the gates to higher education is certainly beyond the scope of this study, but a cursory review of the retention literature suggests a number of possibilities.

Fidler and Godwin, referring to several studies which describe high college attrition rates for African Americans, state that "colleges and universities have historically structured their curricula, student services, and campus environment based on a white middle class norm" (35.) Jones bluntly says, "In its insistence on hierarchy, racism situates basic writing programs as Jim-Crow way stations for minority students, for the thousands of Black and Latino students who fill basic writing classes across the nation" (73).

A study of African-Americans in the academy found that "only five percent of all college faculty are African-American" (Gray 3A). Hillard sees the paucity of African American faculty as a big problem for blacks who enter the university. They are taught primarily by white instructors, who may not only have negative attitudes towards black language patterns but who "are ill-prepared to teach students who are unlike themselves" (qtd. in Harrold 17). In *The Agony of Education*, Feagin, Vera and Imani agree, stating that "the intellectual discourse at traditionally white colleges and universities is for the most part parochial and restricted by subtle or overt Eurocentric interests and biases" (114). Hopkins believes that one reason African-American males in particular have difficulty within the educational system is because teachers have low expectations when they should "be committed to this population, show compassion and understanding and be confident that these students can learn" (112). Wallace and Bell cite a number of other studies which suggest causes for the low retention rates of black students at predominantly white institutions: being a first-generation student; having a low socio-economic status; experiencing a lack of comfortable social context; lacking prerequisite courses, and having difficulty with core courses (308). African-American students' feelings of invisibility and marginalization on white campuses may undermine their scholastic ability and determination to succeed, add Feagin, Vera and Imani: "The lack of human recognition the students detect in some white peers, teachers, advisers, police, and other campus personnel is serious, for it teaches major lessons about neglect, exclusion, or self-worthlessness" (133). And, despite the fact that linguists and literacy scholars have been urging educators for the past thirty years to accept African American Vernacular English as a legitimate linguistic variety, the national Ebonics debate in December, 1996, and January, 1997, revealed how widely and deeply the negative attitudes toward permitting its use in the classroom prevail.

Focusing on the Wrong Problems

When we set up our tracking study, the focal point of our interest was our students' emerging writing ability. Our assumption, shared

by most academics, was that students' writing skill would be a key determinant of their long-range academic success or failure. The belief that students must be proficient writers before they can tackle the rest of their college work has long been accepted in the academy and is the foundation around which most colleges and universities build their curricula: hence, the ubiquitous first year basic writing course.

However, after five years of following our students, we have to question our original assumptions about the role of writing skill as the primary determinant of college success. In fact, most of the successfully "remediated" students in our study began to falter as soon as they began courses in history, psychology, sociology or other subjects which were heavily reading-based. We looked specifically at our students' success over five years with the regular college courses, the ones which are more reading-based than writing-based. We calculated the percentages of reading-based or math-based courses our students had passed.[2] The result is a percentage of reading-based college courses passed with a C or better. We considered the students who had passed 80% or more of these courses to be "Above Average" in overall college success; those who had passed from 70 to 80% to be "Average" and those who had passed from 0 to 69% to be "Below Average." Neither the white students nor the African-American students have performed exceptionally well, if we consider that over one quarter of the whites and nearly three quarters of the blacks have been classified as "Below Average."

Yet we saw the same discrepancy revealed in our Table 1: 67% of African-Americans were "Below Average," compared to 27.3% of whites, and that only 18% of African-Americans were "Above Average," compared to 59% of whites. Again, the fact that African-Americans who had been "remediated" foundered at a much higher rate than whites suggests that we may need to re-examine assumptions behind first year programs designed to help at-risk students succeed in college.

Increasing Emphasis on Reading Skills

Virtually all institutions of higher learning consider basic writing and freshman composition courses to be service courses which *must* be offered in the first year to prepare students for later college work. But perhaps institutions need to pay closer attention to the reading skills of their at-risk students. As mentioned above, many students in our study revealed that before the Fall of 1993, when they entered our course, they had never read an entire book. Although we assigned more books for them to read than they had ever read before, eight weeks of reading was undoubtedly not enough to prepare them well

for college reading, as evidenced by the low success rates with reading-based courses. Though writing and reading skills are frequently interactive, in a typical institutional scenario, the two are often distanced from one another and treated as separate skills.

For example, at our institution, students find it easier to exit the first-quarter developmental reading course than the first-quarter developmental writing course because exiting is based on their ability to pass a standardized multiple-choice reading test at the end of the quarter. The majority do pass the first time. But this assessment tool may not be providing a valid measure of the reading skills students will need in higher level courses. Chase, Gibson and Carson point out that "reading differs significantly across academic disciplines in college in terms of number of assigned pages, text characteristics and function and student perception of the role of text" (14). They closely examined the reading requirements for four college courses–American History, Political Science, Biology and English–and found that in American History, for example, students were required to read eighty pages per week. In Political Science, thirty-four pages per week were required, and in Biology, thirty pages of text, five pages of lab manual, and ten pages of study guide were required every week (11). But it was not just the amount of material which was challenging, it was the nature of how that material needed to be processed. The authors write,

> In these university courses, reading was a vehicle for gathering information and ideas which would then be transformed through analysis and synthesis into written exams, essays and other application activities, such as labs. Even in the Political Science course, where exams were multiple choice, questions were designed to require the student to make critical judgments and synthesize material from texts and lectures (12).

Underprepared students may be more challenged by reading tasks than writing tasks in their later courses because at our institution, and, we suspect, a number of others, the majority of professors in non-English disciplines do not emphasize writing in their courses, nor do they make writing projects the primary component of the course grade. If they require papers, they tend to be less critical of them than an English teacher might be. Thus, if basic writers finish their required English courses, they will probably never again do as much writing as they did in those early courses. But reading is a task they will face on a daily basis for virtually every course they will take for the duration of their academic careers. Our data suggest that success in college depends more on reading ability and all that it implies—speed, comprehension, and critical thinking—than on writing skills. Institutions should consider strengthening first-year reading programs as paral-

lels to first-year writing programs.

Institutions which serve at-risk students should develop Reading Centers, along with Writing Centers, to offer students support and assistance with their college reading assignments throughout their college years. Robert and Thomson describe how the Student Learning Center at the University of California at Berkeley offers study groups for different subjects which are led by experienced students: "The leader acts as a facilitator by encouraging active discussion and helping students understand lecture and reading material" (10).

Other Risk Factors For Minorities

Of course, literacy skills may be just one of several factors contributing to the high attrition rate of African-American students. Tinto points out in *Leaving College* that cultural, financial and psychological considerations may also play a role in attrition. Simmons cites degree of maturity, family support, motivation, expectations, and social skills as elements which may influence African-American students' success or failure in college. Furthermore, the emotional and cultural disenfranchisement which blacks experience on white campuses may escalate the drop-out rate. Robert and Thomson write that "it is difficult for minority students to escape the suspicion that they really don't deserve to be at the university and wouldn't be there if they didn't get special (read 'unfair') advantages and a lot of special help" (6). As Tinto states, ". . . the ability of students to meet academic standards is related not only to academic skills . . .but also to positive academic self-concept" (73).

African-Americans May Need More Institutional Support

Colleges and universities must become more aware of the obstacles which African-American students face as they embark upon their college careers. Black students, writes Tinto, "are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have experienced inferior schooling prior to college" (73). Robert and Thomson note that minority students at Berkeley "come from families with far less experience with higher education and far fewer resources to support the education of their daughters and sons" (6). They suggest that colleges and universities must work actively to retain these high-risk students by creating support programs which help them to adjust not only to the functional aspects of college life, but to the white college culture.

Although our institution does offer study skills courses, minority tutoring, a Learning Resources Center and a summer enrichment program for incoming minorities, Robert and Thomson point out that

> It has been a common finding that academic support programs which require the student to initiate the contact are particularly unsuccessful with at-risk and minority students . . . Seeking academic assistance becomes discrediting, and many students of color may simply choose not to do so . . . . Students confided that they had initially denied to themselves and others that they were struggling academically and often delayed seeking assistance until too late in the semester to recover (6).

We have also noticed that our minority students are reluctant to seek extra help.

When we started our study, it had not occurred to us that racial polarization would emerge as an issue. We simply wanted to learn how our high risk students fared academically after they left our developmental classes. Near the end of the second year into our study, however, we began to notice distinct differences between the academic progress of our black and our white students, and with each subsequent year, those differences became more evident. We began researching the literature and were dismayed to discover that what we were witnessing at our own institution was a national trend. We now realize how easy it can be for this problem to go unrecognized.

Notes

1. Tables detailing the academic progress of the 61 students in the study, both individually and as groups, are available on request. Contact the authors care of the Department of Writing and Linguistics, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA 30460.

2. We excluded physical education courses, study skills courses, grammar and mechanics courses, lower division health, music, theater, or Regents review courses (which help students pass the state-mandated writing and reading exams). We also did not include the required freshman writing sequence.

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Sibylle Gruber

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ELECTRONIC CIRCUIT: A VIRTUAL REMAPPING OF BORDER CROSSINGS

ABSTRACT: *Research in computers and composition has contributed to a multitude of insights important to scholars and educators interested in computer-supported writing instruction. However, the field has not yet engaged in critical discussions of nontraditional students' – especially African-American students' – interactive strategies in online communication. To provide a starting point for critical explorations of African-American students' computer-based interaction, this paper analyzes how an African-American male student negotiates his multiple subjectivities in a largely white university setting and in a male-dominated society. Specific examples from online transcripts generated in a basic writing class show that he is "otherized" in an anglophile environment but also "otherizes" in a patriarchal and homophobic society. By foregrounding the different voices he brings to the classroom, this study undermines oversimplified dichotomies of majority and minority discourses and instead argues for accepting diverse and sometimes contradictory subject positions of all participants in interactive communities.*

> In the tradition of Western science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war.
>
> Donna Haraway, from "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 191.

In recent years, research in computers and composition has provided teachers and scholars interested in the theoretical and pedagogical applications of new computer technologies with a plethora of studies. Book-length explorations, articles in edited collections and jour-

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nals, web-based publications, and conference papers discuss how computers influence our thinking about virtuality, reality, and truth; how classroom practices are influenced by conferencing software, the internet, and the web; and how teacher-student interaction is affected by new technologies (see, for example, Fischer; Gruber, *Weaving*; Haas; Hawisher and Sullivan; Johnson-Eilola; Selfe and Hilligoss; Selfe and Selfe; Stabile; Stone). Computer-based instruction, according to findings in various classroom-based studies, might shift but does not eliminate teacher domination or gendered discourse in online discussions (see, for example, Gruber, "Ways"; Regan; Romano; Takayoshi). These and other explorations have contributed to a critical view of how computers should be integrated into an instructional environment, cautioning teachers to look at technology as a tool that needs to be implemented carefully in specific settings to increase equitable student-teacher interactions and women's participation in online interactions.

What is largely missing from current research, though, is how students from different ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds situate themselves in a computer-mediated academic environment. Specifically, computers and compositionists have remained aloof to African American students' interactions in online composition classes. The near absence of qualitative and ethnographic studies in this area is especially surprising considering the heightened sensitivity to diversity in the educational system.[1] The debate over ebonics, for example, has raised awareness of language differences. Also, research on the success rates of minority students in college confirms that African Americans and students from other minority backgrounds often feel alienated because their experiences are not in accord with the white middle-class backgrounds of the majority of college students. As Mike Rose maintains, because of "tangled, disturbing histories of discrimination, skewed perception, and protection of privilege" (412), these students oftentimes encounter numerous problems with the educational system and the assumed literacy skills endorsed by the academic community.

Whether computer-based interaction, as part of the "alien" instructional environment, leads to additional problems for students already disadvantaged or whether it helps them move toward academic literacy has been touched upon briefly in A. Suresh Canagarajah's recent discussion of "safe houses" which African-American students established in a networked classroom. Canagarajah, unfortunately, only looks at African-American students as a homogeneous group that uses language on- and offline to "express their frustrations, display resistance, and seek emotional sustenance and solidarity" (179). Such a perspective, however, only exacerbates an indiscriminate labeling of students as "other" and "underprepared," looking from the outside in but unable to become part of the larger whole. Ignoring the diversity

among people from the same ethnic group would deny what Henry Louis Gates so aptly pointed out in a recent radio interview: "If there are 30 million African Americans, there are 30 million ways of being African American" (February 20, 1997).

To complicate the notion of "African Americans," and to explore the multiple discourse strategies they bring to computer-mediated environments, this paper analyzes how Bailey[2], an African-American male student from a mid-sized midwestern town, negotiates his position in a mainly white university setting and in a mainly male-dominated society. My analysis focuses on his interactions in a basic writing class and his comments on PacerForum, an electronic communication tool which was used for synchronous and asynchronous online discussions[3]. This contribution is intended to raise awareness among composition scholars and teachers that the various and sometimes contradictory subjectivities of African Americans—and all our students—can lead them to impose stereotypes, for example, while at the same time being stereotyped when interacting in class or when using an electronic communication tool.[4]

By foregrounding the different positions of an African-American student during online discussions, this study undermines the belief that the established dichotomy between majority and minority students can be upheld in a society that judges people not only by skin color but also by other, equally important factors. For example, gender, economic background, educational experiences prior to college, and sexual preferences also influence the interactions of students in the classroom. Thus, instead of ignoring the diversity among people from the same ethnic group, I will emphasize Bailey's many voices, his ability to walk "out of one culture and into another" (Anzaldúa 77), and, consequently, his ability to employ multiple positions during his interactions online. Race, therefore, is no longer seen as an easily definable hegemonic concept but instead as a social and rhetorical construct which, as Keith Gilyard points out, needs to undergo critical reevaluation.

Asking Questions

> If we consider at the outset where our speech is going and what it will do there, and if we enlist the voices of others to guide us along the way, trusting the other to teach us what we need to know, we will be less likely to fall prey to the temptation ever before us as academics to view research as an end in itself and the knowledge we produce as its own justification.
>
> Patricia A. Sullivan, from "Ethnography and the Problem of the 'Other,'" 112.

This paper is an attempt "to bring stories not yet heard to the attention of the academy" (Brodkey 48). Essentially, I want to foreground Bailey's experiences, acknowledge the many different voices he employs, and explore the reasons for these differences. Thus, instead of asking "What are the differences between black and white discourse strategies?" or "What are the differences between the discourse strategies of basic and mainstream writers?"—questions which assume set properties independent of the person and the situation—I will pose different questions: "How does Bailey's economic, social, cultural, and ethnic background influence his discourse strategies in specific situations?" and "How does the electronic medium used for class discussions influence Bailey's interactive behavior?" Emphasizing specific instances of interaction acknowledges that communication strategies are never absolute but are, on the contrary, relative to the situation in which any interaction is realized, and relative to the person who is participating in any given situation. Such in-depth studies of individual students are especially important when trying to avoid generalizations about groups of so-called "basic writers," "African-American students," "women," or any other group usually identified as adhering to some easily identifiable traits.

The specific setting in which the study takes place is a computerized section of Rhetoric 103—a writing course for students whose ACT, SAT, and essay test scores are considered "below average" by university administrators—which was taught by the researcher[5] in the Fall of 1994 at a large midwestern university. For an in-depth study of participants' development in Rhetoric 103, I used questionnaires at the beginning and end of the semester, conducted interviews, analyzed PacerForum transcripts, and also analyzed the research papers that they wrote for class. I also observed them in class and noted their participation and general attitudes towards their peers and the class. This study focuses specifically on Bailey's online strategies and the multiple positions he occupies as an African American, a man, and a heterosexual, all of which influence his discursive behavior and his responses to the three online discussions analyzed in the following sections.

Starting to Participate

> We approach our maturity inside a larger social body that will not support our efforts to become anything other than the clones of those who are neither our mothers nor our fathers. . . . As we learn our way around this environment, either we hide our original word habits, or we completely surrender our

> own voice, hoping to please those who will never respect anyone different from themselves.
>
> June Jordan, from "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan," 123.

"My immediate goal is to adapt well to college life and to start off on the right track in my classes. My long-term goal is to graduate with a substantially high G.P.A., and to attend Law School." Bailey, the main actor in the story unfolding over the next pages, wrote these well-articulated sentences during the initial day of class in Rhetoric 103, the first of a two-semester basic writing course. Despite his ability to write grammatically correct sentences, he was placed into Rhetoric 103 because his ACT and essay test scores were below the average test scores of students entering this midwestern university. Thus, although Bailey was self-confident about his ability to achieve academic excellence and to enter law school, university admissions considered him to be "at risk" and less prepared for academic success than most entering first-year students. Bailey was found lacking in academic discourse skills, and Rhetoric 103 was intended to serve as a place where he could learn how to "extend [himself] into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind, tricks of the 'what might be said' and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community" (Bartholomae 278; see also Bizzell). And Bailey, according to his answers on the initial questionnaire, did not show any resentment about his placement and seemed to be quite willing to "adapt" himself to the new environment.

However, before we look at Bailey as simply a basic writer with a set number of characteristics—for example, a lack of necessary writing skills but a willingness to work hard to achieve success—we have to look at the individual and how he presents himself in an academic setting. Looking closely at how Bailey interacts with his peers, we can see that he moves beyond the global description of a basic writer who is characterized by Patricia Bizzell as someone with "differences in dialects, discourse conventions, and ways of thinking" (296). These differences might indeed be present in some students; however, they play out in various ways in the student population rubriced under "basic writer." Bailey's participation and his expressions of his opinions (he does not use a "different dialect," for example) is unique and idiosyncratic, and we would do injustice to him and other students if we considered his comments without considering the specific situation in which these comments were written.

We Wear the Mask: Being an African American in a White World

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Laurence Dunbar, from "We Wear the Mask" (223)

Bailey is determined to succeed in college and to learn how to do well. But despite wanting to fit in, he is also suspicious of his environment. He is enrolled in a predominantly white university where racial slurs still find their way onto walls[6] and where students from different ethnic backgrounds do not generally mix with each other. Fortunately, in Rhetoric 103 the 16 students came from many different backgrounds and had to interact with each other in order to participate in class and also in online discussions. In terms of ethnic backgrounds, African American students constituted the majority (6), followed by Anglo Americans (4), Asian Americans (2), Hispanics (2), a student from India (1), and a Persian American student (1). In terms of socioeconomic status, most students in this class grew up in households with an income below the average family income of their college peers. Furthermore, students came from many different areas in the state and also from out-of-state.

The various backgrounds of students, for one, provided a diversified audience for discussions on race-related issues. Thus, during an online exchange[7] on minority representation in advertisements, Bailey seems to feel comfortable discussing his viewpoint on racial tensions and injustices. After reading an article on race discrimination in higher education as well as an article delineating stereotypes in advertising—both intended as a starting point for a writing assignment—he agrees with the opinions brought forward by the authors. His first comment illustrates his position:

> 90.[8] Bailey
> The white-man is in control, so how he views things in society is going to be accepted as right even if it is wrong.

Bailey's statement, presented as an indisputable fact, is based on the readings and—according to subsequent postings and comments he make in class—his sentiments can be seen as the result of his own experiences in American society as a black person who, because of his skin color, feels excluded from many positions occupied by the "white-

man." Accordingly, Bailey sees himself in a subordinate position which, as he makes it clear, is beyond his control to change. Bailey's negative opinion about his own impact on how "things are viewed" is not only an expression of past experiences as a member of a minority but can also be related to his experiences at the university. In 1994, when Bailey entered as a first-year student, the African-American student population numbered only 6.1 percent (1994 Student Enrollment Table) whereas the State of Illinois' African American population amounts to 12.1 percent. Most of the administrative positions at the university were—and are—held by whites, and his professors during his first semester—in his Economics, French, Math, Kinesiology, and Rhetoric classes—were also white.

Although minority issues are often relegated to the periphery of academic discussions, and although minority students' voices usually don't carry much weight, Bailey's position as a non-white person in Rhetoric 103 establishes his authority on race issues. He becomes the "host" of the online exchange and finds support from other class members who validate his opinion and who substantiate his underlying comments on his position as a minority person who suffers from discrimination. For example, Carla, John, and Egan, two white students and an Asian-American student, wholeheartedly endorse Bailey's statement:

> 93. Carla
> Bailey That is soooooo true. I think we all need to change that
>
> 97. John
> I agree with Bailey the white man still has most of the control.
>
> 105. Egan
> I think this is still a white man's world.

In subsequent comments, most of the students agree that the country is run by white men and is thus hostile to African Americans and other minorities.

This grim picture of reality presented by many students in the class does not appeal to Miriam, one of the white students in class. She argues:

> 96. Miriam
> Bailey I disagree I feel that times have changed. I don't think the white man is in control.

Miriam challenges Bailey's assumptions based on her experiences with ethnic diversity. Miriam grew up in a mainly white, middle-class sub-

urban neighborhood and did not experience racial tension—or diversity—before she came to the university. For her, racism—defined by Audre Lorde as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (282)—does not exist. She is not willing to admit that anything is wrong in American society and that race relations are less than ideal. However, Miriam's opinions are not the opinions of the majority in this class, and Bailey is supported among others by Langston, an African-American student who grew up in the inner city of Chicago, and Carla, a white student who was raised in Georgia. Their comments and the comments of other students lead to an involved discussion on the political and economic situation in the States.

100. Langston
Who's president, Miriam? Most of our mayors and governors? The people that run the show are usually white.

101. Carla
Miriam, He may not be in control as much as he used to be, but he still has a pretty tight hold on things.

106. Bailey
Miriam, if the white-man wasn't in control we probably wouldn't be having this discussion. Who runs these advertising companies?

109. Carla
Yeah Langston, and the majority of them (governors, senate) are still white males

113. Bailey
I don't think this issue is subject to change unless we change who is in control of these operations and that won't happen any day soon.

115. Miriam
NO SEE THAT IS WHY PEOPLE DO NOT GET ALONG . . . THE WHITE MAN IS NOT IN MY OPINION IN CONTROL . . . HOW MANY BLACK PEOPLE RUN FOR PRESIDENT ?? VERY FEW MAYBE IF THER WAS MORE EFFORT PUT FORTH THINGS WOULD CHANGE . . .

117. Langston
I agree Bailey. Other races need to come together first and settle their own differences to change the way things work.

118. Alex
Miriam it does not matter if a black man runs for president. The majority of businesses are run by whites.

125. Tashi
No Miriam I have to disagree with you. Alot of effort is put in but look who is the majority. You can't say effort isnt put in because there are so many trying to achieve a higher level of status in society.

Tashi, an African-American woman whose mother teaches high school students and who is usually very quiet and reserved in class, opposes Miriam's efforts to blame African Americans and other minorities for their social and economic situations in society. Tashi's comment and other voices in the class support and underscore Bailey's argument. Even more importantly, his voice, which expresses his perceptions concerning the discriminatory practices of white men in a "white man's world," exists in unison with other voices and also depends on them. In Bailey's case, the interactions with his peers on PacerForum were necessary to express his ideas and respond to other participants' postings. His relationship with his classmates and their comments made a dialogue on a hard issue—experiencing discrimination—possible.[9] The postings on PacerForum thus strengthened Bailey's feelings of belonging in the classroom environment despite his outsider status in the larger context. And although one of the participants disagreed with the premise put forth by Bailey and other students, the idea that this is a white man's world which subordinates African-American men was reaffirmed.

PacerForum and the electronic discussion thus became a means for participants to bring into the open the perceived systematic discrimination which is still a part of minority groups' day-to-day lives. They were also able to critique the perceived bastions of the "white man's world" by appropriating a tool—the computer—which is often seen to represent dominant power structures (see Selfe and Selfe). Bailey, as one of the participants, positioned himself as a member of an ethnic minority who is frequently exposed to racism and discrimination, but who at the same time is able to use his background in connection with the new technology to gain authority and a voice in the classroom. This complicates Henry Louis Gates' notion that many African-American students feel "like visitors, like guests, like foreign or colonized citizens in relation to a traditional canon that fails to represent [their] cultural identities ("Transforming" 35). Instead, Bailey uses his position as a "colonized citizen" to assert himself; he uses the "master's tools"—in this case electronic communication technology—to speak up for minority groups.[10]

Putting Down the Ones Who Are Already Down: What Is Rape Anyway?

> Prosecute? No, I just want to get home. While I'm pickin' some guy out of some line, who knows who's messin' around with my momma and my baby.
>
> Altamese Thomas, rape survivor; qtd in Fine, 115

Being a black man in a white man's world is at the forefront of Bailey's entries in the previous online discussion on race-relations and discriminatory practices of white America, and his perspective on the "oppressed" leads his classmates to show compassion and understanding for Bailey; it also shows his use of language to transgress power relations. However, his position shifts once the conversation moves in a different direction and focuses on issues less directly connected with racial discrimination: sexual harassment and rape.

To provide students with a variety of opportunities to think about date rape and rape before discussing it as a group and before writing a critical argument on gender issues, they were asked to go to the Union Building and "study" a wreath put up in memory of victims of rape and date rape.[11] Additionally, participants in Rhetoric 103 watched a documentary about a University student who had been date raped and had, after a long silence, agreed to talk about it openly. Using a wreath and a documentary as reading material before engaging in an online discussion was intended to provide students with information that they could connect to their own lives and their own environment, which would then engage them in active and critical participation.

Despite the "preparation" intended to raise awareness of a real problem, Bailey confirms the unwillingness of some men to "own up" to a societal ill. He, like others in the class, sees rape as the fault of the woman. He shows himself as a person who is willing to put blame on those already victimized by a stranger or an acquaintance, thus moving away from being the victim of an alien and racist society toward victimizing women who have been raped.[12] Alex, another African-American man, supports Bailey's opinion:

> 38. Bailey
> I feel that most rapes occur because women put themselves in situations where they lead a man to the point where he won't take no for an answer.
>
> 45. Alex
> I agree with Bailey, if you don't want a person to get the wrong impression, let them know where you stand. I would [rather] want to hurt a person's feelings than get raped

For Bailey and Alex, it's a clear-cut issue: if a woman gets raped, it is her own fault because she was leading the man on. Bailey confirms this stance in another entry:

> 60. Bailey
> I believe that sometimes women get to a point where they feel that they are obligated in having sex for whatever reasons. After the fact these women feel as though their rights have been infringed upon, therfore justify their actions by calling rape.

Although many of the men participating in the discussion—from minority and majority backgrounds—agree with Bailey, their ideas do not go uncontested. Miriam, for example, counters these opinions, although they seem to be the opinion of the majority up to this point:

> 62. Miriam
> If we are talking about other than just date rape then how does a women who has been kidnapped or grabbed and raped say Gee excuse me I dont think I want to go this far . . . the jerk just does it.

Bailey, however, is not deterred by this comment, and he still insists that women unjustly call sex "rape." His responses, of course, are colored by his own experiences as a man who does not want to be called a rapist. This becomes apparent in one of the entries he sends to the group:

> 70. Bailey
> No means No and yes means yes to a certain point. I have been in many situations where I have been told no but upon further actions ends up leading to having sex, so does this mean that I'm a rapist, after all she said no.

Clearly, Bailey is trying to justify his own actions, and by doing so, he puts all responsibility on the woman.

Despite Bailey's dismissive statements, the conversation on this topic continues, prompting Alba, a Latina, to get involved. She asks Bailey to reconsider his opinions, but Bailey is adamant about his position:

> 85. Alba
> Bailey? If women regret sex they will call it rape?
> Look unless you know that for a fact, that is a very strong comment to make. Why would a woman want to put herself

through that? I've seen trial proceedings on rape cases and the defendants strategy is always to portray the woman as a slut "who asked for it". I don't know about anyone else but I'm sure I would rather just deal with regret, than have someone come out and try to portray me as a slut with no credibility as a human being!

103. Bailey
Alba, in every rape case one side will view the victim as a slut, but on the other hand she will receive sympathy from the other side and be looked upon as a goody goody. So take your choice which one outweighs the other. I didn't say all women who regret having sex with someone call rape, I said sometimes this occurs and you can't tell me that it doesn't.

123. Bailey
I feel that more women should get the picture on how rape can be interpreted many different ways and understand that rape is hard to prove under most circumstances. Since rape is such a hard thing to prove then women should take it upon themselves to stay away from unfavorable conditions.

Bailey's last comment in this exchange expresses his sentiments most clearly. His posting is a response to Alba's narration of a serial rape that happened to a friend.[13] Alba had to defend her friend from a number of accusations, and she finally responds to the probing questions which Bailey and two other men in the class posted on PacerForum. The response to Alba's post, however, is in line with previous comments Bailey made:

181. Alba
She lived right next door. They lived right next door. Let me just say that these questions are a good reflection of what a victim would have to go through, defend her actions. Besides she consented to only one boy the others just joined in, and she didn't or couldn't refuse.

193. Bailey
Alba, what do you mean she couldn't refuse? If she would have refused then she would have had a case but since she didn't, END OF STORY.

"End of Story." For Bailey, the conversation has ended, and like some of his male colleagues, he is all the more convinced that it is the woman's

responsibility to prevent rape. Furthermore, he faults the woman in cases of rape, absolving men from any accountability. What is apparent is that Bailey is no longer subjected to an outsider position who suffers from discrimination; instead, he becomes a defender of current attitudes toward women whose bodies have been violated and who have become victims of male aggression. Bailey's feelings of subordination and being dominated, and his use of language to transgress existing power relations, disappear when he takes on the role of a man in a mainly male-dominated world, becoming part of the patriarchal structure dominating western ideologies.

Excluding the Excluded: Homophobia Revisited

> I don't blame you for letting gays upset you. I know I'd be extremely upset. We're taught that homosexuality is a sin among other things, and can suffer great shock when actually approached with it in any way.
>
> Maria Garcia, qtd in Regan, 16

Bailey's "roles," so far, have been that of the victim of "white America" and that of a man who grew up believing that rape is the fault of the woman. During the course of the semester, Bailey did not show any change in attitude concerning these two issues. However, his opinions on another topic—sexual preferences—underwent a remarkable development. Like many heterosexuals in a homophobic environment, Bailey first uses his heterosexuality to show that he is "right" and "straight" and that he can decide what is wrong. During a synchronous discussion[14], Bailey is one of the students who is grappling with the question of sexual preference and its impact on the family:

> 14. Bailey
> I think the whole family plays a part of one being homosexual. "A bad apple spoils the bunch", and homosexuals are many times considered bad apples.

According to Bailey, gay and lesbians should not discuss their sexual preferences publicly and instead "stay in the closet":

> 46. Bailey
> I do feel that homosexuals should have a private identity because they would only be hurting themselves by making their way of life public business. By living this private identity homosexuals would protect themselves from society and its backlash against homosexuals.

Bailey sees this "backlash" as the problem of those who do not conform to the sexual preferences of heterosexuals, and he does not question the assumptions about society which he is making in this statement.

In the above entries, Bailey's position is the "position of society," and he tries to approach homosexuality from the perspective of righteous concern for the deterioration of American morals on the one side and the safety of homosexuals on the other side. Later on, however, Bailey moves away from using "society" as a front for his opinions and very clearly expresses his own ideas on the subject, and his homophobic tendencies become very succinct:

> 85. Bailey
> I'm sorry I just don't understand how a man or woman could be in any way attracted to another man or woman sexually. Would somebody explain it to me.
>
> 180. Bailey
> If homosexuality is wrong then there should be some limits on what can be stated about it. It may violate the freedom of speech right but we cannot enhance wrongdoing.
>
> 229. Bailey
> God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve. Evidently for some reason he created man and woman. Why? To produce other offspring. If being gay isn't wrong what if everyone turned gay that would prove detrimental to the world because no one would produce other children and how could that be right.

Bailey's concluding statement at the end of the online discussion expresses his belief in the fundamental "wrong" of homosexuality, using the Bible to prove his point.

Opinions on this issue were divergent, and the online exchanges were heated and passionate. One of the students, for example, also used the Bible as her source of authority, but this time to argue a different point:

> 93. Alba
> People are "coming out of the closet" because they're making it a point that they are going to defend themselves voluntarily and they don't want to have to hide anymore.
> ...I agree immensely with the bible and the belief that God did not ordain homosexuality but it also says in the bible that no

> one shall judge but the Lord, and everyone's time will come - but we "are all children of God in the meantime"

Many issues remained unresolved, and feelings were running high during and after the online discussion. To provide participants with a chance to continue the conversation and clarify some of the comments made on PacerForum, the discussion was continued face-to-face in class two days later.[15] During this exchange, emotions were still at a peak. However, this time, defenders of equal rights for homosexuals brought up connections between racial discrimination and the discrimination of homosexuals, a comparison which Bailey and many of his peers resisted. According to Bailey, his race was not a choice whereas homosexuals choose their sexual preferences. Furthermore, he resisted any mention of the similarities between racial and sexual discrimination because, as he pointed out, a black person will always stand out whereas a gay person is not distinguished by skin color.

The in-class discussion only seemed to strengthen Bailey's views on homosexuality and sexual preferences. However, although it was not apparent at the time of the discussion, his final project shows that he listened to the arguments brought forth by some of his peers, and Bailey decided to write his final paper on what he called *Homosexual Discrimination in American Society.* In this project he reexamined his position on sexual preferences and instead of seeing homosexuals as a threat to procreation and the survival of humanity, he now argued that "a country divided cannot prosper." More distinctly, he points out in his paper:

> if we continue to judge people by such facets as race, culture, and/or sexual preference we as society will divide ourselves, and the division of a nation leads to a number of internal conflicts that tend to weaken a country.

In his concluding remarks he says:

> If we . . . begin to understand that everyone isn't the same . . . the better off we will be in coping with minority preferences such as homosexuality.

Here, unlike in the discussion on rape and date rape, Bailey reconsiders his opinions and is able to see the connection between his position as a black man in a "white-man's world" and the position of homosexuals in a homophobic environment.[16] Bailey's changing attitude, of course, implies that his ideas—in all three discussions—did not develop in a vacuum, nor would his opinions have been expressed and changed without the influence of other participants in the online and

off-line exchanges. The interactions online and offline helped Bailey to move beyond his fear and beyond his preconceived notions of homosexuality by listening and participating in an exchange of conflicting ideas put forward by him and other members in the class.[17] His interactions online also show that he is not only an African American oppressed by white society; instead, he inhabits several spheres, among others the sphere of a minority and the sphere of a man in a largely patriarchal and heterosexual society.

Coming to Terms with Difference

> The residual distrust of conflict and struggle in the field of Basic Writing is sustained by a fascination with cures for psychic woes, by two views of education—as acculturation and as accommodation—and by two views of language—essentialist and utopian. We need more research which critiques portrayals of Basic Writers as belonging to an abnormal—traumatized or underdeveloped mental state . . .
>
> Min-Zhan Lu, "Conflict and Struggle" (910)

Unlike much other work on African-American students in an academic setting, this paper tried to complicate Bailey's position as a minority student in a largely white environment by excerpting his online comments on race discrimination, rape, and homosexuality. Bailey, according to the excerpts, encompasses a number of subjectivities, determined by his background, his race, his gender, and his sexual preferences. His positions constantly shift, partly showing him as somebody who is oppressed but also as somebody who oppresses others, excludes them, and discriminates against them. To summarize, Bailey uses PacerForum and also his position in the face-to-face environment and the written paper to fit a number of purposes:

* He discusses his status as a black person who does not have access to positions of power, signifying the continuation of black subordination.
* He argues against men's responsibility and blames women for being raped, promoting the continuation of male domination.
* He condemns homosexuality, agreeing with the continuation of heterosexual prejudice.
* He is able to reconsider his position on homosexuality and to connect prejudices against people with different sexual preferences to racial prejudice.

In other words, Bailey shows that he feels "otherized" by the "white-man" but he also uses PacerForum to "otherize" women and people with different sexual preferences. As the PacerForum excerpts show, he occupies many subject positions. To use Gloria Anzaldúa's words, Bailey is "on many shores at the same time" (77), being discriminated against by others but also discriminating against others. Bailey's online behavior and his final project are clear examples of "virtual heteroglossia" which, in this specific case, shows itself in Bailey's varied but connected online subject-positions and in his need to fight against discrimination of African Americans, not only the discrimination he experiences but also the discrimination he imposes on others. As teachers, then, we need to work toward a pedagogy which takes into consideration individual students varied and shifting identities and "demystifies" a reductionist analysis of nontraditional students' use of language.[18] Instead of one-dimensional judgments, we need to make a concerted effort to appreciate the multi-dimensional natures of students' interactive approaches in our classrooms. It is not enough to acknowledge "contact zones"—a term phrased by Mary Louise Pratt to connote the "spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" ("Arts" 34)—*among* different cultures and among students in a classroom, but we also need to apply these contact zones to the spaces within a culture. Even more importantly, we need to broaden—or narrow—the term to apply to the conflicts within one person's heterogeneous self. Without attention to the shifting—sometimes contradictory and even incompatible—nature of students' language practices, we are in danger of continuing teaching practices which inhibit students from using their voices to explore their own positions as participating members in educational, political, and social communities.

Notes

My heartfelt thanks for reading drafts of this article go to the members of my reading group—Laura Gray-Rosendale, Jean Boreen, and Cynthia Kosso. I also want to thank the *JBW* reviewers for their helpful comments.

1. Sirc and Reynolds' articles in *Computers and Composition* (1990) and in *Network-Based Classrooms* (1993), and Susan Romano's and Todd Taylor's articles in *Computers and Composition* are some of the few explorations of nontraditional students' online interactions.

2. To insure confidentiality, actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

3. PacerForum is an electronic communication tool that allows students to post at anytime from on- or off-campus locations that have networked computer equipment. It is organized by topic of discus-

sion to which all students have access and to which they can contribute as frequently or infrequently as they desire. In the class discussed in this paper, PacerForum was used synchronously as well as asynchronously for discussions of texts and how these texts relate to students' experiences.

4. On a related topic, see Laura Gray-Rosendale's piece in the *Journal of Basic Writing* for an analysis of basic writing student discourse and her suggestions for rethinking current approaches to basic writing scholarship.

5. My positions as a teacher, researcher, and woman in a large midwestern university provided challenges but also brought rewards. Like Cathy Fleischer's, my question was: "How can I separate my participant self from my observer self to write about the experience in ways which will be read kindly and seriously and help effect some change?" (28-29, qtd in Ray). My immersion and participation in the environment I studied enabled me to see my research for its "transformative potential for [myself] and [my] classrooms" (Ray 292). Studying classroom interactions in one of my classes has given me insights I would otherwise not have gained.

6. For example, students found "Niggers go home" scribbled on one of the walls in the English Department, and although the university's operations and maintenance personnel were quick to paint over the insulting phrase, it remained visible long enough for many students to see.

7. During these exchanges, students were logged on at the same time but were not in the same room with each other. Instead, they took part in the discussion while being at various locations on or off campus which had computers with network connections. Students constructed my role in the online forum—after discussing it among themselves in the classroom—as a participant who would not be given any "teacher" privileges (authority to lead the discussion). Instead, students elected the discussion leaders from their peers.

8. The numbers indicate the chronological order of the postings. The excerpts used in the following pages are postings pertaining to Bailey's interactions. Other discussions focusing on related issues but not involving Bailey went on at the same time.

9. The synchronous nature of PacerForum and the ability to post comments at the same time allowed for a very engaged and vivid discussion. In face-to-face interactions, participation depends on turn-taking which makes it usually more difficult to engage all students in the discussion.

10. For a more detailed description of the appropriation of dominant discourse and the notion of transculturation, see Mary Louise Pratt, "Transculturation and Autoethnography."

11. This wreath is put up every year in December with an in-

scription intended to raise people's consciousness of the issue. Each person who knows a rape victim is encouraged to tie a ribbon on the wreath.

12. Bailey's unwillingness to reconsider his position on rape issues show interesting similarities to Miriam's unwillingness to see race discrimination as a problem in the previous discussion.

13. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Just recently, a 15-year old girl was gang-raped for 18 hours by 21 people in Phoenix, AZ. The mother of one of the perpetrators insisted that "this girl was not raped." The victim received death threats and was put in protective custody. (ABC news at 10, March 1, 1997).

14. The texts students read for this session were taken from the reader *Writing about Diversity* . The articles were: "Family Values" by Richard Rodriguez (566-571), "Gays Under Fire" reprinted from Newsweek (671-676), and "The Love That Dare Not Speak" by Gara La Marche and William B. Rubenstein (821-823).

15. Bringing the online discussion into the classroom was also part of the two previous discussions.

16. Students were not restricted to any particular topic and could choose freely from their various interests.

17. It is interesting to note that many of the online discussions and also the face-to-face discussions were based on a highly argumentative style. Bailey, for example, tended to attack his classmates' position and defend his own, an interactive style that often prevents students from showing a change of mind. In the written paper, however, Bailey was able to move beyond his defensive attitude and develop his perspectives based on his own ideas and the ideas of his classmates without attacking them.

18. Cornel West calls reductionism "either one-factor analyses . . . that yield a one-dimensional functionalism or a hyper-subtle analytical perspective that loses touch with the specificity of an art work's form and the context of its reception" (214).

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Laurie Grobman

"I FOUND IT ON THE WEB, SO WHY CAN'T I PUT IT IN MY PAPER?": AUTHORIZING BASIC WRITERS

ABSTRACT: The World Wide Web dramatically transforms basic writers' dialogic processes because Web source texts do not undergo conventional review processes to establish credibility. However, basic writing students' use of the World Wide Web in the dialogic process can advance a number of pedagogical objectives as students enter the "conversation of ideas" through reading and writing, particularly in terms of how basic writers become authorized in the academic community.[1] Student evaluation of Web source texts not only makes visible how authorization occurs but engages students in this process. Moreover, the questionable quality and credibility of Web-based source texts in the dialogic process brings the related skills of critical reading and thinking, of particular importance to underprepared writers, to the forefront of classroom pedagogy. Paradoxically, though, this technology also necessitates a reconsideration of the relationship between authority, academic discourse, and basic writers.

Introduction

As technology rapidly advances, it continues to transform how we basic writing instructors approach our classes. Having introduced word processing software and electronic conferences into our classrooms, we now must consider the influence on pedagogy of the World Wide Web as it brings widely varied and easily-accessible source texts into basic writers' knowledge-making processes. The Web dramatically transforms the dialogic process because Web source texts do not undergo conventional review processes to establish credibility. Indeed, many Web-based source texts are "self-published" or have a vested economic interest.

I will argue in this paper, however, that basic writing students' use of the World Wide Web in the dialogic process can advance pedagogical objectives as students enter the "conversation of ideas" through reading and writing, particularly in terms of how basic writers become

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authorized in the academic community. Student evaluation of Web source texts not only makes visible how authorization occurs but engages students in this process. Moreover, the questionable credibility of Web-based source texts in the dialogic process brings the related skills of critical reading and thinking, of particular importance to underprepared writers, to the forefront of classroom pedagogy. Paradoxically, though, I believe this technology also necessitates a reconsideration of the relationship between authority, academic discourse, and basic writers.

Academic Discourse, Authority, and the Web

Basic writing pedagogy emerging from social constructivist views of writing encourages students to see their written texts as part of academic discourse, a larger conversation taking place in writing. This approach brings with it the assumption that developmental writers can produce serious writing if we challenge them with important, intellectual issues and enable them to enter the conversations we deem significant. As Ann Berthoff remarks, we should want our students producing texts "worth reading" (6), writing that "engages us because it is dialogic" (9). But the question revolves around what we deem as "worth reading," or, to put it another way, what we define as "academic enough." By entering into the conversations taking place in the academy, students can discover what it means to be part of a discourse community and to share in the creation and communication of knowledge. Arguably, though, they can also learn what it feels like to be excluded from such a privileged group.

David Bartholomae's landmark essays "Inventing the University" and "Writing on the Margins: The Concept of Literacy in Higher Education" locate the basic writer outside academic discourse, lacking the *authority* academic writers possess. Basic writing classes, therefore, begin either the acculturation or resistance process that initiates students into the academic community or enables them to critique it. If student writers need to become *authorized* to gain entry into the academic discourse community (whether to adapt or transform it), as these models suggest, can they gain this authority through the use of unauthorized source texts in the dialogic process? Moreover, how do we define such authority at a time when technology has irrevocably altered notions of literacy and competence?

My focus in this paper is specifically on Web materials as *source texts*, not as objects of study. Cultural critique pedagogy, which encourages a broadened notion of "text"--from advertisements to behaviors such as tattooing and body piercing to the Web itself--has informed us of the value of "unauthorized" texts in that they force us to reexamine the mythologies of culture that define and are defined by us—and

our students. However, even in cultural studies approaches in composition and basic writing classes (including my own), the critiques play themselves out—finally—in the conventional formal essay. That is, while notions of text-as-subject have broadened, notions of text-as-form—and the source texts in the production of the essay form—remain relatively unchanged (see Sidler).

While academic discourse itself is highly contested (see Bartholomae, Elbow, Kraemer), at the risk of oversimplification, I like to think of it broadly as the knowledge-making *process* specific to the academy. Though variations in this process, as well as in what constitutes knowledge, exist both between and within disciplines, we cannot ignore the common thread: knowledge builds upon prior knowledge as the inquirer/writer engages with other points of view. This *dialogic* process places a student's written text, according to Bartholomae, "in a space defined by all the writing that has preceded [it]" (64). However, the academic writing space does not include *all* writing, as Bartholomae claims, but only *authorized* texts. Peter Elbow explains it this way: "as academics . . . we have various aids to authority. The most obvious one is to take a ride on the authority of others. . . . What we write is not just a neat idea we had that we send out to be judged on its own merits; it builds on Aristotle and echoes Foucault" (148). Because academics cannot gain authority from "taking a ride" on unauthorized texts, do students close the door on the academic community when they use unauthorized source texts accessed through the Web? To extend Elbow's metaphor, can students "take a ride" on the academic highway while dragging a garbage truck behind them? The presence of the Web in basic writers' knowledge-making processes thus compels us to question the academic discourse paradigm primarily because it brings nonacademic (unauthorized) discourses into the dialogic process and the "conversation."

Don Kraemer suggests that the way citations are used in an essay is what counts: "Citing your Aunt Judy or Tracy Chapman probably isn't going to count for much in anyone's academic discourse, but . . . just citing James Kinneavy won't necessarily count for much either. What counts is why Kinneavy's words are telling or how Aunt Judy's words can critically recontextualize the academic discussion underway" (56). Though Kraemer contradicts himself (does he think Aunt Judy can ever "count" in academic discourse?), his points are nevertheless instructive: even if we could make Aunt Judy "count" in academic writing (as more and more feminist compositionists, in particular, attempt to do; see Tompkins), it would require a lot more work. Aunt Judy must be authorized by the writer; Kinneavy already carries this weight, even though the academic writer must use Kinneavy's idea dialogically and intelligently.

While many basic writing instructors ask students to evaluate

the authority of source texts in the meaning-making process, basic writers may be reluctant to evaluate "academic" sources which carry the *assumption* of authority, *especially* because these are the students who most likely lack the confidence and perhaps even the tools for questioning such status. Students may not be aware of the review process, but they have a tacit understanding of the privileged status of an academic or otherwise reputable journal mainly because we have consistently placed parameters on what kinds of source texts they can use (we view *People* less favorably than *Newsweek*, *Newsweek* less favorably than the *Journal of Popular Culture*). Moreover, as often as we have tried to convince students that academic or reputable (by journalistic standards) status does not imply "truth," only a certain level of validity and reliability, Penrose and Geisler's study suggests the undergraduate, unauthorized writer tends to view "academic knowledge" and the source texts for that knowledge as fact.[2] Their study, which involves a freshman writer they define as "relatively skilled," indicates how difficult it must be for basic writers to assert authority over *published* material. These writers have been told by their institution, by virtue of their placement in developmental courses, that they are unprepared for college-level work. Basic writers' status as novices in a new, intimidating environment may lead them to feel they have no basis for challenging "expert" knowledge.

Basic writers' use of unauthorized source texts through the Web raises additional pedagogical questions. Paul Linnehan uses the phrase, "sustained, **disciplined**, intellectual inquiry" (56, emphasis added), when referring to basic writers in the meaning-making process. But when we introduce unauthorized source texts from the Web into this process, "disciplined" inquiry seemingly becomes undisciplined chaos. Because Web-based source texts lack the implicit assumption of authority, the evaluation process itself takes on greater urgency. When basic writers do evaluate academic or other conventionally reputable source texts, the answer itself is inevitable, even though the evaluative process itself remains worthwhile as basic writers hone analytical skills: these sources are valid or they would not *be* "academic." Critique of these texts, therefore, may lean more towards students' assessments of how the source writers establish authority rather than whether they do so. The existence of authority is assumed, even if the rhetorical strategies compel analysis and evaluation. Indeed, when my basic writing students read academic texts, I customarily ask students questions about tone, types of evidence, strength of evidence, soundness of logic, and how these rhetorical techniques contribute to the overall persuasiveness of the written text. Through these questions I hope to foster students' critical reading skills; but it is the strength of a given writer's persuasion, rather than authority itself, at issue. When we bring the World Wide Web into basic writers' meaning-making processes, we

transform these assumptions of authority in source texts. Using Web sources, students join not only an "authorized" academic conversation but an unauthorized one. As such, the dynamics of their participation in the conversation inevitably changes.

Serving Academic Discourse: Basic Writers Reading/ Writing "Authority" on the Web

Web sources in basic writers' meaning-making processes offer an important opportunity to serve both the widely accepted objectives of the academic discourse paradigm in basic writing and to rethink those objectives themselves. These objectives include, first of all, fostering students' sensitivity to academic discourse conventions. In both the accommodation and resistance models of academic authority, basic writers become authorized by their ability to operate from inside academic discourse--whether to adapt or resist. Web source texts in the meaning-making process put discourse itself at the center of inquiry, and by affording students the opportunity to move back and forth between authorized and nonauthorized discourses, we highlight their existence as different communities. For example, in a theme-based course questioning conventional definitions of literacy, my basic writing students this semester read E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s "Cultural Literacy and the Schools." After our careful and deliberate rhetorical analysis of this article, I sent students out onto the Web to find documents that "converse" with Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy. We paid careful attention to both the content of the information they found and the forms in which that information was delivered (from advertisements and order forms for Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* to a book-length hypertext document called "Engines for Education" written by a cognitive scientist at the Institute for the Learning Sciences at Northwestern University), questioning at every turn the Web source writers' credibility and the varied discourse conventions they utilized.

When we encourage basic writers to use nonacademic sources found on the Web, we compel students to establish the authority of a text and simultaneously demonstrate that authority is of a community's own making. Moreover, because Web sources may reflect theirs rather than their instructors' discourse communities, students may identify more readily with these texts and, through the process of authorization of such texts, may authorize themselves. Ironically, then, by encouraging the use of unauthorized discourses in the dialogic process, we may inadvertently accelerate students' appropriation of academic discourse. These students come to "own" the source texts and thus their own essays as well.

World Wide Web access in the classroom also demonstrates

knowledge-making in action, thereby enhancing the social context of writing. Eldred's point about computer-mediated-communication before the proliferation of the Internet and World Wide Web has applicability in this newer context as well: "when students find their work becomes part of a text base, they understand more fully the notion of 'intertext': the idea that their work is integral to a network of knowledge available to augment and increase the knowledge of others" (212). The Web has broad implications for a "network" of communication, for demonstrating the interconnectedness of ideas and opinions, disagreements and controversies across a wide range of communities. However, in Eldred's example, the writing teacher has control over the text base; we give control over to our students when they use Web sources in their writing projects.

Some Web sources, like archived listservs ("frozen," inactive listserv discussions available as Web sites for spectating rather than participation), enable students to see the "conversation" occurring and may lead them to insert themselves into it. Penrose and Geisler accurately point out that student writers' "outsider" status makes them reluctant to become "creators" rather than "reporters" of information (515). Linda Adler-Kassner and Thomas Reynolds, however, suggest how classroom access to library databases and Web browsers "close the gap between student writing and source texts" as students feel validated when they see other texts in dialogue with their own (175).[3] In archived listservs, students can see the back and forth disagreements, testing of claims, and rethinking of assertions at work. Academic knowledge thrives on disagreement, so by viewing these activities, students may more willingly participate and offer points of view if they believe more than one "right" answer exists. The metaphor of a "conversation" becomes more concrete, and student writers may gain "some sense of authors speaking to one another" (Penrose and Geisler 514). By viewing certain kinds of "conversations" on the Web and then writing their essays in response to these conversations, students create their own context to "see themselves as authors, reading and writing alongside other authors in the development of community knowledge and norms" (Penrose and Geisler 518). Students authorize and empower themselves through this process.

The most compelling example for me of an archived listserv's contribution to basic writers' willingness to enter the conversation of ideas came last fall when some of my basic writing students chose to study and write about tattooing. The archived conversation, which occurred in July 1996, included participants from a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds (see Yee). The students examining the archived listserv could easily "imagine" themselves in the conversation when we uncovered this posting by Daniel Solomon: "Well, I'm just a poor little undergrad—haven't even majored in anth, yet, but

this has driven me out of my dark&dingy lurking place to attempt a feeble, unlearned comment." This undergraduate student (whether he had ever been a "basic writer" was not clear) felt unauthorized to speak—but then did so anyway.

The nature of the conversation itself was also instructive for students as it ranged from highly "academic" (e.g., anthropological connections to primitive cultures) to the more personal: "With all this talk of a lack of ritual, etc. in Western 'tattooing,' is there anyone on this list who has actually gotten a tattoo or talked to someone who has gotten a tattoo?"asks Marie Conrad. Indeed, the participants themselves display conflicting pulls between academic and public discourse, grappling with the rules of evidence they should apply. Mike Shupp, a frequent contributor of scholarly analyses and explanations, responds to Conrad's question this way:

> Talked to someone who has? Of course. A freshman girl in an English class I took had one and wrote about it most amusingly for the school paper. But to tell the truth, she didn't go into her motives and I doubt she has any idea as to why she got a butterfly on her ankle—it was "just a neat thing to do" and affordable (at $60), so she did it.

Would "just a neat thing to do" qualify as evidence in academic writing, even for basic writers beginning the process of acquiring academic discourse? Clearly, the listserv's vacillation between academic and nonacademic discourse provides opportunities for basic writers to see a conversation occur, to compare and contrast evidentiary decisions based on the nature of the discourse, and feel more confident to engage in the conversation occurring in the classroom and their own written essays.

Web access in the basic writing classroom also hones students' critical reading abilities because it directly involves them in the process of determining authority. Because of the relationship between the social view of writing and the knowledge-making process—that "new texts are generated through interaction with previous texts" (Eldred 205)—we cannot ignore the crucial role reading plays in this newer conception of a networked basic writing classroom, where students have access to a whole array of source texts. Good writing depends on good reading abilities. When students enter a larger, written conversation enacted by fellow academics, they must build knowledge from previous knowledge, read from outside sources, evaluate and synthesize the information as they accept, reject, or modify it when formulating their own ideas (208). For basic writers, this is particularly problematic. It comes as no surprise that underprepared writers have little experience with reading. Indeed, in my current basic writing classes

studying literacy, the majority of students readily admit to reading only when forced. Almost none read for pleasure, and most say they can "get all the information they need" from television.

When we require students to evaluate the authority of Web-based source texts, we also bring issues of authority directly into the classroom. Students can become more attuned to acculturation processes in the accommodation model; on the other hand, bringing the contingent nature of authority itself to the fore can also enable a resistance model; basic writers may begin to understand the connection between language and ideology. Because of the questionable authority of many Web-based source texts, students' evaluation of these texts—especially in juxtaposition with their "academic" (authorized) counterparts—highlights and reinforces how power relations play out in discourses and texts. Students can begin to ask who retains the power to determine who can speak with it. Does one's educational credentials alone authorize that person to speak in a particular community, as Penrose and Geisler assert? Are academic credentials "authority" enough, when knowledge has not been through the rigorous review process? That is, can claims be supported with sources that are accompanied by "expert" names, even when the sources themselves have been "self-published" outside the traditional review process? Some of the students studying tattooing found articles in *Journal of Popular Culture* and *Adolescence* and were confident of their authority, only to find they understood little in these articles (see DeMello, Houghton). Another student accessed a Brown University web site on tattooing and, after questioning its academic status and authorizing it, could understand enough of the information to integrate it into his text (see Landow). By being flexible with source texts, we force students to participate in determining acceptable evidence in their own essay writing (though they are obviously aware that the instructor will judge their decisions). Issues of authority multiply.

To facilitate this process, I ask students to figure out what kind of document they have found and what they know about the writer(s) and the original audience(s). I ask them questions about the validity and reliability of the information itself, in essence asking them to *authorize* the Web document to *authorize* their own text. I ask them about the writer's objectivity, the weight and sources of the evidence, and the writer's *claim* to authority. We also discuss potential indications of bias, like sites for tattoo stores (business home pages are advertisements) and sites that try to convince users to purchase Hirsch's books. Students' analysis and evaluation of the source document must extend beyond figuring out how the writer is persuasive to *whether* he/she is persuasive based on the writer's authority or knowledge on the subject. Consequently, students need new models as they integrate and apply "self-authorized" ideas into their writing. A sentence lead-in like

"According to David Bartholomae" [or other academic expert]," carries an assumption of authority; using his name alone is enough. But a source writer from the Web without built-in (academic) authority must be authorized *in* the student's text, not only in the classroom (for the instructor's benefit). The student writer might write, "According to [author] in an archived e-mail conference on the Web," but the student must take a further step, explaining how or why he/she has authorized the point made by this writer (for example, that the source author has studied the topic extensively, has experienced the topic, etc.). In this case, the student invites an unauthorized source into his/her writing, authorizes it, and then claims authority for him/herself and his/her own text.

Finally, Web access expands students' (and our own) notions of literacy. I agree with Lee Odell's concerns about the trend to move basic writing in the direction of composition, specifically in terms of the overriding emphasis on academic literacy. Citing scholars in technical communication, Odell notes how academic literacy ignores visual aspects of texts, video, multi-media, and hypermedia. The Web in the classroom, as it brings newer kinds of texts into the dialogic process, raises questions about traditional conceptions of "good writing" while it also invites the opportunity to further students' critical reading abilities through a study of these nontraditional documents. Students learn to "read" hypertexts and hypermedia, increasingly pervasive discourses (which serves the simultaneous objective of reinforcing the idea that discourses differ). Indeed, John Slatin's initiative in constructing and articulating a theory or rhetoric of hypertext—"to discover the principles of effective communication and then develop ways of implementing those principles through the available technology" (874)—has broad implications for the unauthorized basic writer. Slatin concludes that because hypertext dramatically and profoundly changes traditional organization of texts, "hypertext requires authors and system designers to find new methods of indicating relationships, representing and constructing knowledge, and achieving coherence" (882). Students *reading* and *evaluating* hypertext documents in the process of authorization become part of the *process* of defining such a rhetoric, of helping to identify, determine, and define effective hypertext communication. No longer passive recipients of others' notions of effective discourse, students become the determiners of authority and in the process authorize themselves.

The process of authorizing hypermedia involves complex cognitive processes that both differ from and reinforce traditional means of evaluating texts. Hypertext theorists (see Slatin, Shirk, among others) point out the complex decision-making process of hypertext writers, given the nonlinear structure of hypermedia and the freedom of readers as they make their way through these texts. Basic writers be-

ginning to understand that rhetorical contexts affect writers' choices can benefit from exercises that consider a web developer's decisions about topics, links, networks, animation sequences, and musical or voice sequences in the attempt to foster user readability and comprehension (see Slatin for a good discussion of predictability in traditional texts and hypertext). Hypertext analysis allows students to consider complex issues of organization, purpose, and audience (readability). As Slatin remarks, hypertext and traditional texts differ in their assumptions about "what readers do and the ways in which those assumptions about reading affect the author's understanding of composition" (870). Basic writers can certainly benefit from comparing and contrasting texts and hypertexts as they consider how readers' needs govern writers' decisions.

Surfing (and Slipping on) the Web: Issues and Concerns

Web accessibility, therefore, offers the opportunity to advance a number of pedagogical objectives in basic writing classes according to the academic discourse paradigm. However, it also provides a forum for furthering discussions of the paradigm itself. We should ask what it means to be a college writer, what writing and thinking skills we want our students to achieve, and whether we should emphasize academic discourse at the expense of discourses students will inevitably need after college. Perhaps more significantly, we need to consider whether de-authorizing some students through the academic process is elitist, excluding those who do not or cannot live up to the standards defined by academic professionals. Web accessibility in the basic writer's meaning-making process compels us in its own way to confront issues of authority and privilege within basic writing itself.

Scholars who have used and written about computer-mediated communication (CMC) in terms of online conferencing forums address authority issues, but these issues differ markedly from those raised by Web source texts in the dialogic process. Typically, scholars believe CMC enables students to create their own diverse community, participate in written dialogue in the classroom, and engage in a process that mirrors their own initiation into academic discourse. Research suggests that the absence of teachers (academic authority) in these forums enables students to challenge social and political definitions of good writing and acceptable knowledge (see Harris and Wambean, Cooper and Selfe). Pamela Gay claims CMC in basic writing classes specifically enables students to extend their conversations beyond the classroom, "become part of a wider network of writers" (75) and "in acting like writers, actually become writers" (76).[4] Through critical reflection, students uncover the forces that disempower them.

However, online conversations are considered neither academic nor authorized (see Harris and Wambeam). The Web in the meaning-

making process more closely resembles traditional academic communication as students access source texts as part of the dialogic process, though the instability, permeability, and questionable authority of these sources obfuscate the process. Even Cooper and Selfe, who advocate the use of online forums as a means to counter teacher-centered hegemony, distinguish "formal" class discussions and written essays from asynchronous computer-based conferences (848), implying that it may be acceptable for students to only *simulate* academic discourse in prewriting spaces, but in formal papers or projects, they must *attain* it. It is, again, a question of authority.

Basic writers' Web authorization thus raises and reinforces the tensions between the accommodation and resistance models of academic discourse. Do the new technologies signify a need for altering traditional notions of academic authority, particularly in light of cultural studies and deconstruction's challenge to traditional academic practices? Many recent studies in basic writing, composition, and computer-assisted composition question the accommodation paradigm, particularly its tendency to reinforce the status quo. Cooper and Selfe, for example, argue that "even as it empowers students with new knowledge and the ability to operate successfully within academic discourse communities, [it] also oppresses them, dictating a specific set of values and beliefs along with appropriate forms of behavior" (850) and precluding "dissent through discourse" (851). Feminist compositionists, for example, refer to academic discourse as patriarchal and exclusionary; similar claims are made about its ethnocentricity, particularly when it comes to basic writers. This debate over developing students' critical consciousnesses through the system—whether by teaching academic discourse we are oppressing or liberating them—rages on but takes on even more heightened meaning with the proliferation of the World Wide Web. Web access in basic writing literally dumps unauthorized conversations into previously-guarded domains.

Ideally, social constructivist views *distinguish* discourses from one another, claiming appropriateness or acceptance according to time and place (the social dynamics that define or comprise a particular community). From this perspective, academic writing is only better writing *in* the academy rather than in any transcendant way. But we cannot pretend that a hierarchy about "better" thinking and writing does not actually exist. Furthermore, as Elbow notes, it is "self-serving" to "defin[e] people as ignorant unless they are like us" (138); "in *using a discourse* we are also tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it. In particular we are affirming a set of social and authority relations" (146). Privileging academic over other kinds of discourse says something about how we see ourselves in relation to our students. Marilyn Cooper may suggest we do not "want our students to be 'better thinkers,' but rather that we want them to join us, to be a part of one of our communities" (qtd. in

Kraemer 55), but I believe the language of the academic discourse paradigm suggests otherwise. We ask our students to work against commonplaces, to dig deeper for insights, to provide well-reasoned arguments rather than mere opinions. Some types of discourse are simply considered more learned or sophisticated than others, and until and unless we acknowledge this disparity, and decide whether and/or how to remedy it, we cannot adequately deal with the changes technology brings to writing classrooms.

Carol Severino claims that this crucial debate over whether the "purpose" of a writing course is "to help students fit into society or to convince them to change it" may "never be resolved" (74). I suggest that resolution can only occur if compositionists attempt to resolve our own issues of marginalization and hegemony through a careful reconsideration of the academic discourse paradigm, particularly in light of technology's sweeping influence on literacy, a process that has certainly begun. This self-examination must begin with basic writers because, as Jane Hindman asserts, the basic writer is positioned "at the center of the system that—in part at least—gains its authority by de-authorizing them" (62) since we call "good writing" writing that looks like our own (67). But Hindman claims she does not want to suggest anything wrong with how we de-authorize basic writers while authorizing ourselves, or even that "what we think is good writing isn't 'really' good" (69); she simply wants to point out that the qualities of what we consider to be "good writing" are not fixed, but contingent. This seems too obvious to me; indeed, social constructionism and theories of academic discourse are grounded in the knowledge that communities vary in regard to what constitutes knowledge and how to communicate that knowledge. I think the more important question has to do with privileging one kind of discourse over another, not simply because a particular discourse is appropriate to a particular time and place, but because it is better, more sophisticated, or more intellectual.

Web accessibility may provide the opportunity to broaden notions of literacy, as Odell and others suggest, at least for student writers who, for the most part, will never choose to join the scholarly community. I love academic discourse because of its potential to lead writers and readers to listen to other points of view. This is its greatest benefit to basic writers in the meaning-making process. But perhaps it is time to broaden the academic discourse paradigm itself and allow students to include points of view that really mean something to them and that they can understand (because academic source texts are often difficult for basic writers to understand, my students tend to distort and/or oversimplify them in the meaning-making process, as was the case with the scholarly articles on tattooing). I am not suggesting we move away from intellectual, meaningful issues in basic writing classes. Rather, we can teach students to write and think in ways that will be

useful to them both within and beyond the academy, and we will do that more effectively by not prescribing reasoned authority. If I were to have the opportunity to ask Elbow about allowing students to use Web sources in the dialogic process, I think he would be all for it, providing that students could independently *authorize* these texts as reasoned, sensible writing, regardless of whether it comes with the conventional kinds of authority we expect from academic discourse: "students can do intellectual work even in street language" (149). Returning to Severino's claim about composition studies' current struggle with the question over our role, I'd like to end with this thought: until we resolve whether or not we want to maintain our own position of authority—in the process deauthorizing our students—we have no right to even suggest that we teach students to "change society." Change must begin in our own backyard.

Notes

1. Any time we discuss "basic writers" we run into a problem with definition since the "basic writers" at one school may be another's composition students. Basic writers are comprised of a diverse group: represented and underrepresented students directly out of high school, adults returning to school, and ESL students. I am defining "basic writers" in the following way: students who did not meet the standards of their college or university's placement system and are therefore underprepared for the level of writing expected at their institution.

2. Penrose and Geisler further claim that student writers tend to view "all texts (except their own) as containing 'the truth,' rather than as authored and subject to interpretation and criticism" (515), but we must question their use of the word "all" since their study included eight "scholarly" texts. We must also question whether source texts found through the Web carry the same weight of authority in students' perceptions (this is an issue for all students, not only basic writers), an exploration I have begun. When my students first began using Web sources in their essays, they did very little evaluation of authority in these texts. The fact that it was published information was enough for them (hence my title, "I Found It on the Web So Why Can't I Put It in My Paper?"). However, by making the Web itself part of our critique, students have begun to understand why a text's credibility can be suspect.

3. However, as useful as their analysis may be, they fail to acknowledge the important aspect of how these newer technologies provide immediate resources for evaluation of "authority" of source texts. Focusing on how students can sift through World Wide Web informa-

tion to find "relevant" source texts (176), they omit considerations of authority and standards of academic discourse.

4. Though fewer studies have addressed CMC in basic writing classrooms, Gay's study and my own classroom experiences suggest that basic writers, considered to be largely comprised of underrepresented groups even more distanced from "academic discourse" than their composition counterparts, seem to be well-suited to both the social constructivist orientation in composition and CMC's potential to further its pedagogical objectives.

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Beth Counihan

FRESHGIRLS: OVERWHELMED BY DISCORDANT PEDAGOGIES AND THE ANXIETY OF LEAVING HOME

ABSTRACT: *Drawing from a semester-long ethnographic case study of three freshmen at Lehman College of the City University of New York, the author looks at the very difficult situation underprepared students encounter. To succeed in college, they must change nearly everything about themselves – particularly their class and cultural identification. Resisting this change, the freshgirls fail. What teachers can try to do to help students relax and learn, this study suggests, is to exercise flexibility in their pedagogies.*

The Context

In the Fall of 1995, I conducted an ethnographic study of three first-semester freshmen at Lehman College, the only four-year college of the City University of New York (CUNY) in the Bronx. Evone Morales, Monique Vasquez, and KiKi Cook, my three case-study subjects, were enrolled in the Freshman Year Initiative (FYI), a program designed to combat the high freshman attrition rate of almost forty percent. Students in the FYI take all four classes together in a block, and their professors (ideally) coordinate curriculum.

Recent state budget cuts to CUNY compounded the dynamics of this inquiry, resulting most significantly in the dissolution of Academic Skills classes at Lehman and a substantial rise in tuition CUNY-wide. Fall '95 was the first semester in which all full-time Lehman freshmen were mainstreamed into the FYI, regardless of placement test scores. While the freshgirls were not all Academic Skills students in terms of test scores, they certainly were in terms of their estrangement from school culture.

I scribbled down their words and actions as I observed them on-site in the classroom, mostly in their composition class for two hours per week. Shirley, the composition instructor, was my most willing participant of the study. I also met with KiKi, Evone, and Monique for interviews and collected samples of their writing, taking care in everything I did or said to demonstrate an objective control. I did not push

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the freshgirls for more than they were willing to reveal—it was a miracle to me that they cooperated at all. I give my case-study subjects the moniker "freshgirls," for not only were they new to the whole experience of college, but they were also both urban fashionably "fresh"—and also "fresh" as in mildly obnoxious. I am well aware that "fresh" (meaning cool and hip), a usage outdated even in 1995, is considered even more so now. And despite the way it seems politically incorrect, I cannot bring myself to call Evone, Monique, and KiKi any gender term but "girl." Although legally adults and KiKi the mother of year-old Taequan, they were simply too unformed, too vulnerable, to be called "women." Besides, the word "girl" carries with it the optimism and resilience of youth, which the freshgirls need to have in abundance.

My expectations for the results of this inquiry were high at the beginning of the semester: each of my three subjects seemed bright-eyed and reasonably energetic, and I hoped to chronicle the freshgirls' triumphant segue into college culture despite such serious obstacles as poverty, fear, and instability. Yet college itself proved to be an obstacle. As is all too common with many underprepared students, the freshgirls failed nearly all their classes and have yet to successfully complete another semester at Lehman College. Did we, the college, fail them? Or did they sabotage themselves? Or are the cards so stacked against them that there isn't anything anyone can do?

Fall '95 was a turning point in the freshgirls' lives, a time when each had a harsh introduction to what it means to become an "educated person." What follows here is an attempt to understand their dilemma through a "thick description" (Geertz) of the classroom. I try to heed the fiction writer's maxim "show, don't tell" whenever possible—because, above all, a sense of empathy is essential for instigating change.

Humanities Class—1 Hour

> "Let us BEGIN with *Dubliners*, providing easy access into the JOYCEAN universe."

It is eleven o'clock on a Wednesday in November. Fifteen freshmen are jammed into the last row of the classroom; the other half of their classmates are late.

> "Note the sentences COLLIDING into another, the ABANDONMENT of syntax, the repetition and ASSOCIATION .... Joyce really MASTERS and conveys the THOUGHTS, the musicality of WORDS, stylistic TRAITS. The SUBSTANSIVENESS of things. AND the OPRESSIVENESS

of that PROCESS." Dramatic pause. "Throughout MY analysis of the stories . . . ."

With a flourish worthy of the cadence of his speech, David the Humanities professor gestures toward the notes he's written on every single inch of the blackboard space behind him. He is a white guy about my age (28), a PhD candidate at the Graduate Center who is heavy-set, with holes in the knees of his bluejeans. David's student audience is busying copying his notes from the board: it doesn't seem to me that anyone is listening to his words, nor does he seem to notice that he's lecturing to no one. A few restless students whisper. Their voices grow louder, until David cuts them short with his first direct eye contact of the hour and bellows "Excuse me!"

With David's permission, I am sitting in his class, furiously looking around the room, listening, writing field notes, trying to see what the freshgirls make of this class. The fall of my freshman year at Fordham University, ten years before and just down the road from Lehman, and throughout my education there, most of my professors lectured. They would never supply the notes for us. Of course not, we took our own notes. For the most part, I loved the seeming scholarliness of their oratory skills (though sometimes, intensely bored, I would resort to listing the fifty states).

But in this classroom, I'm stewing at David's disregard for his audience, even more annoyed because my freshgirls are AWOL. Then two of my case studies make a fashionably late grand entrance: the pretty Nuyorican (New York born and bred Puerto Rican) girls, Evone and Monique. They clomp into class on their heavy Timberland hiking boots, reeking of cigarette smoke. Both wear deep red lipstick and their long hair is pulled up into high tight ponytails. They look so much alike that early in the semester, I mistook Monique for Evone, who had been my only volunteer, and so Monique agreed I could study her as well. We exchange hello smiles and the two girls sit down in front of me and start copying the notes from the board. Monique's handwriting is a uniform fat print—it's slow going. Evone (pronounced Yvonne) writes faster, in a loose script, as she chews gum and shakes her legs.

As David lectures, moving on to the story "The Encounter," his voice rises and falls with an irregular and unpredictable frequency. It makes me jump, but the students stay slumped in their chairs. I'm not entirely sure if my presence is affecting the proceedings—is David showing off for me?—but from what the freshgirls tell me, it's not far from the usual. Said KiKi of David in an interview: "I don't understand what he talking about, period." Said David on the phone when I called to explain my study: "Frankly, many of them shouldn't be

allowed in college."

David continues discussing "The Encounter": "Joyce's narrator here is reflecting on the boredom of school with the typical HYPERBOLE of EXUBERANT YOUTH! The Joycean style, as always, is SUBTLE, using MUSICAL METAPHORS."

Into class KiKi saunters, eating a Twinkie, about thirty minutes into an hour-long class. She sits down without removing her fire engine yellow triple-fat-goose-down coat, nor does she unpack her backpack, which looks empty anyway. A very pretty and delicate African-American girl with dark even-toned skin, KiKi has a gold marijuana leaf planted in her left nostril. KiKi is her nickname; she's really Lakifah and she keeps her face expressionless, her eyes dull. She did not volunteer to be a freshgirl; in fact, Shirley, the composition instructor, suggested that I invite KiKi to participate in my study, as a way to give her a sense of academic support, and KiKi agreed.

David is now discussing the practice of corporal punishment in Irish schools. "You hit me, I hit you back," I hear Evone's husky voice mutter. Monique giggles. Both have their heads down on the desks by now, the busy work of note-copying completed.

David lectures on: "The HYPERBOLE of this PUNCTUATES the SHATTERED EXPECTATION, in a sense PUNCTUATES the NAIVETÉ.... Yes, Tim?" Tim, a lanky African-American guy, is the only student David seems to recognize by name. His unsolicited question is the only student comment offered or taken during this class period.

"Were they inside that old man's house?"

"NO, in the PARK." David seems annoyed at this specific textual question.

Evone gets up and spits her gum out in the garbage can. Monique is back to copying the notes, now in lavender ink. "I don't understand anything I've done in that class," Monique once told me, "and he can't teach, in my opinion." KiKi gets up and walks out of the classroom, her deflated backpack left behind.

"Again, there is a setting of CONTRASTS punctuated by the fact that he is an EXOTIC figure . . . this story is really about ENTRAPMENT, this OPPRESSION, all these various SECTORS of LIFE!" I am laughing to myself, thinking how oblivious David is to the irony of his words. And he goes on and on, until I stop writing because Monique and Evone appear to be sleeping, with KiKi gone for nearly fifteen minutes.

The class is near over. Evone pulls on her wool cap, Monique cracks her back. KiKi returns in time to retrieve her backpack. All three slip away before I have a chance to talk to them. I know they run from me.

Composition Class (ENG 090)—2 Hours

A few weeks earlier, I arrive to the composition class a bit early, and watch the students interact. Ethnically, they are a very eclectic group, with almost half foreign-born, from the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jamaica, Guyana, the Philippines and Albania. Little flirtations and alliances shift from week to week, without any seeming animosity. My freshgirls, of course, are nowhere to be found, but they also contribute to the camaraderie of the group.

Shirley, a petite white woman in her early 50s with a cap of soft brown curls, walks in carrying a pile of papers and books and gives an exasperated grin. "Oh come on, everybody!" she says, "Don't wait for me to tell you to get into a circle." An adjunct with a master's from Teacher's College, Shirley is teaching traditional-aged freshmen for the first time in many years. She is accustomed to the enthusiasm of Adult Degree and New York City Writing Project students; these petulant teenagers puzzle her. "Their lack of guile both charms and alarms me," Shirley told me with a smile.

The students shove desks around into a misshapen circle, then some get down to the business of freewriting, which is always the first activity of every class meeting. Shirley practices process pedagogy, a teaching style that was alien to me until I came to Lehman. At Fordham, we never kept double-sided notebooks or wrote process notes. That is, as far as I knew, we didn't: I was exempt from taking composition, so I really have no idea what it is to be a freshman in a comp course, except from what I can ascertain from the freshgirls.

Most of the students are not freewriting. Shirley is sitting at the focal point of the circle, her brow knitted in concentration as she writes. A boy and a girl, sitting nearly on top of each other, sing "Endless Love" to each other in soft breathy voices. Another student, Jorge, throws a nickel at the lovebirds. "You could make money singing on the subway," he says.

Monique and Evone waltz into class—late, of course—munching on potato chips and a candy bar and sitting down out of Shirley's line of vision. Evone gets to writing, her thick head of hair in a curtain around her face. Her high school English teacher taught writing process style and Evone told me, "I already did the English." But she likes to write and says she doesn't mind doing it again. Monique, her leg jiggling, digs into the bag of chips, clasping the chips with manicured fingernails. KiKi walks in, drying her hands on a paper towel, and sits down next to Monique. Bangs hanging over her eyes, KiKi begins to write, her hand changing from print to cursive and back. Eventually the class settles down, and nearly everyone is writing. The community feeling of quiet focus is very powerful.

Shirley gently breaks the mood and calls on volunteers to read their freewrites out loud. KiKi reads in a sleepy voice: "I'm so bored. I have cheerleading practice after school. I joined a club: MAT. That stands for "Mature . . . something, I don't know." Her classmates laugh, swinging their legs restlessly, chewing on pen caps, twirling strands of hair. "Tomorrow is my son's birthday and I don't know what to do with him."

"Thank you, KiKi," Shirley says, and without further comment, suggests for the class to break up into groups, to read conversations they have overheard and written down, to each other. This assignment will later be developed into papers analyzing dialectical variations in English. Evone slams her hand down on the desk and stage whispers, looking straight at me, "Damn! I left it at home!"

"Would you like to count off and work with different people or is there anyone in class that you haven't worked with before that you would like to work with?" Shirley asks, looking around the room.

Her question elicits no response, except for Monique who mutters, "Who cares?" She begins to mock her teacher's gentle loopy movements, the way Shirley cocks her head and smiles. I want to go over and twist Monique's ear. Shirley has no idea this is going on, and Monique's classmates pay no attention to her antics.

I follow Monique into a group with Tim and Eddie, a chunky good-natured Ecuadorian boy. She doesn't have her assignment done. "Why are you even here?" Time demands, only half joking. "Go sit in the corner."

"No," Monique protests, pulling the plastic off a lollipop, "She'll follow me, get on my nerves. You think she's cool? She's a little snotty with me." I almost laugh out loud—look who's talking! Monique flips through pages in her notebook mumbling insults in Spanish and I catch a little English mixed in: "She's a stupid ass."

The two boys ignore her. I wonder if Monique gets satisfaction out of instigating dramas for me to write down, even though she, KiKi, and Evone seem to treat me with friendly indifference. I'm just always sitting as close to the thick of things as I can, writing it all down, and nobody seems to take any notice.

"Can I at least see the stories? Anybody have?" Monique holds out her hand, snapping her fingers. "I don't know what we're supposed to do," she complains. I end up explaining the assignment, playing the role of teacher when it is not my place. I even go so far as to prod Monique to think of how she talks to her friends on the phone and what elements of dialect and accent come through. "I don't got no accent," she says.

Tim and Eddie each read their dialect transcripts out loud, to no comment except for "sounds good." "Time for a break," announces Eddie, rubbing his hands together, "the best part." Tim turns in his

chair to talk with a different group. After just ten minutes or so, the whole activity has lost steam, and Monique and Eddie start talking about Calvin Klein fragrances and the cafeteria's french fries. Shirley appears to check on their progress.

Monique graciously speaks for the group: "He had Spanish in his, and he wrote about someone from down South, and I had one about a conversation on the phone with my friend."

"How interesting," says Shirley, "I'm glad you got that phone conversation down—" Shirley seems to be looking on Monique's desk for the paper which, of course, does not exist.

Monique interrupts: "Can I ask something else? Do you have any more of the articles . . . ?"

"I'm glad you reminded me." Shirley is unruffled, looking at Eddie's paper and murmuring encouragement, "Great, Spanish and English, great." She turns her warm motherly gaze on Monique, "What about Monique, when you were on the phone reporting that conversation. What did other people notice about it? Any particular feature of the language?"

I am enjoying Monique's squirming, as she hides a smile under her hand, and Eddie covers for her. " You know, talking like 'how you doin?,' this and that, " he says lamely.

It all goes beyond Shirley. "Sounds like you've got a lot of good meaty samples already. Now the question is, where to take it?"

I feel like exposing Monique's lie, but I'm no snitch. "The English class is easy, " Monique told me once, "Everyone knows how to play her."

Later, Shirley asks students who wrote particularly strong observations to share them with the class. Some read in Jamaican and then Guyanese patois, another in Spanglish, another in Tagalong. Anna reads in Albanian, then gives a line by line English translation.

"Dag!" Evone interrupts, exclaiming, "You said all that in one little sentence? I be like, huh?! But my mother, when she's mad, she speaks the best English. I mean sentences—this lady, she don't speak sentences. Curses up a storm, she good at that. We start snapping on her, trying to get her to laugh or something."

Shirley gives Evone a brief sweet smile, then signals for Anna to continue. KiKi stretches her arms over her head. She's wearing a midriff-revealing t-shirt and I can see stretch marks on her little belly. Monique darts her head around, looking for some amusement. Evone scowls and doodles in her notebook.

"Let's take a few minutes to write a process note on how we might develop these explorations into dialect," suggests Shirley. The class hardly has the energy to pick up their pens.

Each student, then, reads a few lines of their process note.

Monique reads the same one she always does: "My writing group was helpful. I have to work on the introduction and add more details."

Before the freshgirls bolt out of class, Evone tells me the ceiling in her apartment's bathroom fell on her head while she was taking a shower and she plans to sue for millions.

Location, Location, Location

Eighteen years earlier, the Bronx burned as Evone, KiKi, and Monique lay snug in their cribs, playing with their toes. The mid-70s saw hundreds of apartment buildings set on fire by landlords looking to collect insurance money, or building strippers in search of valuable copper pipes, or even the tenants themselves, hoping to be relocated from crumbling buildings to brand-new public housing. The freshgirls spent their babyhood serenaded by sirens.

Meanwhile, I played Lenne Lenape Indian housewife in my backyard treehouse in semi-rural New Jersey and watched a hard-hatted President Carter on TV as he toured the ruins of the South Bronx. Shirley walked her three children to their progressive private school along the tree-lined streets of the Upper East Side of Manhattan, less than ten miles to the south of the freshgirls' playpens. David was no doubt locked away in a garret somewhere, reading *Ulysses* at the age of eight, a boy groomed for brilliance.

Growing up, Evone and KiKi were often kept home from school to babysit their younger sisters and brothers. KiKi wrote: "When I was little, I was free. I hardly had anyone there to tell me what to do. We played outside, running around." When she was ten, while I pretended to read Plato under a tree on Fordham's gated campus, KiKi and her siblings were taken from their mother and placed in foster care—where she remains, living in a group home in the notorious Hunts Point section. She became a mother herself, giving birth to Taequan in September of her senior year of high school.

At sixteen, Evone left her overcrowded home, where nine assorted relatives and friends live in a three-bedroom apartment. "My mother's house is disgusting," she told me, "There's no respect for anything, and my mother's always fighting over money. You gotta buy your own food in that house—and hide it." Evone graduated from a small alternative high school and now lives with friends, three brothers from Guatemala. They do construction work, and Evone shares a room and a bed with one of the brothers. "I tell him, 'If you pull anything stupid while I'm asleep, I'll hit you, I'll hurt you.'" Fall 95 is actually her second semester at Lehman—Evone is on academic probation for her poor grades in Spring 95. She works two part-time jobs to support herself, a work-study job in a Lehman administrative office and an after-school stint as recreation supervisor at a community center.

Like KiKi and Evone, Monique grew up with no father in sight. An only child, she lives with her secretary mother and her grandmother, who speaks no English. "We argue about everything and anything," Monique told me, "If I have an argument with my mother, then my grandmother won't talk to me. And my grandmother is not a sweet old lady." Monique and her boyfriend also fight a lot, when they are not watching trash talk shows on TV. She attended Mount Saint Ursula Academy for Girls, a Catholic high school just up the hill from Lehman; she hated it.

Now, here they are in college, at Lehman, with its proud and embattled 25-year-old tradition of open admissions, although there are plenty of professors still reeling from the shock of opening the gates. Lamenting student preparedness is one of the prime topics of conversation in department offices, as if Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* had never been written. Many teachers struggle with adjusting their pedagogical philosophies and expectations to accommodate student (especially freshman) needs.

"We've all got concerns about 'college level' stuff," Shirley confided. "Many are not getting what you hope they would because they're not starting where you'd like them to be starting. But they're here now." Given their scores on placement exams, the freshgirls are stamped "underprepared students" or "basic writers"—euphemisms, in each of their cases, for someone who is deeply estranged from school culture, someone who, though she has spent 13 years of her life in school, has found no comfortable place in it.

Each freshgirl told me at one point or another that she envisions herself in ten years with a house, a car, and a husband and children—all the trappings of a middle class life that Shirley, myself, and (I presume) David experience as a given (if not now, then in the past or hoped-for future). The freshgirls believe that a college degree is a guaranteed ticket of admission to this lifestyle. Each girl told me she is at Lehman to "get an education," a stock response. It's a directive every child, regardless of class status, hears again and again. The freshgirls have a desire to change their economic status; they know it is important to do well in college to achieve that goal. But somewhere along the line, perhaps the very first day of class, it becomes apparent to the freshgirls that in order to change their economic status, they must change their class allegiance. And they fight it—sabotaging the bottom line, their final grades.

Join Us or Fail

The issue of class is an uncomfortable one, especially in the field of composition, where most faculty are adjuncts like myself, Nancy, and David. Our yearly gross income from teaching a few classes a

semester puts us among the lower classes of society, but the level and quality of our education, as well as our dedication to it, place us among the upper crust. And most of us are white, raised in middle- to upper-middle-class families, or have a spouse who makes a good living. Part-time faculty comprise the martyr ideal of a literate culture: we value reading, writing, and teaching above making a decent wage with benefits. No wonder students think it's easy to play the teacher.

Domination and resistance are central to class dynamics (Willis 88). The proverbial struggle between labor and management is enacted in classrooms between teacher and student and in offices between teacher and administration. It's Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zones" every which way you turn, essential to the very idea of a university. Without the struggle of debate, ideas stagnate. Within our universities, as elsewhere in society, culture and values clash and negotiate, as the points of contact are redefined. Yet the freshgirls are at the margins of the contact zone. They are not given the choice of give and take; they can only surrender.

I doubt they are consciously aware of the issue of class, but also I believe it is the factor that does the most in determining their behavior. When Evone interrupts, as she is wont to do, when Monique flips Shirley the bird (as I saw her do several times), when KiKi slumps in her chair with a vacant gaze, these disruptive behaviors are rooted in the tradition of working-class anti-intellectual attitudes. They are an attempt to undermine the authority and credibility of the teacher—first off, by the refusal to know or call the teacher by name. In an interview with Evone and Monique, they kept saying "she, she, she" until I barked: "Who's she? The cat's mother?!" (something my grandma would always say), and they burst out laughing.

Whereas middle-class students are wise to what Jane Nagle terms "school literacy," defined as "feeding the teacher back her words, (23)" the freshgirls and many of their classmates attempt a different tactic. As they resist the teacher's efforts to engage them, they experience what Ira Shor calls the "illusory power of someone who thinks she is beating the system" (59). Even the best-intentioned teacher, like Shirley, who wants so badly for the students to love her class, is met with the resistance of disruptive behavior, silence, and/or whining to take a break. There was also a bit of love-hate mother-daughter stuff going on there too, further complicating matters. "What I'm seeing here is learned helplessness," Shirley once told her passive sleepy class in a rare show of temper, "smart people who go dumb in school."

Think of what is being demanded of the freshgirls as they hit college: to conform to a whole social system, a different body of reference that they've hardly been exposed to at school, and, from what I could ascertain, certainly not at home. This body of reference derives from literate culture, whereas the freshgirls live in what Walter Ong

differentiates as an oral/technological culture. Their references all relate to television, music, and who beeped who at what time and how come you didn't beep me back? They are not being asked to simply adapt, but to utterly change their class and cultural identity—an overwhelming task, especially at such a young age.

Evone and KiKi are children of the underclass: raised in desperate poverty and neglect. Evone mentioned in offhand comments to me how she was physically and sexually abused. KiKi, who, I am sure, has been poked and prodded by countless social workers, psychologists, and lawyers, revealed nothing so personal. Daily survival, rather than intellectual achievement, has been their focus. Although Monique's background is more secure working class, with the disciplinary benefit (or curse) of a Catholic education, she is the most resistant student of the three. Her main activity in life seems to be sulking.

All three are the first in their families to attend college. The pressure on them is intense, and certainly showed as the semester progressed. KiKi, Monique, and Evone, with their legs jiggling in class as they chewed on their fingernails or chipped nail polish or played with their hair, seemed to exude anxiety. Nervous energy just radiated out from them. Here they are, at a point in their lives when they can begin to exercise their free will and start on that road to middle class comfort, but their choices are limiting and confining. In fact, there is no choice: either change or fail.

Leaving Home

The crisis of the uprooted intellectual, which Victor Villanueva and Richard Rodriguez so eloquently describe in their literacy narratives, is the price paid for turning one's back on class and ethnic identity to become fluent in the dominant culture. They will never feel fully at ease anywhere, least of all in their family's home. For an eighteen-year-old Bronxite freshgirl, a life in exile is a daunting consequence of "getting an education." Home may not be the sweetest place when your shrew of a grandmother is screaming in Spanish through a locked door, or when you are raised as a ward of the state, or when your mother beats you for breaking a plate—but it is that one and only place best known to you.

As students attending Lehman College, a place devoted to learning within the confines of the poorest borough in New York City—indeed with "the most adverse conditions in the State" (State University of New York study 29)—the challenge of redefining themselves doesn't get much support. Tutoring and counseling services offered by the college, as well as the beauty of Lehman's campus, with its Gothic buildings and lush lawns, can only go so far. The freshgirls live and

attend college on a huge hunk of rock where sixty percent of high school students are welfare recipients, where the little spending money people have at their disposal does not get them much. What one can buy for a dollar in most places costs $2.13 in the Bronx. Supermarkets are few and far between, and I know of only one bookstore in the thick of the Bronx, which largely handles trade in used textbooks.

The freshgirls do not have the privilege, as I did, as Shirley did, of going away to college. Funny, how I went to the Bronx, and they need to get the hell out of there. Certainly, commuter students miss out on what many college graduates recall as the most pleasant aspect of "getting an education": the whole social scene, the thrill of getting out from under your parents' thumbs. Monique felt this acutely; some of her girlfriends from the Mount went away to college: "They partying away, and I'm just *stuck*, ten minutes from my old school. Still in the Bronx."

I remember asking Monique if she understood that in order to transfer out of Lehman to a "good school," she would need to do well this semester. "I can deal with difficult work when I want to, because I'm smart," she told me, "If I'm interested, I'll do the work."

Pedagogy Woes

Susan Miller and Lester Faigley have both criticized writing process pedagogy for not addressing issues of class and resistance. Writing process, they contend, demands an "engaged sensibility" (Miller), assuming the cooperation of the students. Many students in Shirley's class, including my freshgirls, did not keep a process journal, nor did they bring multiple copies of their work to writing groups when they saw Shirley was not vigilant about enforcing these duties. No one in the class cared enough about their writing process to do any work that was not collected.

However, comparing process pedagogy to the standard lecture format of the Humanities class makes it clear that a classroom which aims to be student-centered is preferable to one in which the teacher embodies Freire's "banking theory of education." Yet I would argue that it is an important experience for students to have professors that are difficult to contend with. In some ways, I can safely say we need more of the "transferrals of information" in the classroom, though Freire argued against them. Underprepared students need to learn more *facts* if they are to find pleasure and connection in this class transformation that is demanded of them.

Reflecting on the painful situation of Shirley and David's classrooms, I see that we are all guilty of hubris—the false pride of thinking that what we know is best. David, Shirley, and me; Monique, KiKi,

and Evone, we are all at fault. As Freire writes: "Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility" (71). Students are accustomed to throwing around the word "respect," and teachers bemoan the lack of respect in the classroom, when perhaps we should all strive to be humble.

We need a serious reassessment of our rigid views of what a college experience "should" be. Richard Larson writes that teachers often expect students to be apprentice versions of themselves. Many of us teach because we loved school so much we never wanted to leave. Can we expect that same attitude and devotion of our students? We can encourage it yet also exercise a flexibility in our pedagogies that will help us all, teacher and student alike, to relax and learn. We must be prepared to use a number of approaches—mix lecture and note-taking with creative writing with critical pedagogy (Shor) with writing process, and so on. A flexible pedagogy, I believe, can better assure finding the place of "common language" (Burke).

However, developing a pedagogy of humble flexibility is fruitless—perhaps even perilous—without significant changes in the political atmosphere. I would argue that even students as unengaged and perhaps ill prepared as the freshgirls should be allowed the opportunity for a college education. They need more support, not less. What is the point in dismantling Academic Skills departments or decreasing the number of credits for the BA degree? What is the point in limiting access, as CUNY's Board of Trustees has voted to do—denying entrance to senior colleges to students who fail any of the three placement tests? The point, it seems, is to shut out students like the freshgirls.

Mercy

What would need to happen for Evone, KiKi, and Monique to stop resisting and surrender to school culture (or, better yet, prevail within it)? When will their anxiety turn to determination? I did see them performing covert little literate acts of their own free will—not too often, but at least the seed. KiKi would make "to do" (take baby to doctor) and "what I want" (bear coat, gold ring, gold bracelet) lists. Monique read *'Teen* magazine in class. I know Evone kept a journal and has a sense of herself as an artist; indeed, from the work of hers that I read, I think she has a gift for vivid imagery. When and how will they begin to transfer this meaning of purpose to their studies?

When I presented a part of my thesis at the CAWS (CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors) Conference, one colleague commented: "It sounds as though these students will come back to college years

later to finish what they couldn't start." Well—they haven't—yet. From what little I know in trying to track them down, life has continued to show the freshgirls little mercy.

Evone is a single mother of twins, Cane and Evone, born on Christmas day 1996. She lives with a friend, is not working, and told me on the phone that she "misses school so much." Surprising me, Evone remembers the Humanities class with the most fondness. I mailed her an Adult Degree application, but she is worried about leaving her children with a babysitter. She has no time for writing but reads regularly to the twins.

I was unable to speak with KiKi, but I did speak with a social worker who knows her and gave me some more background information on her, including the fact that she lived for several years in a residential treatment center for children with emotional problems. According to this social worker, he last saw KiKi during the summer, and she looked well, was living with family members, and may have had another child. He couldn't remember for sure, because he saw her with a group of former clients and couldn't keep track of all the babies. Her Lehman transcript shows that she has registered several semesters since Fall '95, the last in Spring '98, but withdrew from all of them.

As for Monique, I had no luck in locating her—the phone number on her transcript is "temporarily disconnected at the customer's request," and I received no response to the letter I sent. She did complete the Spring '96 semester, though she failed biology. But I have a feeling (hope?) that Monique may now be a proud graduate of a SUNY or a small Catholic college. She alone of the freshgirls had a stable background in terms of education and family.

Shirley is studying writing process teachers at Theodore Roosevelt High School, I'm working on my Ph.D. at the CUNY Graduate Center, teaching, and coordinating various programs offered through Lehman's Office of Individualized Studies. I don't know where David is.

The whole experience of doing this ethnographic research left me unnerved. Never again will I expect to think that I can really know the way things are for someone else. I got reasonably close to their experience, but I can never fully understand the freshgirls' dilemmas and anxieties. Still, I know enough to know how much a chance to "get an education" matters to them—even though they may have acted as though it didn't matter. I hope we can make that chance more real and realizable. I feel sure we cannot allow the class mobility an education offers to slam shut in their faces.

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News and Announcements

Conference announcement: Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, July 4-7, 1999. Conference theme "Rhetorical Education in America." Keynote Kathleen Jamieson. For additional information, http://www.psu.edu/dept/english/rhetcomp99/

Call for papers/hypertext: *Tenure 2000* will be a special issue of *Computers and Composition* coming out in April, 2000, guest-edited by Susan Lang, Janice Walker, Mick Doherty, Keith Dorwick, and Susan Halter. For further information and the full call for papers/hypertext, see http://www.uic.edu/~kdorwick/tenure2000/ or contact Dr. Susan Lang at slang@siu.edu.

The 1999 Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will be held from **June 2 through July 23** on the campus of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. For application or additional information, contact Director, Kellogg Institute, PO Box 32098, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608-2098, (82) 262-3307; http://www.ced.appstaate.edu/ncde.

Call for Proposals: 23rd Annual CAWS (CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors) Conference will be held Friday, October 29, 1999, in Manhattan. Conference theme: How Do We Situate Writing? Elaine Maimon (Arizona State University) will be the keynote speaker. Proposals sought for papers, panels, workshops, and roundtables. Submit abstract and title to: Caroline Pari, Department of English, Borough of Manhattan Community College/CUNY, 199 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007. **Deadline: July 1, 1999**.

Call for Papers: Journal for the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (*JAEPL*) is soliciting manuscripts for its fifth annual issue. The editors solicit theory grounded manuscripts that discuss pedagogical concerns focusing on topics that extend beyond currently accepted attitudes toward, and paradigms of, language. Send 4 copies of 12-15 page manuscripts (MLA style) by **January 1, 2000** to Linda Calendrillo, Co-Editor of *JAEPL*, Department of English, 600 Lincoln Ave., Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL 61920, e-mail cfltc@eiu.edu. Inquiries Kristie S. Fleckenstein, Co-Editor of *JAEPL*, Department of English, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306-0460, e-mail kflecken@gw.bsu.edu or jaepl@cctr.umkc.edu.

Symposium announcement: Rewriting Literacies: Changing Communities, Shifting Discourses in the Twenty-First Century. A symposium to extend the conversation about the shifting meanings of literacy includes leading scholars, teachers, researchers, and graduate students. Friday **October 22, 1999** Texas A&M University Reed Arena 8:00 am - 5:30 pm (on-site registration available). Keynote speakers Victor Villanueva, Ira Shor, Andrea Lunsford, Akua Duku Anokye. Inquiries: Symposium coordinators: Michelle Kells: m-kells@tamu.edu and M. Jimmie Killingsworth: killingsworth@tamu.edu.

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