

## EDITORS' COLUMN

Beginning with an article entitled “The City University of New York and the Shaughnessy Legacy: Today’s Scholars Talk Back,” this issue necessarily invites us to reflect on the early days of Open Admissions and, at the same time, to assess the current state of basic writing programs and pedagogy. This multi-authored article began as a panel at the Spring 2007 Conference on College Composition and Communication in New York City. Judith Summerfield, University Dean for Undergraduate Education, convened a group of compositionists from various CUNY campuses to examine the questions of the University’s multiple identities within the legacy of Mina Shaughnessy, who coined the term “basic writing” and founded the *Journal of Basic Writing* in 1975. The resulting article is a collage depicting the challenges and rewards of working with basic writers at the beginning of the twenty-first century in a climate that is now, as it was in the 1970s, politically charged. Like Shaughnessy before them, today’s scholars raise questions that force us to grapple with the very nature of literacy and democracy.

Of course, the Shaughnessy legacy is not limited to the City University of New York. In the 1970s and beyond, basic writing programs came into being at many institutions across the country. In recent years, particularly in the 1990s, these programs have been challenged and subjected to constraints and legislative mandates, which have inspired attempts to make BW programs more rigorous and intellectually challenging as well as more successful in institutional terms such as pass rates, retention rates, and student progress. This issue contains longitudinal reports on two such programs. And the news is promising. In “*Stretch at 10: A Progress Report on Arizona State University’s Stretch Program*,” Gregory R. Glau summarizes comprehensive data on the progress of nearly 8,000 basic writers who have participated in this program. Designed to combat the “outsourcing” of basic writers to community colleges, the *Stretch Program* gives these students what they most need—*more time*. Time to think, time to write, time to revise, and—perhaps most crucially—time to assimilate into the new discourse communities they have entered. In a course sequence that “stretches” the work of first-year English over two semesters, students do the same reading and writing assignments as regular composition students and receive three hours of elective credit (for the first semester) and three hours of English credit (for the second semester). Based on a wealth of data collected over a ten-year period, the conclusion is clear: “the *Stretch* concept actually works and . . . thousands of students have benefited from the extra time and guided writing experience they receive.”

In “Re-Modeling Basic Writing,” Rachel Rigolino and Penny Freel describe another approach to providing basic writing in the four-year college. The

Supplemental Writing Workshop (SWW) Program was developed in 1996 at the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz to respond to public pressure to discontinue so-called remedial writing courses at four-year institutions. Like Arizona State's *Stretch Program*, the SWW Program has the same objectives and requirements as regular composition, carries academic credit, and gives basic writers more time to work on their writing. In the SUNY New Paltz program, however, the extra time is given in the same semester in the form of an integrated writing workshop and required tutoring sessions. Based on long-term institutional data on pass rates, retention rates, graduation rates, and GPAs, the students who began in the SWW Program are doing very well indeed when compared with other students entering at the same time. Commenting on the program's success, the authors explain, "[W]hat had begun as an effort to resist an impending exclusionary policy resulted in a robust curricular design that actually accelerated the progress of our basic writing students toward their Bachelor's degrees."

While large-scale change is taking place at the institutional level, concerned professionals continue to examine and improve aspects of classroom assessment and instruction. The last two articles exemplify this type of informed, reflective practice. In "Assessing Student Writing: The Self-Revised Essay," Janine Graziano-King summarizes the major historical trends in writing assessment and suggests an alternative. Hoping, on the one hand, to reduce the "cognitive load" of instructors who assess student portfolios and, on the other, to assure that students are the "sole authors" of their work while at the same time providing "authentic" writing tasks that go beyond one-shot timed writing samples, she and a colleague have experimented with a new approach to writing assessment. "The self-revised essay" develops over time as a series of revisions of an essay based on an important course theme. At several different points during the term, students revise this essay during class time, expanding their initial draft by referring to additional course readings but without receiving teacher commentary or help from outside sources. Although further testing of this assessment method is clearly needed, Graziano-King feels that the self-revised essay has the potential to combine the best features of portfolios and timed essay exams.

In "The Economy of Explicit Instruction," Don J. Kraemer re-examines another important issue that every writing teacher faces—just how explicit to be in guiding student learning. The trend in recent years to encourage inquiry and student discovery has often led us away from the direct approach. In this article, Kraemer looks to his own practice in asking "whether to name for students what is important and what they must do." Struck by recent discussions of teaching that draw upon economic metaphors, Kraemer decided "to bring the economic more explicitly into [his] teaching and into [his] students' learning."

He did so by asking his students to focus on problem formulation and rhetorical framing in *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner. This move, he argues, “added value” to his instruction. By requiring his basic writing students to read a challenging text and respond to it in certain ritualized ways, Kraemer encouraged “an economy of development,” in which students could expand their notion of writing to communicate with new and different audiences for different purposes.

Taken together, the articles in this issue suggest that basic writing is alive and well in the twenty-first century despite the recent threats to its existence. The two reports based on long-term program assessment contain statistical evidence confirming that, given good instruction, basic writers can succeed at similar rates as other college students. The other articles exemplify the pedagogical creativity of scholars and teachers who are committed to working with students initially labeled as basic writers. It appears to us that, currently, some of the most innovative work in program and curriculum development is happening in the field of basic writing.

Finally, we would like to announce an upcoming change in the editorship of the *Journal of Basic Writing*. Beginning with the Spring 2008 issue, Hope Parisi, currently Associate Editor, will become Co-Editor along with Rebecca Mlynarczyk. Bonne August, who has co-edited the journal since the Fall of 2002, has decided to step down from this position. Her many responsibilities as Provost of CUNY’s New York City Technical College have necessitated this decision. Speaking on behalf of *JBW*’s Editorial Review Board as well as our authors and readers, Rebecca would like to thank Bonne for her unfailing wisdom and guidance over the past five years. We are grateful that we will still be able to call on her from time to time in her new role as Consulting Editor.

—**Rebecca Mlynarczyk** and **Bonne August**