Open
WORDS

*Access
and
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In this issue

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Access and English Studies

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Editor's Introduction:
Untidy Alignments

"Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. . . . Beside comprises a wide rang of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations." (Sedgwick 8)

Early in the opening article in this issue of *Open Words*, Pegeen Reichert Powell and Danielle Aquiline explain their essay's side-by-side organization: "This format," they write, "and the frantic nature of the reading of it, illustrates our difficulties of going back and forth between students' voices and retention research, our struggle to reconcile both of these discourses into one tidy narrative, and the disjointedness of our understanding of retention." I could not help when I read this sentence during our final editing process but to consider how it spoke to ways this issue of *OW* itself has been arranged and the ways this arrangement calls attention to the journal's aim to explore the range and dynamics of political, professional, and pedagogical issues related to open admissions and non-mainstream student populations. Consecutive pagination, although not altogether futile, no longer seemed optimal.

Indeed, these articles could all very well be sliced and spliced in ways to create two or more sets of columns throughout. Side-by-side, passages recounting Danielle A. Cordaro's experiences tutoring Michael, a deaf student navigating his first-year curriculum at Purdue, would resonate with Wendy Olson's mapping of the shifting terrains of Basic Writing's social material processes. These mappings would resonate with Robin Murray's work with Native American and returning nontraditional students in an open-admissions college in Oklahoma, and her work would resonate with Cordaro's scrutiny of disability theories and policies, which would resonate with arguments Murray makes for ecofeminist standpoint theory as a frame for literature instruction, which would resonate with the story that Reichert Powell and Aquiline tell of Jenelle, along with Jenelle's own first-person account of the academic experiences, the family life, the institutional supports, faculty interventions, financial issues, and just plain runs of bad luck that determine her persistence rate in school. The frantic nature of reading such works set side-by-side rather than on consecutive pages would illustrate the

need for scholarship in educational access to function more intersectionally, to find ways both at the level of content and level of representation to align and transect the multiple sites and discourses that shape post-secondary education for students considered nonmainstream and to dismantle the undemocratic forces that course through it.

The untidy narrative that is the struggle for educational access persists in discourses that shape theoretical considerations as well as classroom stories and student voices. Its telling involves an aligning of those theories, stories, voices that shape related programs—not just English programs and student services, but disability, gender, and ecological studies, any place discursively and materially related to the critique of dominating culture and the programs, offices, attitudes, and pedagogies that might serve it. Together, essays collected in this issue speak to the broad array of sites through which resistance to elitist and stultifying machinations of the traditional curriculum are underway, and they indicate how an align-ment of these sites might destabilize myths that contrive a singular story for mainstream soci-ety—a story that elides the fact that nearly 39 percent of all college students attend two-year schools, that 4.4 million students attending Title IV institutions in the U.S. are "minority" stu-dents (National Center 3), and that over a third of students in postsecondary education are above the age of 25 ("College Enrollment" 22). We tend to think of *Open Words* as the site at which their resistant stories might gather, as "untidy" as such a gathering might be.

John Paul Tassoni
August 2009

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Pegeen Reichert Powell and Danielle Aquiline
Retention Risks and Realities: One Student's Story

INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY ARE SPENDING
increasing amounts of resources and energy on the issue of retention[1]. And according to Vincent Tinto, a leading retention scholar, "Student retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education[1] ("Research and Practice" 1). Retention is the effort of an institution to keep students enrolled until graduation, or put another way, to dissuade students from leaving. First-year writing instructors have many reasons to pay attention to the discourse of retention in higher education: for one, we are more likely than our colleagues who teach upper level courses to have the opportunity—and the concomitant responsibilities—to teach students before they decide to leave. Moreover, for readers who share this journal's commitment to the political work of teaching open admissions and non-traditional students, there is even more urgency to pay attention to retention, for in many cases, these are the students who are often least well-served by our institutions and who are more likely to decide to leave.

By "paying attention" to the issue of retention, however, we are not arguing for an uncritical, no-holds-barred approach to keeping students in their seats until graduation. Retention is an effort complicated not just by the reasons students leave in the first place but also by institutions' motivations to prevent them from doing so.

We are in the process of working with a group of students who volunteered to be "partnered" with a faculty member during this current academic year. The students were drawn from participants in the summer Bridge program—a program specifically designed by our institution to assess and ready otherwise ineligible first-year college students. Given that these students did not—for a variety of reasons—meet the admissions requirements of our institution prior to the Bridge program, they represented the wide-ranging risks associated with retention studies.

At the end of Bridge, students were given the opportunity to participate in

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1. One study found that a sample of 40 American colleges spent an average of $9,696 on conferences, webcasts, research reports, and other information sources and a mean of $25, 527 on consulting services to improve student retention in the past year. 65% of the colleges had a high-level administrator or Dean whose primary responsibility is to maintain and increase student retention. (*Survey of Student Retention Policies in Higher Education* 18-19)

The Student Faculty Partnership for Success program during their first year.[2] The Student Faculty Partnership for Success program has two goals. The first is to learn from students themselves about the many complicated factors that lead some students to decide to enroll in subsequent semesters and others to leave our institution. The second goal is to intervene, when it's both possible and right to do so, to help students address problems that might otherwise lead to decisions to leave.[3]

The data that our institution and retention scholars compile and study provides some insight into the problem of attrition, but we couldn't hear our students' voices among the numbers and percentages and statistical probabilities. The Student Faculty Partnership for Success program in general, and this article in particular, is our attempt to listen carefully to individual students' voices, and to figure out what we can learn by doing so.

> "our attempt to listen carefully to individual students' voices, and to figure out what we can learn by doing so"

In this article, we rely on the words of one student to illustrate the frustratingly complex issues surrounding retention. We first met Jenelle as one of Danielle's Bridge students. Danielle also partnered with her for the following academic year. Then, Pegeen taught Jenelle in Writing and Rhetoric I, the first required writing course at our college. Jenelle in many ways represents the larger population of students who are at risk for dropping out of college before graduation. We hear in her story many of the "risk factors" the data tell us to look for when trying to determine who might leave. She is representative, too, because paradoxically, her story is unique—the peculiarities of her experiences and behaviors and personality traits make it nearly impossible to extrapolate from this one case any useful generalizations about retention. We are inclined to argue that this is true for all students. Getting to know her, like getting to know the other students in our program, has taught us just how much we don't know, and how much we may never be able to know, about why some students leave and other students graduate.

3. The Student Faculty Partnership for Success program partners approximately 30 students with one of four faculty members. The faculty member contacts each student regularly throughout the academic year to check on their academic and social adjustments to college, as well as to see how they're doing physically, emotionally, financially, and so on. All of the students participated in the summer Bridge program, where they learned about and volunteered to participate in the SFPS program.

And yet, as we discuss at the end of the article, while we don't know as much as we'd like to about retention, what writing instructors do know is pedagogy. The main question that Jenelle's story raises for us is this: If Jenelle never graduates from college, what do we want her to get out of our courses while she is here? In other words, as you read the following sections about how little we know about retention, consider how it might change the ways you approach course and assignment design, classroom practices, and pedagogy more generally.

In what follows, we've put Jenelle's own words and story next to our reflection, as teachers and scholars. This conversation took place during an interview we had with Jenelle near the end of her first semester. In many ways, it is the culmination of a dialogue we had been having with Jenelle and with each other all year. This format, and the frantic nature of the reading required of it, illustrates our difficulties of going back and forth between students' voices and retention research, our struggle to reconcile both of these discourses into one tidy narrative, and the disjointedness of our understanding of retention.[4]

Retention and Previous Academic Experiences

Jenelle's story begins much earlier than this first excerpt. She lived in the city, then moved out to a suburb with her Mom, where, in her words, *"I got Saturday detentions almost every weekend. Didn't go"* and *"I wasn't going to classes. I was ditching a lot of the morning classes, always late."*

She got involved with gangs, then moved out to her Dad's home to avoid the gang members after her friend (sponsor? play brother?) was killed and they were coming after her. About that school, she says, *They threw me into geometry. And geometry I slept through every day. I told the [teacher] I'm not going to be*

According to Jennifer L. Crissman Ishler and M. Lee Upcraft's review of retention literature, "There is substantial evidence that the most powerful predictor of persistence into the sophomore year is the first-year student's prior academic achievement, including high school grades" (33; see also Caison, 431; Astin and Oseguera 256). If "prior academic achievement" can predict whether or not a student will re-enroll after the first semester or first year of college, then Jenelle's high school experience does not bode well. Her high school GPA undoubtedly reflected all of the moving around and

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4. A note about Jenelle's words. Together, we interviewed Jenelle on campus on December 11, 2008, and that conversation was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. All of Jenelle's words appear here, in the left column in *italic* font, exactly as they appear in the transcript. An ellipsis (. . .) indicates parts of the conversation that were not included; brackets with italics inside [italics] indicate places where we inserted words to protect someone's anonymity, or because Jenelle's words weren't clear on the tape and we inserted a word that was our best guess. We used regular type in the left column to indicate our narrative explanations. All words in the right column are ours unless indicated by quotation marks.

able to learn this. And I slept through it every day. Chemistry was the same thing, slept through that. So, like, I was really screwing myself hard as hell, hard as hell. I wasn't passing any classes.

She then moved back to her Mom's when she found out that she wouldn't graduate on time from the school she attended at her Dad's. We asked if she had been held back a year in school because of all the turbulence . . . *[I]n answer to your question if I was held back, technical I was held back, because when I went to H-F as a junior, they did label me as a sophomore, so I guess that is being held back. But they told me I'd be able to make up the credits. But they're telling me in order to graduate, I would have to do so much schoolwork, Prairie State College to do night courses, do this, and then get my diploma mailed to me. I told them, kiss my ass. Either I'm going to graduate on time, or instead of doing all this stuff, I'll get my GED because it will be a lot quicker than doing all the extra shit.*

Rather than go to that trouble, she re-enrolled in her original high school and, in her words, *I killed my senior year. Killed it. Came out with A's and B's. Killed it. Graduated on time.*

violence and uncertainty that characterized her life during this period of time. Regardless of the quality of her high schools or the availability of AP classes or extracurriculars (we don't know these details about the high schools she attended), she clearly wasn't taking advantage of opportunities to prepare for college academically or behaviorally, and that lack of preparation is to some degree captured in the numbers of the GPA.

However, what her GPA doesn't adequately reflect is her high intelligence or her strong personality, which we can see glimpses of in her narrative here, and which we both witnessed ourselves in our classrooms and interactions with Jenelle over the course of several months.

Many humanists are wary of GPAs and SATs and all of their numbers as indicators of intelligence. To this general sense of wariness we'll add the further caution that when these numbers are used to predict retention, they'll increasingly be used to determine access (an institution that is determined to improve retention numbers will be more likely to deny access to students whose numbers suggest they won't make it) (see Astin).

What is unnerving for us, in trying to understand retention better, is how even knowing more of Jenelle's story, even seeing behind the numbers, even coming to tremendously enjoy and respect her intelligence and her personality, we are no better able to predict her chances of graduating

Retention and the Role of the Family

With the encouragement of a friend, she applied to Columbia College Chicago, a private generous admissions, arts and media college. Her acceptance was contingent on attending a Summer Bridge program.

Yeah, and I got a letter that said I had to do the Bridge program, and I was pissed. I remember I was pissed about that. My mom read the letter first, though, and out of her mouth was, I told you this wasn't going to work and all this. But I was pissed, like, man, I wrote good on that essay. There should be no reason. But then I thought about it. They probably looked at my high school and, you know, my test scores, and they probably figured, you know. But I couldn't blame them for that because I wasn't showing up, so what the–you know? So, I told my mom–she told me I couldn't do it, and I said, watch.

PEGEEN: So, did you have either of your parents' support when you started the Bridge program?

No. My dad, like, he did come with me one time to another open house, like, after I came with [a friend] and stuff. It was like a parent thing. He came with me, and he said he liked the school, and he liked it because the music–neither one of my parents supported it as a career for me, or, you know what I'm saying, where I should be going to school at. But they're still–to this day, they're still talking about me going to community college.

Like her previous academic experiences and high school GPA, Jenelle's parents might be considered a "risk factor." It seems like commonsense, but retention scholars confirm that "Students whose parents expressed belief in their competence and abilities and who shared the students' interests and concerns were more likely to perform well in college than those whose parents did not demonstrate these attributes" (Cutrona, et al., 373). Not only did her parents not support her college choice, but her mother, from the very beginning, showed very little confidence in Jenelle's ability to succeed.

If we study retention in order to improve *all* students' chances to succeed (our reason for studying retention, though admittedly not the reason many institutions spend so much energy and resources on this problem), then studying factors like a student's relationship with her parents seems like a dead end. This is something that institutions can neither predict nor control.

Perhaps knowing Jenelle's story of her relationship with her parents helps, in some small way, to explain her performance, both in high school and college, but it actually raises more questions for us than it answers. For example, when and how do we intervene, if we feel that her mom is eroding Jenelle's sense of confidence and accomplishment, and thus her chances to succeed? In the context of retention efforts, should an institution's approach to *in loco parentis* take

Retention, Self-efficacy, and Institutional Support

Jenelle did enroll in the Bridge program, where she met Danielle. She was very successful in the program, and agreed to "partner" with Danielle in the Student Faculty Partnership for Success Program. We asked if after the Bridge program, she felt ready for the semester.

Yeah, I was, but then no. I don't know. I was, but then I was nervous, because I'm thinking, OK, if that was two classes with Bridge, now I'm taking five. And that ended up being my worst–you know what I'm saying, like, that ended up being what kicked me in the ass in the end.

Jenelle enrolled in 15 credit hours for her first semester at Columbia.

I didn't even choose any of my classes. This lady, I don't even know her name, but this lady just sat me at a computer and she did everything. She told me what [classes] to pick out and what to pull. So, I really didn't have any say-so in what classes I wanted to take, really.

It was in the Art of Business Recording, a class required for Jenelle's major, that she start-

While faculty may be the most obvious point of contact between a student and the institution, Jenelle's story also highlights how multifaceted the student's college experience is. She was nervous going in—retention scholars might identify this as her lack of a sense of self-efficacy (see Bean 220-223). And while it might be tempting to ascribe these nerves to her prior academic experiences or to her relationship with her parents, we might also consider how the institution can exacerbate her nervousness. As John P. Bean says, "Any interaction between students and an institution's faculty and other employees that increases the students' sense of self-efficacy is likely to improve their attitudes toward school and increase their likelihood of remaining enrolled" (221).

The fact that Jenelle didn't get much say in shaping her first-semester schedule undoubtedly failed to increase her sense of self-efficacy. Moreover, as she

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5. *In Loco Parentis* is the idea that the university should play the role of the parent while the student is on campus. This idea was challenged successfully in the 1960s and 1970s, when students demanded more autonomy and more prominent roles in college governance, and when the legal age to vote was lowered to 18. At this point, colleges and universities shifted away from a culture of *in loco parentis*. However, more recently, institutions have been sued and found responsible for things that have happened to students while on campus. The tendency of parents to sue institutions, as well as the culture of "helicopter parenting," has initiated another shift, back toward policies and practices that might be understood as in loco parentis. Some retention efforts—including our own Student Faculty Partnership for Success program—could be seen as efforts by the institution to play the role of the parent; we argue for more research and greater skepticism when this occurs. (See Sweeton and Davis for a brief history of this concept; see Trimbur; Podis and Podis for critiques of *in loco parentis* in composition studies.)

ed questioning whether or not she wanted to continue her degree in Music Business.

Because we had, like, a paper, a 16-page paper due on–what was it like, the different–I showed you, the different jobs. And I have to talk about how country and rap did this in the industry and how money and all, like–it just wasn't–when I looked at that paper, I was like, well, this is my career. I should love doing this. And I showed, you know, David in our class, I showed him the paper, and he was like, man, maybe I should do this. I would love to write a paper like that. So, I'm thinking, like, damn, you know, people actually like doing this, so maybe this ain't for me. And that was just–and another reason why I dropped [the class] was because that was just–I already saw a downfall. You know. I already saw that it was going to bring me down, so I just figured, just cut it while I can, you know?

became increasingly unsure about her career choice and major, she could surely have benefitted from better academic advising. Tinto argues that "advising is particularly important to the success of the many students who either begin college undecided about their major or change their major during college" (Epilogue 322).

We understand the importance of institutional efforts to improve students' experiences with academic advising, the financial aid office, and other crucial services. And we think Jenelle's experience with these services at our college should have been better. However, we are not confident that improved services would necessarily increase her chances of succeeding. The more we know of her story, the less able we are to identify straightforward solutions: Improve the advising process! Provide more career counseling! Tutoring! Better customer service in Financial Aid!

We see how a student's sense of self-efficacy and her chances for success are the accumulation of variables both as profound as the relationship between mother and daughter, for example, and as capricious as an academic advisor's bad day, a chance conversation with a classmate, the timing of the "withdraw" date on the academic calendar.

Retention and the Role of Faculty

Jenelle was also realizing that, unlike the Bridge Program, she had to initiate relationships with her teachers. She admits that she didn't always make the effort to do this:

PEGEEN: OK. Those two teachers, did you go to their offices?

JENELLE: No.

PEGEEN: You never go to their offices during the semester?

JENELLE: Mm-mm.

PEGEEN: How did you communicate with them?

> "I tell him I've got
> a lot going on,
> it doesn't phase him"

JENELLE: Just through e-mail and my – but with my econ teacher, I'll leave him a – like, I haven't – me and him haven't been – he only knows, like, a fragment of what's been going on in my life, you know? And I'm sure when he reads an e-mail, and I tell him I've got a lot going on, it doesn't phase him, you know? But he – I told him about the car accident. I told him about that. But I really haven't – I didn't go in detail like I should have, you know? But I didn't feel that – to me, he wasn't that kind of teacher to give you that connection to chit-chat like that, you know?

PEGEEN: And the other teacher?

The management teacher? She knows everything, but it's like she rushed, like, when I

A student's relationship with faculty can also have both profound consequences and be the result of the capriciousness of the registration process. In their review of retention scholarship, Ishler and Upcraft refer to a study that found that "specific faculty behaviors contributed to student persistence: faculty members being supportive of student needs, being approachable, and returning telephone calls and e-mails in a timely fashion" (38). Increasingly, retention scholarship is arguing for the role of faculty in improving students' chances of success (see Tinto "Research and Practice").

And in fact, some of this research, as well as our own instincts about these matters, motivated the Student Faculty Partnership for Success Program that Jenelle was a part of. What first-year writing faculty do as a matter of course—teach smaller classes, conduct frequent conferences, assign papers that call for personal writing—are a tremendous resource, deliberately or not, for retention efforts at their institutions. But, in spite of—or is it because of?—our experience with the Student Faculty Partnership for Success Program, we are hesitant to argue that this is a role that faculty should seek or fill.

What should be the extent of faculty response-ability? Just how "supportive" and "approachable" should we be? These are sincere questions, arising out of a real frustration with the conflict between our best intentions and our most severe limitations.

was trying to explain to her, because I came up – I sent her an e-mail when I was absent for the classes. And one day after class, I went up to her and I wanted to talk to her personally and just explain to her personally, like, everything I said in the e-mail, but to her face. And when I was talking to her and she was, like, oh, like rushing me, like, oh, it's OK! Yeah, it's OK, _____, you know? So, I just felt like she really didn't care. She seemed – she told me I'm going to pass, so that's what it was, you know?

We found ourselves, over the course of a semester, trying to respond to domestic violence, the threat of homelessness, financial crises, possible unplanned pregnancies, mental illnesses, physical illnesses, and a whole host of other serious issues. We were overwhelmed and under-qualified.[6]

It's easy to point an accusatory finger at the faculty member who was too rushed to talk with Jenelle, or who didn't like to "chit chat." But that was us, sometimes, too.

Moreover, we could never argue that faculty should play a more prominent role in responding to student needs, in the name of retention, until the working conditions of our part-time colleagues are drastically improved. It should be obvious to all readers that teachers' working conditions and students' experiences at any given institution are inextricably linked. It is the part-time faculty, after all, that so often ends up shouldering much of this responsibility. In the case of our institution, we found that—due to both staffing scenarios and the enthusiastic involvement of newer teachers—it was many of the part-time faculty members that developed lasting bonds with these students and that tried, endlessly and without additional compensation, to facilitate success during these students' first year.

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6. Virginia Tech, and closer to home, Northern Illinois, have raised a whole host of legal and ethical issues about faculty response-ability. In the context of those tragedies, retention seems almost trivial.

Retention and Stress: Time and Money

Jenelle's first-semester experiences, as well as her frustrations, were heavily influenced by events happening outside of the classroom, including the fact that her need for money, both to pay for school and to live, requires that she works 25-30 hours a week as a janitor at a sub-urban mall.

DANIELLE: What do you think are the top three factors that contributed to you not doing as well as you wanted to in your classes?

Time. Time is one. That's one thing I can say. Like, I didn't give enough time in my studies . . . I did not give enough time in my studies. But that's because I didn't have the time.

Well, just drama, like, just drama at my house, and just like the situation. I mean, my family and, like, as stupid as it sounds, but with me jumping a lot with different houses, it really, it takes toll on your mind after a while, like, not having, like, one bed to sleep in. Like, it sounds really stupid. I mean, that sounds lame as hell, but–

Well, like, I don't know. To me, it just sounds like a bad reason not to, like, do good in school, but just jumping around and having to worry about, like, one month having the money for a Metra pass but then next month not hav-ing the money for a Metra pass, but then where am I going to stay, and not argue, you know? It was just – that's one thing I feel.

DANIELLE: So, time, family drama, and maybe money?

Yeah. That would be it. Well, I wouldn't even say the money, like, would affect the

So, how does a faculty member, who is wor-ried about time, money, family obligations, and the stress of day-to-day living, respond to these concerns in a student?

Worries about time and money con-verge for most students in an unavoidable catch-22: the absolute necessity of a job to pay for school and the time a job takes away from schoolwork. It's interesting to note that Jenelle doesn't really consider money to be a top stressor. "Money comes and goes, you know?" But neither does she consider it an option to *not* work, and it's the time commit-ment required of working that is, in her mind, the number one stressor.

Part-time work (fewer than 15 hours) on campus has been found to increase a student's chances of persisting. More hours, or work off campus, decrease these chances (Ishler and Upcraft 39). But on-campus work is not available for every-one, and most students, like Jenelle, need far more hours to barely scratch by.

It's tempting to see money as the cure-all for all attrition. However, even this isn't as simple as it looks. While more money probably would make a huge differ-ence for Jenelle, we heard too many other stories from other students for whom money was not the reason they were struggling. Moreover, retention scholars argue that it's not just a student's ability to pay for school that influences retention, but if a student believes that the cost *exceeds the benefits,* he

grades, because money comes and goes, you know?

DANIELLE: *But the stress from the money.*

Yeah. There you go. I would say number three stress, then. Yeah.

or she may decide to leave (Braxton and Hirschy 62).

The stressors that Jenelle names are fairly typical. At times, the stress she was under might have been different in degree, but not necessarily different in kind, than the stress that all of our students and our colleagues experience. Why does this stress prevent some people from succeeding, while others are able to manage? And to what extent can retention efforts deal with these factors?

Retention and Plain Bad Luck

So I wasn't, like, steady living at mom's house, but I was there most of the time now. And the first two weeks, we were just bickering. The third week, it was horrible. And then around that time, I got in the car accident. It was on a Wednesday night, and–I got in the car accident, and my parents, like, I don't know. They weren't focused on the car accident. They were focused on the neighborhood I was in. Which it wasn't–it was on 76th and State, and my house is on 87th. So, really, you know what I'm saying, you can't really bitch at me for that. You know? . . . Well, I go home, and my mom–I already called my parents when the accident happened. And I go home and I talk to my mom. I said I need–because she was holding $400 for me. She had $400 of my savings. And so I said I need $100 to get the car–to tow the car. When I got to the curb, she was gone. She went with her boyfriend and left the money on the table. Which right there, that kind of hurt my feelings because, if it was me and my

The story that Jenelle tells about the car accident illustrates perfectly the bewildering mess of issues that comprise the problem of retention: the family drama, again; unexpected expenses that eat into savings; missed days at work and school because of transportation; even access to technology (because of her work schedule and commute to school, she did not have enough time in the labs on campus to do homework; the laptop, a gift from her father, promised to be a real boost to her performance in school).

And all of this triggered by chance, an unlucky wrong-place-wrong-time occurrence. The car accident, for Jenelle, was a turning point, the point at which we saw her motivation, her self-confidence, and her energy levels drop precipitously. Up until that point, the Student Faculty Partnership for Success program had provided her a valuable support network, which, combined

daughter got into an accident, my ass would be waiting outside for her to come through that door. You know what I'm saying?

And then the next day, well, I got home to the house. After all this, got home to the house, and my mom goes, where's your laptop, that I just got that Tuesday before. This is Wednesday. I got it the week before on Tuesday. And I said, what? And she said, where's your laptop? And I said, you're taking away my laptop? And she goes, not me, your father.

The next day, I wake up to both my parents calling off of work. And I go outside, and my dad's there, and he sees my car, and I could see his whole face turn pale. And gets to where he about threw up. And I looked at him and said, at least I'm not dead. You know? That's all I could say. I didn't know what to say, you know? My car looked horrible. And he was just like, don't talk to me right now. And I said, OK, that's fine. I just walked away, and I came back about ten minutes later, and I said, well, what am I going to do about my car? And he looked at me, and his white face turned to red, and he started screaming at me, telling me how I'm fucking up my life, how he don't know what's going on in my head or what I'm doing. And I just–I, at that point, like, with the accident and everything, I had no energy. I had no reason to scream.

with her intelligence and wit and strong will, made all of us hopeful.

But there is no retention effort or well-intentioned faculty member or institutional program that could have prevented or predicted this accident.

And if Jenelle does not enroll in subsequent semesters, then she is left with no college degree and serious amounts of debt.[7] While her relationship with our college may dissipate, the consequences of the few months she was here could plague her for years.

There are a number of details in Jenelle's story that could be plotted as data points in a retention study: her high school GPA, her family background, her experience in the advising office, her relationship with faculty, her income, and so on. But there is very little in her story that tells us what we should do differently, as faculty or as institutions.

This conclusion is consistent with the retention scholarship at large. Tinto acknowledges that "while it can be said that we now know the broad dimensions of the process of student leaving, we know very little about a theory of action for student persistence" (Epilogue 317). We might be able to explain why some students leave and some succeed, and in some cases we might even be able to predict these outcomes with some degree of accuracy, but we still don't know what to do about it.

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7.   Jeffrey Williams writes very persuasively about the need for faculty to consider what we're teaching the next generation by requiring that they accumulate tremendous amounts of debt in order to attain a degree.

Conclusion: Retention and Writing Instruction

PEGEEN: So, you're not registered for classes this spring.

No, unfortunately.

PEGEEN: So, what's your plan?

Work and work.

DANIELLE: On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the most sure, how sure are you you're going to come back in the fall?

In the fall? I don't know. But how sure am I going to come back? Ten percent – or not 10 percent. [10, the most sure.]

DANIELLE: Ten. OK, on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the most sure, how sure are you that you're going to graduate from Columbia in the next five years?

7… I would say 10, but the thing is, I'm just not sure if I want to keep to music. You know. But I have to do something from Columbia, because I don't see myself being at any other college, so I have to pick some kind of degree to graduate, so 7 1/2, but we'll push it to 10, though, because I'm going to graduate eventually. [CHUCKLES] *Just eventually.*

But I do know for a fact that if I don't have my stuff together by the age of, like, 20 – I said 21, but I'm saying 20 – I'm going to the military. I already – I have no other option. And I figure 21 will be a good age, because by the time I serve four years, I'll still come out young, you know? I won't have any – I don't know. That's it.

And yet, we must continue to teach, knowing that there are other Jenelles in our classrooms (we should be so lucky!), and that every student deserves our best efforts.

The one factor in Jenelle's experiences that we don't discuss in the sections above is her time in our classrooms. This is the one factor that we *do* control, that we *can* predict, at least to some extent, with thoughtful lesson plans and assignment design.

We argue that the issue of retention should frame our thinking about pedagogy more than it currently does: What should our course goals be, when we consider that many of our students may never take another college class?

Our (tentative) response is that we need to stop thinking of our first-year courses, and especially basic writing courses (which are more likely to be populated by students who are at risk for dropping out), as *preparation* for further academic study. This is counterintuitive, we realize, because many first-year writing and basic writing pedagogies are grounded in the assumption that if only we give students a solid foundation (of basic skills, of critical thinking, of academic strategies), they will succeed.

However, in *The End of Composition Studies*, David W. Smit claims that "the evidence suggests that learners do not necessarily transfer the kinds of knowledge and skills they have learned previously to new

tasks" (119). So, the efficacy of designing courses that prepare students for success in future courses is questionable anyway.

But in the context of retention, keeping in mind students like Jenelle who may never take another college course—or who may graduate "just eventually"—it is even more important that we design courses that are meaningful for what they do *right now,* while they're in our classrooms.

At a 4Cs 2008 panel on retention, Tom Fox, in his comments afterward, put it succinctly: "participation, not preparation." We need to design courses that invite students to *participate* right now, in our classrooms, in consequential, engaging work that involves substantial writing and reading.

For example, at the end of Pegeen's class, as part of a final project, Jenelle and another student went to a local school and did a presentation to persuade the students not to join a gang. Jenelle and her classmate came up with this idea on their own, out of the conviction that other kids shouldn't have to go through what they did. Courses and assignments that provide students the opportunity to do meaningful work right now may not seem like the most obvious retention strategy. Retention is not the goal, though. Education is.

Epilogue

Though we don't see Jenelle as often since her first semester ended, we do still keep in contact with her. Initially, she had set up monthly visits with a counselor in the Office of Student Affairs. This relationship—coupled with Jenelle's bond with both Pegeen and Danielle—kept her connected to college life and to our institution, specifically.

A few months ago, Jenelle told us that she would be transferring to a local community college for the fall semester. She was having a very difficult time finding the financial resources to pay for college and, since the community college is considerably less expensive than our institution, this proved an impetus for change. Jenelle was happy that she would be able to continue school in downtown Chicago and that, thankfully, many of her credits would transfer.

Recently, Jenelle's circumstances—and, as a result, her short-term goals—have changed. She continues to live in an unstable home and has taken a second job in order to prepare for living independently. With a work schedule that extends beyond 40 hours a week, she has had little time to think about returning to school. As of now, she plans to take a few more semesters off and "maybe take a class or two" when she can.

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Danielle A. Cordaro

Composition, Deafness and Access in the Mainstream: Rhetoric and One Student's Reality

For most students, participation in postsecondary education is not limited to being physically present in a lecture hall. It is the possibility to ask questions, to discuss ideas with classmates, to have a critical conversation with professors about papers, to reflect upon readings, to explore the library, to have access to information in accessible formats at the same time as their non-disabled classmates, to work on a research project, to have coffee with friends, to participate at campus social and cultural events, and really take part in the college experience. A quality education is about coming away from each campus experience having gained knowledge about, and insight into, a wide variety of human experiences and disciplines. Most critically, it is about being able to do these things without the kind of hardship that exceeds that of the typical student during the postsecondary educational year. —National Council on Disability

IN THE LAST LARGE SCALE ACCOUNTING, STATISTICS SUGGEST THAT there are over 468,000 deaf or hard of hearing students enrolled in US colleges or universities (Schrodel, Watson, and Ashmore 67). However, an average of only 30% typically graduates (Smith 23). Lack of adequate accommodations might be one reason for such a high rate of attrition. West et. al, (464) report that students with disabilities who attend mainstream institutions report problems finding out about and accessing support services. Social dimensions of disability and difference may also be a factor. Deaf students, in particular, may feel extraordinary pressure to fit in and appear "normal." In *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness,* Brenda Jo Brueggemann reveals stories of deaf students' efforts to "pass" as hearing:

> Most memorable for me were stories of the students at the state university in town who refused to use the "services" offered to them by the university's Office of Disability Services—primarily because those services, either an interpreter, or, more often, the use of an FM audio loop system, prevented them from "passing" one way (culturally) even as it jeopardized them passing (academically) in another. (38)

Then, there is the English issue. Many deaf individuals' first language is American Sign Language (ASL), not English. For these deaf students, English is a second language; they will likely struggle with grammar and the conventions of academic writing more than their hearing peers. Clearly, deaf and hard of hearing students new to mainstream colleges and universities are challenged in ways that hearing students are not.

In the fall semester of 2006, Michael[1] , a deaf first-year student, enrolled in Purdue's four-credit first- year composition course, English 106. Within the first week of school, his teacher informed him it was very unlikely that he would pass the course at his current level of English proficiency. Through a series of events I will explain later in detail, I became Michael's private, paid tutor. I was interested in learning about the Deaf community and thought tutoring a deaf student would be a good way to begin to understand it firsthand. Unexpectedly, tutoring Michael taught me more about the reality—and rhetoric—of the mainstream than that of the deaf community.

Before we started working together, I saw Michael as an opportunity to satisfy my curiosity, make some extra money, and perhaps do some research on a subject that was interesting . However, the nature of ongoing one-on-one tutoring made it impossible for me to think of him so abstractly and instrumentally. After long hours of discussing this or that grammar problem in an essay, Michael and I would drift into talking about other things. Michael liked to chat about his latest girlfriend, the party he went to last night, difficulties he was facing in his classes. I complained about my colleagues, my family, and my dissertation. The necessity of working so closely on skills and documents for which the stakes were very high produced a special kind of camaraderie between us. Michael was no longer just someone I wanted to study or educate; he was someone I knew.

As time went on, I became more aware of all Michael had to do in order to navigate everyday life at Purdue. During after-session chats, Michael talked about how he tried, and sometimes failed, to participate in university life. We talked about how he communicated with hearing people when an interpreter wasn't available, about the role school-provided auxiliary aids like interpreters and assistive technology played in his life. We talked about how (and how well) his teachers coped with having a deaf student in class. We talked about what was rewarding about living at Purdue and what was frustrating. Through Michael, I began to understand why so many deaf students choose to attend deaf institutions, and importantly, why Michael did not.

Through my association with Michael, I became interested in how composition teachers, tutors, and administrators can learn to make our courses and programs more acces-

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1. Michael is a pseudonym. Some details about this student that are unrelated to the research have been changed to protect his identity.

sible to the deaf. I decided I wanted to try to write an article about the challenges deaf students face in mainstream universities and in composition specifically. When I presented my idea to Michael after a tutoring session one day, he agreed to become my informant and to share his account of being accommodated at Purdue. Though certainly not an archetype or generalizable case, I hope Michael's experiences give other compositionists insight into what constrains and empowers us to make our campuses, our classrooms, and the English language more accessible.

In order to serve all students with more compassion and justice, we must become more knowledgeable about how the rhetorics of disability law and our own goals as teachers, tutors, and administrators impact deaf students' realities. To that end, I first review the rhetoric of current civil rights legislation and discuss how it has conditioned those in mainstream higher education to think and act. Next, I relay information from my interviews with Michael and detail how he was accommodated in writing courses at Purdue. In this section, I include the perspectives of Purdue faculty and staff who are involved in composition and disability services. Finally, I discuss and problematize recent scholarship on instructional responses to deaf students in mainstream composition.

Rhetoric: Civil Rights Legislation, "Immediate Communication," and Literacy

Two laws are relevant to deaf and disabled students in post-secondary education, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Section 504 indicates that in programs that receive federal funding, people with disabilities who are "otherwise qualified" cannot be discriminated against. When the program is a course in a college or university and the person protected by the law is a student, "otherwise qualified" means that the student is "one who meets the academic and technical standards requisite for enrollment in the course" (Bergstahler 23). They must not be denied any benefits of programs that others receive (Thomas 249). Title II of the ADA, more recent legislation, echoes Section 504 in specifying that no public entity, including colleges and universities, may bar the participation of, refuse benefits to, or otherwise discriminate against to otherwise qualified individuals because of a disability (42 USC 12182).

Discrimination comes in many forms. Denying a student who meets admission standards enrollment because of a disability is an obvious form of discrimination. A more subtle form is refusing to make reasonable alterations to the environment to make it accessible. For deaf students, altering the environment may mean providing services or auxiliary aids that are specifically tailored to their individual disabilities. A Department of Justice regulation to Title III of the ADA (28 CFR Sec.36.303 1994) includes recommendations that help protect

deaf students' right to "appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to ensure effective communication." Aids in the regulation for deaf and hard of hearing individuals can include:

> [q]ualified interpreters, notetakers, computer-aided transcription services, written materials, telephone handset amplifiers, assistive listening systems, telephones compatible with hearing aids, closed caption decoders, open and closed captioning, telecommunication devices for deaf persons [TTYs], videotext displays, or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments. (28 CFR 36.303)

While these protections make minimal participation in classroom life possible for deaf college students, the ADA and its regulations apply only to those accommodations that enable immediate communication. This means that deaf or hard-of- hearing students have the option of receiving sound amplification, so they can hear English words; transcriptions of speech, so they can read English words; or a sign language interpreter, so that they can receive and deliver content in their native language. While undoubtedly necessary, these services are information delivery systems; they are not meant to foster literacy in English, the language of the mainstream. Tutoring and other academic support services that improve English literacy for deaf people over the long term are considered personal study aids, not accommodations or auxiliary aids and are thus not covered under the law.

Though the ADA protects certain rights of deaf and disabled people in schools and workplaces, it is not "an entitlement program" that requisitions funds for academic support services (Gordon and Keiser 4). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1974 does guarantee academic support for children with certain kinds of disabilities from elementary through secondary school. This may lead some deaf students to expect the same kinds of services when they get to college. However, ADA does not protect adults' rights to academic support services. Gordon and Keiser explain that the ADA was not designed primarily as educational reform. They indicate that it is civil rights legislation generally aimed at protecting people from discrimination in the workplace and in other public spaces. Thus, it is not aimed at helping them "succeed" (5):

> . . . accommodations should not give a person an advantage over other employees for long-term hiring, promotions, or other job-related benefits. The intent of the [ADA] law . . . was to level the playing field, not tilt it. And, without a doubt, it was not designed to guarantee that the disabled individual find success on the job or during educational training. It is an outcome-neutral law that simply ensures that an individual with a disability will not be prevented from competing with others as long as he or she meets the same qualifications. (5)

While Gordon and Keiser are not alone in their interpretation of the law, there is considerable controversy over the notion of the "level playing field" among those involved in rhetoric and composition and disability studies.

Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel critique the idea of the level playing field in their article "A New Visibility: An Argument for Alternative Assistance Writing Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities." Using the legal definitions provided by criminal law professor H. Richard Uviller, they argue that there are actually two notions of fairness inherent in the idea of the level playing field. The first ". . . emerges from the free interaction of the competing interests of the parties in a neutral arena" (Uviller qtd. in Fendley and Hamel 517). The second, less traditional idea can be understood as "the conscious judgment of immersed and thoughtful people as to how the interests of both parties are [best] served" (Uviller qtd. in Fendley and Hamel 517). Uvller uses the example of speeding ambulances and fire trucks to illustrate the second definition. We tolerate transgressions of ordinary law or practice because it is ultimately beneficial to everyone. In the same vein, we allow disabled students to have services that are denied to others because it ultimately benefits everyone for students with disabilities to participate meaningfully in education and, later, as working, productive members of society.

The conservative position, on the other hand, is predicated on the notion that a "neutral arena" exists, or that by judicious action, we can bring it into existence. This position assumes that bodily and cultural differences can be ameliorated, reduced, erased, by granting people with disabilities just enough and just the right kind of services or alterations to normal practice, and no more. In the case of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, the law recognizes the need for interpreters only for immediate communication. In Chapter 2 of *Lend Me You Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness*, Brenda Jo Brueggemann proposes that for Deaf students in mainstream colleges and universities whose native language is ASL, much more than immediate basic communication is necessary for active, embodied participation in university life.

> "assumes that bodily and cultural differences can be ameliorated, reduced, erased, by granting people with disabilities just enough"

Brueggemann argues that there are two types of literacy, "literacy for communication" and "literacy for language." Literacy for communication represents "the 'product' of literacy," which in classical rhetorical language includes "style, delivery, memory,

pronunciation, tone, gestures, diction, etc." and which we now understand as "punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and penmanship." According to Brueggemann, the goal of literacy for communication is "the appearance of the product itself, and [the] ability to convey information 'accurately'" (120). Literacy for language, on the other hand, allows a person to communicate more than just "accurately"; he or she is able to engage with others about his or her "thoughts, morals, and ethics, both his own and those of the community, nation or culture at large. Here literacy is a process, a means of exchange and change, a way of belonging to a place and a people—a language" (120). While Brueggemann recognizes both literacy for communication and language as "worthy goals," she asserts that literacy for communication has been so emphasized in the field of deaf education that it obscures the need for, or even the existence of, literacy for language. I agree with that sentiment and add that it is true also of mainstream education. Literacy for communication, what we in composition now call "lower order concerns" or the "mechanics" of English, is equated with the basic requirements for intellectual life. Deaf students who arrive on campus without literacy for communication—or language—are at a competitive disadvantage on the "level playing field" espoused in the ADA.

The field of mainstream higher education is not level for students who are deaf, particularly those who are not comfortable or proficient with using English. Like other English as Second Language (ESL) students, deaf students who enroll in mainstream institutions usually have the necessary grades and intelligence to accomplish whatever academic goals they may be pursuing; yet in order to be "otherwise qualified" for programs within colleges and universities and on the job, they must quickly develop literacy for communication and language. Deaf students must engage individually with teachers, tutors, and administrators to devise plans for English language learning on their own and usually, because these services are not protected under the ADA, without legal, school, or financial support. In effect, deaf ESL students in mainstream institutions are forced into the position of having to ask for and rely on the charity of individuals because the ADA does not recognize English literacy training as necessary for active, engaged participation in university life.

In the next section, I will return to Michael and his reality. I will attempt to describe how Michael is learning to write in English at Purdue University. To contextualize his experience, I also present information from interviews I conducted with administrators, faculty, and staff involved with composition and disability services about their opinions and general practices at Purdue. As I indicated earlier, my goal is not to provide a generalizable case, but to represent one occasion where the rubber of legal and institutional rhetoric met the road of instructional reality for a deaf student.

Reality: Michael's Experience at Purdue

Michael describes himself as a typical Purdue undergraduate. He works hard to stay ahead in his classes, but somehow finds time to date, socialize, and party on the weekend. He wants to be a lawyer and is currently taking courses in sociology and criminology. In an interview, I asked whether or not he sees himself as disabled[2] :

> Disability is a harsh word to me because the term defines the meaning that can be misjudged by people. Unfortunately, some people can be easily ignorant believing kinds of people who fit into that category of disability are unable to function in the community. For me, I prefer to be called deaf because I do not want to assign into a category that defines all different issues with people such as blind, wheelchair, etc. Yes, I am like other deaf and hard of hearing students need to have special access such as interpreters, Typewells[3] , etc in mainstream college. I wish everyone could look at the definition of disability differently rather than just helpless people in their world. Since I was a kid, I convinced myself that I am different (such as something's wrong with me) than them, but then I realized that we are all different. It is just a labeling that affects how we perceive and judge and treat others. I see myself as a student with a lot of potentials at Purdue University. Purdue is the place I can get a better opportunity for my future than I can find in other place. On the other hand, I do still struggle with accomplish my goals while I have some people labeling me as disability because that's all what they can understand.

> Clearly, Michael does not see himself as disabled, but being at Purdue sometimes makes it hard for him to feel that way. "I love it at Purdue, no doubt about that," Michael said, "but Purdue sometimes makes me feel like I'm disability in their eyes . . . I don't get same access as everyone does at here."

> Michael indicated that he sometimes feels as though people feel sorry for him or don't know how to behave around him at Purdue. During an interview, he indicated that he knows and socializes with a few deaf or hard-of-hearing students on campus, but that most of his friends and his girlfriend are hearing. At some point early in his life, Michael learned to speak very few words in English, but he does not use oral speech to communicate. He said he has some ability to read lips, but it isn't very reliable. During our tutorials and the inter-

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2. I have used Michael's words and have not corrected his grammar, but at his request I have corrected spelling. Michael and all the other individuals quoted in this article have had an opportunity to review the sections where they are quoted and to make corrections or amendments.

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3. TypeWell is a transcription service that employs a trained stenographer who uses specialized computer software to produce transcripts of classroom lectures and discussions. TypeWell transcripts are detailed but not verbatim; they are edited by a trained specialist before being sent electronically to the student.

views conducted for this article, Michael and I used computers and a combination of Microsoft Word and AOL Instant Messenger to converse.

Michael indicates that his girlfriend sometimes translates for him at parties and other social events where a university-appointed translator is not available. However, Michael must get around without his girlfriend, a computer, or a translator for a significant part of the day. In these cases, he relies on texting on his cell phone, a Sidekick™, to help him communicate. But as he indicates below, that method of communication is not perfect either:

> In my freshman year at Purdue University, I had no problem talking with everyone by typing down in my phone to communicate. After one year being here, I feel like I am a robot because I do not look directly at people's face, but at my phone or their phone. I appreciate their trying to communicate with me, but I have noticed that they are easily getting frustrated to communicate with me through our phones. They are sometimes lazy to inform me of everything or trying to learn more sign language to communicate better with me. My girlfriend is an amazing signer, but I sometimes wish I could not look at her as my interpreter when we are hangout with the crowd. I am getting sick of using my phone all the time with people.

Though Michael describes himself as very social, he says the language barrier gets in the way of forming deep friendships with hearing people. "I do have a lot of friends but I'm not that close to them because they kinda get lazy after first time or a few times they meet me. When I'm at partying–easier communicate is playing beer pong or playing cards."

Michael said life in the classroom can also make him feel disabled. It is occasionally difficult for him to participate in classes because the auxiliary aids the university provides are not always reliable. Interpreters, notetakers and TypeWell stenographers are human beings, and sometimes they are late or absent. When this happens, Michael is unable to participate by speaking or receiving audio content, and he misses out on class discussion. Even when things go well and his auxiliary aids are in place, Michael explained that ASL interpretation is an inexact science. Michael stated that:

> In classes, I do not want to ask a question or comment because my interpreter sometimes do not understand me that well because they are not familiar with topics in classes. Another problem occurred; I have a lot of different interpreters popped in and out of my classes. With this method confused interpreters and they tend to ask me all about material in the class before it starts so they have an idea what it is going to be about. I also had to study a lot more time than most people would normally do for exams.

This is especially true in courses that require writing. As I indicated at the start of the article, Michael began attending Purdue in the fall semester of 2006 and, like most other

freshmen, enrolled in Purdue's four-credit introductory composition course, English 106. Purdue also offers English 108, a three credit accelerated option for those who wish to enroll in a faster-paced, more challenging class. As is the case at most other universities, one of the two composition courses offered is required for graduation. In an interview, Rick Johnson-Sheehan, director of (ICaP) from 2005-2008 described the goals of Purdue's composition courses for undergraduates:

> . . . to teach [students] to write better than they did when they got here and write in ways that are especially suitable for college purposes, but then also write in ways that that are transferable to a future career in some way [. . .] there are also a lot of issues of how to do research, how to write clearly, how to work in multimedia environments. I'd like to think that students are getting a particular genre set that's transferable across classes [. . .] I'd like to think they're gaining a critical awareness of culture and how culture influences how they think and how they behave in this world in some sense. If I could wrap it all up, I've always believed that we're training students for excellence in some way, to be excellent people, or high quality people and so I believe it starts here at the university level.

As a former instructor in the program, I can say that Johnson-Sheehan's description of it feels right. Excellence at Purdue is expected, especially academically. The program expects that students will already have basic proficiency in English and will have some experience writing essays. Currently, no basic writing course is available in Purdue's composition program.

When Michael first enrolled in English 106 as a freshman, he was informed by his teacher that he was not meeting the course's standard for English proficiency. Michael says he didn't realize how much he needed to work on his English skills. He had attended a high school for the deaf, where he indicates he did not learn much about English or composition:

> I took literature classes in my high school with normal required such as required essay and reading. I used sparknotes.com to understand better what I read. No teacher had sat down with me and informed me that my English was poorly. All I heard was how excellent student I am. I received all A's in my literature classes. No one told me if I wanted to be in reality (being in mainstream college, getting a job that wasn't teacher career in deaf school) that I had to improve my English language to be prepared for it. I had no information to be prepared for real world because the school I attended primarily used American Sign Language as their main language.

English 106 was a reality check for Michael. He indicated his composition instructor "pointed out how my English skills was that bad and I have to improve on it at first if I am planning to be a lawyer." He and his teacher, in conjunction with the program's WPA and Janie Fischbach, Auxiliary Services Coordinator at Purdue's Disability Resource Center,

decided that he should take the course once as "practice" (i.e. for no credit) and repeat it the following summer for a grade.

Michael feels that his experiences taking English 106 benefitted him in terms of learning what we would call the higher order concerns, including how to do research, use sources honestly, and organize an argument. However, Michael said he thinks there wasn't enough discussion of grammar in his English 106 courses. "ENGL 106 isn't really helping me that much although I learned a lot from it. I just really need to study more on its grammar structure and preposition. I do get everything in simple, basic language, but not in advanced writing." For help learning grammar and mechanics, Michael has relied on me, his tutor, since his first run at English 106.

As I discussed in the section on the law and accommodation in universities, tutoring is considered a personal study aid and is, therefore, not covered under the ADA. Under typical circumstances, Michael would have had to recruit, vet, and pay for his own tutor. But through a series of unusual, though by no means accidental, events, Michael's tutoring was provided at no cost to him. As at most large public universities, Purdue has an office whose sole responsibility is to ensure that students who have disabilities are protected from discrimination. The office arranges to provide the accommodations that ensure equal access to the campus environment. At Purdue, this office is called the Disability Resource Center (DRC). It is staffed by experts in disability law, service coordinators, assistive technology specialists, as well as professionals specializing in specific disabilities. The DRC is where students with disabilities make arrangements for classroom accommodations and auxiliary aids. To do so, they must provide the office with professional documentation of their disability. Once the DRC has received and processed a student's documentation, a program specialist meets with each student to determine which classroom accommodations and/or auxiliary aids are appropriate.

Michael has kept in contact with Fischbach, his Auxilliary Services Coordinator at the DRC, letting her know about his progress in courses. When Michael's instructor told him he was failing his first attempt at English 106, he spoke to Fischbach. Together, they decided he would need intensive help learning to write in English and came to the conclusion that private tutoring was the appropriate choice. According to Fischbach, private tutoring is the best option for some students:

> I'm a firm believer in individual tutors. Since writing is required in most college
> classes and in most job situations, it's a skill that students must cultivate in order to
> be successful. If a student has a disability that interferes with his/her learning to
> write effectively, then I think the student should have access to a writing center or
> an individual tutor. Unfortunately, the University does not fund individual tutors for

any student, and the Writing Lab does not have the personnel or resources to provide consistent one-on-one service over an extended period of time.

The Writing Lab, where I also work as a tutor, provides individual tutoring sessions, a world-famous online writing lab, conversation groups for ESL students, workshops for students and instructors, a grammar hotline, and general help available via email. According to Tammy Conard-Salvo, Acting Director of the Purdue Writing Lab, the "underlying purpose [of the Lab] has always been to help any writer at any stage of the writing process with any writing project." This does not mean the lab can offer unlimited help to students. Currently, Lab policy is that a student may receive two half-hour tutoring sessions per week. The reasoning, according to Conard-Salvo, is that

> . . . restricting students to two appointments per week ensures that some students don't monopolize appointments and that we allow as many students as possible to have access to the Writing Lab. This policy has been in place since before I started in 2003. Personally, I'm inclined to continue this practice because, pedagogically speaking, students need time to revise. Simply coming in for as many sessions for as long as possible doesn't encourage students to make changes, reflect, go back, etc.

From my experience working as a tutor in the Lab, I can also say that the policy helps to discourage students from coming in simply to have their papers edited. As Condard-Salvo implies, limiting the time tutors spend with each client encourages them to listen, participate, and ask questions during the tutorial and to apply their new knowledge on their own. Ideally, during their first session, students will come with a paper, discover through working with a tutor one or two things they can work on by themselves and return a few days later to review their progress with a tutor. However, some students will return the second time having attempted nothing on their own, and wanting the tutor to edit the paper line-by-line. The policy is meant to prevent this kind of behavior and encourage independence.

However, some students, particularly those who are learning English as a second language, may benefit from more frequent or longer tutoring sessions. A tutor can support the acquisition of language more robustly if he or she is frequently available to communicate with beginning ESL students about problems or questions they may have. Longer tutoring sessions allow for more in-depth explanations of difficult grammar concepts, both using drills and in the context of students' own writing. Also, depending on where beginning students are in their acquisition of English, it may take a long time for tutors to

" it may take a long time for tutors to discover what students are trying to express"

discover what students are trying to express and to help them learn how to clarify and reorganize sentences. Thus, for some students, working with an individual tutor who can spend several hours a week with them makes the most sense.

I don't want to give the impression that the Writing Lab is unfriendly to ESL students or students with disabilities. In fact, the Lab's staff has worked hard to make the Purdue Online Writing Lab compliant with current screen reading technology for blind and low-vision visitors. The staff is also currently working on a guide to tutoring students with writing-related learning disabilities. The Lab does offer longer tutorials to students who ask for it as an accommodation. There does, however, seem to be some confusion on how the Lab should handle such accommodations. As Conard-Salvo pointed out to me in an interview, the Lab does not require students to disclose a disability in order to receive accommodations like longer appointments. Instead, all potential clients are asked during their first visit whether they want to request accommodations. Using the word "accommodations," Conard-Salvo indicated, is a strategic move. Students who have worked with the DRC are likely to be familiar with the term while others are not. According to Conard-Salvo, this method is meant to protect disabled students' privacy, while preventing those who "shouldn't be receiving accommodations from somehow getting around our strict system of half an hour appointments."

Clearly, there are problems associated with this way of providing accommodations. Some clients who have disabilities might miss the subtle cue or be unfamiliar with the term "accommodation." Others might be unaware that requesting a longer tutorial is an accommodation the Lab offers. Further, students who don't have a documented disability, like ESL students, might also benefit from longer tutorials. I believe what the Lab is striving for is a policy on tutorial length that is fair to everyone and workable for the staff. Currently, the Lab is surveying staff and clients to determine how well the half-hour tutorial policy is working in practice. My guess is that, though the staff believes in its goal of fostering independence through shorter tutorials, it isn't working particularly well for everyone, especially ESL students in the early stages of acquiring English.

In most cases at Purdue, if students with disabilities decide that the Writing Lab does not offer enough support, they are on their own to find and pay for private tutors. However, according to Fischbach, some students with disabilities are clients of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), a federal agency "whose mission is to enable students with disabilities to become employed in their chosen fields." Fischbach explained that if students choose colleges or universities within their home states, the VR offices in those states may choose to pick up the cost of private tutoring. In these cases, it is usually up to the students to recruit their own tutors and arrange for payment through VR. Michael's case is different from that of the average deaf student at Purdue. First, he received funds for private tutoring from his home state's

VR office, in spite of the fact that he decided to attend an out-of-state school. According to Fischbach, this is very unusual and was the result of negotiations between herself and Michael's VR counselor. Second, Fischbach decided to take it upon herself to recruit and vet a private tutor for him, a job I later found out she was not required nor paid to do. She took on this extra responsibility because she feels that some deaf students learn English more successfully when they are matched with an English tutor with whom they can form a long-term working relationship. Thus, it was through Fischbach's extra efforts that I was employed as his private tutor.

I was not sure where to begin with helping Michael make sense of English when I became his tutor in 2006. His sentences were not only jumbled, they often lacked both a subject and a verb. He rarely used prepositions or articles. He also had a tough time deciding where adjectives and adverbs should go. As he explains below, Michael was struggling with the disconnect between ASL and English:

> . . . Sign language is body language and it has different grammar structure. It is very simple language without any important details such as article, preposition, etc. I grew up in mainstream school–I read a lot and it helped, but then I moved to deaf school where English is not used often. Not a lot of people encouraged deaf students to learn English—in my mainstream [elementary] school, they put me in special education and then at deaf school, they cherished deaf culture and American Sign Language. No one tells us that we have to study more on English skills or that our English skills were that bad. I thought my English skills was fine until I came to Purdue. I realized how bad my English is.

When I met Michael in 2006, I was a novice at tutoring students who were not native speakers of English. I was not a linguist or a grammarian. I did not know how (or how much) to comment on his essays. The result was that at first I often supplied him with whole sentences instead of helping him make his own. I knew from the training I was receiving as a Writing Lab tutor that this was not good practice and that we would have to address grammar more directly.

We started by reading *Grammar for Dummies* together. I explained to Michael that he was not the dummy, I was. I knew many of the "rules," or "how" of grammar, but I had a hard time answering Michael's "why" questions. Reading *Dummies* gave Michael the language of grammar and me strategies for answering his questions. We also spent time looking at and completing grammar exercises on a number of ESL websites, including the Purdue Online Writing Lab (*http://owl.english.purdue.edu*), World English (www.world-english.org), and Gallaudet's English Works Website (*http://depts.gallaudet.edu/englishworks*). Completing these exercises helped us both to understand more about syntax. We worked first on subject and

verb and then moved on to objects. Once Michael understood that these elements made up a sentence, he started looking for the subject-verb-object (S-V-O) pattern in his everyday life. He would often bring snippets of text, usually from ads, and we would discuss why they were (or were not) grammatical. Soon the S-V-O pattern started showing up in his own sentences without too much effort. At that point, his writing improved dramatically, and our tutorials became much more fruitful. We were able to tackle Michael's tendency to add multiple strings of prepositional phrases, adjectives and adverbs to sentences that were already complete. Michael explained to me that in sign language, it's easy to add many descriptors, actors, and actions in a single thought, and that the grammar for combining them is significantly different to that of English. Once he had the basic pattern for English sentences down, we could talk about what grammatical elements of his sentences were "extra." Now we're concentrating on sussing out adjectives. Adjectives can be difficult to identify because they can look just like nouns. It's hard for Michael to decide which noun-like thing is a real noun and which one just describes. Vocabulary is also a challenge. Michael admits he needs to "read a lot more carefully," with a dictionary to expand his vocabulary and continue to get a feel for English syntax.

One thing I think both of us still struggle with is time. Michael is stretched incredibly thin in terms of his time and his energy. Yet, he feels he doesn't do enough to stay ahead. "I know that I have to work harder on my own. The problem I'm too busy with studying and writing the papers and hangout with my girlfriend. [. . .] The result, I haven't accomplish anything that much." Having known Michael for almost three years, I can say that he is by no means lazy, and that he has in fact accomplished a lot. When he writes for class, he starts weeks ahead of time to ensure that his essays meet the instructor's guidelines and communicate exactly what he means to say. One thing I have noticed in these latter days is that Michael's conversational English is so much improved that I hardly ever need to ask for clarification. Yet when he writes papers for courses, he feels pressured and inadequate, like his own way of saying something isn't enough. Michael says that he has the "ability to understand the textbooks and readings, but when to write it down–I have the picture in my head, not words by words." He often tries to paraphrase the words of people he regards as experts, but the result is usually very confusing, both for him and for me. The old errors crop up, and it can be difficult for me to understand what he is trying to say. These days I feel more like a coach and, admittedly, sometimes an editor, rather than a tutor. I encourage him not to rely on the words of others, but to try to say it his own way. But it's hard for Michael to relax and just say what he means because he is aware that academic English exists and that he does not have access to it yet. Using the words of others seems safer.

Revising our Rhetoric, Redesigning Reality

Michael's story is important not because it enacts truisms about deafness or disability, but because it shows how the rhetoric of the level playing field conditioned what happened at Purdue and what we continue to allow to happen, in our classrooms, our tutoring sessions, and our writing programs. Many of Michael's experiences at Purdue are demonstrations of what Jay Dolmage refers to as "retrofit" responses to disability: "To retrofit is to add a component or accessory to something that has already been manufactured or built. This retrofit does not necessarily make the product function, does not necessarily fix a faulty product, but acts as a sort of correction" (20). A pedagogical retrofit is an attempt to make up for or work around an educational setting designed for the "average" white, middle-class American student. Dolmage argues that the retrofit is a "level-playing-field response to disability," a way to preserve the notion that everyone "otherwise qualified" can aspire to compete in the mainstream. In short, the retrofit implies that the mainstream can (and should) remain unchanged and unchanging.

While I agree with Dolmage in principle, I argue that the retrofit can sometimes be the only response available to educators. Examples include the reactions of Michael's teacher, DRC specialist, and the ICaP WPA to Michael's first attempt at English 106. If the instructor had wanted to, she could have allowed Michael to continue through the course without consulting him or the WPA. He would undoubtedly have failed. The WPA and the DRC specialist could have supported the instructor's decision. That outcome would have been "fair" according to the principles of the level playing field. After all, Purdue abided by the recommendations of the ADA and provided Michael with an interpreter and other auxiliary aids that help to "ensure effective communication." His failure might have been interpreted by all concerned as the result of a deficiency in "skills," a deficiency for which other "basic writers" in English 106 do not receive extra consideration. Instead of capitulating to the rhetoric of the level playing field, the individuals involved made another choice. They decided that a retrofit, allowing Michael to take the English for no credit and then repeat it, was more "fair" because it allowed him to gain needed practice composing in English before he was required to perform for a grade. Michael's tutoring might also be regarded as a retrofit. His home VR office easily could have refused to give him funds for tutoring because he decided to go to a university outside his home state. Fischbach was not required to help Michael find and vet his tutor. Yet, an individual tutor was clearly what he needed.

Dolmage argues that retrofitting is a reaction to diversity that becomes necessary when an institution has not planned adequately for the arrival of students with disabilities (20). I would argue that this is especially the case when, as at Purdue, an institution superficially espouses diversity by recruiting and admitting diverse students and then does little to

educate the university community or provide services beyond those specifically recommended by the ADA. The main problem with instructional retrofits such as the one I just described is that they rely on individual educators, administrators, and disability specialists' individual commitments to diversity, sometimes in the face of an institutional culture that works in the other direction. The retrofit is an individual or small-group decision affecting only one or a few students. In Michael's case, some of the acts of retrofitting I observed seemed shrouded in secrecy, as though those involved wanted to protect him, and perhaps themselves, from accusations that he received academic charity. As Dolmage points out, acts of retrofitting are seen as charity in academia (22); I argue that this is especially true in a university culture that accepts nothing but the most conservative notion of fairness on the level playing field.

> "creating educational environments that are maximally accessible to a widely diverse population of students"

While it is perhaps difficult for instructors, tutors, and WPAs to quickly and directly influence university culture, they can affect the culture of their own classrooms, writing centers, and programs by adopting and popularizing principles of universal design for instruction. According to the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, universal design is an outgrowth of the barrier-free and disability rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Initially, the goal of universal designers was to ensure that products and physical spaces were maximally useable by a widely diverse population. Since the turn of the millennium, however, universal design has made its way into pedagogy. Universal design in instructional contexts means creating educational environments that are maximally accessible to a widely diverse population of students.

A good place to go to begin learning about universal design for instruction is Sheryl E. Burgstahler and Rebecca C. Cory's edited collection, Universal Design for Higher Education. Some approaches that reoccur throughout that resource and which are defined in the first two chapters that are specifically relevant to deaf and hard of hearing students include delivering course content visually in a digital format, providing closed captioned video (5), allowing multiple means of participation in group work (e.g. in-person or internet communication) (31), allowing students to show competence in multiple ways (30), giving all students adequate time to complete work for class (31), and including course content that reflects a diverse population of students (16). Burgstahler also advises instructors to publicize early on what the content of courses will be and to stick to the syllabus (34). This helps all students know what is happening in class, especially those who have to arrange for interpreters or

other services ahead of time. Being transparent about grading and specific requirements for the course also makes it easier for students to select the courses that work best for them and to talk to instructors about accommodations if needed. Finally, Burgstahler urges instructors to familiarize themselves with how to arrange for accommodations at their institution (34).

All of these suggestions are relatively easy for instructors in composition to apply, but it is unlikely that they will become widely adopted and persistent in a writing program unless the WPA makes it an initiative. WPAs should think about how they can encourage instructors and tutors to implement universal design approaches in instruction. One way to increase awareness of how courses and tutorials can be designed more universally is to invite speakers from an institution's disability resource center to speak at departmental meetings or instructor or tutor training sessions. Once per year or semester may not be enough. These disability professionals often have helpful tips for instructors and tutors about how they can make the "mainstream" educational environment more equitable, accessible, and comfortable for all students.

Although the language of universal design is that it is supposed to "benefit people of all . . . abilities," it important to understand that even the most perceptive, committed instructor or tutor is incapable of foreseeing every need. Likewise, every need is not necessarily satisfied through universal design. For example, though universal design principles ask us to anticipate that some students, including those who use ASL as a first language, may have difficulty using English, we cannot prescribe a single method of helping those students gain literacy for language. A student's specific issues with language must be addressed with targeted, individualized approaches. Instructors encountering deaf students should understand that they will have different experiences using written English; not all students will require the same kind of instruction Michael received. Opening a dialogue with individual students on how and what they were taught about English and writing in the past is a good starting point in determining what learning approaches will be most effective.

WPAs should anticipate that they will need to provide support to instructors or tutors who are working with deaf or hard-of-hearing students for the first time. First, instructors and tutors should know how to communicate appropriately with deaf students. Many instructors don't know that they should speak to and make eye contact with deaf students, not their interpreters. Second, instructors might benefit from individual consultations with disability resource specialists on how they can make their classrooms more deaf friendly. WPAs can be an important link between such offices and instructors and tutors. Third, an inexperienced teacher or tutor can be overwhelmed by the writing of some deaf or hard-of-hearing students, leading them (like me) to edit or take on too much responsibility for their texts. It makes sense to schedule several ESL training sessions throughout the semester and to offer individ-

ual consultations with those instructors or tutors who feel they need more preparation. Finally, WPAs should keep copies of recent scholarship on deaf students in mainstream composition on hand for instructors and tutors. Rebecca Day Babcock's "Tutoring Deaf Students in the Writing Center" and Brenda Jo Brueggemann's *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* are useful resources on this subject.

It is not possible for compositionists to solve all of the problems or address all of the injustices inherent in the current rhetoric of disability law or its interpretation on college campuses. It is also impossible to bestow literacy, for language or communication, on the deaf students who choose to enter the mainstream. It should not be our responsibility to devise retrofits, but our belief in social justice will call upon us to do so. Universal design holds some promise, though as I indicated, it, too, cannot level the field so that things like English literacy in academia no longer matter. In order for things to change, really change, colleges and universities as whole entities must enact diversity, not just espouse it. Compositionists can participate in this change by being open about the challenges intrinsic to learning English as a second language, about the retrofits they have made for ESL and/or deaf students, and their attempts to design courses and programs using universal design. We should be vocal about such issues when we participate in student and faculty senate meetings. Our programs, courses, and tutorials should demonstrate to our colleagues around the university what the liberal interpretation of fairness can mean in practice. Finally, and most importantly, we can participate in this change most meaningfully when we listen to students. The act of listening to, though not necessarily hearing, what students have to say allows us to make the changes that matter, not as an act of charity, but as a political enactment of the liberal ideal of fairness.

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Robin Murray

Giving a Voice to Nature in the Postmodern Composition Classroom:
Or, What Can Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory and Ecocriticism/Ecocomposition Teach At-Risk Students?

Introduction—Why Ecofeminist Eco-Composition?

MY TURN TOWARD A POSTMODERN FEMINIST ECO-COMPOSITION sprung from experiences teaching two populations of at-risk students at an open-admissions college in Oklahoma: Native Americans and returning nontraditional women students. Students at Southeastern Oklahoma State University entered from a variety of backgrounds—"homes" according to ecologists, who translate ecology as the study of homes. Admission requirements differ according to categories aligning with these different "homes," from traditional first-year to non-traditional first-year, transfer, returning, non-degree seeking, and concurrent students. Although an ACT requirement is included in the criteria for each category, all students also have the option to take and pass remedial courses to fulfill testing or GPA requirements. During my tenure there, at least a third of the students were Native American, mainly Choctaw and primarily assimilated into mainstream Euro-American culture. At least a quarter of the students were nontraditional women who were returning to college after marriage and families, usually after divorces in this buckle of the Bible belt. Most of them came to Southeastern with a will to learn but a limited repertoire of knowledge on which to draw. They also came with a desire to change their situation and, to a certain extent, that of other Native Americans and/or exploited women around them.

Many students at Southeastern enroll in classes to find a new beginning and overcome various forms of oppression. All of these students benefit from an approach to composition instruction that encourages coming to voice, giving an activist edge to composition instruction, helping involve students in the intersections of discourses that compete within Western culture and helping them situate themselves in order to find ways to exercise agency with movements that facilitate voice and resist those forces that take voice away.

Although postmodernism and ecocomposition are sometimes seen as contradictory because postmodernism is constructed as passive theorizing rather than activism, I believe composition and literacy courses that take a postmodern feminist eco-composition approach will show students that postmodern theory need not silence nature. Nor will it silence students who study it; it may even lend them a more powerful voice. Combining a postmodern feminist standpoint theory with ecocriticism and ecocomposition theory in the classroom will blur interdisciplinary boundaries and break down binaries grounded in Enlightenment thought, as well. Integrating such a feminist ecocritical approach in writing classes also helps the at-risk student gain a sense of voice that may transfer to not only more active reading and writing but to activism.

What is Postmodern Ecofeminist Composition?

The 1995 publication *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* and the many articles from ecocritics responding to the debate about postmodernism—even post-postmodernism—and its impact on nature and the natural world make clear that "Postmodern Natures," views of nature that suggest its representation is relative, are often seen as problematic. In *Reinventing Nature?* the majority of the articles suggest instead that we should fear the consequences of viewing nature through a postmodern lens. Gary Lease's introduction, for example, discusses two trends in ecocritical studies: "the first trend is the recognition that the forces of cultural construction play a much greater role in forming our understanding of nature than has been admitted" (7), but Lease advocates the second trend, "the acknowledgement of the still strong defense of nature as a realm that is autonomous and valuable in its own right" (7). Donald Worster's "Nature and the Disorder of History," asserts that postmodern historians are excessively relativistic and that they distort reality (67-8). N. Katherine Hayle's "Searching for Common Ground" argues for "strong objectivity" (61) rather than the relativism of radical postmodernism and social constructionist views. And Stephen R. Kellert's "Concepts of Nature East and West" suggests that "The deconstructionist position of nature—as solely a human creation based on power relationships—confuses content with underlying structure and thus ignores the formative influence of biologically based human valuation dependencies on the natural world" (104).

With these arguments in mind, viewing texts as situated, with meaning dependent on context, might silence nature according to ecocritics, since, for example, immersing perceptions of nature in their historical context would "distort reality." In fact, any form of situatedness—viewing nature relative to history, culture, or individual perceptions—seems to be seen as problematic by many ecocritics. For these ecocritics, the consequences of viewing nature and the natural through a postmodern lens becomes frightening because such a per-

spective paralyzes the viewer, eradicating any possibility of social or environmentally conscious activism springing from the academy and the academic discourses in play in an open-admissions classroom with at-risk students.

In spite of these misgivings, however, ecocriticism also calls out for a situated and an interdisciplinary approach to reading and writing that draws on these relativist postmodern views ecocritics tend to reject. For me, joining ecocriticism and ecocomposition with postmodern feminist standpoint theories like those of Susan Hekman will help us avoid silence and paralysis and highlight the inherent interdisciplinarity of ecocriticism, especially when guided by a postmodern feminist hand. When postmodern feminists reconfigure views of liberalism with an "enlightened" view of postmodern cultural studies, nature remains active, maintains its voice—and ecocritics and ecocompositionists maintain their call to action, their ability to facilitate environmentally conscious activism from at-risk students in an Oklahoma open-admissions classroom. Native Americans will learn to argue effectively for their sovereignty, for example, and nontraditional female students will gain the agency necessary to assert their own autonomy, each gaining a sense of identity that facilitates action, from writing proposals for continued tribal sovereignty and more environmentally-sound treatment of tribal lands to establishing ecofeminist book discussion and response clubs. An ecofeminist standpoint approach helps students localize exploitation, breaking down binaries between dominant and subordinate cultures and genders, interrogating "environments that affect and are affected by the production of discourse" (Dobrin 13) while adding an activist edge to the discussion.

> "each gaining a sense of identity that facilitates action, from writing proposals for continued tribal sovereignty and more environmentally-sound treatment of tribal lands to establishing ecofeminist book discussion and response clubs"

Ecocriticism, however, no matter how "new" a form of literary criticism it may seem, did spring from the same liberal traditions as did first wave feminist approaches and early approaches set on eliminating oppression based on class and race and, to a certain extent, sexuality. Gre-

gory McNamee calls these early ecocritics, "60s survivors who, having transferred their idealism from politics to the realm of nature," (14) teach canonical works of nature writing like Thoreau's *Walden* and Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. John Tallmadge suggests that these early ecocritics "saw in the wilderness, with its healthy and interdependent communities, a model for just and sustainable human societies" (5). Even twenty years later, when William Rueckert coined the term ecocriticism in his seminal "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment" and delineated its definition, such liberal idealism drove Rueckert's translation of ecology for literary application. According to Rueckert, ecocriticism "sees literature inside the context of an ecological vision in ways which restrict neither" (105). Ecocriticism draws on the ecological belief that "everything is connected to everything else."

In his letter for the 1999 *PMLA* Forum, Patrick D. Murphy connects ecocriticism to both the classroom and the community when he demonstrates that ecocriticism as a movement "arose from the social concerns of teachers and students as have other critical movements . . . like feminism, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism" (1098). According to Murphy, "while these earlier movements are focused on extending equitable moral considerability and social justice to excluded, exploited, and oppressed peoples, ecocriticism—like the various forms of ecology on which it is invariably, although somewhat tenuously based—extends that considerability to nonhuman nature (at the same time, the relation between ecocriticism and these other movements is being developed through ecofeminism, environmental justice, and multicultural ecofeminism)" (1098). Ecofeminist standpoint theory applies broader views of ecocriticism as extending equitable considerability and social justice to nonhuman nature, to include humans' interactions with nature on a local level. An ecofeminist standpoint approach invites marginalized constituencies like at-risk southeastern Oklahoma students to address the range of discourses that situate them in and out of school, finding a space for their own voices to work toward change.

Like the other movements Murphy describes, ecocriticism is not only activist based but interdisciplinary in context. According to Ursula Heise, ecocriticism intertwines research on literature, film and photography with work in fields like ecology, history, art history, anthropology, and philosophy (1097). And this interdisciplinarity offers ecocritics a way to move beyond the liberal roots that maintain the binary oppositions that perpetuate racist, sexist, and classist oppressions, as well as those that contribute to humans' destruction of the natural world. Environmental philosophy, for example, provides ecocritics with a vision of what Louise Westling calls "an ecological humanism" that, as she suggests, would counter "basic notions of human superiority we inherited from Renaissance humanism" (1103) and "restore appropriate humility, absorbing the lessons of quantum physics and emphasizing cooperative participation within the community of planetary life" (1104). Westling's defini-

tion of ecological humanism, then, moves ecocriticism ever so slightly into a postmodern realm in which the agency necessary to overcome the oppression Westling hopes to foreground—that against nature—might be arrested and demonstrates the ongoing debate between essentialist (modern) and relativist (postmodern) views of nature.

Ecocomposition and Postmodernism

This same debate between modern and postmodern views of nature drives conflicting views in ecocomposition studies. Christian Weisser and Sidney Dobrin highlight this debate in their introduction to *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches.* According to Weisser and Dobrin, ecocomposition began when composition specialists inquired "into scientific scholarship to inform work in their own discipline" (1). Weisser and Dobrin explain how their text "seeks to explore the connections between interdisciplinary inquiries of composition studies and ecological studies and forwards the potential for theoretical and pedagogical work in ecocomposition" (1).

In an Ecocomposition class, for example, instructors may focus on improving student writing in a variety of writing environments, with emphasis on the sense of place defined there, either essentially or in context. Weisser and Dobrin assert that

> ecocomposition is an area of study which, at its core, places ecological thinking and composition in dialogue with one another in order to both consider the ecological properties of written discourse and the ways in which ecologies, environments, locations, places, and natures are discursively affected. . . . Ecocomposition is about relationships; it is about the coconstitutive existence of writing and environment; it is about the production of written discourse and the relationship of that discourse to the places it encounters." (2)

According to Weisser and Dobrin's "Breaking New Ground in Ecocomposition: An Introduction," the roots of ecocomposition are found in traditional rhetoric, ecocriticism, and environmental rhetoric. All of these approaches sometimes take a cynical view of postmodern perspectives on "nature" because they are seen to hinder activism. Ecocritical approaches, especially, caution against relativism as a silencing instrument. Combining these approaches with ecofeminist standpoint theory will again provide a space for agency and activism in postmodern ecocomposition studies.

In "Writing Takes Place," Dobrin suggests that in a class driven by ecocomposition theory, "students become critical of how those places are mapped, defined, regulated, managed through discourse so that they may identify for themselves how discourse affects and is affected by places they experience and find connection with. Nature and environment must be lived in, experienced, to see how the very discourses in which we live react to and with

those environments" (15). An ecocomposition pedagogy thus encourages political activism, public writing, and service learning, and student writing can be directed beyond the limited scope of classroom assignments to address larger, public audiences" (15).

According to Dobrin and Weisser, however, ecocompositionists take one of two approaches or may meld the two: an ecological literary approach typically couched in modernist visions of nature that focuses on responses to nature writing and real-world responses to ecological issues and organizations; and a postmodern discursive ecology approach that argues that "words, language, and writing are themselves parts of ecosystems and that when writers write they affect and are affected by environment" {"Breaking Ground" 584). The course may be linked with an environmental issues course and collaborative or webbed writing (in hypertext) may be the goal.

The essays in Weisser and Dobrin's *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches* highlight this bifurcation between modern and postmodern views of nature and its impact on composition studies and include chapters that address the relationship of postmodern visions of discourse to environments (see Sidney Dobrin, Anis Bawarshi, and Christian Weisser, for example) and modernist views of discourse, nature, and writing (see Randall Roorda, Derek Owens, Mark C. Long, Greta Gaard, and Edward Lotto, for example). The pieces tend to take modernist approaches in an ecocomposition class when the goal is transformation and activism in the classroom or community and postmodern approaches to discourse when the goal is extending discourse analyses to include organic and inorganic environments. In a nod toward essentialism, Edward Lotto's "Written in Its Own Season: Nature as Ground in the Postmodern World" suggests that nature can serve as grounding in a postmodern world. According to Lotto, "It can serve as a powerful authority in a world that has at least the glimmerings of an ecological ethic" (254). Anis Bawarshi, on the other hand, asserts that "genres are the rhetorical ecosystems that allow communicants to enact and reproduce various situations, social practices, relations, and identities" (71), highlighting a postmodern view of discourse as situated.

These conflicts between essential and postmodern ecocomposition views arise out of the roots of ecocomposition, with ecocritical roots tending to encourage modernist perspectives to enhance activism and sustainability and rhetorical roots tending to stimulate more postmodernist views of discourse in relation to the environment without the nod toward sustainability found in modern views. But they also spring from a need to ensure that, as Weisser and Dobrin state, "ecocomposition not become a master narrative that proselytizes ecological thinking as somehow better or more important thinking" ("Breaking New Ground in Ecocomposition: An Introduction" 9). In response to a critique of their anthology as overemphasizing activism, Weisser and Dobrin offer a disclaimer based on the work of David

Thomas Sumner: "we do not do justice to our role as teachers if our composition classroom turns into a cheering section for pet causes, environmental or other. Such a class may generate converts, or even enemies, but it will not provide students with the necessary critical writing and thinking skills to address the complexity of issues they will face at the academy and in life" ("Breaking New Ground in Ecocomposition: An Introduction" 9).

Adding a Renewed Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory to the Mix

I believe, however, that we can teach writing for a sustainable future without proselytizing or minimizing effective writing instruction. By combining postmodern views with ecofeminist standpoint theory, activism can again enter composition courses driven by rhetorical views of place, and modernist classrooms can recognize that students, discourse, and nature itself are situated, interpretive, and public—both post-process and postmodern. At-risk students in southeastern Oklahoma can benefit from such an approach because each student's situatedness can become the focus of her or his responses. Their perspectives become validated because they read and write in relation to their own specific standpoints, their ideologies and repertoires. Native Americans and returning female students at Southeastern Oklahoma State University can, as ecocomposition scholars like Dobrin contend, examine "classroom environments, electronic environments, and textual environments since . . . they are some of the many locations in which the relationships between discourse and place are highly political and in which actual learning takes place" (13). With the addition of feminist standpoint theory, they can also apply that examination through activism, confronting mainstream populations that, in the southeastern Oklahoma context, have exploited them.

Feminist critics like Susan Hekman and Donna Haraway have aligned feminism and postmodernism in ways that preserve the agency and activism of early feminism, while solving some of the problems associated with a liberalism based on Enlightenment thought (and the binaries it perpetuates). Aligning ecocriticism and ecocomposition with postmodernism in similar ways will both eliminate silencing and repudiate some of ecocriticism's troublesome roots, moving it in line with the interdisciplinary blurring of boundaries ecocriticism becomes when applied.

Applying theories of Foucault to ecocritical readings and ecocomposition applications, for example, would provide a way to preserve and value nature without needing to point to universals, which separate humans from the natural world. According to Hekman, "a program of political action does floe [sic] from Foucault's work" *(Gender and Knowledge)*, one in which power relations like those between humans and nature can be called into question without needing to ground them, as Hekman asserts in a more recent article, "in an

absolute, universal conception of truth and justice" ("Truth and Method" 342). Even if nature and the texts in which it is represented become historicized, they maintain a sense of voice. Writers, too, maintain voice and place when writing is seen as situated, public, and interpretive. Hekman's explanation for feminist standpoint theory draws on this juxtaposition, arguing that the theorist's "quest for truth and politics has been shaped by two central understandings: that knowledge is situated and perspectival and that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced" (342). According to Hekman, feminist standpoint theorists examine, "first, how knowledge can be situated yet 'true,' and second, how we can acknowledge difference without obviating the possibility of critique and thus a viable feminist politics" (342).

By asserting that situated knowledge can still be true and may also be critiqued, Hekman's synthesis of postmodern and feminist theories provides a space for agency, a space aligned with ecofeminist theory. Like traditional ecofeminist theory, ecofeminist standpoint theory looks at intersections between the oppression of women and the oppression of non-human nature in Western culture, but ecofeminist standpoint theory offers a way to address the reversed binaries of radical ecofeminists like Mary Daley and to put feet under postmodern ecofeminist theories like those of Carolyn Merchant.

Combining ecocriticism and ecocomposition with an ecofeminist standpoint theory provides the opportunity to give nature a voice, as well, opening up the interdisciplinarity that seems so inherent in the theory. An ecofeminist standpoint theory localizes—and makes more forceful—Patrick Murphy's proposal for an adapted dialogics that unifies ecology and feminisms. According to Murphy, "Dialogics reminds ecofeminist practitioners that every position is really a pivot by which to step and dance, to practice and develop, but not to stand or come to rest" (159). Ecofeminist standpoint theory offers a way to come to rest, so change can be made. Sandra Harding, for example, asserts that the theory allows the natural sciences to critique its sometimes-exclusionary efforts to meet the needs of dominant groups:

> Standpoint projects critically engage with natural sciences in two ways. Some delineate how particular sciences, such as primatology (Haraway 1978/1989) or biology (Rose 1983), constituted their hypotheses and methods to meet the sexist and androcentric (and often racist and Eurocentric) needs of dominant social groups, thereby providing distorted and partial accounts of nature's regularities and underlying causal tendencies and revealing otherwise hidden features of dominant ways of thinking. These and others also directly analyzed the inadequacy of sciences' standards for achieving objectivity or good method, and how the plausibility of these standards has been maintained (see, for example, Harding 1992b and Keller 1984). (26)

An ecofeminist standpoint theory also provides ecocritics and ecocomposition theorists with a space in which to advance growth of knowledge from a situated perspective. Harding explains situatedness from a social science perspective:

> standpoint theory claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry. Given such projects, perhaps one should expect the combination of either disattention or hysterical attack with the absence of serious engagement that, with important exceptions, has characterized even the responses of self-proclaimed postpositivist philosophers of science and science studies scholars to this theory. (26)

These same assertions about local situatedness advancing knowledge can apply in an ecocomposition classroom. When Hekman redefines the feminist standpoint after critiquing some of the theory's weaknesses, she focuses on two questions: "First, if, as we must, we acknowledge that there are many realities that women inhabit, how does this affect the status of the truth claims that feminists advance? Second, if we abandon a single axis of analysis, the standpoint of women, and instead try to accommodate the multiple, potentially infinite standpoints of diverse women, do we not also lose the analytic force of our argument?" ("Truth and Method" 349). According to Hekman,

> Feminist standpoint theory is part of an emerging paradigm of knowledge and knowledge production that constitutes an epistemological break with modernism. Feminist standpoint theory defines knowledge as particular rather than universal; it jettisons the neutral observer of modernist epistemology; it defines subjects as constructed by relational forces rather than as transcendent. As feminist standpoint theory has developed, the original tension between social construction and universal truth has dissolved. But it is significant that this has been accomplished, not by privileging one side of the dichotomy, but by deconstructing the dichotomy itself. The new paradigm of knowledge of which feminist standpoint theory is a part involves rejecting the definition of knowledge and truth as either universal or relative in favor of a conception of all knowledge as situated and discursive. ("Truth and Method" 356-7).

Hekman recasts feminist standpoint theory in relation to Max Weber's "ideal type" as a counterpoint to relativism, arguing that knowledge is situated and discursive, so discourse communities may share values and ideals. From such a perspective, Hekman concludes that even though "women speak from multiple standpoints, producing multiple knowledges. . . . This does not prevent women from coming together to work for specific political goals" ("Truth and Method" 363). In an ecocomposition class, then, where standpoint theory joins ecocriticism, an ecofeminist standpoint approach to composition, students can share similar

values regarding ecology and maintain an activist stance, but they can also maintain their own voices, not from a relativist perspective, but from a perspective that, according to Hekman "makes it clear that social analysis is a necessarily political activity, undertaken by agents who live in a world constituted by language and, hence, values. We engage in specific analyses because we are committed to certain values. . . . It is our values, then, that save us from the 'absolute relativism' that defenders of modernism so feared" ("Truth and Method" 362).

Ecocomposition and Feminist Standpoint Theory in the Writing Intensive Classroom

To clarify its difference from many other ecofeminist approaches, I call this combining of ecocriticism and ecocomposition with feminist standpoint theory, ecofeminist criticism and ecofeminist composition studies. Such juxtaposition has helped me and other instructors integrate a situated activist-driven approach to writing in 1) classes that take an ecological literary approach but maintain emphasis on critical thinking, reading, and writing that open up a variety of interdisciplinary approaches in the classroom; and 2) classes that take a postmodern discursive ecology approach.

Writing-centered and writing-intensive courses that take a postmodern ecological literary approach highlight the power of viewing knowledge as situated and discursive. For example, a sophomore-level writing course I taught to open-admissions students at Southeastern focused explicitly on nature writing in a variety of genres and drew on this alliance of ecocriticism and postmodernism and the interdisciplinarity it encourages. The course, like the theories, stemmed from the view that representations of nature and the natural are relative rather than universal. Viewing these representations of nature as relative made sense to me, since ecology, which is at the root of ecocriticism, looks at the way species interact with their physical environment and with other species around them as a study of homes, a concept my mostly first-generation college students could embrace.

Weisser and Dobrin focus on the idea of place in their explanation of approaches to postmodern ecocomposition in their introduction to *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches.* According to Dobrin's "Writing Takes Place," an essay in the anthology, ecocomposition is the place where "ecology and rhetoric and composition can converge to better explore the relationships between language, writing, and discourse; and between nature, place, environment, and locations" (12). Dobrin asserts that ecocomposition draws attention to the ideas of context and social construction of identity to include physical realities of place, and of natural and constructed space, both ideological constructs that often seem ignored in favor of more conceptual ideological structures such as gender or race" (12). Studying ecolo-

gy from the perspective of both shared and individual standpoints—situatedness—may deepen readings of both self and of literary texts.

When designing the course, I found it necessary to provide my Southeastern Oklahoma State University students with diverse views of nature and the natural through a variety of genres, emphasizing the need for immersion in pieces from a variety of disciplines and foregrounding views of knowledge as situated and discursive. I included Marilynn Robinson's *Housekeeping*, Simon Ortiz's *After and Before Lightning*, Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, Sheri S. Tepper's *Shadow's End*, and an anthology of essays entitled Deborah Clow and Donald Snow's *Northern Lights: A Selection of New Writing from the American West* to which students responded in short response papers and longer more formal essays.

I also provided students with readings from the sciences, from anthropology, and from history to ground the literary works, including excerpts from Stephen Jay Gould's *Dinosaur in a Haystack*. Readings from genres like fiction, essay, poetry, fantasy, postmodern fiction interacted with documentary and narrative films, including *After the Warming* and *Leaving Normal*, again highlighting the need for an interdisciplinary approach with a postmodern feminist view of ecocriticism, but clarified that we were not taking a relativist approach to our reading but one based in values shared by our multiple discourse communities. Our readings highlighted the diversity of perspectives regarding ecology—the study of homes. But they also highlighted common goals to sustain our ecology. Solutions differed but goals intersected. Students' standpoints on the issues explored in the texts also differed but provided an inroad to action as well as critical reading and writing.

> "Students' standpoints on the issues explored in the texts also differed but provided an inroad to action as well as critical reading and writing."

One nontraditional female student responded to dominant female characters in *Shadow's End*, for example, arguing that Saluez and Lutha were greatly "affected by internal conflict. Doubts about their lives and futures dominate their thinking. Their journey to the Omphalos only served to increase these doubts and make them more agonizing to Saluez and Lutha." The student also connected these dominant characters' experiences with her own, finding ways she might negotiate resolution to such dilemmas, just as one of these characters negotiates a resolution of her own, choosing to "know [. . .] better" rather than hanging on, as the other character does to "wanting to believe."

Students' written responses to their readings were also grounded in postmodern feminist ecocriticism, since they were meant to highlight how each student's cultural and literary repertoire and ideology—their standpoints and values—impacted on their reading of each text, especially in conjunction with the repertoire and ideology reflected by the texts they read. Intertwined with these somewhat literary goals, however, were goals meant to stimulate self-awareness (if not actual ideological change) in my students. One of the goals of the class was for students to not only interrogate the repertoires and ideologies represented by the texts they read, but also to examine the assumptions and beliefs they believe they themselves brought to their readings and how they impacted on their reaction to the texts. By making their own values transparent, students recognized their place in the ecocritical conversation and gained the agency necessary to write toward a sustainable future.

One Native American student, for example, explored her reaction to Housekeeping through a comparison of the novel with the film *Leaving Normal*. In spite of the radical ecology emphasized in the novel, this student recognized and responded to the freedom found in nature illustrated by both novel and film. She also connected that freedom with travel, leaving, and wandering, but asserted that "all of the wandering and traveling did not take away the problems they had and the trappings of culture that tried to follow them." She then noted how her sympathetic views toward nonhuman nature and her cynical perspective on dominant culture affected her response, noting that she too sought freedom in nature but, since she could not escape the "trappings of culture," she must learn to both refute and accommodate them when necessary.

Students followed one of two formats for these responses. The first was more informal and asked students to answer specific questions about how the text's repertoire (literary and general knowledge base) and ideology (literary and general worldview) either conflicted or confirmed their own, especially in relation to environmental issues reflected by the texts. Simon Ortiz's Native American poetry, for example, responds to a non-Western worldview that perceives space and the natural environment as sacred and interconnected with cyclical time. It also defines elements of non-human nature and even inanimate objects as "persons." Students' reactions to these non-Western views, once interrogated, helped them not only gain awareness and tolerance for difference but also for nature and the natural world.

With knowledge of different cultures' reactions, both real and imagined, to environmental problems—including the disasters possible after global warming—students started a campus recycling program, fought to change the mascots name from "The Savages" to "The Savage Storm," and formed a feminist book club where they could discuss feminist readings in a safe environment. They also attended and participated in a Native American Symposium, talked freely about their own heritage and its impact on their identity, and gained con-

fidence to complete their work in this class and others, demonstrating the power of place in writing. Their successful entrance into academic, civic, and professional discourse communities (once they moved on to the workplace) demonstrated their literal coming to voice.

A second approach directed students to write one-page, single-spaced (with MLA-style parenthetical citations) reading responses to help them think through the readings and form the basis for their contributions to discussions. I asked that students include the following in each response: A title—this will signal to your readers that you have a clear focus; A clear reference to the title and author of the piece you are referring to; An epigraph, or a brief block quotation from the assigned reading or observation—to demonstrate close reading or observation and to bring readers into your response; A question, or a series of questions raised in the course of the reading; A response to the quotation and the questions it raises.

To connect with their own ideology and repertoire and move beyond this more modernist patriarchal and structured approach, I asked students to think through questions like the following before they responded: How do your beliefs and assumptions coincide with or differ from those of the text on central issues? What does the text fail to say about the assumptions it raises? This may point to elements a writer takes for granted and does not make explicit, the place the text's relation to its underlying belief system may be found. What is the context to which the reading responds? What kinds of ideological conflicts underlie the assumptions of the text? What conflicts is it not dealing with or might it be trying to suppress? How does your own belief system line up with that of the reading? Do myths touched on in the reading line up with reality? What myths of our own culture can be compared or contrasted with those of the reading?

These responses prompted stimulating discussions and written short and long responses as well as voluntary calls to action. One student, for example, found *Housekeeping's* ideology particularly offensive because it seemed to promote anti-social behavior and negligent parenting. When this student—a nontraditional Baptist minister—explored the reasons for his discomfort in writing, however, he realized he had neglected his own "family" by neglecting environmental and social justice issues in his ministry. He discovered that even though *Housekeeping* seemed to promote neglect, it also validated localized nurturing of both nature and the women connected to it—Sylvie and Ruth. He found that he had, like Darlene, embraced broad cultural values without considering the local and the individual. He and his congregation had promoted overseas causes, especially those in African missions, but had neglected local issues that affected mothers and children in the region. In his final paper, he proposed a solution to local land use policies that benefited human and nonhuman nature, educating women and girls, so they could develop more sustainable farming, gathering, and ranching techniques.

Feminist Standpoint Theory and Ecocomposition-Driven First-Year Composition Courses

Writing-Centered ecocomposition courses may also highlight either or both postmodern and essentialist views, drawing on critical theory, especially ecofeminist standpoint theory, a particular kind of critical theory. By particularizing critical theory instructors can maintain agency for students in relation to both their writing and their representation and response to the natural world. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Epistemology*,

> feminist standpoint theory is a type of critical theory, as this term was understood by the Frankfurt school of critical social theorists, from Adorno to Habermas. Critical theories aim to empower the oppressed to improve their situation. They therefore incorporate pragmatic constraints on theories of the social world. To serve their critical aim, social theories must (a) represent the social world in relation to the interests of the oppressed—i.e., those who are the subjects of study; (b) supply an account of that world which is accessible to the subjects of study, which enables them to understand their problems; and (c) supply an account of the world which is usable by the subjects to study to improve their condition. Critical theory is theory of, by, and for the subjects of study. These pragmatic features of critical theory raise the possibility that claims of superiority for particular theories might be based more on pragmatic than epistemological virtues (Harding 1991, Hartsock 1996). Even if a particular feminist theory cannot make good on the claim that it has *privileged* access to reality, it may offer true representations that are more *useful* to women than other truthful representations.

These representations may be more useful to students in an ecocomposition, as well as to the environment.

One way I infused this ecofeminist standpoint theory into a first-year ecocomposition course was to localize both the writing and the readings. Another course taught to open-admissions students at Southeastern focused on opposing viewpoints on the American frontier and highlighted differing perspectives on issues relevant to those living in Oklahoma, like representations of Native Americans, diverse reactions to oil production, and causes and repercussions of the dust bowl. Students summarized and critiqued particular writings to gain skills in close reading, applied those skills to evaluations of film for a public audience, synthesized their own readings in relation to a local issue significant to them, and then pursued a research topic for a pre-professional audience, members of their prospective discipline, and presented it in some form (Power Point presentation, poster session, etc.) for a wider community.

Here emphasis was on both environmental issues and writing and attempted to provide students with agency as writers and activists examining local environmental issues for a community audience. The emphasis, then, was on the idea that discourse and values are localized but still powerful. This course, like the others I have taught, showed students that postmodern theory need not silence nature and the students and faculty who study it; it may even lend them a more powerful voice. Students who see theory—even composition and ecofeminist theory—as all talk and no action can benefit from applying ecofeminist standpoint theory in academic, civic, and professional spheres, since examining their own perspectives and those of a variety of texts makes the ideology behind discourse transparent and, consequently, more easily confronted. Kathi Weeks provides a renewed definition of feminist standpoint theory in her *Constituting Feminist Subjects* and asserts that a standpoint is not essential but situated. According to Weeks, "A standpoint is derived from political practice, from a collective effort to revalue and reconstitute specific practices. Thus, a standpoint constitutes a subject, but one which does not rely on a transcendental or natural essence. A standpoint is a project, not an inheritance; it is achieved, not given" (136).

As Hekman argues, feminists, ecocritics, and ecocomposition students and theorists "cannot prove their values to be objectively correct ones. On this point the postmoderns are correct: we live in a world devoid of a normative metanarrative. But we can offer persuasive arguments in defense of our values and the politics they entail" ("Truth and Method" 362). If, according to Hekman, we are all "situated, engaged agents who live in a discursively constituted world" ("Truth and Method" 359), combining a postmodern feminist standpoint theory with ecocriticism in the classroom will break down binaries leftover from the Enlightenment and give students and nature a more powerful voice.

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Wendy Olson
On the Institutionalization of Basic Writing as Political Economy

> *Open Admissions began as a remedial wing to a few departments on traditional college campuses, but it is now transforming the colleges themselves, exposing far more than the deficiencies of the new students. By probing into the nature of those deficiencies and resisting those who have tried to isolate the phenomenon of disadvantage from the society that caused it, Open Admissions is forcing the real question—not how many people society is willing to salvage, but how much this society is willing to pay to salvage itself.*
>
> —Mina Shaughnessy, "Open Admissions and the Disadvantaged Teacher"

AS SHAUGHNESSY'S ARGUMENT MAKES EXPLICIT, BASIC WRITING HAS always been tied to the politics of open admissions and educational access. A particular kind of literacy politics formed within institutional settings of higher education, basic writing continues to be about social and economic justice as much as it is about pedagogy. And as the above excerpt suggests, the politics of literacy in crisis shape the politics of basic writing—both then and now. For even as Shaughnessy's case concerning the transformational effect of basic writing is both a valid and compelling one, her rhetorical positioning of basic writing during the initial years of open admissions has contributed to a discourse on basic writing that continues to profess crisis at its core. Certainly, basic writing is a site of antagonistic struggle. Yet such a rhetorical positioning of basic writing—namely a reading of basic writing as *always* in crisis—delimits a deeper understanding of the changing conditions that both give rise to and currently impact basic writing in its assorted and diverse manifestations. Yet such an understanding is necessary if we are to continue to strategically employ basic writing, as a pedagogy or a program.

Basic writing is at once a program, a classroom, a pedagogy, a practice, a certain kind of student—not to mention programs, classrooms, pedagogies, practices, and students. As Bruce Horner might aptly put it, basic writing is a keyword that embodies contradictions in construction and value as it gets produced and reproduced in academia[1] . Since basic writing

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1. See Horner's *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique* for his analysis of keywords in composition studies.

is produced and circulated, both within institutions and as a discipline (at least), it acts as an economy. And because these various productions and uses—economies—of basic writing are both historically and politically situated, basic writing constitutes a political economy: a system formed out of power relations to meet the material needs of literacy instruction in academia[2]. Yet our readings of basic writing often tend to focus on one or the other, either the politics or the economics of basic writing. We tend to focus, that is, on a part rather than the whole in our analysis. One consequence of misreading the relations between these political and economic formations is that we tend to read basic writing ahistorically, contributing particularized effects of it to abstract functions—we read basic writing as only a gatekeeper of standards, for example, or more often as referenced in basic writing scholarship, as only a structure for maintaining institutional access for marginalized students.

As embodied even in Shaughnessy's legacy, basic writing represents contradictions:

> "a critique that might read as both transformative and assimilationist; a politics of access as well as standards"

a critique of remediation, a critique that might read as both transformative and assimilationist; a politics of access as well as standards, both of which are institutionally defined; and an economy of literacy within and across institutions of higher education. While these competing definitions exist because of distinct and often contradictory ideological and material forces that shape basic writing as a literacy commodity, to date our scholarship on basic writing lacks such a comprehensive understanding of basic writing in these various formations. Rather, a selective narrative of basic writing has emerged, a narrative that over relies on Shaughnessy's place and time-specific vision: basic writing as a new pedagogy within a new open admissions policy at CUNY in the 1970s. Consequently, one predominate pattern that has emerged within basic writing scholarship, a pattern ensconced in crisis rhetoric, is a focus on the preservation of basic writing within predominately tier 1 and selective liberal arts institutions. Our scholarship, through both an emphasis on such institutional case studies and by omitting other institutional models, tends to focus on preserving basic writing within institutions where open admissions is either threatened or no longer in existence. This dominant narrative prevails while open admissions' institutions of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century—namely regional two-

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2. I take this definition from Victor Villanueva: "the relations of power to systems for meeting material needs" ("Toward" 61).

and four-year campuses—admit basic writing students into basic writing programs at growing rates. While the rhetoric of crisis in basic writing scholarship has tended to dismiss the particulars of these institutions as homogeneous, given the changing demographics and policies across institutions of higher education in the last 30 years, we might do well to engage a more thorough analysis of these institutional economies.

The material conditions of basic writing's political and economic structures continue to alter, yet our scholarship on basic writing has yet to adequately assess and address these processes in part because of a reliance on the language of crisis to predominately frame and explain the material conditions of basic writing. This rhetorical frame of crisis tends to shape basic writing as *fixed*, a product as opposed to a process. Addressing and theorizing the complex and reciprocal relationship among political and economic formations of basic writing as a shifting terrain, therefore, becomes an important step toward more fully mapping basic writing as a social material process. For it is only in such a recognition of basic writing as changing and mutable, as history in the making, that we might take seriously, for better and for worse, the role of non-selective institutions in the enterprise of basic writing. Bruce Horner provides some precedent for this mapping in his reading of Shaughnessy's discourse on basic writing.

In "Discoursing Basic Writing," he argues that the dominant discourse of basic writing evolved in response to the larger public discourse debating higher education and open admissions, a discourse that "perpetuates the denial of the academy as part of the material, political, social, and historical worlds" (200). The rhetoric of open admissions, Horner reveals, put forth that it could preserve academic excellence as well as accommodate the new, presumably unacademic, students—" a different kind of student" (204). Shaughnessy and other CUNY basic writing teachers develop their defense of basic writing and basic writing students, those folks subsequently permitted to enter the university because of open admissions, through the same rhetorical positioning. This positioning "required that they contend, and shaped how they contended, with terms of the public discourse prevailing in debate on the educational rights and capacities of their students" (207). In other words, the rhetoric of basic writing pedagogy had to balance justifying the presence of these new students in the academy at the same time that it promised to preserve the hierarchy of academic standards. What resulted was an acculturative molding of basic writing students into the academy, a shaping that brought basic writers into the university but also simultaneously defined them as others within its walls[3] .

To illustrate this point, Horner charts how this discourse on basic writing evolves out

3. See Lu's "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence" for further discussion on this acculturative process.

of CUNY public editorials, institutional policy documents, English department memos, course surveys, etc. Through close discourse analysis, he shows how Shaughnessy's defense of basic writing strategically allowed, at least temporarily, access for basic writers into academia, but in so doing the evolving discourse of basic writing also developed a particular way of seeing and reading basic writers: "Basic Writing discourse accepted the identification of basic writers as 'outsiders,' it characterized them as nonthreatening, apolitical, as beginners or foreigners seeking and able to join the American mainstream" (207-208). Subsequently, we can see how Shaughnessy's construction of basic writing shaped not only a pedagogy, but also a curricular economy that impacted how basic writing students were represented in the university system.

One danger in these kinds of representations is that such rhetorical maneuvering results in particular givens about the basic writer. As Horner explains, "it thus 'naturalized' them both in a cognitive developmental and civic sense, locating them at a particular stage in a natural sequence of learning and attributing to them the aspiration to join with rather than disrupt mainstream American society" (208). Another observation might be made about this discourse more generally: while Shaughnessy's defense of basic writing during these early years was, of course, strategic, the discourse on basic writing that has emerged since has been predominately influenced by these representations, fixed representations that not only contribute to the iconic discourse that scholars such as Jeanne Gunner and Min-Zhan Lu critique[4] , but which also depict basic writing as concomitant with crisis.

Rhetorics of Crisis

A political economy of rhetoric, according to Victor Villanueva, provides an avenue for investigating the relationship between the rhetorical and the material in our lives, a way to both recognize and unveil potential gaps between what we know through discourse (the rhetorical, the ideological) and the realities of our day-to-day lives caught up in an economic web of existence. He writes, "the role of rhetoric, according to Burke, is the demystification of the ideological. The role of political economy is the demystification of relations tied to the economic. If we are to understand where we are and what is happening to us—and maybe even to affect it—we need the tools provided by both" (58). Such a view of economics does not reduce human existence to merely production, does not, in other words, return conversations concerning materialism to economic determinism, a simplification of the cause/effect relationship among the base and superstructure, in Marxist terms. What it does do, however,

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is recuperate conversations on the materiality of culture from the slippery slope of postmodernism, wherein materiality often becomes dehistoricized. That is, in arguing for a political economy of rhetoric, Villanueva recognizes the complexity of the cultural sphere, yet he also makes explicit the need to not divorce it from the specific material conditions that impact it.

Villanueva's theory of a political economy of rhetoric has important implications for how we attend to the institutionalization of basic writing. First, a political economy of basic writing rhetoric might allow for a more keen assessment of how a discourse of crisis has emerged within basic writing through demystification of the ideological. As with any scholarly literature, our scholarship on basic writing can't help but construct an ideological commonsense within our field. One effect of this commonsense discourse is that it produces a narrative on basic writing that portrays a field always in crisis. Such a homogeneous reading of basic writing is, in short, a rhetorically constructed myth that obscures the heterogeneous formations of basic writing. At the same time, this crisis rhetoric might also be traced back to a particular academic economy: the development of basic writing as a subfield within composition and rhetoric. That is to say, there is a relationship between the rise of basic writing pedagogies and programs that is tied to the rise of other basic writing structures, such as the field's journals, conferences, and professional organizations,

> "a rhetorically constructed myth that obscures the heterogeneous formations of basic writing"

a relationship that institutionalizes basic writing as it unfolds. We have yet to sufficiently unpack this relationship. Second, because the kind of demystification that Villanueva calls for necessitates a recovery of the relationship between the ideological and the material, it provides an avenue for further investigating various up-until-now underanalyzed basic writing economies, in particular the ongoing institutionalization and reconfiguration of basic writing in regional two-year and four-year colleges. For the most part, these institutions remain neglected in representations of basic writing programs within our field. This neglect, I'd suggest, contributes to a selective narrative on basic writing, a narrative wherein crisis is inevitable. In turning to an analysis of rhetorics of crisis below, I borrow from Robert Connors' "The Abolition Debate in Composition: A Short History," where he identifies "reformism" and "abolitionism" as "alternating periods" in the history of composition in the U.S. (280).

Reformist efforts in composition, Connors reminds us, are abundant—and in basic

writing we see no exception to this pattern. According to Connors, reformist periods in composition function "as the thin red line protecting the very life of literacy" (280). As a pedagogy, Shaughnessy's discourse on basic writing served as a "thin red line" of literacy: it promised to provide students previously perceived as inadmissible with the skills they would need to survive in the university while simultaneously quieting protests against educational inequality. That is, the premise of Shaughnessy's reformist rhetoric relied upon her new pedagogy as an acculturative process, making sure that the new students rose to the level of academic literacy as it was defined by the university. At the same time, the institutional standards and assumptions that spoke what constituted academy literacy by the university were never actually challenged within this discourse. Shaughnessy's work and legacy are, therefore, distinctly reformist in that they argue for the improvement of basic writing as a necessary literacy threshold, a trope found throughout much basic writing literature post-Shaughnessy.

While reformist rhetoric has changed and adapted over the years, most significantly in response to the social turn in composition, its underlying argument for the necessity and usefulness of basic writing remains little changed. In the years following the founding of *Journal of Basic Writing (JBW)*, many if not most of the articles in the journal have relied upon and expanded the reformist rhetoric that Shaughnessy and others employed during open admissions in the early 1970s. For example, articles published in *JBW* throughout the eighties focused most heavily on the study of error and basic writing pedagogy. While the approaches to error and pedagogy during this period vary drastically in some cases, what all of the approaches have in common is an ethical appeal that furthers the legitimacy of basic writing as an academic field, and, in many cases, an underlying assumption that little questioned its acculturative stance.

Perhaps the most representative example of contemporary reformism in basic writing comes from the work of Laura Gray-Rosendale. Gray-Rosendale's scholarship has significantly impacted the field in the last decade or so. Her reformist efforts illustrate what Connors calls "status-quo or modern reform": critiques of basic writing are offered followed by suggestions for rethinking the field. The reasoning behind such rhetoric critically assesses *how* such work gets done within the institution yet often the underlying assumptions of the arguments themselves work to sanction the necessity of basic writing and, consequently, one effect is the preservation of the structural status quo of basic writing.

Gray-Rosendale is disillusioned by what she sees as an overemphasis on identity politics in basic writing scholarship. She defines identity politics, a dominant theme in basic writing throughout much of the 1990s, as a tendency toward describing and categorizing basic writers rather than a move toward figuring out what basic writers do. In her critique, she

argues that while identity categories such as class, race, and gender are important, "examining them to the exclusion of other factors has also at times limited our understanding of Basic Writers" (13). Instead, she proposes that basic writing scholarship turn to an analytical model that "discloses the local, social construction of Basic Writers' identities and knowledge productions in their everyday talk within our classrooms" (15). Such a model, certainly, provides important groundwork for attending to the local conditions of basic writers and the texts they produce. Yet at the same time, we can see how this model for re-seeing basic writers might inadvertently elide the impact that material structures of basic writing within institutional settings have on the contexts and locations that basic writers find themselves negotiating outside of the classroom, for instance the realities of racism, sexism, and classism, not to mention placement structures and programmatic funding and support. While always context-specific, the construction of basic writers is not limited to a particular basic writing classroom or a particular basic writing pedagogy. Nor is it limited, I'd argue, to only the local conditions of individual campuses. The conditions that mark the particulars of basic writing locally are always tied to broader economic and political constraints,

> "the realities of racism, sexism, and classism, not to mention placement structures and programmatic funding and support"

such as the likes of state budgets, literacy campaigns, and inter-institutional policies on remediation, to name a few. These constraints impact how basic writing is supported or not within individual classroom settings.

Of note, the most politically charged crisis rhetoric to date is likely the discussion that preceded the closing of open admissions at CUNY. In 2001 CUNY reneged on its 30-year-old open admissions policy by stopping open admissions at four of its colleges. In the years working up to this monumental policy change, debates surrounding the state of basic writing flourished in JBW. In a controversial article titled "Our Apartheid: Writing and Inequality," Ira Shor calls for the end of basic writing. A CUNY insider, he questions the means by which basic writing instruction acculturates and assimilates. Rather than reading basic writing as the educational equalizer Shaughnessy imagined it to be—an enterprise "to remedy the failure(s)" of educational institutions and society (Shaughnessy 107)—Shor argues that it has grown into an extended system of language control. Once the "egalitarian 1960s," had passed, he writes, "BW emerged soon after as a new 'identity,' a new field of control to manage the time, thought, aspirations, composing, and credentials of the millions of non-elite students

marching through the gates of academe" (93). He questions the ways in which basic writing functions to sort and contain students within the university. Positing that basic writing enables rather than confronts educational and economic status quo, Shor maintains that it acts as a gatekeeper within higher education. Consequently, he argues for its abolishment.

The concerns Shor raises about basic writing in this 1997 article are some of the same concerns made by others in the broader field of composition and rhetoric during the early 1990s. Citing a slew of problems associated with first-year composition as a required course—an inconsistent curriculum, unethical working conditions, its gatekeeping position within the university, a "remedial" categorization within English departments, to name a few—Sharon Crowley argues to abolish the course as a universal requirement (169-170). Crowley's argument, coined "New Abolitionism," picks up supporters across composition camps, such as Robert Connors, Charles Schuster, and Lil Brannon. Her arguments' influence on the field of basic writing, I believe, cannot be underestimated. Though he does not reference Crowley per se, David Bartholomae's 1993 *JBW* article, "The Tidy House: Writing in the American Curriculum" questions basic writing as a curriculum within the institutional structure of the university just two years later, posing questions about the subfield's legitimacy that, in many ways, echo some of Crowley's central concerns about first-year composition.

Comparable to Crowley's argument against the universal requirement of composition, Bartholomae worries that the institutionalization of basic writing does not necessarily offer the best solution to how writing instruction should be engaged in higher education. While Bartholomae does not call for the wholesale abolition of basic writing—indeed, he explicitly states that he does not advocate for the elimination of basic writing courses—his article does pose many questions about the formation of the field. Reflecting on the state of basic writing in academia, he writes:

> Basic writing has begun to seem like something naturally, inevitably, transparently there in the curriculum, in the stories we tell ourselves about English in America. It was once a provisional, contested term, marking an uneasy accommodation between the institution and its desires and a student body that did not or would not fit. I think it should continue to mark an area of contest, of struggle, including a struggle against its stability and inevitability. (8)

A problem for Bartholomae is the way in which basic writing has come to function rhetorically in the field of composition, "naturally, inevitably, transparently there in the curriculum." Further, he questions "the desire to preserve 'basic writing' as a key term simply because it is the one we have learned to think with or because it has allowed us our jobs or professional identities" (20). In critiquing these rhetorical and economic manifestation of basic writing, Bartholomae's analysis points to a political economy: the interrelations

between basic writing as a subfield requiring specialists and the rhetoric that persuades toward its preservation as a curriculum. In his discussion, Bartholomae reminds us that basic writing courses are historical and institutional constructs that have not always existed in the university. This rhetorical move, as Connors notes, is a recurring strategy in abolitionist debates. A consistent move within critiques of composition over the last 100-plus years is a reminder that composition began as a provisional solution to the problem of literacy until secondary education improved (281). Though not an abolitionist, Bartholomae uses a similar logic when he questions the "stability and inevitability" of basic writing at this historical moment. Less than five years later, Shor looks to the institutionalization that Bartholomae questions and names it academic apartheid.

Shor's controversial article drew heated debate from basic writing reformist camps. Former *JBW* editor, Karen Greenburg, perhaps best represents this reformist period in her response to Shor. Greenburg contends with Shor's call for the abolition of basic writing in the next *JBW* issue, chiding Shor for his generalizing and "demonizing" of basic writing programs (90). Speculating on how Shaughnessy might respond to Shor's argument, Greenburg's critique of Shor calls on Shaugnessy's rhetoric to defend basic writing. In her praise of Shaughnessy and basic writing, she exposes what she reads as myths of basic writers and basic writing, in turn arguing for the uniqueness of basic writing programs and the dedication and pedagogical flexibility of basic writing teachers.

As Greenburg's response demonstrates, rhetorics of reform often operate to maintain basic writing as a unique pedagogy for academically marginalized students within higher education. These rhetorics argue the need for a space for such students in higher education. At the same time, in arguing for a particular kind of pedagogy for a particular kind of student, rhetorics of reform can also inadvertently contribute to and maintain certain commonsense assumptions about student identities, abilities, and place. These rhetorics can unwittingly create contradictions between how basic writers are theorized and the actual material conditions of basic writing as an institutional economy, contradictions that aren't easily or often resolved. For example, while basic writers are often caricatured as "at-risk students," academic outsiders in need of the safe haven curriculum, the changing demographics of students across institutions might call this representation into question.

Other basic writing scholars also responded to Shor, including Terrence Collins and Deborah Mutnick. Acknowledging that the history of basic writing is rooted in issues of racism, classism, and exclusion, Mutnick argues that because of these realities, teachers must also negotiate the very material conditions that circumscribe students' work with discourse and error. "To defend basic writing at present," Mutnick writes in a 2000 *JBW* article, "means contending both with the conservatives who condemn us for allowing underprepared stu-

dents through the doors of higher education in the first place and those in our own discipline who want to abolish remedial instruction because it stereotypes students and segregates them from the mainstream" (71). Mutnick rightly observes the contradictory betwixt and between state that envelops basic writing; yet, in an attempt to resolve this contradiction, her rhetoric ends up positing basic writing as an either/or state of existence—a class/program/pedagogy at a particular location, that is, rather than recognizing it as a social material process in a state of constant reconfiguration within and across institutions of higher education.

Recognizing basic writing as social material process would mean unpacking the contradiction that while basic writing might not exist as an official institutional program within the university, basic writers, at least as we define them in our scholarship, nevertheless certainly would still exist, whether these students are absorbed into traditional FYC classrooms at the university or shifted to regional two-year institutions. Without this more fluid understanding of the making and remaking of basic writing as both hegemony and counter-hegemony in process, the materiality of basic writing is obscured while the rhetorical implication is that basic writing once again stands as the thin red line protecting both literacy and equality in U.S. literacy practices. Such a position perpetuates a reading of basic writing as narrowly tied to crisis and necessarily to be maintained within the specific location of the university. This dominant narrative belies the actual existence of many if not most basic writing programs in the United States, programs located on the campuses of regional colleges.

In arguing for basic writing's uniqueness, rhetorics of reform make it difficult to see beyond the university in thinking about how to engage and resolve basic writing issues and concerns. That is, rhetorics of reform often focus on alternative—and even innovative—pedagogical and programmatic changes in basic writing within an institution. There is little serious discussion in rhetorics of reform, however, as to how basic writing concerns spill over, both ideologically and materially, both politically and economically, from one institution to another, across two-year and four-year colleges, between main campuses and urban campuses, as to how basic writing is tied, outside of academia, to economies of knowledge and the rise of mass literacy in a new capitalist and global world order. Yet, these are the kind of changing cultural and material conditions we ought to be concerned about in future discussions of basic writing.

Recent abolitionist arguments from within composition and basic writing diverge significantly from previous abolition movements in composition history. Historically, most abolitionist arguments are based on the assertion that basic skills instruction is not the responsibility of the university, that students should acquire these skills before admittance to the university (Connors 287). The above arguments concerning basic writing differ distinctly from this claim. Shor and other abolitionists are not university elitists concerned with

maintaining the institutional status quo. The reasoning behind their arguments, instead, actually questions the status quo of literacy instruction. Their major concern is that the institutionalization and stratification of basic writing perhaps does more harm than good for students required to take such courses. Their purpose in arguing for the abolition of basic writing is to advance education toward what it strives to be: a democratic reality. Yet at the same time, like the reformist rhetoric discussed above, this abolitionist rhetoric not only reframes basic writing as crisis, but also in some cases undertheorizes the relationship between functions and effects of basic writing. As Horner notes in a critique of Shor, though some basic writing programs do have the effect of excluding students, to assume that such exclusion is the function of basic writing is to misread an unintended consequence as intended (*Terms* 123). So while certainly an important step in revealing the materiality of basic writing, such orthodox Marxist readings, wherein basic writing is constructed as only a direct cause or effect of institutional economies (such as language control) or political ideologies (such as conservative backlash), can tend to obscure basic writing's formation as a complex social material process.

Notably, reformist and abolitionist positions in basic writing are not as ideologically distant from one another as their rhetorics might suggest. Both camps agree that the problem of basic writing hinges on what basic writing students need and deserve from a literacy education at the college and university level. Indeed, both camps have students' best interests in mind. At the same time, both narratives rest on the foundational metaphor of crisis. Where they primarily differ is in their ideological constructions of basic writing: rhetorics of reform vary, but the underlying element of crisis centers on the consequences for students if basic writing programs are eliminated within the university. As for rhetorics of abolition, the element of crisis rests on the consequences of a gate-keeping function if basic writing programs continue. Yet both rhetorical positions contribute to a selective narrative on basic writing. If basic writing is to truly assist its students in the academic enterprise, its theoretical and pedagogical emphases need to move beyond an either/or model that takes crisis as its foundation. And in doing so, we might be better positioned to excavate alternative basic writing narratives at other kinds of institutions.

The Institutional Sites of Basic Writing

Since the closing of open admissions at CUNY and other university campuses, more recent basic writing scholarship often moves to describe and address the local, context-specific realities of basic writing. In many cases, these representations focus on programs restructuring in the face of threats or actual elimination of funding for remediation. In a 1999 article, William B. Lalicker identifies five basic writing structures identified through a survey sent to

writing program administrators through the Writing Program Administrators listserv: the prerequisite model, the stretch model, the studio model, the direct-self placement model, the intensive model, and the mainstreaming model. As described by Lalicker, the prerequisite model is the baseline and "current-traditional" model (par. 4). Placed into this type of course, students are required to complete the course before completing first-year composition. This basic model carries no credit toward the degree or general education requirements. Lalicker goes on to describe the four remaining models as alternatives to this approach.

Following the same curricular structure as the baseline model, the self-directed placement model makes basic writing optional rather than required. The stretch model, most well known through its association with Arizona State University, expands the first-year composition general education requirement over two terms rather than one. In contrast to the prerequisite model, students receive university (and sometimes general education) credit for the additional class. Of emphasis within the stretch model is that the curriculum across the two terms focuses on the same core, college-level composition objectives. The studio model attaches a required one-credit group tutorial to the standard first-year composition course for students demonstrating the need for supplemental writing support. A variation on the studio model, the intensive model might be described as an expanded first-year writing course. Students are required to take more writing credits than traditionally required for first-year general education, but they do so within one term, taking, for example, a five-credit English 101 course rather than a three-credit English 101 course. Finally, within the mainstreaming model, basic writers are simply included in standard composition courses with no prerequisite or additional writing requirements required. Of course, as Lalicker points out, in some cases, depending upon admissions requirements, mainstreaming might eliminate basic writers as well.

Though these alternative basic writing models exist across the spectrum of higher education institutions, three models in particular—the mainstreaming, stretch, and studio models—have historically been associated with university programs in our scholarly literature[5]. This association might be contributed to a confluence of factors. For example, the decline of open admissions within universities occurred alongside the rise of university-wide writing programs. At the same time, the legitimatization of basic writing as a subfield cannot be separated from the earlier growth of composition as a recognized academic field of study within the university, a growth that has steadily contributed to an increase in rhetoric and composition specialists over the last few decades. At the university level at least, these spe-

5. As Lalicker notes even in 1999, "one might expect research universities, comprehensive state universities, liberal arts colleges and community colleges to favor particular models according to institutional type, but such seemed not to be the case" (par. 2).

cialists are required to produce not only as teachers, but also as scholars. And since many basic writing specialists also serve as writing program administrators at their respective institutions, it follows that their scholarship often focuses on their own programs. Let me clarify: these observations are not to suggest that basic writing exists in the university simply as a function to preserve basic writing scholarship. On the contrary, the relationship between basic writing as a curriculum and basic writing as a subdiscipline is much more complex. This observation does, however, suggest that there is a political economy of basic writing at work here, one in which the material needs of students, teachers, scholars, and institutions contribute to the formation and reformation of attending power relations within the enterprise of basic writing.

Mainstreaming's association with CUNY provides a useful example for exploring this university-based association. Mainstreaming debates surface in *JBW* around the same time that CUNY announced the end of open admissions in the late 1990s. In a foundational 1997 article, "From Remediation to Enrichment: Evaluating a Mainstreaming Project," Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason describe and assess a mainstreaming project that they were able to pilot at CUNY with support from a FIPSE grant. As described in this article and other subsequent mainstreaming accounts, mainstreaming functions to eliminate basic writing programs at the institutional level, but it does so hesitantly, strategically maintaining a commitment to basic writing principles yet doing so under the auspices of a traditional FYC space.

Rhetorically, mainstreaming disappears basic writing programs, most notably within institutions no longer allowing remediation per se. At the same time it attempts to preserve basic writing pedagogy and basic writing students within a shrunken curricular space. In effect, I'd suggest, mainstreaming becomes the site wherein reformist and abolitionist rhetorics of basic writing are ideologically reconciled with one another. The placement/requirement apparatus that allows for basic writing to exist as a gatekeeper is removed, yet in theory mainstreaming allows for the continuation of a basic writing pedagogical approach. Though the program designs vary, both studio and stretch models of basic writing might have similar effects. While such programs are to be applauded for their attempts to continue support for basic writers under volatile institutional conditions, it must also be noted that this reconciliation furthers the dominant basic writing narrative wherein the crisis of basic writing

> "furthers the dominant basic writing narrative wherein the crisis of basic writing is seemingly managed and resolved"

is seemingly managed and resolved, even if only tentatively, within the context of local institutional conditions. And since these localized narratives are based, by and large, on university programs, this reconciliation implies that, once again, basic writing is barely preserved within the university. Further, the institutionally specific approach of such narratives, such as Soliday and Gleason's focus on mainstreaming through their CUNY pilot, Greg Glau's depiction of ASU's stretch program, and Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson's portrayal of the studio approach allows for a commonsense that rejects grand narratives on basic writing.

On the one hand, attention to such context-specific details of programs allow for more discussion of particular material realities of each program. On the other hand, because these detailed stories collectively form a narrative wherein non-university programs are not represented, they reinscribe a discourse that suggests basic writing programs exist only at universities. Because of the differing missions, resources, and student populations at non-selective four-year institutions or even non-traditional university campuses, such as branch and urban campuses, the structure and function of basic writing programs might vary widely from campus to campus. At my own urban campus, for example, the basic writing program adopts the model being employed at the main campus, a combination of the studio and stretch model. However, due to significant differences in resources, enrollments, and student numbers, our program enacts this model very differently when it comes to staffing, course offerings, and administrative oversight. It is not the exact same program. John Paul Tassoni, too, describes how the politics between the main campus and his branch campus at Miami University have impacted the formation of the basic writing program at his campus[6]. The relationships between these campus specifics need to be exploited rather than disregarded. When only a part is represented as the whole, as demonstrated in our scholarship, the effect is mystification of the kind Villanueva suggests: the material realities of basic writing programs at other kinds of campuses are made invisible. Instead, we ought to strive for an analysis of the whole (the multifaceted institutionalization of basic writing) in order to make sense of the parts (dominant and alternative formations of basic writing).

Further, as Lalicker rightly observes, at times the material effects of mainstreaming in particular mean that actual basic writers disappear along with basic writing programs. In many cases, the students who are disappeared from the university end up in non-selective institutions. However, our scholarship engages little of the institutionalization of basic writing in these settings—beyond the familiar rhetoric of crisis, that is. Our representations of two-year colleges are a case in point. As Jon Lovas notes, we have a "blind spot" when it comes to composition in the two-year college (274), tending to either ignore or inadequately engage the vast work being done in the teaching of writing at such institutions. When such

6. See his discussion in "Retelling Basic Writing at a Regional Campus."

institutions are addressed, the representations are selective at best. Take, for example, Scott Stevens account of community colleges in California. In "Nowhere to Go: Basic Writing and the Scapegoating of Civic Failure," Stevens chastises his California university for abandoning its commitment to serve folks labeled as basic writers. Stevens critiques the way in which a rhetoric of democracy is evoked to justify moving remediation out of the university and into the community colleges. As he sees it, the university re-instates elitism by declaring community colleges as the site where remediation of basic writers should occur because of its open access mission. Stevens' depiction of what goes on at the community college is an image we are familiar with: unqualified instructors are hired at piecemeal rates, all the while provided no basic writing training (12). Under-funded and under-valued, community colleges are certainly contested sites where basic writing instructors are likely to suffer institutional exploitation. Yet, as Lovas points out, we might make a similar observation of the use of TAs to staff first-year composition in universities (278). A political economy reading might better sort through these contradictions between access and elitism, between remediation and exploitation, in order to provide a fuller explanation of what is happening.

Another familiar critique of two-year colleges is the "cooling out" function. As a literacy gatekeeper, basic writing—or rather remediation as it is more often referred to within the community college setting—is considerably implicated in such a process. Here's Lovas' summation of this community college function, which he traces most recently within our discipline to Shor, then back to sociologist Jerome Karabel and Steven Zwerling during the 1960s and 1970s:

> more minority and low income students entered two-year colleges than other institutions of higher education, but the rate at which they reach upper division was much lower than the rate at which those who entered the universities reached upper division. In this construction, the two-year college was a device of a corporate system intended to dampen the aspirations of minority and poor students. (274)

Here, Lovas identifies the working assumption behind this theory, that two-year colleges were designed for such a function. And indeed, in his critique of the stratified state of higher education, Shor asks us to consider the following: "why would a society dominated by white, male, and corporate supremacy build 1,200 new community colleges to disturb its old hierarchies of race, gender, and class?" (135). Though Shor's question is decidedly a rhetorical one, we might reframe it to ask "how?" rather than "why?" That is, in asking *how* one effect of community colleges has been a cooling out function, we must look to the historical conditions that gave rise to it. Such work might constitute a political economy of basic writing and remediation within two-year colleges, an unpacking that demands that we look to how community colleges have historically evolved to meet specific and often contradictory

educational outcomes—one of which has been remediation—within limited material means, and always among a confluence of power relations, not the least of which includes relations between community colleges and universities. Mapping such contradictions historically provides not only a better understanding of basic writing as a key term, but also the opportunity for finding counter-hegemonic potential within the hegemonic. Seeing, for example, that while basic writing in two-year colleges might very well contribute to a cooling out, since this is an effect and not its designated function, there is also the possibility for counter-hegemonic resistance in community college work.

In *Terms of Work for Composition*, Horner offers a cultural materialist critique of composition, a critique that redefines and resituates the work of composition in light of its often elusive and dematerialized representation in our scholarship. "I argue for redefining [composition] sites," he writes, " in ways that confront their materiality, acknowledging both the power of existing material conditions to shape the work we do in composition and the history of those conditions—that is their susceptibility to changing consciousness and action" (xvi). In other words, Horner calls for a recognition of the ways in which composition's materiality, because it is process and activity always in the making, affords "counterhegemonic potential" (xvi) within the hegemonic structures of academic writing instruction, structures such as basic writing. Such work is only possible when we acknowledge economies as both materiality and culturally (that is, ideologically) realized.

By limiting and potentially misreading the reciprocal relationship between cultural and material formations of basic writing, we miss opportunities to enact change. A political economy of basic writing attends to the social material processes that have given rise to basic writing, including the historical, economic, political, and cultural processes currently shaping and contributing to basic writing as a contested and contradictory formation. Political economy provides a comprehensive analysis of basic writing because it allows for a more fully realized material analysis. At the same time, in order to fully explore the politics of basic writing as an economic structure, such an analysis must also engage in historical materialism. If, as Polanyi argues, economy is "embedded" among "politics, religion, and social relations" (xxiv)—a premise that informs this examination—our analyses of basic writing, while mapping the local and site-specific conditions of institutional constructions of basic writing, must also recuperate historical narratives that inform our understanding of the interrelations among basic writing constructions. An important part of this work means that we must read basic writing within the historicity of remediation, acknowledging basic writing as both hegemony and counterhegemony in process, not either one or the other. Such work requires that we turn our attention to the ways in which basic writing and remediation are constructed and reconfigured not only within but also across a variety of institutional settings.

Toward a Political Economy

A precedent for doing the kind of critical work I suggest is needed exists within our field. Alongside the dominant narrative of crisis that I outline above, scholars have and continue to call attention to the material and economic conditions of basic writing, doing so in ways that forefront historical contingencies. In addition to the contributions of Horner, Shor, and Villanueva, a number of basic writing scholars, such as Jeanne Gunner and Joseph Harris[7] , have suggested that one consequence of Shaughnessy's legacy is that it has distanced basic writing from its remedial roots. Horner and Lu's collection, *Representing the 'Other': Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing*, examines basic writing from a cultural materialist lens. In their analysis, which they describe as concerning "discursive practices in basic writing, foregrounding the specific sociopolitical and intellectual contexts of both the production and reception of a discourse dominating the field" (xi), the authors emphasize how particular material and historical conditions contribute to the construct of basic writing as we know it today. That is, they attempt to deconstruct assumptions of basic writing and basic writers as "natural" by mapping the ways in which various discourses emerge historically to create basic writing as a particular field and basic writers as a particular kind of student. Such critique is important because it points to the constructed nature of basic writing, opening up a space for a political economy of basic writing to recuperate other basic writing histories.

Horner and Lu identify five assumptions that undergird their cultural materialist readings of basic writing: the view of discourse as material practice, a theory of multiple subjecthood, the assertion of education as a political and socio-economic structure and construction, the notion of hegemony as a transformational possibility, and a belief that human agency is always limited by material constraints (xiii-xiv). These assumptions provide a theoretical baseline for examining the ideological construction of basic writing and its relationship to economic and material realities. By revealing the institutional pressures that contributed to the formation of basic writing at CUNY, Horner and Lu make vital connections between how basic writing policies and pedagogies are complexly yet directly related to civil society and therefore necessarily not value-free. By reading the enterprise of basic writing and its effects on basic writers through this cultural studies lens, Horner and Lu succeed in "relocate[ing] writing and the teaching of writing in society and history" (xiv). One important consequence implied by their collective work, therefore, is the recuperation of an institutionalized legacy of basic writing prior to Shaughnessy, a legacy mired in the social and the political. From here, a political economy of basic writing might further reach to include an

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7. See, for example, Harris' *A Teaching Subject* and Gunner's "Iconic Discourse: The Troubling Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy."

analysis of wider cultural, historical, political, and economic processes that have impacted basic writing in critical ways.

Furthermore, Soliday's recent book, *The Politics of Remediation: Institutional Needs in Higher Education*, is also an important contribution to political economies of basic writing. In resituating basic writing's history, she argues that the history of writing remediation, the beginning of which she traces to over 100 years ago, must be read in light of the institutional needs it performs within the academy. Similar to Shor, she critiques basic writing's use as an "economic base" (7) in academia. She argues that this use perpetuates a reliance on remediation through traditional, commonsense notions that assume that "remediation exists only because students need to be remediated" (22). Soliday critiques this ahistorical assumption, an assumption which presumes that while students' skill levels might ebb and flow across decades and demographics, a certain universal standard exists to be met by students while the institutional conditions and expectations remain the same.

Her historical analysis of remediation within educational institutions provides a lens for reading the inherent biases in such an *a priori* assumption, also revealing how literacy standards within academia are historically and politically constructed within particular institutions to meet particular needs at particular historical moments. While Horner and Lu interrogate the presumed "naturalness" of basic writing and basic writers, then, Soliday extends this conversation to investigate the "always-new remedial student" (10) alongside a history of remedial programs that adapt to a variety of institutional needs across time, such as enrollment increases and decreases, more often than to actual student needs.

Each of these approaches offers a particular perspective on the relationship between the material and the ideological within the enterprise of basic writing. What is needed, in addition, is a broader understanding of how the institutional and cross-institutionalization of basic writing creates a political economy. To do such work requires a comprehensive mapping of basic writing formation, a mapping that addresses specific local conditions, broader systems of power, and the interrelations among them. It requires an understanding of hegemony as complex processes: an understanding of hegemony as rhetorical, an understanding of hegemony as it intersects with the material, an understanding of how hegemony as a process embodies the dialectic among the rhetorical and the material in the making of history. In short, as Villanueva advises, we must recognize how "rhetoric is tied to political economy, if the work of rhetoric is the demystification of the ideological" (64). A foundation for this kind of critical work exists within our field. Our future work is to further it. In rehistoricizing the field of basic writing, we must work to uncover histories and practices of basic writing and remediation across as well as within academic institutions; most pressingly, we need to examine basic writing at contemporary open admissions institutions, the kinds of institu-

tions that are often invisible in the majority of basic writing scholarship, yet the kinds of institutions where the preponderance of basic writing instruction occurs.

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