Open WORDS

Access and English Studies

In this issue

OPEN WORDS: Access and English Studies is dedicated to publishing articles focusing on political, professional, and pedagogical issues related to teaching composition, reading, creative writing, ESL, and literature to open-admissions and "non-mainstream" student populations. We seek critical work in areas such as instructional strategies, cultural studies, critical theory, classroom materials, technological innovation, institutional critique, student services, program development, etc., that assist educators, administrators, and student support personnel who work with students in pedagogically difficult settings. Articles should consider the particularities of these settings—issues, for example, surrounding the identifier of "open access," intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, regional and cultural differences, and the range of competencies students bring with them to classrooms—in light of the aims of English studies to empower students' critical and creative endeavors. We value works pertinent to specialists yet accessible to non-specialists, and we encourage submissions that take into account what interactions with students teach us about the broader, democratic goals of open-access educations and English studies.

OPEN WORDS: Access and English Studies accepts manuscripts year-round and is interested in theory, critique, qualitative or quantitative studies, narrative, biography, history, or pedagogical practice. Prospective contributors should prepare manuscripts in MLA style with all identifying references to the authors deleted. Submissions should include a cover page, giving the name, address, and institutional affiliation of the author. We do consider longer works, but submissions should try to stay under 30 pages. We will acknowledge receipt of submissions immediately and inform contributors of the status in approximately 8-12 weeks.

Electronic submissions should be sent to John Paul Tassoni at *tassonjp@muohio.edu* or William H. Thelin at *wthelin@uakron.edu.* Paper submissions can be sent to John Paul Tassoni, OPEN WORDS, Department of English, Miami University Middletown, Middletown, OH 45042. Please prepare three copies.

OPEN WORDS: Access and English Studies is published twice a year in electronic form and is available on Pearson Comp Pro at *http://www.pearsoncomppro.com/.*

Volume 5
Number 2
Fall 2011

Open
WORDS

Access
and
English
Studies

Table of Contents

Guest Editor's Introduction:
Finding Ourselves Here

THE ECONOMIC WOES OF THE NATON—INDEED OF THE WORLD—cannot help but impact higher education. States contribute less money to universities and colleges than in years gone by, and increased student tuition does not seem to offset the lost revenue. Yet, institutions of higher learning find funds for buildings, dorms, and football teams, a situation which troubles educators, especially those of open-access students. While we could use smaller class sizes, more tutors, investment into on-campus child care facilities, better counseling services, and, of course, more full-time positions with benefits and livable wages for instructors so as to teach better, the priorities on many campuses seem to be elsewhere.

Rather than helping to bridge the gap between the working and middle classes, higher education appears to be continuing the class-based inequalities of K-12 education that Patrick Finn documents in his book, *Literacy with an Attitude*. Finn reviews much of the research into disparities found in funding, opportunities, and pedagogies among affluent, middle-class, and working-class schools, concluding that students are tracked early on in their schooling to reproduce in their adulthood the social class into which they were born. Higher education often has been seen as democracy in action—the method by which working-class students can succeed. Instead, institutions pay less attention to needs associated with the working class, such as remedial programs, and privilege disciplines that produce revenues through grants and corporate sponsorship. The liberal arts, which can expose students to the critical literacy needed to challenge class stratification, languish in many colleges and universities, growing increasingly more reliant on adjunct and/or contingent labor and having demands placed upon them for "accountability" in the form of dumbed-down curriculum and regressive assessments.

With more desperate working-class students turning to the university for relief in the form of job training, critical educators need to respond, both in finding ways to help students with their immediate needs and in teaching them about the forces that work against them. It would be nice if our education could directly supply gainful employment for the masses, but it does not. So while not ignoring the education necessary for students to prepare themselves for the workforce, our goal should be critical citizenry toward challenging the status quo. The world of capitalism confuses many students, as policies seem to lack consistency and logic. The need for job creation gets tied to national and state deficits. We are told that privatization is good when it comes to profit, but losses become a matter of public responsibility. And we

are told that, somehow, reducing the power of unions so that fewer well-paying, public sector jobs are available will benefit workers. We fight wars in countries that did not attack us. We give tax breaks to corporations so they will invest in the American economy, but unemployment continues to rise. Michael Parenti refers to this as a concerted effort toward the "Third Worldization" of our country (35). Instructors need to make students aware of this process in order to fight against it.

I could not help but think of these pressing concerns as I again read the articles that make up this issue of *Open Words*. Each author's dilemma in some way connects to the dire circumstances we find ourselves in. The economy, after all, forces choices on us. Laura Rogers, for example, tells us she started teaching in a correctional facility because she needed a job and discusses how prisons lost funding for college programs due to cuts, leading her to conduct workshops for inmates. Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano sought to find a placement process that would respond to the needs of their open-admissions students but had to also recognize the demands placed on university resources in order to enact stronger procedures. Certainly, teaching at a regional campus of Kent State University at least partially contributes to the perspective M. Karen Powers gives about the ways in which class has been elided in institutional documents. Yet, as always, when times look bleak, committed educators remain resolved to serve students and fight the status quo. These authors' articles, although differing considerably, all share a commitment to righting wrongs.

We start with M. Karen Powers's in-depth examination of the mission and diversity statements of community colleges and top public research universities in "'Good Citizens' in a Twenty-First Century University: Social Class, Institutional Texts, and the (Anti-)Democratic Politics of Place." Powers finds that social class is simplified in the dominant discourse of institutional texts, leaving alive the troubling myth of community colleges and higher education in general as the great equalizers. For at-risk students in perilous economic times, the opportunity presented by community colleges reifies class stratification. Powers argues for re-imagining a future in which open-admissions students will have their needs met by institutions that take seriously the role of higher education as a democratizing tool.

In "First-Year Composition Placement at Open-Admission, Two-Year Campuses: Changing Campus Culture, Institutional Practice, and Student Success," Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano take traditional placement processes to the task for not addressing the complexities surrounding open-admissions students. They argue for a multiple-measure approach toward "student readiness" that is locally situated. Recounting the progress they have made in the University of Wisconsin system, Hassel and Giordano discuss the time and resources needed for such a project to flourish but show the benefits that accrue as a result.

Finally, Laura Rogers in "'The Secret Souls of Criminals: A Different Prison Teaching

Story" reflects on the question asked of her by an inmate in the prison where she worked: "Why are you here?" Rogers examines the dominant explanations for teaching to such a non-traditional population and assesses the possibility that she is complicit with the system of discipline and punishment in offering education to the prisoners. She understands, ultimately, that only in confronting the truths about herself can she ask for the respect and trust of her students.

Paulo Freire taught us about the frustration liberating educators face in "swimming against the current," and he cautions us about expecting from education what it cannot do: "transform society by itself" (Shor and Freire 37). Yet, he concerns himself equally with those who turn away after discovering the limits of education, "denying every effort, even important ones. . . and fall[ing] into a negative criticism, even a sick one" (37). I find it important as the co-editor of *Open Words* to never ignore the strides made by individuals to implement change. We wonder, sometimes, at the end of the day, what we have accomplished, what we are doing here, merely teaching in colleges and universities while suffering surrounds us. But this is where we find ourselves. Through our critiques, our innovations in facets of administration, and our intervention in the lives of those forgotten if not demonized in society, we make a difference. It is a difference worth remembering.

William H. Thelin
October, 2011

Works Cited

Finn, Patrick. *Literacy with an Attitude*. 2nd Edition. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009. Print.

Parenti, Michael. *The Face of Imperialism*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2011. Print.

Shor, Ira, and Paulo Freire. *A Pedagogy for Liberation*. New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1987. Print.

M. Karen Powers

"Good Citizens" in a Twenty-First Century University: Social Class, Institutional Texts, and the (Anti-)Democratic Politics of Place

Community colleges are indeed democracy in action.—Nell Ann Pickett
The two-year college as "democracy's college," as an institution committed to egalitarian values, is a myth.—William DeGenaro

AT THE 1997 CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND Communication, Nell Ann Pickett ended her Chair's address with this proclamation: "Community colleges are indeed democracy in action" (98). If these particular words are Pickett's, the historical truism they reiterate testifies to the enduring trend to tout open-access campuses as bastions of social equality. Such meritocratic discourse is woven throughout two-year college history, as Ronald Weisberger summarizes: "The expansion of our public colleges and universities and particularly community colleges after World War II was supposed to make a difference in providing access to all citizens" (127). Patrick Sullivan alludes to the stamina of this standard story, suggesting that scholars have tended to venerate "the modern community college, with its 'open-admissions' policy," by embracing the deeply entrenched conviction that the institution "democratized what had been essentially a caste system of affluence and privilege in higher education in America" (142). As Weisberger and Sullivan intimate, traditional historiography must circumvent a vexed past to imagine the open-access institution as unambiguous egalitarian entity. Since such (re)writings of history cannot avoid encountering evidence that challenges higher education's presumed commitment to social equality, these conventional narratives coalesce into what William DeGenaro labels a "myth" (183).

Under the semblance of impartial history, this myth has not only long disregarded classed experiences that call into question the open-access institution's persistent designation as "'democracy's college,'" this authoritative history also exerts considerable influence on the politics of higher education in the present moment (DeGenaro 183). One consequence is that these recurring and disingenuous (re)presentations of the past reinforce prevalent diversity discourses that tend to similarly discount social class as a key marker of sociocultural difference within the contemporary public university. The significance of such exclusion is

illuminated when representative institutional texts are examined in light of the dialectic established by Pickett and DeGenaro. As I argue in this case study focused on my own workplace, Kent State University, this institution's diversity statement tacitly (if inadvertently) legitimates the stock historical narrative by assuming that social class is immaterial. Moreover, I suggest that this institutional text authorizes subtle class bias embedded in KSU's main campus and regional campus mission statements, the latter two texts fashioning opposing and class-bound versions of the "good citizen."[1] As my interpretation maintains, this pair of written artifacts sustains class stratification, although without explicitly mentioning class, at the same time the diversity statement ignores social class difference altogether. Critical rhetorical analysis of this paradox calls attention to potentially far-reaching implications of overlooking social class as a pivotal marker of diversity.

The local history I assemble from a set of Kent State's institutional texts is admittedly narrow, intentionally meticulous, and unavoidably interested—one fragment of the university's recent past that I write into existence to address a distinct concern about ways diversity discourses are shaping higher education. Yet I take my cue from historians like Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori, who describes such an agenda as the process of "productively transforming discursive practices structured not to see (and to make others not to see), not to take into consideration, what might otherwise disturb a given version of history" (xi). My methodology also responds to an aspect of rhetorical historiography articulated by Carolyn Steedman: "Historians read for what is not there: the silences and absences of the documents always speak to us" (qtd. in Carr 237). As I scrutinize my own university, the one about which I know and care the most, I envision other teacher-scholars evaluating ideologies of social class difference embedded in conspicuous and ubiquitous artifacts that contribute to their respective institutions' histories. I do so in anticipation of the likelihood that "[m]any 'local' histories [might] thus fashion a richer, more fluid and permeable national history" (Carr 238). Such a multifaceted history stands poised to raise "[q]uestions about access to higher education [that] are more complicated and more troublesome than questions about what college costs" (Sacks 23).

---

1. I use the terms "main campus" and "regional campus" throughout. Although I acknowledge the divisive potential of such binary language, I contend that these terms most accurately reflect the two sites' historically contentious relationship. The politics of such naming practices were accentuated at Kent State University in October 2009 when Provost Robert G. Frank announced that "we need to standardize the terminology we use when referring to the individual Regional Campuses." In a university-wide e-mail, he stated, "From this point forward, please preface the name of each Regional Campus with 'Kent State University at.'" Notably, the directive does not stipulate referring to Kent State University at Kent. Whether this standardization policy reflects a new egalitarianism, that is, a move toward more equitable relations among sites comprising KSU's "eight-campus system," remains to be seen.

As Peter Sacks argues, "American society, with its ideological insistence that free markets are best, is getting the higher education system it deserves" (24). He goes on to ask these compelling questions: "[A]re we getting the education system that is just? Are we getting the education system that we need for the future of the democracy?" (24). In light of such concerns about the present-day politics of higher education, this historical moment witnessing the unfettered rise of the corporate university, the active involvement of those who agree that "[e]ducation is *inherently* an ethical and political act" is especially important (Apple ix). Such a collective endeavor might redouble critique of the burgeoning corporate model and potential aftermath, such as an overarching problem James Berger predicts: "Whatever does not contribute to the corporate good will be hard-pressed to justify its continued existence" (25). Such a cooperative undertaking might address Martha Nussbaum's concern about a university driven by profit in which "educators for economic growth will not want a study of history that focuses on injustices of class, caste, gender, and ethnoreligious membership, because this will prompt critical thinking about the present" (21). Such a collaborative effort might resurrect and reframe for the purpose of the current political battle convictions like that expressed by Michael W. Apple nearly twenty years ago when he insisted that our work as educators involves "intensely personal choices about both the common good and our own place in the struggles toward a society based on it" (ix). The tension that exists between Pickett's and DeGenaro's antithetical ideas presents a productive launching point for multiple ethical/political/personal investigations of various institutional texts to expose ways specif-

> "a profoundly classed and thus fundamentally anti-democratic politics of place"

ic artifacts position some sites for higher education in terms of a profoundly classed and thus fundamentally anti-democratic politics of place. In my case, I propose that traditional historical discourses that disavow class struggle are reinforced by Kent State's pivotal and time-honored institutional texts, as they simultaneously expunge social class difference and reinforce class bias. This recurring rhetorical process not only accomplishes the ideological work of (re)inscribing hegemonic history and the attendant myth of meritocracy, it also masks current inequitable relations that continue to construct the open-access campus as class-bound counterpart to the more selective university.[2]

2. I recognize that sites for higher education do not cluster on either side of a simplistic democratic/anti-democratic binary. If, despite traditional historiography's standard story, the open-access institution is not an undisputed locus of democracy, neither is the more-selective university. For a broadly contextualized critique of the U.S. public research university's ostensibly democratic foundation, see Catherine Chaput's Inside the Teaching Machine: Rhetoric and the Globalization of the U.S. Public Research University.

I make this specific argument at this particular moment because traditional historiography's dominance, as it is reflected in the most common institutional texts, is especially problematic during uncertain economic times like these. Widespread job loss, especially in the manufacturing sector, has prompted increasing numbers of first-generation and working-class students to enroll at open-access institutions across the nation, including Kent State University at Tuscarawas, a regional campus of the second-largest public research institution in Ohio where I teach primarily lower-level writing courses.[3] More than fifty years after the genesis of open-access campuses, the most recent upsurge in this specific demographic is continuing to transform U.S. student populations. In light of democracy's resolute avowal that higher education is the great equalizer, addressing repercussions arising from social class inequalities would seemingly be an imperative throughout academe as the nation struggles through one of the most severe economic recessions in U.S. history. Yet contemporary university and political debates alike seem to misread or disregard theoretical analyses and scholarly explanations enumerating the complex and substantial effects of class-biased ideologies that are inevitably concomitant with such monumental shifts in higher education.

Even liberal rhetoric tends to privilege what Keith Kroll and Barry Alford describe as a short-sighted focus on "business-centric education policies." As they explain, "For the Obama administration and those who support their education policies and discourse, 'education' has become narrowly defined as 'job training' and 'workforce development.'" One contributing factor to, as well as one consequence of, such constricted definitions of "education" is that social class is often excluded from articulations of human diversity routinely endorsed by the ostensibly democratic rhetoric characteristic of the public research university. Moreover, this persistent and pervasive erasure of social class remains strikingly evident in the ever-present diversity statement, an institutional text that undertakes the customary aim of inscribing universities' identities, principles, and objectives. As one of the twenty-first-century university's most authoritative institutional texts, the diversity statement speaks in a collective, if not seamless, voice about the place for social class among an accepted array of

---

3. According to the "most current information available as of January 2011," the American Association of Community Colleges states that this category of institution alone enrolled 12.4 million students or 44% of all U.S. undergraduates. Further, 42% were among the "[f]irst generation to attend college." The "[e]stimated enrollment increase [from] fall 2008-fall 2010" was 15% (See http://www.aacc.nche.edu/ AboutCC/Pages/fastfacts.aspx). Kent State University confirms this trend, enrolling in spring semester 2011 a total of 39,936 graduate and undergraduate students, of whom 24,909 attended the main campus and 15,027 attended one of the seven regional campuses. Enrollment on the main campus increased by 5.21 percent from fall 2009 to fall 2010 and by 4.51 percent from spring 2010 to spring 2011. Yet on my regional campus, Kent State University at Tuscarawas, enrollment increased 17.63 percent from fall 2009 to fall 2010 and 7.22 percent from spring 2010 to spring 2011
(See *http://www.kent.edu/rpie/enrollment/upload/8-campus-system-fall-10.pdf* and
http://www.kent.edu/rpie/enrollment/upload/8-campus-system-spring-11.pdf)..

diversity markers. For example, a review of the 68 institutions categorized as the top public research universities in the 2010 edition of *America's Best Colleges* reveals that 33 of these institutions acknowledge social class in their diversity statements.[4] This statistical evidence is telling: Only about half reference class in their public testaments to the worth of sociocultural difference, suggesting that Kent State University shares its inclination to omit class with a number of nationally ranked public research universities.

The University of Illinois typifies the group that does explicitly designate class as one among several named aspects of diversity influencing identity and worldview: "We are committed to diversity because we serve a diverse student population and strive to create an atmosphere and institutional culture which is welcoming to all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, ability/disability, socioeconomic class and national origin" (*http://www.diversity.illinois.edu/ statements.html*). This category uses a variety of labels such as "socio-economic status," "social backgrounds [and] economic circumstances," "socioeconomic class," "social circumstances," "economic and social diversity," "the working classes," "social class," "socioeconomic background(s)," "socioeconomic levels," "whether [students] grew up on a farm or a city block," "economic backgrounds," "economic status," "economic strata," "socioeconomic and geographic composition," and "socioeconomic and geographic diversity." Notably, however, even when class is acknowledged, the most frequently used term derives from "socioeconomic status," a label that foregrounds financial standing, namely lower income. In other words, "socio-," or the whole complex of meanings inherent in notions of the "social," is invariably linked to "economic status," effectively reducing social class to income level.

Although referring to class with this most prevalent term does, on one level, reflect recognition of this pivotal difference, such an invocation is nonetheless problematic in the sense bell hooks explained more than fifteen years ago. Citing a "working poor" background that prompted her to understand class as "mainly about materiality," she explains her reconsideration of the concept as a student at Stanford University: "It only took me a short while to understand that class was more than just a question of money, that it shaped values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would be given and received" (177-78). Considered through this lens that elaborates and complicates class in ways that would appear to be particularly useful in academic settings, "socioeconomic status" func-

---

4. I reviewed 68 public research institutions categorized as the top public universities by U.S. News and World Report's 2010 online edition of America's Best Colleges. (The Web site for U.S. News and World Report now cites the 2011 edition of America's Best Colleges, but the source I consulted continues to exist in print format. See: U.S. News and World Report. America's Best Colleges. Ed. Peter Meredith. 2010 ed. Washington, DC: U.S. News and World Report, 2009. Print.) To gather this information, I used a site-specific method and the terms "diversity" and/or "diversity statement" to search from each institution's home page for a statement that pertains to the entire university.

tions as a reductive term. In effect, the phrase implies that class is largely an undesirable but (fortunately) temporary marker of difference. The college experience and degree are, in fact, intended to provide the cultural capital to earn higher income and concomitant higher social status—the means by which to leave a working-class background behind. Only one institution among the 33 references "social class"; only one presumes to explicitly name "the working classes." If the overarching intent of the public research institution's diversity initiative is to immerse students in a wealth of disparate experiences and perspectives, it is worth considering ways the latter two labels extend the concept of class to span cultural class, such as taste and style, and political class, such as power and influence.

Eighteen other universities among the most widely recognized and respected public research institutions in the U.S. fit into a second general category by virtue of their respective approaches to naming, defining, and valuing social class in higher education. This group eschews specific categories of difference altogether in favor of seemingly more comprehensive, if imprecise, definitions of diversity that list no specific attributes. The University of Delaware speaks for this group, saying the institution "is committed to creating an educational community that is intellectually, culturally and socially inclusive, enriched by the contributions and full participation of persons from many different backgrounds" (*http://www.udel.edu/diversity/*). Yet, if this cohort does not openly dismiss social class, neither does it unequivocally embrace class as integral to diversity. Most likely, such ambiguous statements do not evoke class distinctions at all, given that contemporary U.S. media and culture discourages forthright considerations of class. As Ira Shor notes, for example, "[S]ocial class is an unfamiliar, uncomfortable, sometimes forbidden theme" (163). Alternatively, the more predictable differences, such as those based on race and gender, probably are brought to mind.

A third group resembles the first in that these seventeen universities delineate specific categories of difference such as race and gender, but they neglect to include social class on lists that vary in regard to number and variety of traits specified. North Carolina State reflects the short-list approach: "We welcome people of all races, ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientations" (*http://www.ncsu.edu/diversity/chancellor/ pdf/DiversityandtheGlobalResearch.pdf*). Virginia Tech represents the lengthy-list approach: "We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status" (*http://www.vt.edu/diversity/principles-of-community.html*). The obvious exclusion of social class here, as well as in the similar statements of fifteen other institutions, is noticeable. On one hand, I make no claim that my review of these 68 public research universities is exhaustive, nor allege that my categorization of their respective diversity statements is indisputable.

Also, although I made a concerted effort to review the most current versions, I cannot ensure that my citations are identical to those now in existence, given the rapid rate at which such institutional texts tend to undergo revision. If this ongoing official attention to these texts confirms their importance to the public research university, even a cursory examination of the top-ranked institutions, which establish precedents and standards for lower-ranked universities, indicates that conspicuous omissions and contradictions surrounding social class difference persist. Moreover, the problem surfaces even in current and prominent artifacts such as diversity statements, despite historical evidence that names social class as a primary factor affecting literacy and despite the increasing number of critical studies about the U.S. university as a site for class stratification and oppression.[5] Equally troubling is the likelihood that diversity statements work in rhetorical tandem with other university artifacts, as well as with a wide range of national and media discourses to create operative definitions of difference. As collective texts, such statements transcend individual institutions in a joint ideological venture that I argue continues to obscure class conflict endemic to the history of higher education.

In several ways, Kent State University, a public research institution that delineates specific markers of difference but overlooks social class, typifies a sector of the contemporary university in its interpretation and valuation of diversity.[6] For instance, the "Celebrating Differences" declaration published in the 2010-2011 undergraduate catalog maintains that "Kent State University is by its very nature an institution of intellectual, social and cultural diversity."[7] Moreover, the university makes an explicit discursive move that transcends both abstract generalities and passé rhetorics of mere tolerance to commemorate the wide-ranging differ-

5. The influence of social class on literacy has informed scholarly discussions since Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* appeared in 1957, followed by Burton Clark's 1960 essay, "The 'Cooling-Out' Function in Higher Education" that appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Also, as James Thomas Zebroski notes, "Since at least the 1970s, when the work of Richard Ohmann and Ira Shor, among others, began to point out the ways in which English (and the work that English accomplishes) is part of a wider hegemony that keeps capitalism in place in the United States with the consent of the ruled, there has been a general disciplinary agreement that reading and writing have social class connections" (771). In addition, a 2003 issue of Radical Teacher examined "Class in the Classroom," a 2004 special issue of *College English* focused on social class and English studies, and a 2005 special issue of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* addressed the theme, "The Invisible 'C': Class and the Community College."

6. In the fall of 2010, Kent State University's Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion launched a year-long initiative called "100 Commitments" to encourage the entire university community "to support and participate in activities designed to show our commitment to inclusive excellence." Since one difference highlighted was "socioeconomic status," perhaps this program portends a shift toward including class as a valued aspect of diversity in the university's institutional texts. (See *http://www.kent.edu/diversity/100commitments/background.cfm*).

7. All quotes from Kent State University institutional texts may be found in Appendix A. In addition, each text is listed in the Works Cited under "Kent State University."

ences it specifies: "[T]he university encourages an atmosphere in which the diversity of its members is understood and appreciated; an atmosphere that is free of discrimination and harassment based on race, religion, ethnic heritage, age, country of national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation or veteran status." Although these particular words compose this specific institutional text, the statement voices a perspective not uncommon in the contemporary U.S. university.

Kent State articulates one standard definition of diversity that echoes other twenty-first-century universities in the sense that missing from this otherwise detailed delineation is any mention of social class. Yet allegiance to Kent State's standpoint on the general merit of diversity is notable among public research institutions in the U.S. and is prevalent in academe as a whole, for, as Walter Benn Michaels observes, "[D]iversity has become virtually a sacred concept in American life today. No one's really against it; people tend instead to differ only in their degrees of enthusiasm for it and their ingenuity in pursuing it" (12). To be sure, the public research university's recognition of difference is not only commendable, but also vital to democratic tenets that legitimate the disparate perspectives of various groups of people with whom sovereignty presumably resides in this system of government. Yet, speaking in concert, certain institutional texts celebrate a deficient definition of diversity, their official language neglecting to integrate complex notions of social class into a comprehensive understanding of sociocultural difference. As a result, such texts fail to recognize one of the most consequential factors shaping the experiences of U.S. college students.

In this sense, "Celebrating Differences" is a representative institutional text that reveals a tendency within the public research university to overlook the burgeoning trend to acknowledge that class matters—and matters a great deal if, as journalist Alfred Lubrano succinctly insists, "Class is script, map, and guide" (5). The institution largely disregards the very marker of sociocultural difference that is arguably the foremost influence across American cultures and experiences, unmindful of extensive manifestations of social class such as those Lubrano describes in *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*:

> [Class] tells us how to talk, how to dress, how to hold ourselves, how to eat, and how to socialize. It affects whom we marry; where we live; the friends we choose; the jobs we have; the vacations we take; the books we read; the movies we see; the restaurants we pick; how we decide to buy houses, carpets, furniture, and cars; where our kids are educated; what we tell our children at the dinner table (conversations about the Middle East, for example, versus the continuing sagas of the broken vacuum cleaner or the half-wit neighbors); whether we even have a dinner table, or a dinnertime. In short, class is nearly everything about you. And it dictates what to expect out of life and what the future should be. (5)

In light of the putative magnitude of class difference, the reluctance of some universities to recognize social class is curious and troubling—especially since Kent State echoes the U.S. university when it defines itself emblematically in "Celebrating Differences" as "an ideal place to learn about the different cultures and experiences of people in the United States, as well as the rest of the world."

Even a cursory examination of Kent State University's most recent diversity statement points to a contemporary academic climate that esteems various social positions and the multiple worldviews they shape and reflect. The text pronounces "[t]he wide variety of people of differing races, ethnic backgrounds, beliefs and values … one of the greatest strengths of the university" and exhorts the audience "to take advantage of this resource and to learn from one another about the diversity of the human community." Further, "all members of the university are expected to join in creating a positive atmosphere in which we can learn in an environment that is sympathetic, respectful and supportive." Advocating this collaborative effort, the statement places emphasis on ensuring that "each student feels a part of the university community." This account testifies to the university's concerted and public effort to establish an inclusive environment. At the same time, a palpable silence resounds, muting the pertinence of social class to membership in academe. Diversity statements that omit social class difference obfuscate the middle-class belief systems and experiences that exist as the unacknowledged status quo. This omission, in turn, creates an unfamiliar environment that confronts increasing numbers of working-class students in the university community. Little seems to have changed since bell hooks insisted in 1994 that "[it] is still necessary for students to assimilate bourgeois values in order to be deemed acceptable" (178).

Kent State is not unique in terms of disregarding social class as an assumed and valued component of diversity, since approximately one-quarter of the universities I appraised take a similar position. That stance should not be surprising in light of Lubrano's estimation that "[f]or the last 30 years, universities have been awash in the politics of self-awareness, teaching the Holy Trinity of Identity—race, gender, and class. While race and gender have had their decades in the sun, however, class has been obscured and overlooked" (4). Of late, however, what Lubrano terms the unspeakable "'C-word'" is being uttered more often and

"unavoidably a geographic, economic, sociocultural, historical, political, and ideological place indelibly imprinted by social class"

more insistently in some fields to call into question the institutional invisibility of class (4). Although the standard story of higher education's past continues to suppress class analysis, James Thomas Zebroski traces one historical trajectory of the burgeoning claim that class is of considerable consequence when he notes that "scholars in composition and rhetoric … have been laboring for decades trying to raise social class on the disciplinary radar screen" (773). In addition, his observation that "[s]ince at least the 1970s, … there has been a general disciplinary acknowledgement that reading and writing have social class connections" (771) pinpoints the pivotal intersection between Pickett's assertion—"Community colleges are indeed democracy in action" (98)—and DeGenaro's counter statement—"The two-year college as 'democracy's college,' as an institution committed to egalitarian values, is a myth" (183). If Pickett's and DeGenaro's claims are antithetical, they nonetheless turn on a shared assumption that the two-year college—and, by extension, the open-access campus—is unavoidably a geographic, economic, sociocultural, historical, political, and ideological place indelibly imprinted by social class. Their differences notwithstanding, Pickett and DeGenaro invoke the mutual belief that democracy and institutions of higher education are inextricably intertwined, although they are clearly at odds when it comes to interpreting the historical truism that casts the open-access campus as democratic shibboleth.

Corroborating ideologies of diversity embedded in Kent State's 2010 "Celebrating Differences," two other twenty-first-century university artifacts—an institution-wide mission statement and its regional campus counterpart—present analogous definitions of sociocultural difference. Yet, rather than elide social class altogether, these ancillary institutional texts turn on class difference, or, more accurately, class partiality. They prove equally instructive in the sense that they similarly rouse from the past a hegemonic historiography to signal their engagement in what Weisberger calls "the ongoing class struggle that has characterized this country since its inception" (138). Although this pair of 2005 mission statements prefigures the diversity homily offered in the current "Celebrating Differences" text, the documents, taken together, suggest that class conflict continues to play out in disquietingly anti-democratic ways at this institutional site. Further, weighted as they are with public research university authority, these texts are indicative of the larger academic sphere in which the neglect of social class cannot help but impede any democratic impetus. Submitting these texts to critical rhetorical analysis not only offers glimpses of a local history in which social class exists, paradoxically, as an "absent presence," but also suggests implications for the whole of academe (Zebroski 773). In a general sense, my analysis takes up Zebroski's charge:

> Too often we look microscopically at the stylistic moves of academic discourse, but
> we rarely look at the class values embodied in such discourse. We study the marks on

the page, but not the power relations—including social class—that are the conditions of any utterance. … [O]ne must situate academic discourse in an equal study of social class that drives it at all levels, including those of the student, teacher, discipline, and especially the wider society. (790)

In a more specific sense, I insert a public research university and its regional campus counterparts between "discipline" and "wider society" in Zebroski's evaluation to assess the following institutional texts and to critique classist ideologies, however unintentional, that I maintain reinforce historical patterns of exclusion and oppression glossed by traditional historiography. I suggest that such discourses are quietly complicit in the current prominence of "job training" and "workforce development" on open-access campuses, definitions that Kroll and Alford consider nothing short of "indoctrination." In their words, such a philosophy "is not education. It has no socially constructive or just outcome, particularly at a time of upheaval and uncertainty. It is a failure of everything that a liberal arts education contributes to a just and democratic society."

Constructing the "Good Citizen": Mission Statements, Civic Literacy, and the Democratic Ideal

What American universities have done for a hundred years is prepare some youth to take up places in the professional-managerial class and, if they wish, exercise robust citizenship, too—while preparing other youth for more technical work and narrower citizenship.—Richard Ohmann

If Kent State University's 2010 "Celebrating Differences" declaration operates as an institutional text that constrains democratic practice by validating a classist belief system with silence and in the name of diversity, two 2005 university mission statements also authored by this public research institution reveal traces of the current diversity statement's ideological history. Equally infused with an unspoken but nonetheless contentious politics of class, these institutional texts, in turn, call on a legacy of class stratification Richard Ohmann traces across one hundred years. The university-wide mission statement that speaks for Kent State prepares its students precisely as Ohmann observes, "to take up places in the professional-managerial class and, if they wish, exercise robust citizenship too" (39). The sharply contrasting mission statement that addresses the seven surrounding regional sites prepares its students also as Ohmann remarks, "for more technical work and narrower citizenship" (39). At the center of this dual agenda is the public research university's historical tendency to articulate versions of the "good citizen." This discursive task reflects an ideological objective, as a detailed comparison of these documents demonstrates, one that is tacitly tied to global and national interests, as well as bound to local economies, politics, and histories. My juxta-

position of these two mission statements that address audiences segregated by social class illustrates ways the standard story of the open-access campus as democratic paradigm is a myth sustained by such institutional texts.

As linked rhetorical artifacts, the statements belie the democratic ideal by fashioning site-specific and classed notions of civic literacy. Defined by Donald Lazere as simply "critical citizenship," civic literacy involves the public construction of a sociopolitical and economic landscape for the practice of democracy (xii). The class-bound politics of place, veiled or overt, on which particular constructions of civic literacy are predicated consequentially illuminate the university's differentially imposed model of the good citizen. Although both mission statements operate as conventional declarations of "rationale and purpose," "responsibilities toward students and the community," and "vision[s] of student, faculty, and institutional excellence," their class-inflected rhetoric deploys conflicting philosophies of higher education contingent on geographic locations and corresponding social positions (Meacham 21). The two local texts under consideration provide insights into recent history in terms of this university's prevailing notion of civic literacy by marking ways social class indelibly imprints institutional identities tied to place. Equally important, these local texts contribute to a more expansive public rhetoric that continues to normalize class stratification, ironically, at a purported site for consummate democratic practice, the open-access campus.

The 2005 mission statement titled "The Role and Mission of Kent State University" and presumably applicable to the entire eight-campus system offers a certain image of the ideal good citizen. At the same time, this discursive construction illustrates ideologies of social class that invariably shape the politics of place. The university states immediately and explicitly, "The mission of Kent State University is to prepare students for responsible citizenship and productive careers, broaden intellectual perspectives and foster ethical and humanitarian values." Notably, "responsible citizenship" is the principle positioned to draw the most attention. This notion appears first in the list of four major endeavors and serves as an overarching rhetorical context for the three broad tenets that follow. The concluding phrase of the mission statement's opening sentence—to "foster ethical and humanitarian values"—couples with "responsible citizenship" to frame two other aims: to prepare students for "productive careers" and to "broaden intellectual perspectives." The latter two objectives are those students themselves might be more likely to express, but these intentions are positioned between the first and the last, thus garnering less notice and intimating that they modify the preeminent idea: the university's molding of the responsible, ethical humanitarian—historically the U.S. university's quintessential good citizen.

Notably, "responsible citizenship" at this site necessitates "productive careers," the

two phrases linked with the coordinating conjunction "and" rather than with a perhaps less-binding comma to stress each idea equally and to intimate how tightly the two ideas are aligned. In addition, "productive careers" connotes professions beneficial to human society as a whole when read against the foundational tenet of "responsible citizenship" to which it is firmly attached, as well as when regarded in terms of "ethical and humanitarian values." The choice of words and their arrangement in the sentence suggest that the imagined good citizens' "broaden[ed] intellectual perspectives" would inspire them to rise above a mere job where "productive" would likely take on a different meaning altogether. These undergraduates are not, as Lenore Beaky describes students in a "new, 'reimagined' CUNY community college" (19) set on "a strict pathway" that "marches them straight through their courses to a diploma and a job, like so many pieces of chocolate in the *I Love Lucy factory*" (21).

Further, two subsequent points in this mission statement speculate that these careers will play out in a global context. First, main campus good citizens are prepared for their roles in larger society by "faculty and staff [who] are engaged in teaching, research, creative expression, service and partnerships that address the needs of a complex and changing world." The future work of responsible citizens is prefigured as influential in a multifaceted yet ultimately unknowable realm beyond the local community, beyond the university. Second, the mission statement reinforces assumptions about the far-reaching influence of this good citizen's anticipated capabilities with a concluding point that summarizes the university's overall goal: "By discovering and sharing knowledge in a broad array of graduate and undergraduate programs, Kent State University meets the dynamic needs of a global society."

If the main campus mission statement lives up to its ambitions, these good citizens, as members of "a supportive and inclusive learning community," benefit from a university experience that expects participation, via their academic programs, in "discovering" knowledge. This highest level of the creative intellectual process necessarily resists the status quo by questioning and reconfiguring existing understandings of what counts as "knowledge." In addition, the stipulation invites good citizens to participate in "sharing" knowledge. Eschewing the transmission of ostensibly incontrovertible facts from faculty to students, this erudite interchange among recognized equals, even partners, instead takes for granted the legitimacy of students' versions of "knowledge

Given a mission that sanctions students' perceptions—what knowledge they bring to this collaborative endeavor, as well as what new knowledge they make—the main campus good citizen is entitled to assume the status of a fully functioning political practitioner in contemporary democratic society. This student is thus one who is not only likely cognizant of "the capacity for conscious political action," but also capable of embracing "the ability to influence [other] citizens or political institutions" and willing to create or at least "shape the world

we live in" (Chesney and Feinstein 1-2). In short, good citizens constructed at this rhetorical site are responsible, productive, intellectual, ethical, and humanitarian agents who embody the political authority and exercise the intellectual prowess necessary to create and share knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, continuously reshapes global society in terms conducive to validating their particular interests.

When the main campus mission statement is read through the lens of social class, the document makes a public declaration of rationale, responsibility, and vision in the interest of creating good citizens who are clearly groomed to practice "robust citizenship" (Ohmann 39). At midpoint in the first decade of the twenty-first century and in only 115 words, the main campus mission statement agitates for a type of middle-class citizenship that necessitates a particular model student. This student is not reined in by a "strict pathway" but trusted to explore the Kent State University educational experience by defining the university's abstract guidelines in ways that are potentially politically empowering (Beaky 21). This good citizen is entitled to, prepared to, and expected to take a leadership role in shaping the global community by means of participatory democracy. At the same time, the main campus mission statement is an authoritative institutional text that serves as an ideological backdrop for its regional campus counterpart, the latter a more-specific and significantly longer 192-word directive. This text, which could be considered an addendum and thus ancillary to the main campus statement as the university-wide pronouncement, nonetheless imagines a quite different institutional identity and purpose, one unmistakably steeped in ideologies of social class difference. The good citizen at this site is hailed primarily as a narrowly perceived citizen-worker, one who is tacitly urged to abdicate political power attendant with higher education.

The construction of the citizen-worker in the opening line of the regional campus mission statement is illustrative: "The mission of the regional campuses is to extend access to the quality higher education programs and services of Kent State University to the residents of Northeast Ohio." Although this rhetorical move predicts a commitment to inclusion, lending some measure of truth to Kent State's ubiquitous "eight-campus network" naming strategy, the gesture is immediately undercut by the subsequent line: "The campuses share the liberal education goals of the university and strive to meet the needs of society with technical programs that help prepare a paraprofes-

> "conscripted into service for technical programs presumably attractive to the audience of citizen-workers"

sional work force." At this markedly different geopolitical place, "the liberal education goals of the university" and the charge to "meet the needs of society" are conscripted into service for technical programs presumably attractive to the audience of citizen-workers. Rather than meeting the needs of society by creating and sharing knowledge, the regional campus good citizen is prepared to put existing knowledge to work in circumscribed arenas.

This familiar stipulation that invokes the specter of vocational education historically reserved for the working class contradicts liberal education goals. In a sense, the 2005 statement envisages current mainstream discourse that undergirds the CUNY community college slated to open in 2012 where "'work-based learning [will be] an integral part of the college's mission,'" where "[s]tudents will solve problems identified by agencies or businesses," where "prescribed pathways for each major ... limit choice and exploration" (Beaky 21). Rather than recognizing, claiming, and using political power borne of creating and sharing knowledge—and attendant with embracing "responsible citizenship," pursuing "productive careers," broadening "intellectual perspectives," and cultivating "ethical and humanitarian values," as the main campus statement pronounces—the regional campus good citizen is hardly imagined as a potential contributor to the global good. Rather than thinking intellectual, ethical humanitarian, political actor, and responsible citizens with global interests and influence, regional campus good citizens do not measure their "successful college experience" in terms of exploration and discovery but as trained paraprofessionals who might logically support the "productive careers" of their main campus counterparts.

As unentitled citizen-workers, emphasis on the worker, these not-quite-professional good citizens are also not quite full members of what Kent State terms in the main campus statement "a supportive and inclusive learning community." Instead, the regional campus good citizens are not depicted as participating contributors to larger groups, despite "the distinctive feature of being part of the larger university." Rather, this good citizen is an isolated individual engaged in self-development, or, at best, one among a loose association of "persons who see the campus as a way to build a secure and better life for themselves." This exhortation advocates a kind of class jumping, but the self-help approach serves only the individual and only in limited ways, since membership into the global community through the university is not genuinely extended. The regional campus mission statement's focus on training individuals to build a local workforce ties this good citizen to the campus and to the community at the same time it disconnects the citizen-worker from both university and global communities. In effect, such rhetoric severs this good citizen from larger political networks, thus discouraging her/him from seeking agency or seizing opportunities to influence global society as an intellectual, humanitarian, responsible citizen.

As is the main campus good citizen, the regional campus citizen-worker is prompted to "meet the needs of society." But those needs, indeed those imagined societies, are formulated differently, the citizen-workers perhaps using their technical and "paraprofessional" degrees to assist the good citizens, who are taught that their careers "address the needs of a complex and changing world," that their knowledge permits them to influence "global society," that their political power entitles them to shape the world to suit their own interests. The sole regional campus charge that would appear to highlight civic literacy as critical citizenship is mitigated by yet again distancing the individual from wider spheres of influence. Regional campuses "meet the needs of society with technical programs that help prepare a paraprofessional work force," not to benefit global society but to "provide their communities with public service activities of an educational nature for personal growth and development." The potential power to transform global society in ways that invariably delimit opportunities available to local communities and individuals is obstructed by the focus on the individual's self-enrichment or, paradoxically, undifferentiated membership in a "work force" within a truncated sphere of public discourse and influence. Although the regional campus institutional text demonstrates an agenda that is similar to the main campus mission—the construction of the "good citizen"—the university identity and purpose to which access is extended are fundamentally different at this rhetorical site.

Testifying to the troubling, class-bound ideologies of citizen-worker articulated in the regional campus mission statement is the geopolitical context for students on the Tuscarawas Campus, the southernmost site of Kent State University and one of the northernmost counties designated Appalachia. An issue of *Kent State Magazine* that includes a piece on Appalachia describes the region as "rich in natural resources, [but] characterized by poverty" (Lambert 10). As Lisa Lambert observes, Appalachia enjoys "a distinct cultural heritage," one that includes "a long history of suffering abuse by corporate interests" (10). She goes on to point out that "[i]n no other part of the country do so few citizens own so little of the land on which they live and work" (10). Students who attend Kent State University at Tuscarawas typically reflect a demographic that coincides with Appalachia and differs dramatically from the nation and from the rest of Ohio in terms of the "[p]ercentage of adults over 25 who have college degrees" (Lambert 11). The national average is 24%, the Ohio average is 21%, but the Ohio Appalachian average stagnates at 12% (Lambert 11). The regional campus mission statement, operating as a persuasive and classist rhetoric of place—geographic, sociocultural, economic, political, historical, and ideological—resounds with silence in terms of a critical citizenship that might educate and empower one of the most disenfranchised groups of people in the U.S. to shape their own life possibilities, as well as influence the future of the nation and the world.

Open-Access Institutions for a New Century: Social Class and the Practice of Democracy

> *While majority rule and consensus reflect the appearance of democratic practice, they often do not seriously incorporate the voices and lived experiences of particular groups and individuals, and therefore often reproduce the dominant culture rather than questioning and transforming it. Our commitment to cultural diversity, therefore, remains unfinished if it merely subordinates the voices, positions, and lived experiences of socially marginalized groups in an unaltered view and theory of the world.*
>
> —NCTE Resolution on Diversity

If Kent State University's 2005 main and regional campus mission statements, coupled with the 2010 diversity statement, can be considered representative institutional texts for a sizable sector of the public research institution, they offer scant evidence of a nascent critical class consciousness that would recognize the implications of this far-reaching marker of sociocultural difference. To date, what is missing here is also what is "absent in the Obama administration's education policies and discourse," and that is "the role of the community college [and open-access campuses] in providing a liberal arts education that teaches and encourages students to become informed and engaged citizens in a democratic society" (Kroll and Alford). Significantly, the most current revisions of Kent State's mission statements differ so slightly from their immediate antecedents as to suggest that these indicators of the contemporary U.S. university have yet to heed caveats such as the 1999 "Resolution on Diversity" posited by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The university-authored texts under consideration here invite the criticism that this institution reflects merely "the appearance of democratic practice" (NCTE). Perhaps like a number of public research universities, Kent State neglects to "seriously incorporate the voices and lived experiences of particular groups and individuals" and thus "reproduce the dominant culture rather than questioning and transforming it"—at least in terms of "voices and lived experiences" that speak to social class difference (NCTE). KSU's institutional texts fall short of articulating a fully developed diversity ideal that would facilitate objectives such as NCTE's to "[p]romote conversations with a broad range of groups and constituencies about the values of difference for a democracy." Left out are those ostensibly united by social class, such as "members of underfunded rural … communities," a descriptor that best identifies those who attend several of KSU's regional campuses, particularly my own Kent State University at Tuscarawas.

If Kent State's newly revised mission statements supplant the 2005 documents, at the same time they reiterate their precursors by continuing to embrace an overarching aim "to discover, create, apply, and share knowledge." The current regional campus statement pre-

sumably shares this goal, as did the 2005 text, the 2010 version opening with slightly revised wording that declares the intention to "make the resources of the 27th largest university in the country accessible to the citizens of Northeast Ohio." The main campus mission statement, now shortened to 78 words, seems to offer even more autonomy for students to create and share knowledge, as it rightly continues to stress the aims to "foster ethical and humanitarian values" and to advocate "responsible citizenship." The current statement continues to set up "responsible citizenship and productive careers" as parallel objectives. Although the newest text repositions this conjoined aim as the culmination of the university's mission rather than as the opening precept, the emphasis on this purpose remains clear. Significantly, and perhaps ironically, an added stipulation refers implicitly to the university's "Celebrating Differences" philosophy by stressing in this related institutional text the importance of "diverse learning environments" to "educate [students] to think critically and to expand their intellectual horizons while attaining the knowledge and skills necessary for responsible citizenship and productive careers." Presumably, these "diverse learning environments" are now even more critical to the Kent experience; presumably, they are integral to the entire "eight-campus educational system," although there is no indication that social class difference might also contribute a valuable perspective.

The regional campus statement now names the categories of students to whom access has been extended—"'nontraditional' students: people returning to the classroom after having begun or raised a family; manufacturing and business workers in need of retraining in the face of economic change; bright, motivated young students earning college credit while still in high school; and ... the 'traditional' student." Yet this access remains limited, reinforcing rather than challenging the historic open-access pattern Ohmann describes "of tailor[ing] course offerings to the just-in-time needs of students entering or returning to the job market" (42). Such institutions "frankly imagine students as customers, not as citizens or as future leaders or as novices in a common culture" (Ohmann 42). Kroll and Alford reiterate the point, claiming that "those attending community colleges are no longer viewed as citizens or learners (or even at times as students) but rather as economic entities, as 'workers' or a 'workforce.'" The newest regional campus mission statement demarcates students almost entirely by the local community and its need for workforce training. Although the text has deleted the "paraprofessional" label, it retains the embedded assumption that this distinctly classed population is best suited for "programs and services that enhance business and employment opportunities in a time of economic transition."

If this rhetorical site shares the broad goal "to discover, create, apply, and share knowledge," the regional campus statement also continues to limit the definition of "knowledge." This location for higher education is "charged with the task of delivering a wide vari-

ety of area-specific technical education and training to the communities it serves." In 245 words, 53 more words than required to articulate the 2005 mission, the 2010 statement is more a directive than a philosophy, although an explicit invitation to consider the regionals as a place to complete "the first and second years of coursework leading to the bachelor's degree in numerous programs" complicates and challenges the strict segregation of main and regional campuses. On the other hand, the sharper emphasis on this option is not as egalitarian as it might first appear when DeGenaro's understanding of an "inherent contradiction in the nature of open-access learning" is considered:

> It is true that some five million students—many of them first-generation college students of working-class and racial or ethnic minority backgrounds—gain access to higher education by matriculating on two-year campuses. It is also true that the two-year college has a well-documented history of tracking students into remedial classes, vocational tracks, and eventually low-level sectors of the economy. (183)

On the whole, the contrast with the main campus good citizen is disturbingly familiar. Regional campus students are envisioned in their roles as trained workers/customers who use their circumscribed technical knowledge to make a living as they serve their local communities. If main campus students are imagined as thinkers/actors who also must make a living, that reality is enhanced by the promise of a career that simultaneously (re)makes a receptive world. These educated future leaders need only accept their invitation into "responsible citizenship" by using their knowledge and their broadened "intellectual horizons," as well as their experience in "diverse learning environments," to serve and influence "Ohio and the global community."

In the process of articulating the university's historical mission to construct "good citizens," this set of institutional texts "subordinates the voices, positions, and lived experiences of socially marginalized groups," such as working-class students, "in an unaltered view and theory of the world," at least in terms of ways social class must invariably and inevitably shape perspectives on social realities (NCTE). These telling texts establish public identities that hinge on democratic ideals; yet they lend credence to Donaldo Macedo's observation that "while schools are charged with promoting a discourse of democracy, they often put structures in place that undermine the substantive democratic principles they claim to teach" (1). I suspect that these university artifacts, rather than isolated examples, work with a host of contemporary and historical political discourses to structure higher education in ways that posit democracy and open-access campuses as far from synonymous concepts at this particular historical benchmark.

Then again, I offer my class-conscious reading of these salient documents in recognition of the power of dialectical and politically motivated rhetorical analysis to re-read his-

tory, re-write the present, and re-imagine a future in which the open-access institution might plausibly fulfill its promise as "democracy in action" (Pickett 98), a future in which the open-access institution might rightfully claim its place as "the last bastion of democratic higher education in this country" (Kroll and Alford). As Jack Meacham notes, "College mission statements can be effective tools for addressing problems, moving conversations among faculty and administrators forward, and crafting long-term, sustainable solutions" (21). If teacher-scholars take those texts into their classrooms, such statements can also be subjects of critical reading, insightful discussion, trenchant rhetorical analysis, and powerful writing for the very students institutional texts would presume to write into being. Class-conscious debates about mission that invoke multiple and diverse voices can conceivably bring into existence the open-access campus Kroll and Alford envision as one "whose mission must be to foster the democratic ideal of providing an education that offers students from all backgrounds the chance to realize their full potential as human beings."

At this uneasy moment in higher education, assessing institutional texts such as diversity and mission statements is an academic imperative. If such texts construct as well as reflect inequitable social realities, they can be sculpted to serve as harbingers of equitable social change. At this critical juncture in participatory democracy when corporate-sponsored government seeks to invigorate the faltering economy largely at the expense of the working class, Apple's address to "radical teachers" two decades ago resonates all the more insistently:

> No matter how hard others may try to purge the ethical and the political from the way we think and act as teachers, those educators committed to the continuing attempt to build a more democratic and caring set of economic, political, and cultural institutions know that, as educators, we must choose and we must act. There really is no other choice. (ix)

We can choose to rewrite existing diversity and mission statements that, willfully or unknowingly, jeopardize democracy. We can choose to rewrite the full range of institutional texts with the collective and explicit purpose of sponsoring an informed rhetorical practice that, in turn, fosters critical citizenship. This collaborative endeavor to name, critique, and redress a full range of inequalities arising from sociocultural differences gives voice to the foundational principle that all students on all campuses in a diverse and democratic nation deserve the kind of schooling Kent State University envisions in its "Celebrating Differences" statement: "an education that will prepare them equally to pursue successful careers and to become good citizens and productive members of an increasingly diverse society in the United States and the world at large." Until then, "[o]ur commitment to cultural diversity remains unfinished" (NCTE).

Works Cited

Apple, Michael W. "Foreword." *Politics of Education: Essays from Radical Teacher.* Ed. Susan Gushee O'Malley, Robert C. Rosen, and Leonard Vogt. Albany: State U of New York P, 1990. ix-xiii. Print.

Beaky, Lenore A. "A College Education? Or Diminished Expectations?" *Academe* (May-June 2010): 19-21. Print.

Berger, James. "A Mission Counterstatement." *Academe* (Jan.-Feb. 2008): 25-27. Print.

Carr, Jean Ferguson. "Afterword." *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition.* Ed. Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007. 237-240. Print.

Chesney, James D., and Otto Feinstein. *Building Civic Literacy and Citizen Power.* Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1997. Print.

DeGenaro, William. "William Rainey Harper and the Ideology of Service at Junior Colleges." *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*. Eds. Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007. 181-98. Print.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Kent State University. "Celebrating Differences." *<http://www.kent.edu/catalog/2010/aboutkent/celebrating/index.cfm>*

—. "Mission Statement." *<http://www.kent.edu/president/mission-statement.cfm>*.

—. "The Regional Campus Network: Mission." *<http://dept.kent.edu/ksuprovost_office/ugcat/2005/286-335.pdf>*.

—. "Regional College: Mission." *<https://www.kent.edu/catalog/2010/collegesprograms/re/index.cfm>*.

—. "The Role and Mission of Kent State University." *<http://dept.kent.edu/ksuprovost_office/ugcat/2005/000-015.pdf>*.

Kroll, Keith, and Barry Alford. "Let Them Eat Workforce Training." *Dissident Voice* 29 July 2009. *<http://dissidentvoice.org/2009/07/let-them-eat-workforce-training/>*.

Lambert, Lisa. "Awakening Possibility." *Kent State Magazine*. 6.3 (Spring 2007): 10-11. *<http://www.kent.edu/magazine/upload/vol6-iss3-2007-spring.pdf>*.

Lazere, Donald. *Reading and Writing for Civic Literacy: The Critical Citizens' Guide to Argumentative Rhetoric.* Boulder: Paradigm, 2005. Print.

Lubrano, Alfred. *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams.* Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2004. Print.

Macedo, Donaldo. "Apparatus of Lies USA: Introduction." *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education.* By Howard Zinn. Boulder: Paradigm, 2005. 1-25. Print.

Meacham, Jack. "What's the Use of a Mission Statement?" *Academe* (Jan.-Feb. 2008): 21-24. Print.

Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. New York: Holt, 2006. Print.

National Council of Teachers of English. "Resolution on Diversity." < *http:www.ncte.org/positions/statements/diversity* > .

Nussbaum, Martha C. *Not for Profit*: *Why Democracy Needs the Humanities.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.

Ohmann, Richard. "Citizenship and Literacy Work: Thoughts Without a Conclusion." *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers: Writing Instruction in the Managed University*. Eds. Marc Bousquet, Tony Scott, and Leo Parascondola. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. 36-45. Print.

Pickett, Nell Ann. "The Two-Year College as Democracy in Action." *College Composition and Communication* 49.1 (1998): 90-98. Print.

Sacks, Peter. "Rethinking the Rules of the Higher Education Game." *Academe* (July-Aug. 2010): 22-24. Print.

Salvatori, Mariolina Rizzi. "(This is not a) Foreword." *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*. Eds. Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007. ix-xii. Print.

Shor, Ira. "Why Teach about Social Class?" *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 33.2 (2005): 161-70. Print.

Sullivan, Patrick. "Cultural Narratives about Success and the Material Conditions of Class at the Community College." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 33.2 (2005): 142-60. Print.

Weisberger, Ronald. "Community Colleges and Class: A Short History." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 33.2 (2005): 127-41. Print.

Zebroski, James Thomas. "The Turn to Social Class in Rhetoric and Composition: Shifting Disciplinary Identities." JAC 27.3-4 (2007): 771-93. Print.

Appendix A

CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES (2010)

Kent State University is by its very nature an institution of intellectual, social and cultural diversity. The university is thus an ideal place to learn about the different cultures and experiences of people in the United States, as well as the rest of the world. Education at Kent State occurs through a variety of formal instructional settings, co-curricular activities and less formal opportunities to meet and get to know other students, staff and faculty. The wide variety of people of differing races, ethnic backgrounds, beliefs and values constitutes one of the

greatest strengths of the university. It is important to take advantage of this resource and to learn from one another about the diversity of the human community. Such an opportunity can exist only in an environment in which each student feels a part of the university community. To this end, the university encourages an atmosphere in which the diversity of its members is understood and appreciated; an atmosphere that is free of discrimination and harassment based on race, religion, ethnic heritage, age, country of national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation or veteran status. Thus, all members of the university are expected to join in creating a positive atmosphere in which we can learn in an environment that is sympathetic, respectful and supportive.

Within this environment, Kent State offers an opportunity to all students for an education that will prepare them to pursue successful careers and to become good citizens and productive members of an increasingly diverse society in the United States and the world at large. (*http://www.kent.edu/catalog/2010/aboutkent/celebrating/index.cfm*)

THE ROLE AND MISSION OF KENT STATE UNIVERSITY (2005)

The mission of Kent State University is to prepare students for responsible citizenship and productive careers, broaden intellectual perspectives and foster ethical and humanitarian values. Our faculty and staff are engaged in teaching, research, creative expression, service and partnerships that address the needs of a complex and changing world. Kent State's eight-campus network, anchored by the largest residential campus in the region, serves as a key resource for economic, social, cultural and technological advancement.

Kent State is a supportive and inclusive learning community devoted to teaching excellence and academic freedom. By discovering and sharing knowledge in a broad array of graduate and undergraduate programs, Kent State University meets the dynamic needs of a global society. (*http://dept.kent.edu/ksuprovost_office/ugcat/2005/ 000-015.pdf*)

THE REGIONAL CAMPUS NETWORK MISSION (2005)

The mission of the Regional Campuses is to extend access to the quality higher education programs and services of Kent State University to the residents of Northeast Ohio. The campuses share the liberal education goals of the university and strive to meet the needs of society with technical programs that help prepare a paraprofessional work force. The campuses are an entry point to higher education for high school graduates, and they provide access for persons who see the campus as a way to build a secure and better life for themselves. The campuses provide coursework at the freshman and sophomore levels in technical and baccalaureate areas, in the university's 36-hour LERs, associate's degree programs, selected bachelor's degrees, continuing study and basic skills classes, as well as selected junior, senior and graduate courses. For students, the campuses are close to home and affordable,

and many enroll on a part-time basis. The campuses provide the breadth of programs and services necessary for a successful college experience, have the distinctive feature of being part of the larger university and provide their communities with public service activities of an educational nature for personal growth and development.

(http://dept.kent.edu/ksuprovost_office/ugcat/2005/286-335.pdf)

MISSION STATEMENT (2010)

The mission of Kent State University is to discover, create, apply and share knowledge, as well as to foster ethical and humanitarian values in the service of Ohio and the global community. As an eight-campus educational system, Kent State offers a broad array of academic programs to engage students in diverse learning environments that educate them to think critically and to expand their intellectual horizons while attaining the knowledge and skills necessary for responsible citizenship and productive careers. *(http://www.kent.edu/president/mission-statement.cfm)*

REGIONAL COLLEGE MISSION (2010)

The mission of the Regional College is to make the resources of the 27th largest university in the country accessible to the citizens of Northeast Ohio. The Regional College is also charged with the task of delivering a wide variety of area-specific technical education and training to the communities it serves. Finally, delivering programs and services that enhance business and employment opportunities in a time of economic transition is an integral part of the mission of the Regional College. It carries out this mission through the efforts of a faculty committed to the highest standards in the scholarships of discovery, integration, application, teaching and university citizenship. Faculty members actively pursue a variety of creative endeavors, regularly contribute to the scholarship in their disciplines, take pride in their continuing pedagogical successes, and are recognized by the wider University community with teaching and professional development awards. Regional campus faculty are visible citizens in the communities they serve, as well as at every level of university governance.

The Regional Campuses have an open enrollment policy and an expanding post-secondary enrollment option program. Many are "nontraditional" students: people returning to the classroom after having begun or raised a family; manufacturing and business workers in need of retraining in the face of economic change; bright, motivated young students earning college credit while still in high school; and for the "traditional" student, the Regional Campuses offer the first and second years of coursework leading to the bachelor's degree in numerous programs.

(https://www.kent.edu/catalog/2010/collegesprograms/re/index.cfm)

M. Karen Powers *is Assistant Professor of English at Kent State University at Tuscarawas where she teaches courses in composition and American literature and won the 2010-2011 Distinguished Teaching Award. Her research coalesces around histories of rhetoric, sociocultural difference, and the politics of higher education as (re)constructed in/by the U.S. public research university. Most often, she writes situated rhetorical analyses that foreground local histories to illuminate the cultural work accomplished by ideologies and discourses shaping the contemporary university.*

Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano

First-Year Composition Placement at Open-Admission, Two-Year Campuses: Changing Campus Culture, Institutional Practice, and Student Success

> *Placement testing is most students' first contact with the theory and practice of first-year writing programs, and we would do well to make that first contact as inviting and theoretically sound as possible. To do so, we need to think less about placement as a mechanism and more about placement as an opportunity to communicate. Placement is perhaps the first part of our programs that communicates to students.(Harrington 12)*

AT TWO-YEAR, OPEN-ADMISSION UNIVERSITIES MORE THAN ANY other higher education setting, placement testing is a critical piece of positioning students for academic success. However, much of the existing research on writing assessment and placement testing focuses primarily on traditional students within four-year academic environments or specifically on students in developmental and basic writing courses (See Matzen and Hoyt; Moore, O'Neil, and Huot; Peckham "Online"). In this essay, we describe successful revisions to the placement process at our open access, two-year campus, including related changes to placement testing, advising, and our first-year writing program curriculum. We argue for a multiple measures approach to assessing the readiness of students who are at-risk (in conventional and unconventional ways) of not succeeding academically (which can include probation, suspension, or dropping out of higher education) during the first year of college. Our experience illustrates the critical importance for open-admission campuses of developing locally situated placement measures that are effectively aligned with a writing program's learning outcomes and with the unique needs of the specific student populations that an institution serves.

Approaches to Placement

Institutions can take a range of very different approaches to determining student readiness for college writing and achievement in first-year composition. A typical approach empha-

sizes skill areas that can easily be assessed and quantified through objective, standardized tests: sentence correction, reading comprehension, construction shift, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, usage, verb formation/agreement, relationships of clauses, vocabulary, areas measured by popular standardized placement instruments like the COMPASS or ACCUPLACER test. The Community College Research Center notes that of the 92% of community colleges using some form of placement exam, 62% use ACCUPLACER, while another 46% use COMPASS (sometimes in combination with one another) (Hughes and Scott-Clayton 8-9). The "NCTE/WPA Outcomes for First-Year Writing" document suggests another way to assess readiness for college composition that reflects a disciplinary understanding of the goals of first-year college writing courses: *rhetorical knowledge; knowledge of conventions; critical reading, writing, and thinking.* In contrast to the focus of standardized tests, this second set of emphases is much more closely aligned with the learning outcomes of many first-year writing courses. Additionally, increasing numbers of institutions are using multiple measures methods such as directed self-placement (see Royer and Gilles), inclusion of a writing sample or portfolio, and online challenge methods to provide a more nuanced picture of students' readiness for college-level reading, writing, and thinking (see Peckham "Online").

For many two-year and open-admission campuses, however, standardized tests measuring reading comprehension and sentence correction skills remain the primary method of assessing student readiness for first-year composition courses. They may take the form of the ACT or SAT (standardized tests used more frequently for college admission); ACCUPLACER, used at over 1000 institutions in North America (James 2); the COMPASS test, which consists of a sentence skills test, reading, and a writing test assessed by "a powerful scoring engine via the Internet" that "provide[s] an instantaneous evaluation of a student's writing skills using either a 2–8 or 2–12 score scale" (ACT's Compass); or multiple choice tests that are unique to a particular institution. Although this standardized testing approach focuses on arguably important basic skills (primarily at the sentence level), we contend, as have many scholars in the last several decades (Huot: Isaacs and Malloy; Peckham "Online"; White) that as an assessment measure, it does not reflect the complex demands of academic discourse in the first college year. For example, the ability (or lack of ability) to recognize and edit sentence-level issues in someone else's writing does not necessarily indicate whether a student is ready to compose a well-organized college essay that takes and supports a position on a topic or even to construct such sentences. As a standalone placement measure, a standardized test can evaluate only a small part of what students need to be able to do as college readers and writers.

Consequently, the areas of emphasis assessed through this type of placement measure are usually disconnected from many (or even most) learning outcomes for college writ-

ing programs. In other words, students are often placed into first-year composition or developmental courses according to their achievement on exams that don't adequately demonstrate their readiness for developing proficiency in specific writing courses and that provide only an incomplete--or sometimes even distorted--representation of their ability to do college-level work. As an independent assessment tool, then, standardized tests are not a good match for determining students' readiness for the learning tasks that writing programs and instructors expect them to do in first-year composition, and we argue that this is particularly true for the diverse populations at open-admission and two-year campuses.

Writing and Assessment

If standardized tests, widely relied upon by many budget-conscious, public, two-year institutions, do not fully assess student readiness for college, then what are the alternatives? Of course, among scholars of writing and rhetoric, there are competing theories about how to approach the assessment of a student's ability to produce a text for a particular purpose. As far back as 1982, Betty Bramberg argued that "Holistically scored essays should . . . play a leading role in assessments of writing programs and writing competence" (106). This assertion is called into question by Pat Belanoff's 1991 article on the purposes of writing assessment titled, "The Myths of Assessment," questioning the notion that in assessing writing (whether through a standardized test or a holistic essay) we "know what we're testing for; we know what we're testing; . . . we can agree on whether individual papers meet those criteria; . . . that it's possible to have an absolute standard and apply it uniformly" (55). Ultimately, Belanoff arrives at the conclusion that "there are two sorts of valid judgments [about writing quality]--the totally personal and the totally communal--but it has to be a community which is engaged in conversation about teaching and standards all the time, not just during grading sessions and not in the abstract" (63). For many multi-campus institutions like ours, agreeing on a communal set of values that approaches the ideal is particularly challenging when working across campus cultures and geographical distance, even when those campuses may make up a single system or institution.

Later, Brian Huot's foundational work, epitomized by his 1996 CCC essay "Toward a New Theory of Assessment," has sought to question underlying assumptions about the assessment of writing quality, particularly within institutional contexts. In that essay, he advocated, like Belanoff, for a "site-based, practical" approach to writing assessment that acknowledged "context, rhetoric, and other characteristics integral to a specific purpose and institution" (552). More recently, Moore, O'Neill, and Huot have also confirmed that "good assessments are those that are designed locally, for the needs of specific institutions, faculty, and students" (W109) and have supported the well-established disciplinary maxim that writ-

ing "is one of those intellectual activities that cannot be adequately documented through standardized tests" (W118), echoing Haswell and Wyche-Smith's 1994 claim that "writing teachers should be leery of assessment tools made by others . . . they should, and can, make their own" (221). The placement process we describe in this essay aims to create such a site-specific model that responds to the very real and distinct needs of open-admission institutions that may have budget constraints, widely varied student preparation and academic profiles, and a lack of institutional infrastructure for framing writing assessment within the best practice models offered by contemporary assessment and writing scholars like Huot.[2]

Though we know our argument may on the surface run contrary to some recent scholarship, such as Emily Isaacs and Sean Molloy's May 2010 essay, "Texts of Our Institutional Lives: SATs for Writing Placements: A Critique and Counterproposal," we see our work as sharing similar values but different contexts to current disciplinary discussions on placement. For example, Isaacs and Molloy argue that the "SAT placement system has poorly served and even harmed" the students at their institution (518), and they are critical of institutional adoption of assessment measures like the SAT timed writing exercise, which students have "written quickly, without social mediation or opportunity for engaging in various intellectual processes" (519). The multiple measures approach we are advocating includes timed writing, though in contrast with the SAT-W or other standardized tests that include a writing portion graded by either computers or anonymous readers who are reading quickly,[3] the writing sample we suggest is locally-generated, aligned with course-specific learning outcomes, and assessed by faculty in the discipline who teach the courses into which students are being placed.

At the same time, Moore, O'Neill, and Huot's recommendations for implementing widespread institutional change to assessment practices match ours but are dependent upon the status of the WPA within the institution (and seem to assume that most institutions have a writing program administrator who oversees or coordinates first-year writing courses). However, such recommendations overlook that many open-admission, two-year campuses, most of which are multi-campus and geographically decentralized, do not have a dedicated Writing Program Administrator position.[4] For example, the official Council of Writing Program

---

2. Certainly, research prior to ours has confirmed the value of a writing sample as a method of directly assessing a student's likelihood of success in a class that requires writing. For example, Matzen, and Hoyt have determined that "an essay exam is valuable for placement purposes," and that an argument that Ed White has also forcefully made in the past. More recent work by Irv Peckham and by Brian Huot, Cindy Moore, and Peggy O'Neil has also examined this issue and made a case for locally-determined placement assessment measures beyond or in addition to standardized tests.

3.See Peckham 2010 for a discussion of the rating conditions of the ACT-Writing portion.

Administrators' 2009 survey of WPA identity and demographics replicating Linda Peterson's 1986 survey showed that 3% of the WPAs who participated in the survey in 1986 worked at two-year campuses while in 2009, 5% of respondents did (120). This lack of a WPA at most two-year campuses can make implementing large-scale institutional changes described by Moore, O'Neill, and Huot even more challenging: "creating local cultures that support meaningful assessment hinges on an understanding of how, when considered together, relevant historical trends, theoretical tenants [sic], and contextual factors can influence assessment practice in truly transformative ways" (W110). What we describe here is a placement model that has worked for us in several ways--providing a fuller picture of our students' readiness as well as the specific needs of our institution's student population; involving the people who actually teach the courses into which students are placed in the process of assessing their readiness (thus informing our curriculum and instruction), and helping our institution develop a stronger understanding of our assessment tool leading to other placement, curricular, and instructional changes.

The Changing Shape of Placement at UW Colleges

In the University of Wisconsin System, where we (Holly and Joanne) teach, nearly all of the 26 two- and four-year campuses rely on the Wisconsin English Placement Test (WEPT), a multiple-choice standardized test that measures sentence correction, usage, and reading comprehension. This single exam places students into the first-year writing sequence, which, depending on the selectivity of the institution, can range from a developmental course to special sections of first-year writing for English language learners to a research-intensive, second-semester writing course (or beyond, in the form of exemption from the general education composition requirement).[5] The comprehensive and doctoral institutions with competitive admissions use the same test score placement process as most of the open-access two-year liberal arts colleges.

Prior to 2007 at our campus, UW-Marathon, students were placed into first-year writing courses based entirely on the English score (measuring sentence correction and usage) of the Wisconsin English Placement Test, even though a reading score was also available. This means of assessing student readiness for college writing was contrary to the National Council of Teachers of English-Writing Program Administrators' "White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities," which asserts that "Writing assessment should use

---

4. See Peckham 2010 for a discussion of the rating conditions of the ACT-Writing portion.

---

5. We should also note that cut-scores for course placement differ between institutions because each one has its own curriculum reflecting the needs of the student population served by that program.

multiple measures and engage multiple perspectives. . . . A single off-the-shelf or standardized test should never be used to make important decisions about students, teachers, and curriculum" (scr. 2). Partially as a result of this incomplete measurement process, the retake rate (students receiving a C- or lower) in the second-semester, transfer-level, research-intensive composition course required for the Associate's degree and for the core writing requirement at most four-year institutions ranged from 35% for students in the lower-end of the cut-score range (416-469 out of a total English score possibility of 850) to 25% for students at the high end (above 500). A student is required to earn at least a "C" in this course in order to have fulfilled the degree writing requirement. The retake rate for English 101, the first-semester composition course that focuses on introducing students to principles and features of academic writing and argumentation, hovered between 20% and 30%, depending on the semester and year. A student also needs to earn a C or higher in this introductory course in order to move from English 101 to English 102.

Beginning in 2007, we began to involve the English Department in composition and literacy support placement and phased in a multiple measures approach to assessing student readiness through collaboration with our campus Student Services staff, who had previously been entirely responsible for placing students into first-year composition courses, a process that involved administering the standardized sentence-correction and usage test, transferring results to student files, and registering students for the courses they had placed into. We began our initial shift by incorporating a brief, thirty-minute writing sample based on the newly developing First-Year Composition Learning Outcomes that our campus had begun to employ; students took this portion after the standardized Wisconsin English Placement Test.[6] Though it is administered at the same time as the standardized test, the writing prompt itself is designed each year by local English instructors who teach across the spectrum of courses into which students will be placed. We develop each prompt and accompanying rubric to align assessment of the writing sample with the learning outcomes for our composition program (see Appendix A for one year's example).

We were also initially provided with the student's other test score data (usually the ACT), high school grades, high school English curriculum, class rank, and occasionally information suggestive of a nontraditional educational background--a GED or HSED, home schooling, or a gap in education. Our first efforts concentrated on the student populations we would

---

6. We acknowledge Ed White's canonical essay in the 1995 *CCC*, "An Apologia for the Timed Impromptu Essay Test," which supports (though not without controversy) the changes we made simply in his advancement of the "most important argument for an essay test: it is not a multiple choice test" (White 34). He acknowledges as do we that the timed essay does not allow for the process-oriented goals that are the cornerstone of the WPA's and NCTE's recommended best practices or even our department's learning outcomes.

conventionally define as "at-risk" for not successfully passing first-semester, degree-credit courses, including students placing into the developmental writing course in our sequence, English 098. We also included students who placed into the first-semester writing course, English 101, largely because our previous research suggested that this is a group who may on the surface be minimally ready for college but who are often are not well-prepared for the demands of college-level critical reading and writing (see Hassel and Giordano).

The following year, we expanded our student population from the traditionally underprepared (as designated by standardized test scores) to the group placing directly into English 102 (the second-semester, transfer-level writing course), which revealed what became important specifically for our institution but may have implications for other programs. We found, like Irvin Peckham in his accounts of implementing an Online Challenge system at Louisiana State University, that "the border between 1001 first-semester composition and 1002 second-semester composition is improperly drawn" (Peckham, "Turning" 72). Blending the use of standardized test scores (which of course, some research has shown, do have predictive validity for student success in first-year writing courses)[7] with the more direct measurement of students' writing ability, a writing sample, was valuable in helping us assess students' academic readiness for college, but because our student populations have complex educational backgrounds, each year we undertook the multiple measures process, we found ourselves wanting to know more about what students brought with them to their first year of college.

In the subsequent year, we added two additional placement measures that modestly include elements of Royer and Gillies' notion of directed self-placement, a student survey that asks students to self-assess their readiness for difficult reading and writing courses and to indicate whether they would prefer a slower start to college, in addition to a free-answer question asking them to assess how effectively and accurately their test scores and grades reflect their academic abilities. Inclusion of the brief survey also gave students the opportunity to provide us with more complete information about their educational background, high school curriculum, and home language. We also revised our essay prompt to focus on a question that specifically asked students to assess their own preparation for college learning in response to a brief text (See Appendix A).

We identify this process as "locally designed" because it a) emerges from the faculty who teach first-year writing courses on our campus, b) responds to the specific needs of our student populations, and c) matches the learning outcomes for our first-year writing sequence. The first point is important because the process of evaluation is conducted by

---

7. See Matzen and Hoyt.

instructors who teach composition and learning support courses; they are in the best position to assess whether a student has the skills, preparation, and motivation to succeed in our writing program. Second, we are able to adapt and add to the placement process as we learn more about incoming students or as the needs of our student population shift. For example, we added a student survey because our placement process had no mechanism for identifying English-language learners or Generation 1.5 students (students with home languages other than English who receive most or all of their education in the US). The survey also provides us with information about students' senior-year English curriculum from which we gain additional information about their preparation for academic writing . We continue to refine our survey questions as student needs change, especially as our adult learner population increases. Lastly, because we are using learning outcomes for each specific course in the writing program sequence, we are able to design a writing prompt and rubric that specifically requires students to demonstrate skills in rhetorical knowledge; critical reading, writing, and thinking; conventions; and, to a limited degree, processes. Even though we are required by the statewide system to use the standardized test produced by our flagship institution's testing office, our approach permits us to adapt it more usefully to the student populations we serve.

The Value of Multiple Measures for the Placement Process

The multiple pieces of data we look at from individual students each offer specific benefits to us as a placement team in our ability to assess a student's readiness for the first-year composition sequence as well as identify literacy support needs such as critical reading coursework, learning skills classes, or writing center tutorials. In this section, we outline the value of those measures and highlight some of the limitations of each, particularly for open-admission campuses.

Standardized Test Results

Our multiple measures approach to placement uses the reading and English scores from both the ACT and our statewide placement test. Although we believe that standardized test scores have a limited usefulness as a standalone placement measure, the introduction of the ACT reading and English scores to the campus placement process help us identify students who are significantly underprepared for college reading and writing in comparison to their peers both locally and nationally. Further, because most degree-credit college courses require students to take comprehensive, timed final and midterm exams, students on our campus who have difficulty taking high stakes standardized tests almost always require some type of

learning support to help them make a successful transition to college learning.

In assessing our placement process and tracking the success rates of students across the first-year, we have discovered that the ACT, especially the reading test, is useful for identifying students who are underprepared for reading-intensive courses and our core transfer-level composition course, which requires students to independently read and analyze academic sources. A significant number of our students have ACT scores that would suggest a significant lack of readiness for college reading. On average, about two-thirds of our student population has met the ACT benchmark score of 18 for the English test (that is, the score that suggests a student has a 50% likelihood of earning an B or higher or a 75% to 80% likelihood of earning a C) for first-semester English composition.[8] However, students who achieve this benchmark score and enroll in an introductory composition course on our campus are usually not prepared for most degree-credit reading and writing-intensive courses. For most years, less than half (between 47 and 50%) of our first-year students meet the reading benchmark score of 21, which suggests a readiness for reading-intensive social science courses. This implies that, based on the ACT alone, nearly a third of our students place into developmental composition although a much lower percentage than that actually enroll in it on our campus. Using the ACT as a placement indicator, about half of our students are not ready for college reading, and even fewer of them are ready for critical analysis and other types of independent reading required in our core transfer-level writing class. Furthermore, each academic year, our campus enrolls several dozen recent high school graduates with ACT reading and/or writing scores of 13 or lower, suggesting (at least based on standardized test scores) that they are significantly underprepared even for our developmental reading and writing program. We also enroll an equal number of

> "This profile of our student population is complicated by the less tangible material dimensions of our students' lives, including college readiness factors that are much more complex than a student's ability to take a standardized test."

8. Another 10% of our incoming first-year students have ACT scores of 13 or lower in reading or English, suggesting significant underpreparation for college-level reading and writing tasks.

returning adult learners or students from nontraditional educational backgrounds who have had little or no recent experience with academic reading and writing.

This profile of our student population is complicated by the less tangible material dimensions of our students' lives, including college readiness factors that are much more complex than a student's ability to take a standardized test.[9] For example, research collected from the UW Colleges (our statewide two-year institution) and UW-Madison (a research institution with competitive admission) shows that UWC students whose Wisconsin English Placement Test scores place them into the core, degree-credit composition course are 20-30 times more likely to need to retake the course than students with the same placement test scores in the equivalent course at UW-Madison. On average, about 1-3% of the students at Madison taking the English 102 equivalent received grades of DWFI, failing to fulfill the general education requirements. By contrast, students at the UW Colleges who scored in the same range on the same test received grades of C-, DWFI at the rate of 25%-35%, depending on the score (35% of students in the lower end of the range, for example, retook the course vs. 25% of students in the higher end of the range).

Clearly, this verifies that a single standardized test score that attempts to capture students' linguistic and rhetorical abilities is inadequate to the task of accounting for overall preparation, motivation, and material circumstances. What this shows is that standardized tests measure certain, somewhat important but insufficiently predictive qualities that can tell us something about a student's academic abilities; for example, a student's score on the WEPT or ACT indicates something about that student's academic literacy skills—to read quickly, eliminate multiple choice responses, and solve problems, all of which are probably best categorized as test-taking skills. Test scores are useful for looking at patterns across student populations, but they cannot tell us about a student's preparation within a specific discipline, and they are not direct measurements of a student's ability to produce writing that responds to a particular context, purpose, audience, and task--all critical skills for success in first-year writing and other degree-credit college courses.

Writing Sample

Incorporating a writing sample into the campus placement process permits us to identify students with standardized test scores that would otherwise place them into a composition course that does not meet their learning needs nor reflect their readiness for college writing.

9. Patrick Sullivan has usefully explored this distinction in the characteristics of student populations in his July 2008 essay "Measuring 'Success' at Open-Admission Institutions: Thinking Carefully about this Complex Question," focusing primarily on calling into question the use of graduation rates as a measure of success at open-admission campuses but also characterizing the diverse goals, backgrounds, and educational ambitions of students who attend such campuses.

Members of the English Department who teach composition and learning support courses assess students' writing samples based on our institution's learning outcomes for first-year composition courses. We recognize that a timed writing sample, like a standardized test, is not an infallible method for measuring an individual student's writing ability and that our discipline has a long had a productive dialogue about the value of timed writing samples as indicators of a student's academic abilities. However, our experience with assessing students' placement files and teaching the corresponding courses on our campus suggests that a writing sample is a fairly reliable indicator of student readiness for degree-credit writing, especially if the corresponding assessment methods are aligned with a writing program's learning outcomes. In contrast, our statewide, multiple choice placement exam focuses on a narrow and relatively unimportant component of our writing program (sentence correction and usage). The writing sample allows us to assess a wider range of readiness issues, including a student's ability to understand a writing prompt, structure coherent sentences, state and develop a main point, use examples to support assertions, and organize an essay in a logical way.

A locally situated writing assessment permits us to enroll students in a higher level composition course if their writing samples indicate that they have already achieved many of the learning outcomes for a developmental or introductory course but their standardized test scores place them in the lower course. It also helps us identify students who would benefit from a reading course, writing tutorial class, or a composition course taught by an instructor with graduate training in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. More important, the writing sample seems to be a more effective measure of a student's preparation for college writing than standardized tests for students with gaps in their education or those who come from nontraditional educational backgrounds. For example, students have achieved scores on our statewide placement test or the ACT that would place them into our second semester research course even though they have had very few experiences with academic writing. We have even had students test into degree credit writing courses based on the multiple choice test even though they state in their placement materials that they have never written essays before enrolling at our institution.

Similarly, most of our returning adult learners have not had a recent academic reading or writing course, and many of them did not take college preparation courses even when they were in high school. Some of our nontraditional students test into the second semester research course based on the Wisconsin Placement Test, but most are not ready for the demands of a research-intensive course because some of the most basic features of academic writing (essay structure, paragraphing, formulating a thesis, incorporating sources beyond the writer, etc.) are unfamiliar to them. For these students, the writing sample is a more accurate indicator of their readiness for college writing than a standardized test score. The writ-

ing sample, therefore, is a useful tool in helping us identify students who are not yet ready to achieve the learning outcomes for our introductory or transfer-level composition courses—and for determining which students might succeed in a higher level composition course compared to the placement that they would receive based on their test scores.

A good example of the importance of placing students in composition courses based on their familiarity with academic writing comes from the experience of a nontraditional student on our campus whose English placement test scores would have enrolled him in our second-semester, research-intensive course. However, using the multiple measures approach, the placement team assessed the student's writing sample, considered his educational background, and then placed him into the first-semester course (English 101) to provide him with an introduction to academic writing at a college-level. In the middle of the semester, the student reflected on his placement in the introductory composition course and stated that "I feel it was just about where I should have been. Content was easy to understand, however I was rusty in my writing skills. 101 really helped me get a solid foundation to pursue my major." At our institution, students come from diverse educational backgrounds, and many of them don't have a "solid foundation" in academic writing and critical reading in comparison to students at competitive universities. This student identified English as his chosen major and graduate school as his ultimate educational goal, and he was more proficient in writing compared to many of his peers at our open-access institution. Even still, he benefited tremendously from English 101, which reintroduced him to the conventions of academic discourse before he enrolled in more advanced coursework. He probably could have earned a passing grade in the research course, but his needs as a writer were better met by a two-course composition sequence instead of a single class.

High School Curriculum and Grades

The writing sample and standardized tests are often sufficient for assessing the readiness of students who are clearly ready for advanced coursework or who need substantial support in making a successful transition to college writing. However, like many other open-access institutions, our campus enrolls many marginally prepared students whose placement is not immediately obvious from more traditional approaches to placement. As part of our multiple measures approach, we examine each student's high school grades and curriculum, which gives us additional information about that student's readiness for difficult college coursework. For example, the learning outcomes for our second semester research course require students to build on prior learning that they are unlikely to have achieved unless they have previously taken a college writing course or demanding writing-intensive courses during their senior year of high school. For our local high schools, this means courses in academic writ-

ing such as "Advanced Composition" or any AP-designated course that would introduce students to source-based writing and the principles of documentation. At the same time, we have also learned a great deal about the curriculum at local high schools, including courses that can be taken for English credit but that do very little to prepare students for first-year composition, such as film studies courses, Speech, or popular literature classes.

We also regularly assess placement files for students who test into a lower level composition course based on standardized test scores but who submit writing samples that would suggest that they might be prepared for more advanced coursework. For these students with borderline placement profiles, information about each student's high school preparation helps us determine which college writing course would be most appropriate for the student's learning needs.

Survey and Student Self-Assessment

Given that many students on our campus come from diverse and nontraditional educational backgrounds, students' assessments of their own learning also play a crucial role in our multiple measures approach to placement. Students complete a survey about their preparation for college writing, including answering a question asking them to evaluate whether they feel ready for challenging reading and writing courses. The essay for the writing sample also asks them to assess their own preparation for college learning. These self-assessment measures provide us with valuable information for placing students in appropriate composition and support courses, especially for students who demonstrate marginal readiness for degree-credit composition or show promise on the writing sample despite other factors in their placement profiles that suggest they might benefit from a slower start to college learning. Both the survey and the writing prompt also help us identify students from nontraditional educational backgrounds (including homeschooling and alternative high school programs) who may need learning support courses or a slower start to college writing. One of our composition learning outcomes focuses on metacognitive learning, so this measure also helps us get an idea of a student's capacity for self-assessment.

Students' ability to assess their own readiness continues beyond the writing program's initial placement assessment to students' first direct encounter with campus faculty and staff when they register for courses. At least one member of the placement team attends every campus registration session to meet individually with students who have questions or concerns about their placement. These registration sessions permit the English Department to meet face-to-face with students to explain the writing program and differences between courses. During these sessions, students with unusual educational backgrounds or borderline placements have the opportunity to provide the placement team with additional infor-

mation, and the English Department sometimes makes subsequent changes to a student's composition placement or recommends specific support programs (though we do not change the placement for students who are clearly not ready for a course).

When we first began attending registration sessions, we were initially surprised that students with borderline placements overwhelmingly chose a lower level writing course after we explained the differences between courses in our composition course sequence. Before that time, most advisors and instructors on our campus had assumed that, given a choice, students would prefer to skip the introductory English 101 course and enroll directly into the second semester research course. By permitting students to assess their own readiness for college writing, we learned that some students can identify gaps in their own readiness for college writing in ways that are not readily determined by standard placement measures or first-year advising. Further, when students are clearly unprepared for degree-credit reading and writing in ways that are identifiable through standard placement measures, conversations with the placement team at registration sessions helps those students better understand their placement and select appropriate support courses.

Because our campus placement process is flexible and local, we also have the ability to work outside the normal campus registration process and collaborate with advisors to adjust composition course placement for a very small number of students with borderline placements who assess their own academic abilities in relation to the learning outcomes for a specific course and then demonstrate that their learning needs would be effectively met in a different course.

For instance, a student[10] who had attended school both in Southeast Asia and in the United States was placed into and registered for a non-degree credit writing workshop course for multilingual students after the English Department's placement team assessed his writing sample and other information in his placement file (including an ACT English score of 17 and ACT reading score of 10, even though his WEPT score—420—placed him into the second-semester, research writing course, English 102) and determined that he would benefit from a writing course taught by an instructor with a TESOL background. After attending the first day of class and reading the syllabus, the student believed that he was adequately prepared for a more challenging degree-credit composition course. An advisor helped him contact the placement team, we reviewed his placement file, and then we met with the student to discuss his preparation for college writing. He provided us with additional information about his educational background, and we explained the differences between the two writing courses and

_____

10. The students described in this essay formally consented to participate in our research of students' transition to college writing. They represent many other students on our campus who have had similar experiences with placement and first-year writing.

presented the student with a detailed overview of the work that was required in the degree-credit class. As the student discussed his learning needs, we identified appropriate coursework that would support his development as a college reader and writer. We eventually gave him permission to enroll in the more advanced writing course but required him to enroll concurrently in a reading course and a one-on-one composition tutorial. With individualized instruction in the support courses, the student was able to complete both degree-credit courses in our first-year writing program sequence in a single academic year. Not surprisingly, he later reported that both writing courses required a substantial amount of difficult work, but he had made an informed decision to engage in challenging academic tasks when he chose the higher level course.

It is important to note that we do not change the placement for most students who ask us to review their composition course placement either because the student does not demonstrate preparation for more advanced coursework or because (more often) students select the lower level course after learning more about the writing program. Advisors frequently also work directly with students who self-select into lower level writing courses or non-degree credit support courses without consulting us. Although we review composition course placement for only a few students each year, this option helps us meet the academic needs of highly motivated students who come from complex educational backgrounds.

Benefits for Students

At the University of Wisconsin Colleges, the student population is diverse, as is the case for most open-admission institutions that serve their communities. Approximately 58% of our students are first-generation college students, with campuses like Marinette having numbers as high at 71% (Nettesheim). At our own campus, approximately 8% of students identify as Southeast Asian heritage, but almost all of them don't read or write proficiently in their home language (Hmong). Only a very small percentage of students (less than 10%) live in our on-campus residence hall. Nontraditional or returning students (defined as over the age of 22) make up 26% of the student body. A snapshot of a recent Fall semester (2010) showed that 11% of students were in the fourth quartile of their high school class, 31% in the third, 27% in the second, and 17% in the first quartile. Another 13% were unranked, either because they had some kind of nontraditional educational experience (such as conventional or online home schooling) or because they obtained a GED or HSED rather than a high school diploma. On our campus, students in this last category are often less prepared for college writing than many of their fourth quartile classmates. The average class rank ranges from the 39th to 42nd percentile, and the average ACT score in English for the incoming first-year class in the Fall of 2009 was a 19.7 in English and a 21.2 in reading (which are fairly average test

scores), but many of our underprepared students do not take the ACT because they are not recent high school graduates.[11]

The most compelling data collected that demonstrated the benefit of the multiple measures process was part of our campus assessment effort. The number of at-risk students who remained in good standing at the end of the fall semester significantly increased over the implementation of this approach. In fall 2006, 208 students who began their academic career in English 098 (the developmental writing course at our institution) or in English 101 (the first-semester college writing course that well-prepared students typically exempt out of) had an average high school GPA of 2.57 and an average class rank of 42.8 (in the bottom half). With an average ACT of 18.33, 59% of this student group remained in good academic standing in the fall of 2006; notably, of course, this means that 41% of those students were on probation or suspension, nearly twice the rate of the general student population of 18.5% on probation and 5.8% suspended. Over the subsequent three years, the percent of students in good standing within this group has risen to 73%, bringing the percent on probation or suspension closer to the numbers of the overall student population--27% for the at-risk group vs. 20% probation and 4% suspension for the overall student population. Though some of this difference may be accounted for by a slight increase in the academic profile of the students in the two courses (high school GPA of 2.78, class rank of 46.4, still in the bottom half), we believe the data suggest that most of dramatic increase comes from better placement, more cautious enrollment in reading and writing-intensive courses, and more aggressive recommendation and requirement of support courses.

A key finding from this work is that standardized test scores and every other stand-alone tool for assessing readiness for college reading and writing are not effective in identifying many students who need an introductory or basic writing course before enrolling in the core-transfer level composition course and other first-year courses. For example, we routinely encounter students with complex educational backgrounds that illustrate the inadvisability of relying solely on test scores for placement. For example, several student groups stand out to us each year:

- Students with high test scores and low high school grades—such as the students whose ACTs are in the low to mid-30s but whose high school grades are below average. We often discover by reading the student writing samples that issues like mental illness, substance abuse, family problems, or health issues that

---

11. Perhaps because of direct transfer and collaborative degree programs with four-year institutions in our state, we also have an unusually high number of students with high ACT scores on our campus, which is another reason why our overall ACT scores are close to the national average even though we enroll many students who would not be admitted to most four-year institutions in our state.

negatively impacted their academic performance (and still other students do not account for gaps in their academic record even when given an opportunity to do so).

- A second group of students common at open-admission campuses who are better served by the multiple measures model includes returning adult students with significant gaps in education. Prior to undertaking a revision to our placement and curriculum, such students were almost always directly placed into the second-semester, core course, with the assumption that these mature, responsible, motivated students were more likely to be successful there; however, many of these students lack the rhetorical and academic skills to move directly into a course that at our institution (as at most of the other campuses in our statewide system) presumes students possess relatively sophisticated reading, composing, and writing skills and are prepared to start the semester able to produce academic arguments using scholarly sources, something that cannot safely be assumed about students who have been out of school for several or even many years..

- A third group who is better served by this process is the high number of students noted above who do not meet the ACT benchmark score for first-semester college composition, an 18 in English. For our institution, this means nearly a third of students would place into developmental courses absent other measures that might indicate that they are otherwise prepared to do college-level work. Our new process helps us identify those students whose writing samples, high school grades, or other measure suggest that they have the skills necessary to achieve the learning outcomes in English 101 but whose quantitative test scores may not place them there. We are also better able to recommend those students take the first-semester course along with appropriate support (a reading or learning skills course, writing center tutorial, or limitations on other reading-and-writing intensive coursework that semester).

Though it could be argued that this more involved process subjects our students to a greater level of scrutiny than their counterparts at other institutions experience when it comes to assessing their preparation and readiness for degree-credit coursework, we suggest that this process reflects long overdue attention to our students' needs. First, the admissions processes at selective institutions already assess students' readiness for academic coursework—and their placement processes serve a much less critical "sorting" function because those institutions do not enroll the wide range of learners who begin college at open-access

colleges. In the Madison example, above, the test scores produce different results in predicting success compared to students enrolling at two-year campuses because the highly competitive admissions process (not to mention the radical difference in percentage of first-generation college students who attend each of the two institutions—19% at Madison vs. 60% at the UW Colleges) already scrutinizes students' preparation in ways that open-admissions campuses do not.

We have found it important that the expanded placement process involves both the professional evaluation of student preparation by teachers and a mechanism for student voices to self-assess. The survey fulfills this function, but the writing prompt—which asks students to describe their preparation—offers students a space for making their individual learning needs known and presents the institution with an opportunity to meet them.

An example from a recent fall semester illustrates how a multiple measures approach to placement can respond to students' individual preparation for college writing more effectively than standalone test scores or single placement measures. One student tested into degree-credit composition based on the Wisconsin English Placement test with a score that was well above the cut-score for non-degree credit composition. However, the information available to the placement team about her academic background (high school grades, curriculum, and her survey) suggested a lack of experience with academic learning, and her timed writing sample strongly indicated that she did not yet know how to structure a formal essay or edit her own sentence-level writing, even though she completed (with modest success) the standardized portion of the placement test that measures a student's ability to identify error in provided examples. The placement team recommended that she enroll in a non-degree credit writing class and a learning skills course. She followed the English Department's course recommendations, and the academic demands of our accelerated non-degree credit curriculum were quite challenging for her even though her placement test score was the highest of any student in the class. Self-assessment writing that she completed for a final writing course portfolio strongly supports this student's placement in the non-degree credit composition course: "At begin of the semester . . . I didn't know what a thesis statement was, how to make a main point in each of my paragraphs. I am somewhat unclear within my sentences. I still have that problem, but I have a better understand how to edit my papers." She eventually enrolled in English 101 and successfully completed it after receiving substantial support from a campus writing tutorial program. However, it was very apparent to the student and her first-year instructors that she had needed a more basic introduction to academic writing before taking degree-credit courses.

The experience of multilingual students on our campus further demonstrates the importance of making placement recommendations based on students' individual academic

needs. Each year, our campus enrolls many students who identify their home language as Hmong on the placement test. Because all of these students graduate from Wisconsin high schools, they are not required to submit TOEFL scores, and nothing in their admissions materials tells advisors which students would benefit from a course taught by an instructor with graduate training and experience in working with multilingual students. These multilingual students complete their secondary education in just a few local area high schools with similar course offerings, and yet they arrive on our campus with a wide range of educational and linguistic experiences. For example, more than twenty Hmong students from three separate academic years agreed to participate in our research of students' transition to college writing. A close analysis of both their placement profiles and first-year college writing reveals that students with similar placement test scores can have very different needs as readers and writers. From the group of Hmong students with test scores that placed them into non-degree credit reading and writing courses, several students completed writing samples that clearly indicated that they would benefit from our workshop class for multilingual writers, Others wrote essays that were indistinguishable from the writing produced by monolingual English speakers, and the most appropriate placement was obviously in our basic academic writing course. However, other students' placement profiles and essays suggested that they might feel comfortable in either of our non-degree credit composition classes, which both offer an accelerated introduction to critical reading and academic essay writing. After we gave them a choice of courses, some students selected the workshop for multilingual writers while others did not.

Perhaps a more important aspect of the multiple measures approach to placement is that some multilingual students can enroll in degree-credit writing classes even when their lack of experience in editing sentence-level writing makes it difficult for them to achieve a high score on the placement test. For example, one Hmong student had WEPT and ACT scores (mid-teens in ACT English and Reading) that would place him into non-degree credit courses at every institution in our state. However, he successfully completed academic English courses during his senior year in high school. His writing sample showed that he had already developed the writing skills necessary for achieving key learning outcomes for our developmental composition courses, including the ability to structure an essay around a clear main point and support it with specific evidence. The placement team recommended that he enroll in English 101 with a non-degree credit reading course. He completed both degree-credit courses in our writing program sequence within two semesters with solid grades.

The writing that this student completed over the course of his first college year confirmed the appropriateness of the placement team's recommendations. He continued to demonstrate an ability to write well-organized essays based on a thesis. However, academic

reading was challenging for him, and the most difficult assignments for both composition courses seemed to be essays that required him to write from sources. His introductory self-assessment for a first-semester reading class also revealed his lack of experience with academic reading: "As far as reading goes, I am a very slow reader. Due to lack of vocabulary and the way that some things are written, I always get confused or lost." This student benefited from an academic reading class that provided him with multiple opportunities to read, discuss, and write about difficult texts before he enrolled in the second semester course that required him to write about independently located research sources. At the same time, he would not have received the same benefits from enrolling in a non-degree credit writing class.

Benefits to the Writing Program and Its Instructors

The multiple measures approach to placement allows our local English Department to examine each student's individual learning needs based on their previous educational experiences and preparation for college reading and writing. Analyzing the placement profiles for most of our campus's incoming students has provided us with a clear picture of the learning needs of the student populations that our campus serves. Previously, composition and support course instructors focused primarily on the college readiness of individual students in their own course sections instead of having access to multiple pieces of evidence about the overall preparation and educational backgrounds of students on our campus. This new ability to assess the shifting needs of entire student populations at our institution has enabled us to respond with appropriate program changes.

"This new ability to assess the shifting needs of entire student populations at our institution has enabled us to respond with appropriate program changes."

For example, during the placement process, composition instructors assess each student's readiness for reading and writing-intensive coursework, focusing specifically on preparation for our institution's first-year writing program and general education curriculum. The placement team then makes recommendations for appropriate learning support courses. Previously, advisors recommended reading and learning skills classes to students based primarily on their standardized test scores and high school grades. A multiple measures placement process through the Eng-

lish Department means that learning support placement comes from instructors who teach first-year writing, reading, and other support courses. This process has resulted in several important changes to programs for underprepared and at-risk students on our campus and in our statewide two-year institution. Our campus offers six sections of reading each year in comparison to the one or two classes that we previously offered before the English Department assessed reading readiness as part of the campus placement process. We also added additional sections of learning skills courses and writing tutorial classes. Other campuses in our institution have also expanded their basic skills programs in response to the multiple measures approach to placement, which has provided clear evidence that many of the students who enroll in our open-access institution are not ready for college reading and writing without significant support--though this would not necessarily be apparent based solely on reviewing a student's standardized test scores.

An English Department placement process has also resulted in changes to the way that other campuses in our statewide institution place students into first-year courses, including those that continue to use the Wisconsin English Placement Test as the only placement measure. After assessing more than a thousand student placement files, we examined the WEPT cut-scores that our statewide institution uses to place students into first-year composition and non-degree credit English. As we evaluated the results of our campus placement process, we determined that our institution's cut-score for the core, transfer-level research course was unusually low based on the learning outcomes for the course. Using English scores for the Wisconsin test as a standalone measure, many students were skipping the first semester English 101 course and testing directly into the more difficult course—even when every other placement measure (ACT, writing sample, high school grades and curriculum) indicated that they needed an introduction to college-level academic reading and writing before enrolling in the much more difficult second semester course. We also determined that our cut-score was lower than most universities in our state that used the same test, even though our two-year institution has a larger number of underprepared students who are at-risk for probation or suspension. However, until faculty from the English Department became involved in the placement process, the cut-score and testing process remained relatively mysterious to our department because it was administered entirely through a Student Services office. The work on our campus resulted in changed cut-scores that more accurately reflect the learning outcomes for our writing program and the inclusion of a reading score, confirming the value of Brian Huot's observation that successful assessment practices are "sensitive to the purpose and criteria for successful communication in which student ability in writing becomes part of a community's search for value and meaning within a shared context" (563).

Benefits to the Institution

Careful attention to placement by department members with background in writing studies has resulted in a number of dramatic program revisions and benefits to our institution as a whole, some department-specific, some campus-specific, and some with larger implications for our students beyond the first-year writing sequence.

First, careful review of the placement mechanism and its significance resulted in an ongoing paradigm shift within our department, one that required us to transform the way we thought about FYC and that was rooted in historical enrollment trends and institutional memory. As our admission policy crept in the last three decades toward open admission (rather than viewing the two-year transfer campuses as "extensions" of the flagship university), it became clear that the model used at our selected campuses--a single writing course focused on more advanced college writing and research skills for most students--was inappropriate for our student population. Recognition of this shift meant the English department had to undertake some self-scrutiny and structural changes to the first-year writing program, which resulted in more students taking a full year of composition to introduce them to academic writing and critical reading.

The formation of an ad hoc Composition Committee—rather than just a Curriculum Committee who had previously handled all curricular questions on literature, writing, developmental writing, creative writing, and beyond—was a first step toward tackling questions about structuring our courses as a program.[12] In the absence of a WPA, again, typical at many open-admission, two-year campuses, the Composition Committee worked with our previous course guides and course objectives to formulate a set of carefully sequenced learning outcomes based on our local needs and contextualized within recommendations by NCTE and WPA, specifically the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" (Council of Writing Program Administrators). This now-standing committee not only developed cohesive learning outcomes for our developmental, first-semester, and second-semester courses but also revised course guidelines including requirements and recommended texts in light of the new knowledge based on close examination of placement, new authority conferred by institutional structures, and an increased departmental emphasis on developing a writing program based on the student populations that our institution serves.

Secondary but still important outcomes for our institution (particularly at our campus but increasingly spreading to others as the other 12 campuses in the UW Colleges adopt

---

12. Jeff Klausman has argued that "there is a difference between offering writing classes and a writing program. A program, I believe, is characterized by an explicitly expressed coherent curriculum with integrated faculty development and assessment (cf. Fulkerson 680). Lacking that, we have only classes loosely related by too often unspoken and, most likely, conflicting assumptions about aims, means, and purposes" (Klausman 239).

a multiple measures approach) are a better understanding of our students and their needs and strengthened relationship between advisors and the English Department. With more accurate knowledge on the part of the English faculty about student needs, we can make clearer and informed recommendations about student needs for support courses such as learning skills, a critical reading class, writing center tutorial/studio courses, but we also are able to communicate more effectively to advising staff who do not teach FYC courses about the reading and writing demands of the curriculum.

Challenges

The placement process itself over the last few years has come with some challenges on our own campus and as it has been adopted by other campuses that make up our statewide two-year institution. Because placement involves the cooperation of our Student Services office (a centralized unit responsible for admissions, registration, and advising), it was imperative that we collaborate across campus functional units. Since the standardized test is already administered by a proctor out of that office, we work with a Dean in Student Services to provide the writing prompt, survey materials, and instructions for administering it. This process also requires some coordination beyond the administration—pulling together a "placement file" (done by an employee from that office with access to student records) getting the files to the placement team (at least two members our campus English faculty), and working in a timely fashion between student placement testing and registration sessions. This sometimes requires a tight turnaround at busy points in the semester.

One major challenge was shifting the perspective of responsibility for student placement. We saw this manifested in the ways that some advisors had difficulty moving away from the (easy, empirical) placement we had previously been using—a single number on a standardized editing test—to recognizing and acknowledging the English department's authority for pre-empting that number after assessing multiple pieces of evidence in a student's file. Other campus English faculty reported this challenge as well—from advisors, Student Services administrators, and students themselves, who are highly comfortable with the easily quantifiable test score even though it is not correlated with any of the learning outcomes in our writing courses. We've responded to these challenges in several ways:

a) We have created explanatory documents for various audiences (instructors, advisors, administrators, and students) to describe the process and outline placement criteria .

b) Informational meetings and presentations have been critical in helping advisors and administrators understand the multiple measures process. For example, we gave formal presentations at annual statewide meetings for Uni-

versity of Wisconsin System advisors and for Student Services employees within our 13-campus, two-year institution. We initially conducted regular question-and-answer sessions with local campus advisors, and we continue to follow-up with meetings at least one or twice each year.

c) We have also raised awareness of changes to the placement process through e-mail updates to instructors, advisors, campus administrators, and student services coordinators.

d) Each of our thirteen campuses has a "Campus Assessment Coordinator" position, and one of the co-authors served in that position each year as we were moving away from the single-score placement model. As a result, we designed annual campus assessment projects to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes (through measuring performance in particular courses affected by the change in recommendations for enrolling in particular, reading and writing-intensive courses; monitoring changes to the probation and suspension rate; and conducting a survey of writing students about their perception of the appropriateness of their placement). This assessment process was able to provide specific evidence of the value of the change to placement in the face of concerns that periodically arose from our campus and other campuses as they implemented the new approach.

e) We also conducted more formal research to study the relationship between placement and students' progress toward achieving writing program learning outcomes. We received funding from a statewide grant agency supporting research that investigates student learning. We designed a large-scale SoTL project to assess the effectiveness of the process more extensively during the 2010 to 2011 academic year..

f) Finally, we have given presentations, conducted workshops, and organized training sessions for members of the English Department for our statewide institution. This included developing placement assessment tools and guidelines that other campuses could revise and adapt according to their own local needs without having to create new placement materials from scratch. Our meetings with faculty and adjunct instructors assisted other campuses in developing their own campus placement processes while also providing us with crucial feedback on our work. These discussions also helped our 13-campus English Department to reach consensus on placement measures that apply to all campuses (including revised cut-scores for the state test and recommendations for placing students into remedial support courses).

All of these steps have been important parts of changing the culture of our institution to recognize the value of multiple measures placement assessment and the importance of involving the instructors from the English department in that process.

Conclusions

It is clear to us that replicating our multiple measures placement model at much larger institutions than ours (we have a student headcount at our campus of 1400 students, and 14,000 students total across our 13 campuses) would require a significant investment of time and energy by English faculty as well as a coordinated, long-term effort for implementation. In order to implement this process, we have worked carefully with our Student Services staff and with the approval and encouragement of the department chair and campus Dean. We also implemented the process incrementally, beginning with those students most likely to be characterized as "at-risk" for probation or suspension and eventually moving to a review of all incoming, first-year and transfer students. Our budget already accounted for a Student Orientation fee and a small additional charge gave Student Services the resources to pay a modest but sufficient hourly wage to instructors reviewing student files.

Our own work on this project continues this academic year with a large-scale, targeted assessment that tracks student outcomes for two academic years—identifying the placement information with specific students, our course enrollment recommendations (both first-year writing and support or learning resource courses), and the outcomes for those students. Gathering additional data such as reports from students themselves about their first-year experience will provide us with a richer sense of the impact of placement changes on our campus.

We want to close this essay by making a strong statement in favor of assessment of student readiness at two-year, open-access institutions that reflects the complex academic and personal backgrounds they bring to the higher education experience. This placement process must account for the distinct learning needs of students at open-admission campuses and, in order to be most effective, must be administered by faculty from the English department who actually teach the courses into which students are being placed. Though we recognize the demands that such a process places on both the fiscal and human resources of an institution, the substantial value to students, to the institution, and to programs is worth the investment of time and money. Further, in our case, budgets allotted to placement are typically relatively stable and can be reapportioned to accommodate the comparatively small amount it costs to remunerate faculty readers/placement teams, especially when considering the human and financial costs of poor placement for faculty workload and student success.

Works Cited

Belanoff, Pat. "The Myths of Assessment." *Journal of Basic Writing* 10.1 (1991): 54-66. Print.

Bramberg, Betty. "Multiple-Choice and Holistic Essay Scores: What Are They Measuring?" *College Composition and Communication* 33.1 (1982): 404-406. Print.

Charlton, Jonikka, and Shirley Rose. "Twenty More Years in the WPA's Progress." *Writing Program Administration* 33.1-2 (2009): 114-145.

"COMPASS® Writing Essay Test (e-Write)." ACT's Compass System: Writing Essay Test. ACT. Web. 2010. *http://www.act.org/compass/tests/writingessay.html*

Council of Writing Program Administrators. "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition." July 2008. Web. August 8, 2010.

Habley, Wesley, and Randy McClanahan. What Works In Student Retention? *Two Year Public Colleges*. ACT. Web. 2004.

Isaacs, Emily, and Sean Molloy. "Texts of Our Institutional Lives: SATs for Writing Placement: A Critique and Counterproposal." *College English* 72.5 (2010): 518-538. Print.

Harrington, Susanmarie. "Learning to Ride the Waves: Making Decisions about Placement Testing." *Writing Program Administration* 28.3 (2005): 9-29. Print.

Hassel, Holly, and Joanne Giordano. "Transfer Institutions, Transfer of Knowledge: The Development of Rhetorical Adaptability and Underprepared Writers." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 37.1 (2009): 24-40. Print.

Haswell, Richard and Susan Wyche-Smith. "Adventuring into Writing Assessment." *College Composition and Communication* 45.2 (1994): 220-236. Print.

Hughes, Katherine L., and Judith Scott-Clayton. "Assessing Developmental Assessment in Community College." Community College Research Center. Teachers College, Columbia. CCRC Working Paper No. 19. February 2011. Web.

Huot, Brian. "Toward a New Theory of Writing Assessment." *College Composition and Communication* 47.4 (1996): 549-566. Print.

Isaacs, Emily, and Sean Malloy. "Text of Our Institutional Lives: SATs for Writing Placement?" *College English* 72.5 (2010): 518-38. Print.

James, Cindy. "ACCUPLACER OnLine: Accurate Placement Tool for Developmental Programs?" *Journal of Development Education* 30.2 (2006): 2-8. Web. Academic Search Premier. June 16, 2010.

Klausman, Jeffrey. "Mapping the Terrain: The Two-Year College Writing Program Administrator." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 35.3 (2008): 238-251. Print.

—. "Not Just a Matter of Fairness: Adjunct Faculty and Writing Programs in Two-Year Colleges." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 37.4 (2010): 363-371. Print.

Matzen, Richard, and Jeff Hoyt. "Basic Writing Placement with Holistically Scored Essays: Research Evidence." *Journal of Developmental Education* 28.1 (2004): 13. Print.

Moore, Cindy, Peggy O'Neil, and Brian Huot. "Creating a Culture of Assessment in Writing Programs and Beyond." *College Composition and Communicatio*n 61.1 (2009): W107-132. Web. 29 June 2010.

National Council of Teachers of English and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. "NCTE-WPA Write Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities." *WPA Council*. 2005-2009. Accessed June 17, 2010.

Nettesheim, Gregg. "First Generation Students in the UW Colleges." *Academic Matters: A Publication of the University of Wisconsin Colleges Office of Academic Affairs* 9.1 (2009): 4-6.

Peckham, Irvin. "Online Challenge versus Offline ACT." *College Composition and Communication* 61.4 (2010): 718-745. Print.

—. "Turning Placement into Practice." *Writing Program Administration* 29.3 (2006): 65-83. Print.

Royer, Daniel, and Roger Gilles. *Directed Self-Placement: Principles and Practices*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 2003.

Sullivan, Patrick. "Measuring 'Success' at Open Admissions Institutions: Thinking Carefully about this Complex Question." *College English* 70.6 (2008): 618-632. Print.

White, Ed. "Apologia for the Timed Writing Impromptu Essay Test." *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 30-45. Print.

Appendix A
English Placement Writing Sample
UW-Marathon County

Name: _____

An article in the October 10, 2008, edition of the Chronicle of Higher Education entitled "Connecting Schools and Colleges: More Rhetoric Than Reality" by Michael Kirst reported that

> *College completion rates are stagnant for recent high-school graduates. In California, only 24 percent of community-college students receive a vocational certificate or an associate degree — or transfer to a four-year institution within six years. At community colleges nationwide, more than 60 percent of students who enroll after high school end up taking at least one remedial course. In the California State University system, 56 percent of entering freshmen are in remediation.*
>
> *Clearly, the connections between high schools and higher-education institutions are still not what they should be to help students prepare for college.*

In a short essay, use the statistics and claims above to assess your own high school education. In what ways has your high school curriculum prepared you to be successful in college-level courses? In what areas do you wish you were better prepared?

Some recommendations:
- Use standard academic essay structure (introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion)
- Use the conventions of standard written English including formal academic tone
- Assert a thesis statement (make your position clear)
- Select appropriate and specific examples to support your points

New First-Year Student Survey

Name: _____

High School Attended: _____

- What English courses, if any, did you take your senior year of high school?

  _____

- Have you taken Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate courses ***in any subject***? If so, which courses?

  _____

- How long has it been since you took an English course?

  _____

- What is your home language? If English isn't your native language, do you read and write in your primary language?

  _____

- Have you had a college English course before? If so, what, and where did you take it?

  _____

- Do you feel that your high school grades and ACT test scores accurately reflect your academic abilities? Explain your assessment (use back of sheet if necessary).

  _____

  Check any that apply:

- _____ I would prefer a slower start to college with a limited number of difficult classes the first semester.
- _____ I believe I am ready for difficult reading and writing courses my first semester.

  Optional:

  Did you have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in high school for a physical or learning disability? If so, would you like to speak with someone on how to receive accommodations for your college courses?

Rubric for Placement Exam
UW-Marathon County

Organization	• Essay lacks coherence or a single controlling idea or ideas are not logically arranged • May or may not use standard essay structure	• Essay is coherent and focuses on a main point. Ideas are arranged logically • Uses standard essay structure of introduction, body, conclusion	• Write and support a clear, focused, and appropriately placed thesis • Supports a coherent and cohesive essay using transitions within and between paragraphs
Content	• Does not clearly address the text • Thesis offers a self-assessment • Does not use examples to support claims	• Refers to text • Essay self-assesses at least one of the two areas (prepared vs. not prepared) • Uses a few examples to support claims	• Explicitly addresses text • Thesis indicates self-assessment of preparation and lack of preparation • Uses adequate examples to support claims
Conventions of standard written English	• Essay does not demonstrate understanding of how sentences work and are constructed • Mechanical problems interfere with the reader's comprehension of essay meaning.	• Essay contains structurally sound sentences using appropriate syntax and adhering to grammar and usage conventions	• Essay demonstrates mastery of usage, mechanics, and diction appropriate for an academic essay.

Holly Hassel *is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County and director of the University of Wisconsin Colleges Women's Studies Program. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research interests include the scholarship of teaching and learning, student academic success in open-admission institutions, and feminist pedagogy and theory, and her work has appeared in* Pedagogy, Feminist Teacher, College English, College Teaching, *and* Teaching English in the Two-Year College.

Joanne Baird Giordano *is the Developmental Reading and Writing Coordinator for the University of Wisconsin Colleges (a statewide, two-year institution) and a senior lecturer in English at the University of Wisconsin Marathon County. She has graduate degrees in English and TESOL from Brigham Young University. Her research focuses on the experience of students at open-access institutions as they transition to college-level reading and writing. She is especially interested in multilingual writers, significantly underprepared students, and learners from nontraditional educational backgrounds.*

Laura Rogers

"The Secret Souls of Criminals:" A Different Prison Teaching Story

"Why are you here?" Mr. Jones asked me in his Jamaican accent as he carefully took off his glasses and laid them on the desk. "Why are you doing this?"

The other inmates in the writing workshop looked expectantly at me, waiting for my answer. The only sounds in the small, grimy classroom decorated with primary-school posters were those of bouncing basketballs and sneakers squeaking against the wood floor of the gym next door. Mr. Jones' question took me by surprise; why was I, a middle-aged, middle-class, white woman sitting in a small, stuffy classroom with eight black male inmates in a medium-security prison at nine on a Tuesday evening? I couldn't quite imagine the polite, dutiful undergraduates I taught during the day asking anything so personal. Did I indeed know why I was there? I felt a rush of emotions as I struggled to find words. The eight men looked at me and waited for my answer. The sky outside the small, grimy rectangular classroom window, open only a few inches even on this warm night, darkened.

There are no easy answers to Mr. Jones's question, and perhaps no one who teaches in the complex, contradictory, and often tense prison environment should be looking for easy answers. However, the years that have passed since the night Mr. Jones first posed his question have allowed me, after much reflection, to understand both the reasons why his question initially made me so uncomfortable as well as the importance, and even necessity, of his question. This essay explores three main components of my eventual understanding of "why I was there." Mr. Jones's question helped me understand the nature of the prison classroom, with its possibilities of more challenging teaching, the often passionate level of engagement of the inmate students, the attending seduction and danger of the "teacher as hero" narrative, and finally, the unsettling possibility that I was in collusion with the institution. While there may ultimately be no "resolution" to these issues, I did come to understand the necessity of engaging in deep reflection on why I was teaching in a prison classroom and on how I might develop a way to think about that teaching in a new light. Perhaps each of us needs to articulate our truths for ourselves and try to see the complexity of any classroom situation before we can honestly face our students and have the right to ask for their respect and trust.

The Writing Workshop: Some Background

I had been teaching in prison, both in a college correctional facility program that had been terminated by loss of state and federal funding, and as the volunteer coordinator of a writing workshop, for close to twenty years the night that Mr. Jones asked me "Why are you here?" Prison teaching had been the very first teaching I had ever done, and as a young and inexperienced teacher, I had experienced my share of difficult classroom moments in the twelve years I had spent teaching in the college program. These "disruptions," however, were relatively few and far between; the students were motivated and eager to learn, and class-room discussions were often intellectually stimulating and often sophisticated well beyond the discussions held in my on-campus classes. Despite the occasional difficulties, like other prison teachers (Hedin, Jacobi, Stanford, Tannenbaum), I was "hooked" on the intense, engaging and challenging experience of prison teaching; I understood, also, the importance of access to higher education for inmates.

When all state and federal funding for higher education programs in New York state prisons was ended in 1995, I began the voluntary creative writing workshop in the medium-security men's prison I had been teaching writing and literature in for several years as part of a college program. The college program had been offered in three area men's prisons—there were no women's prisons nearby—and had offered associate's and bachelor's degree-granting programs. Joseph Burzynski, in his 2010 *Open Words* article " Conflating Language and Offense: Composing in an Incarcerated Space," summarizes the move from the creation of correctional facility college programs in the post-Attica 1970s to the reduction of the num-ber of many such programs after grant funding was eliminated after the enactment of the "Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994" (13), a move seen in the prison where I taught; the college program was eliminated after the loss of state and federal funding. As Joseph Lockard noted in his 2011 Conference on College Composition and Communication presentation, "Prison Education as a Human Right," the loss of many such college programs meant that there were few educational programs available in correctional facilities (beyond the often-mandated and test-driven GED classes) to the ever-growing population of incarcer-ated men and women in the US, a population disproportionately composed of members of minority groups and the lowest economic classes (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2009). The loss of the college program was particularly significant as numerous statistics show that partici-pation in higher education programs had the most significant impact on recidivism rates of any kind of programming available in prisons (Lockard).

Losing the prison program was devastating for students in the program and for teach-ers as well. While I could not offer workshop participants college credit or degrees, I took the opportunity to create a voluntary, bi-weekly workshop open to any inmate who wanted to

attend. The workshop was an opportunity to offer an educational program beyond the GED classes, to allow the men to engage in literacy activities that offered many personal and social benefits and to work with writers outside of the boundaries of school writing, required exit exams, and grades. While they could not earn college degrees, I could offer them a space in which to write, read, reflect, receive feedback for their work, and publish: I could offer them a space where they could create an identity beyond that of "inmate" or "criminal." The workshop became a place where we treated each other with respect and as adults; as a carryover from the college program, the men addressed me as "Dr. Rogers" and began calling each other "Mr. Jones" and "Mr. Howard," in an attempt to equalize the many disparities between us, to show respect for one another, and to distinguish the workshop space as a place where they were more than the Date of Incarceration (DIN) numbers they were often identified by in the rest of the facility.

The workshop is, as Tobi Jacobi points out in her "Foreword" for the *Reflections* special issue on "Prison Literacies, Narratives and Community Connections," only one of many variations of such programs existing in prisons, jails, and juvenile detention centers. As Jacobi also notes in her article "Writing Workshops as Alternative Literacy Education for Incarcerated Women," such workshops "can provide incarcerated writers with motivation to improve literacy skills and self-confidence through creative experiences and participation...that reaches beyond crime-as-identity"(55). Jacobi explains the many ways participants can benefit from such programs; writing workshops offer, according to Jacobi, rare opportunities for civic engagement, reflection on life experiences, and publication. As the workshop coordinator and teacher, I have certainly seen all of the benefits Jacobi describes enacted for the workshop participants.

Recent literature (Jacobi, Tannenbaum, Lamb, Stanford) focuses on the benefits of these workshops for inmates even while acknowledging the difficulties of prison teaching. Since teaching the workshop, I have experienced my share of what Jacobi names as "the material conditions" of teaching in prison. Administration will routinely "lose" the call-out that allows students to attend class, confiscate student writing, and confine inmate writers to "special housing units" for their "inappropriate writing." I have also heard (some) corrections officers make insulting and degrading comments to students on their way to class. Narratives about teaching writing in prison often locate difficulty in the prison setting and/or administration, which is where the problem legitimately often originates; while such narratives may also locate some difficulties between inmate students and teachers, they do not offer extended analysis of the nature/source of these issues. Additionally, most of these narratives center on college classes in prison, where the complexities of the prison setting are intensified by issues of grading and credit.[1] Because the field of prison pedagogy and literacies is a rela-

tively new one, the complexity of prison teaching is only beginning to be addressed.

Any classroom problems I did experience had all been in the college classes; up until the moment of Mr. Jones's questions, I had not perceived any troubling issues, undercurrents of tension, or disruptions in the workshop that the inmates voluntarily attended and which I had thought functioned so well. Free of the constraints of exit exams and grading, I looked forward to meeting with the workshop every other Tuesday night and believed that the current group of students worked particularly well together; I had tried to create and maintain an open, facilitative atmosphere in which I encouraged students to ask questions of myself and each other. As a teacher who attempted to facilitate a workshop that was grounded in the Freirean principles of dialogic, democratic pedagogy, I had hoped that the workshop could be a space for open, critical, and engaged response and inquiry. Was this uncomfortable question the inevitable result of such a classroom?

Mr. Jones's question made me so uncomfortable because it tapped into the insecurities I felt about my role in the prison, as did the other "troubling" incidents that have caused me to question and re-evaluate my place in the complexity of the prison environment. These incidents did not involve any threats of physical violence. Rather, inmates have made remarks and situated themselves in classroom discourse in ways that indicate that they are well aware of differences and inequities between us; these moments also indicate how much inmates need to understand our motivations to teach in prison and the necessity of opening up a dialogue. As I thought about Mr. Jones's question, the first response that came to my

---

1. Several prison teachers explore difficulties and tensions in college prison writing classes. Frances Biscoglio, for example, in her article " In the Beginning Was the Word: Teaching Pre-College English at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility," offers, in a diary format, an account of the rewards and difficulties of teaching a pre-college English class to incarcerated women. Biscoglio notes problems with plagiarism, classroom behavior, and her relationship with the class. She states, for example, of her class that "If they want to prove they are correct and I am not, they can be as tenacious as bulls—and drive me crazy "(27) and that some students are "verbally insubordinate' (35). Biscoglio, however, also discusses the many rewards of teaching her students as well and also provides a detailed account of a college class in a prison environment.

Philip Martin, in "Literature Lessons from Prison," recounts that on his first night of teaching a college literature class in prison, "A tall, white inmate walks up after class and hits me hard with a forearm flat against my chest" (B3). He recounts his own fear, based on the racial tensions he perceives in the group, as he "walked inside the U shape, rolling chalk in my hand, hoping not to reveal fear to either blacks or whites" (B4). Martin's purpose, however, is to discuss the repercussions of the reading choices he has made for his prison class, not to analyze his relationship with his inmate students. Likewise, Thomas Hruska, in his 1981 article "What Do You Expect? We're All Crooks," offers a series of vignettes of disturbing or unexpected encounters with his inmate students in the various writing and literature classes he taught at a maximum security facility. Hruska relates that one day he finds "a large, red apple on my desk before class. Playfully but cynically, I wonder how any of them spit on it to give it such a nice shine. After the break, I notice that a huge bite has been taken from one side. No one will snitch" (14). Despite his cynicism, Hruska goes on to say that "Whatever the reason, I continue to teach at the prison and, despite the frustration, find the work deeply rewarding" (15). All of these narratives recounting difficulty in teaching in prison explore college classes in prison, not voluntary workshops.

mind seemed far too simple to speak to such a complex question. Why was I there? In spite of all the aforementioned difficulties inherent in prison teaching, I was there because I enjoyed it, because the work we did in the prison classroom mattered to the inmate students in a way it did not to most of my on-campus students. Judith Tannenbaum, in her account of teaching a writing workshop in San Quentin prison, states that she was drawn to prison teaching because "the prisoners responded as I did to poems: as though they received bread, actual matter with the power to nurture" (21). Even though I am well aware of the range of social and political reasons that had made my presence in the college program and now the workshop so important, there was an emotional and intellectual response that could not be denied and that I needed to explore.

The Pleasures of Prison Teaching

Jonathan Jones was a Jamaican student in his mid-forties, and, with his dignified manner and authoritative presence, was the acknowledged leader of the group. He was a faithful attendee of the biweekly workshop, sometimes the only member to show up during the winter months, walking the considerable distance from the building where he lived to the activities building on the other side of the facility grounds even when the January wind chill produced temperatures well below zero. (During the sub-zero upstate New York winters, I rode to the activities building in one of the heated, inmate driven facility vans.) He would appear in the door of the classroom wrapped in layers of what seemed like all of the dark green clothing issued to him by the Department of Corrections. Mr. Jones always led the group discussions, offering clear and insightful observations about group members' work.

"All right, what we gonna do here this week? Who's got something to read?" he would say as he looked around the group. Men would take out precious sheets of paper, some with writing not only on the lines but around the margins, or the coveted black and white marble notebooks, and wait their turn to read. It never occurred to me that Mr. Jones did not trust me or accept my presence.

In the classroom and on my ride home that night Mr. Jones asked me "Why are you here?," I struggled for an honest answer; I found that I had an exceedingly difficult time articulating one. Why was I there? I had started teaching in prison in a college correctional facility program many years ago simply because I needed a job, not out of any political convictions. I began that teaching, the first I had ever done, full of trepidation, not knowing what to expect and not quite knowing what to teach, either. I actually taught in prison for several years before teaching in a "regular" classroom. When I did begin teaching in "regular," on–campus classrooms, I was disappointed; those classes could not compare to the intense and always interesting classes I taught "on the inside."

As I thought through these issues, I recalled a conversation I had some years ago with another volunteer, a retired professor of Journalism who taught a voluntary reading group that focused on African-American writers. We had many students in common. Jack, a man in his late eighties, with his dedicated passion to his group, his wit, intelligence, and clear-eyed but obvious affection for his inmate students, had been given a "volunteer of the year" award (along with his wife who tutored in the GED program) at the facility's annual Volunteer Appreciation dinner. We had talked about the dinner on the phone one night before the event. Jack had been notified of the award and had talked to me about the speech that he knew he was expected to give.

"Everyone asks me why I do this," he had said. "Sometimes our children get upset with us because we can't babysit for them because it is our night to be at the prison. Other people ask me why I just don't sit back and enjoy my retirement. Why do I do this? I don't have any big, complicated answer. I like it! It's fun! The students are wonderful, and I get to teach whatever I want."

Jack's remarks about the engaged, passionate, and involved nature of prison teaching have been echoed and extended by many prison teachers; while I knew that Jack, who had also taught in the college program, did not begin teaching in that program in order to seek out a "fun" teaching experience, one of the reasons he stayed on at the prison as a volunteer was the level of engagement in the prison classroom and the personal relationships he was able to achieve and maintain with his students, a feeling echoed by many prison teachers. Gregory Shafer, for example, writes of his class of incarcerated women that

> While most high school and college students approach writing as a way to acquire the academic skills needed to survive in the society in which they hope to flourish, these unique pupils approach it as a precious gift that can help give voice to their feelings of consternation, alienation, and pain—feelings that erupt in fonts of warm emotion. (75)

Thomas Hruska, even while noting the difficulties of prison teaching, writes that "Whatever else can be said about teaching in prison, it is not boring" (14). Raymond Hedin, in his article "Teaching Literature in Prison," offers a thoughtful analysis of the attraction of prison teaching. For example, Hedin says of the literature classes he taught in prison:

> I have taught *Native Son* ten times in three different colleges, but I have never heard a discussion of it as intense and intelligent as the one I refereed in the Indiana Women's Prison....[M]y on-campus seminar, good as it was, could not touch the students at Pendleton Reformatory for getting inside *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*. (282)

Hedin describes a discussion of *Native Son* in one of his prison classes: "I left that three-hour class with the conviction that I had been part of one of the more sophisticated dis-

cussions of literary form and technique that I had ever experienced...I am not exaggerating the level of discourse" (284).

I had experienced similar levels of engagement, sophistication, and intensity in both the college and workshop prison classes that I taught. In addition to the high level of discourse often present in prison classrooms and workshops, Hedin claims that for both teacher and inmate student, the prison classroom is an escape from the normal routine; for the inmate, as Hedin notes, "he or she escapes to the classroom rather than from it," and for the teacher, "...the prison course is inevitably outside the daily routine, the ordinary "business" of the profession. None of this constitutes the prison classroom as the exotic other, but it does mean that that such a classroom often taps, in both faculty and students, the energies that go into diversion..." (282). Hedin recounts experiences of prison teaching that have been echoed by many other prison teachers who often keep returning to prison classrooms and workshops that are taught in addition to their formal teaching load and are often in prisons located in rural areas that require long, late-night drives in all kinds of weather. While I believe that most if not all of these prison teachers are well aware of the social/political reasons for prison higher education and literacy education, the emotional reasons for prison teaching keep re-emerging in discussions of this experience.

Pleasure, engagement, and intensity are feelings we associate with our best teaching experiences, and although I had experienced these emotions with my on-campus classes, the prison workshop offered many more such moments. That pleasure I experienced in teaching the workshop, nevertheless, also led to feelings of guilt that re-surfaced as the result of Mr. Jones's probing question.

"An Army of Technicians": Collusion and Guilt

"believed that I was, with my mysterious motives for volunteering to teach this group, indeed part of the system that maintained power over them"

Part of my guilt, I realized, was the uneasy feeling that even though I knew that the writing workshop provided many benefits to students, I had wondered whether or not it was possible for any such programs to exist without colluding with the correctional facility. From my past reading of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, I knew that Foucault believes that teachers and volunteers, along with all prison personnel, are implicated in a system in which all are part of an "army of technicians" (11), whose pur-

pose it is to "gaze into the secrets souls of criminals" (25) and use that knowledge to maintain power over inmates. Is it possible to work within the system and not be part of this "army of technicians?" Perhaps Mr. Jones and the rest of the group believed that I was, with my mysterious motives for volunteering to teach this group, indeed part of the system that maintained power over them. Was I just assuming that the workshop, which I had proposed, initiated, and taught, was something the inmates wanted or needed? I had never asked them. Was Mr. Jones's question an attempt to understand "my secret soul?" My discomfort and feelings of invasion prompted by his question provided me with just the slightest hint of what it must be like to be an inmate, to have an "army of technicians" whose purpose it is to try to peer into your "secret soul." It was not a comfortable feeling.

No matter how much I believed myself to be "aligned" with the students in my workshop and "against" the administration and guards, differences between teachers and inmates are, of course, vast, and are signified in many ways. Inmates (in prisons in my state) wear drab green uniforms (teachers and volunteers are advised not to wear clothing of similar green color) that separate them not only from the civilian staff but also from the rest of society. Inmates also wear their DIN numbers and their names prominently on their shirts and jackets. At the end of our workshop time, I say goodbye and walk through the gates topped with the ubiquitous razor wire, and they, obviously, don't.

Anne Folwell Stanford articulates similar feelings of discomfort in her article "More Than Just Words: Women's Poetry and Resistance at Cook County Jail." She states that "My acute awareness of privilege as a white, middle-class academic, free to come and go in this enclosed space, added to my unease and my growing sense of collusion" (281). I feel uncomfortable, too, every time I wave goodbye to the men in the workshop and turn down the walkway to the administration building on my way home or every time I speak with one of the guards. Stanford, in response to her feelings of uneasiness, changed the one or two hour workshops she offered for women jail inmates to four- to six-week intensive sessions to ease her increasing sense of "unease and growing sense of collusion" (281). Although the workshop I teach is well-established and long-running (we meet every other week throughout the year), I still have an uneasy sense that the workshop offers only momentary respite; Stanford writes that she was concerned about "...offering[ing] only palliative moments, and, in so doing, actually supporting and making the very system of which [she was] so critical actually look good" (281). At times, I have felt much the same way.

For example, the workshop has received positive attention from the facility; we were featured in the local Sunday paper, and the group has received flattering comments from the deputy superintendent of programs. This positive publicity makes it seem as though the prison itself is somehow responsible for the good work of the workshop while still not taking

any steps to transform any of the social and cultural conditions that have brought the men to prison. The group is "good" for the facility in many ways; it provides, as do other activities and programs offered by the prison, a structured and supervised place for inmates to be for two hours every other Tuesday night. As much as I like to think of the workshop as subversive, in many ways it is simply another program offered by the facility to provide inmates with an activity.

My feelings of guilt and collusion echoed Stanford's as I worried about the possibility of somehow collaborating with the correctional facility; however, it was not uncommon for people who knew my work at the prison to question me as to whether or not I felt guilty for working with people who had committed crimes. Why not work with children or the numerous other people who need help and have not committed crimes?

Patricia E. O'Connor, in "Afterword: Rewriting the Story of Prison Literacies" in the 2004 Special Issue of *Reflections*, acknowledges the difficult and complex issues prison work implies; she notes that "The worlds of violence and crime claim many lives, harm many more" (206). O'Connor further articulates the need to confront these complex issues; she writes that "We who promote a new sort of literacy in and about prisons must also face the dilemmas that cycles of crime and retribution set forth" (206). Although the men in the workshop were overwhelmingly incarcerated because of drug or drug-related convictions (as was generally true of most of the population of the medium-security facility), there were nonetheless workshop participants who had committed violent crimes. There is, inevitably, a nexus of difficult and disturbing issues involved with inmate education and literacy programs; however, as O'Connor points out, the numerous disparities of "race, income and opportunity" (206) that exist in the prison population cannot be ignored. Do we wish to continue to warehouse the over two million people, the overwhelming number of them members of minority and low income groups, currently incarcerated? Is this, as O'Connor asks, the best way to address the many forces that drive people to commit crimes? These difficult issues are ones that anyone who works with a prison population must struggle with. Nevertheless, when I sit with the students in the college program or the workshop, I sit not with abstract statistics but with individual, complicated human beings and listen to their stories of poverty, abuse, racism and drug addiction. It becomes difficult not to relate to the person sitting a few feet away from me as just that—a person, not a crime. Judith Tannenbaum addresses similar issues, writing "…I saw that even those of my students who had committed the gravest of crimes were not monsters, but human" (29). Additionally, Joseph Lockard argues for inmate education as a "human right" and enumerates reasons (including reduction of the recidivism rate, the responsibility of the prison to provide "basic needs" that include education, the disproportionate number of minorities incarcerated, and the establishment of international law

that makes provisions for higher education for inmates) for inclusion of such programs.

For all of these reasons, then, despite the guilt I sometimes felt about colluding with the institution, I did not feel guilt for teaching inmates, even though I was aware of the criminal acts they had committed. Nevertheless, I needed to carefully examine my motives for teaching in prison in order to make sure I was not casting myself in the wrong light.

The Seduction of Prison Teaching: The Prison Teacher as Activist/Hero?

Raymond Hedin, in his 1979 *College English* article, "Teaching Literature in Prisons," speculates about why some teachers are drawn to prison teaching. Hedin surmises that some teachers are very much drawn to prison teaching because "it seems preferable to teaching on campus, or at least preferable to teaching exclusively on campus" (280). This was certainly the case for me; I looked forward to the passionate, intellectually engaging discussions in my prison classes (none of my own-campus students were ever so passionate about a text that they nearly had a fight over it; while I certainly do not want students physically fighting in class, often I would appreciate a little more passion). Hedin also notes the passive, career-oriented nature of many on-campus students, (which is descriptive of the science-oriented, career-focused institution where I teach) and writes "In that context, the prison offers—or at least seems to—the lure of the underground, the student as outsider, the rebel who in a literal sense resisted 'the system' to the extent of breaking its laws" (281). Hedin goes on to state that the prison tends to attract a certain type of teacher, "...those faculty not wholly comfortable themselves with that system, in general those academics who have something akin to a sense of mission...about the subject they teach and its potential for changing minds" (281).

Although Hedin's remarks might in some ways seem dated, they do, I believe, address some of the reasons why I, along with many other prison teachers, are drawn to this teaching. While many of us may not be "children of the 60s," (although some of us are, or at least of the 70s), many prison teachers are still "inclined to social activism or change" and have "something akin to a sense of mission" about their teaching that Hedin identifies (281). I do appreciate not only the sense of engagement and interest prison students bring to their work, but also the sense of subversion and rebellion implicit in prison teaching. Stanford states in her article that she, too, is drawn to the sense of rebellion inherent in prison teaching; she defines the writing of the women inmates in her workshop as "an act of resistance" (277). Stanford clearly admits what she brings to her workshop; she states that "It is clear to me that I privilege certain kinds of writing—I love it when the women critique the system, when they can articulate what is happening to them in a broader social and political context than the individualistic one bandied about in most social institutions" (283). Jacobi contends

in her introduction to the *Reflections* special issue that "incarcerated writers and learners have the capacity to engage in complex cultural critique while building creative and workplace writing fluencies"(8). Perhaps we need to closely examine the social justice and activist impulses prison teachers bring to work that involves teaching a very marginalized group of people who may not have access to resources or opportunities to speak.

In their introduction to their collection *Blundering for A Change,* William H. Thelin and John Paul Tassoni investigate what they call "the most dominant narrative construction in education—teacher as hero"(4). As Thelin and Tassoni point out, one of the many inherent dangers in this narrative is that "the 'others,' whether they be victims or villains, have no true perspective to offer to the plot" (5). Even though many who teach in prison (myself included) might identify themselves as "critical educators," Thelin and Tassoni maintain that these teachers are just as susceptible to the "teacher as hero" narrative as more traditional educators. Additionally, "the need to emulate the teacher-hero model compromises the very dialogic methods at the heart of critical pedagogy, those methods that allow students to teach as they learn and teachers to teach, but also learn" (5). Prison teachers need to be prepared for the possibility that "letting go" of the "teacher-hero" model, or the conception of the classroom as a place where the teacher is the authority and the students the ones who learn, opens the door to the kinds of uncomfortable disruptions some of my students have presented.

I do not think, however, that many (if any) members of our profession who teach in prisons consciously think of themselves as "teacher-heroes." Despite the discomfort many of us may feel because of our privileges and the uneasy sense of collusion with the institution we may feel, it can be seductive for prison teachers to believe they are somehow "rescuing" inmate students from oppressive and degrading institutional situations. Surely inmate students, the most marginalized and oppressed members of our society, are "in need of rescue." It is also tempting to imagine ourselves as, if not responsible, then influential for the often powerful and what Anne Folwell Stanford calls "raw" (278), passionate and sophisticated writing frequently produced in inmate workshops. Thelin and Tassoni note that such a narrative "promotes a pedagogy that will save students from a number of villains" (4); there are no shortage of "villains" in the prison environment. The danger of the "hero narrative," however, is that the students become objects, with, as Thelin and Tassoni note "no true perspective to offer to the plot" (4). It is alluring to imagine that the most marginalized members of society trust us enough to share the stories of their troubled lives and crimes, the most private parts of their lives. It is impossible not to respond to the often passionate and intellectually sophisticated discussions that take place in a prison workshop or classroom just as it is impossible not to respond to inmates' intense need for contact with people from "the outside" and

the rewarding relationships that often develop. If I had been envisioning myself as the "hero" of the story of the writing workshop, Mr. Jones's question allowed him to define himself with his own questions to ask and story to tell; his questions, and the other ways in which he challenged me, allowed him to become one of the students who "teach as they learn" and me to become a teacher who not only teaches, but one who can "also learn." Another remark made by Mr. Jones, in the conversation that followed his "why are you here" question, also allowed him to become the "speaking subject" of his own story, a story in which he assigned me a place.

After Mr. Jones asked "why are you here," I tried to express some of my thoughts to him about why I was teaching the workshop. He surprised me by leaning back in his chair and saying, "I've studied you for a year now, and I've concluded that you are okay."

His comment took me aback. I had no idea that he ever thought I was not "okay" or that he had been "studying" me for a year. I was relieved and, yes, even flattered to hear that he had concluded that I was "okay." On the other hand, I felt self-conscious and even somewhat annoyed that Mr. Jones had been covertly "studying" me for the past year when I naively thought we had at least a trusting student-teacher relationship. Obviously he had not trusted me—and why should he? Why should I assume that he would? For all he knew, I could be coming into the prison every other week for my own ego, gratifying my liberal, "activist" impulses by my twice-monthly, do-good, safe excursions into the prison. I could have been curious, wanting to find out what kind of people end up being caged. I could have been looking to bolster my own self-esteem by congratulating myself as being someone cool enough to work with prisoners. While Mr. Jones's question had hurt me on some very deep levels, as I thought more about his remark, I began to see that he had every right to ask it. Who was I to come into that enclosed, regulated, and restricted space every other Tuesday night for two hours and then leave, coming back when I wanted, when I truly did not understand what I was doing?

Mr. Jones challenged me in other, sophisticated ways throughout his four years with the group. One night I brought to the workshop poems by Linton Kwesi Johnson, a Jamaican poet who had been featured on HBO's *Def Poetry Jam,* a series many of the group members were familiar with. Johnson's poems are written in Jamaican patois, a mixture of English and Jamaican dialect. I had hoped that Johnson's poems would open up a rich and interesting conversation about language and dialect, which indeed they did. Mr. Jones offered to read one of the poems aloud and brought the piece to life with his Jamaican accent. After we finished our discussion of the poem, Mr. Jones turned to me and said, "Now you read it."

"Okay," I thought, took a deep breath, and did a terribly clumsy job of reading Johnson's powerful, politically charged words written in Jamaican patois. When I was done, I

joined in the good-natured laughter at my own expense. Mr. Jones's request demonstrated how much he understood issues of language and power and also showed, very nicely, that there were areas where he and the rest of the inmates had expertise and I did not. These instances in which Mr. Jones caused a reversal of "teacher and student" and "speaking subject" and "object" caused me to reflect on and re-evaluate my role in the workshop as well as in the larger prison structure.

"The Secret Souls of Criminals" in a Network of Power

The belief that all prison personnel—teachers and volunteers as well—are implicated in the network of power established by the carceral system is examined by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault argues that school in prison—which the writing workshop can loosely be defined as—is part of the apparatus of the contemporary prison system that has changed the definition of punishment from "an art of unbearable sensations" to "an economy of suspended rights" (11). Teachers are part of the "whole army of technicians" who "have taken over from the executioner" (11) in order to "supervise the individual, to neutralize his dangerous state of mind to alter his criminal tendencies" (18). The modern correctional facility system, according to Foucault, "claims to have only the secret souls of criminals as their objective" even while "it is always the body that is at issue" (25). Inmate writing, supported by the existence of the workshop that the prison "allows," functions both as a means of subversion and implication in the system as it is used as part of what Foucault calls "a mass of documents that capture and fix" (189) inmates in the "normalizing gaze" of the correctional facility(184).

My role in this system is equally complex as I set up the conditions that facilitate the subversive writing that paradoxically implicates the inmate in the gaze of the institution. Mr. Jones's remarks about "watching me" for a year indicates his awareness of the need to ascertain my place in the complex prison environment. His remark is ironic in that it is he, an inmate, who is "gazing" at me in what can be defined as an act of surveillance, reversing the "gaze" of the prison by becoming the one who is watching. My immediate, negative reaction implies that I was indeed caught up in this system as I assumed that his question indicated a "negative state of mind." However, I came to realize that I was not alone in my search for understanding my students, myself, and my place in the prison environment.

Help from San Quentin

These "disruptive moments" in my prison classroom pointed out for me the need to more fully understand my place in the multi-layered environment of the prison writing workshop. In my search for a deeper understanding of my role, Tannenbaums's rich and insightful book

Disguised as a Poem: My Years of Teaching Poetry at San Quentin. offered not only a way for me to think about the disruptive classroom moments I had experienced (many of her experiences almost uncannily mirrored my own), but also a way for all teachers to think about "disruptive" classroom moments. Tannenbaum, as a writer in residence at San Quentin prison, is able to use such moments to closely examine her own life, her motivations for teaching prison writing and her place in the vast complex of the prison system. One of Tannenbaum's students also asks her, "Who are you? Why are you here?" This student, Elmo, says to Tannenbaum, "Who are you to expect anything from us? You sail in here...wanting us to open up. You think just your smile and your good-vibe talk are going to lead us to some deep sharing? Think again my friend. What you want is too easy; you have to earn closeness from us" (20).

Tannenbaum reacts to Elmo's blunt words as I had reacted to Mr. Jones's similar comment: with tears, hurt, and indignation. Elmo's question to Tannenbaum is in response to a request she makes to the men, whom she has met with only a few times, to write about a line in a poem by Nazim Hikmet, a Turkish political prisoner; she asks her students to write about what they do in prison so that "the jewel on the left side of your chest doesn't lose its luster" (19), an intensely personal question. In the aftermath of her hurt and anger, Tannenbaum engages in deep self-examination. She is drawn to her inmate students and wants to feel close to them, but writes that "Elmo had challenged my 'hippie ways'" (22); his words seem to her like an attack, a denial of closeness. Additionally, she comes to understand that she does not yet understand anything about their worlds or their lives. Nevertheless, she is able to work her way past these volatile emotions and use Elmo's questions to better understand herself and her motivations for prison teaching. She writes:

> It took my whole ride home for Indignation, Hurt and Revenge to each have their say. By the time I'd parked the car in the garage under our apartment, I was able to breathe deeply and repeat Elmo's question—"Who are you?" Why are you here?"— and hear the simplicity of their inquiry. (20)

Tannenbaum uses these questions as an opportunity to closely examine why her life led her to teaching in San Quentin as well as an opportunity to speculate about the nature of her relationship to her students and the institution. She understands that at that point she does not know anything about the conditions of their lives as inmates and vows not to assume she knows anything about their experience (23). Elmo's questions provide Tannenbaum with moments of deep introspection and, ultimately, understanding; they become a gift to Tannenbaum and lead her to believe that San Quentin seemed exactly where she needed to be (23).

Tannenbaum begins to see that what initially seemed like challenges from her students were actually invitations to begin to formulate a human relationship, something correc-

tional facilities actively discourage teachers from developing with their students. For example, the volunteer guidelines given out in my state warn volunteers against forming close relationships with inmates *(Volunteer Guidelines)*. While, from a security perspective, this is understandable, it is impossible to teach without forming human relationships with students. Tannenbaum writes:

> I always experienced Elmo's insistence that we were two human beings desiring real communication as an in-my-face challenge....I saw Elmo didn't mean to challenge me [;w]hat my body had responded to as attacks, Elmo intended as invitations. Elmo wanted me to respond with my truth, to do my part to bridge the gap between us—to speak, always to speak. What I intended as a roadblock, he intended as a avenue for truth. (117)

My student, Mr. Jones, was very much like Tannenbaum's Elmo—outspoken, articulate, a strong writer and leader of the group. I can imagine that he, like Elmo, was articulating the group's desire to hear my words and my truth. Like Tannenbaum, I initially perceived his question as an attack; perhaps that is the only way I could, at first, understand it in the volatile prison environment where strict lines are drawn between inmates and corrections officers, "inside" and "outside." Like Tannenbaum, I wanted closeness and trust with the workshop group but perceived Mr. Jones's question as an indication that I had fooled myself into thinking that trust existed. As I reflected on Mr. Jones's question and on Tannenbaum's experience, I felt saddened that I did not trust my student or myself to be initially open to his "avenue for truth." Because I did not, I had joined the "army of technicians" Foucault believes that all prison personnel do. It was not until I read Tannenbaum's book that I was able to understand the nature of Mr. Jones's question—a question designed to resist the construction of narrowly defined roles of "teacher" and "student"—and arrive at a much more complex human understanding. Mr. Jones's and Elmo's questions are perhaps necessary in any classroom setting, but perhaps even more so in the prison setting with its enormous discrepancies between teachers and students and the strict boundaries established by the correctional facility environment.

Throughout the writing of this piece, I have struggled to articulate for myself my reasons and motivations for going to the prison workshop every other Tuesday night. I returned to Tannenbaum's book and re-read her remarks about the closeness she felt with the men in her workshop, men she would otherwise never have the chance of meeting, of the respect she felt for their intelligence, talent, and willingness to confront and communicate the painful and difficult truths of their existence and their determination to cling to their humanity in the most dehumanizing of environments. I have come to understand that there is no one single, simple answer to Mr. Jones's question. How could there be? His question, howev-

er, has prompted me to investigate my own motivations for teaching at a prison as well as my complex place in the prison system.

The Need to Be More Fully Human

Mr. Jones's question also pointed out the need to examine and understand the institutional construction of our roles and our implication in power structures. Through both reflection and action brought about by her students' challenges to her, Tannenbaum became what C.H. Knoblauch, in his article "Rhetorical Constructions: Dialogue and Commitment," calls more "fully human" (125), both as a person and as a teacher, something I hope my students' challenges and classroom disruptions can help me to achieve. These "disruptions" have also reminded me of the complexity of my place in the correctional facility system; while it is on the one hand, seemingly impossible to have any part in this system and not get caught up in it (as my initial, defensive response to Mr. Jones's question indicates), there is the possibility of resistance, as Foucault points out. Foucault states, for example, that "power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it;' it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them…just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them" (27).

Mr. Jones's question can be read as a form of resistance to the power transmitted through all aspects of the prison system. The prison environment does not encourage inmates to pose questions; their role is to obey orders and instructions. By posing this question, Mr. Jones resisted his role as an obedient, compliant inmate and perhaps became a step closer to becoming a human being who articulates his questions and his need to understand the motivations and reasons of others; speaking is perhaps the most resistant act one can perform in prison. He pushed me to see him as an individual who was not passively accepting my presence, a presence I had unquestioningly assumed he would welcome. The act of presenting himself as an individual to me was perhaps the most important act of resistance Mr. Jones could have undertaken, one that was important not only on an individual scale, but also on a social one. Tannenbaum, too, notes the

> "pushed me to see him as an individual who was not passively accepting my presence, a presence I had unquestioningly assumed he would welcome"

importance of seeing her students as complex individuals not only on personal level but on a social level as well, writing that "I didn't see how we as a society could do any serious thinking about crime if we didn't acknowledge that basic fact" (28). Similarly, perhaps the ability to be skeptical and frame questions is a necessary step for Mr. Jones to take in order to become a functioning member of society, one that may not be encouraged by the largely punitive prison environment. The workshop itself, as other prison workshop teachers and facilitators (Jacobi, Roswell, and Tannenbaum) have noted, can become a space for transformation and resistance as workshop members write, revise, reflect, and discuss their writing, and by extension, their lives and their choices. Mr. Jones's question seems to be in many ways a natural extension of that process.

Perhaps each of us needs to articulate our truths for ourselves and our students regardless of whether our teaching sites have bars on the windows or not. The importance of articulating them and the naming of our worlds is explored by Knoblauch, who uses ideas from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire to investigate the idea of praxis, the "two dimensions of authentic discourse, reflection and action" (125). Neither one alone is sufficient; when both are present, however, achieved through "a struggle to articulate," transformation becomes possible. Knoblauch also notes that "The ultimate motive for transformation is, according to Freire, the need to be more fully human, to participate more completely and freely in the world" (125). Through both reflection and action, I hope my students' challenges and classroom disruptions can help me to become more fully human.

Perhaps I should not have been as surprised by Mr. Jones's question as I was, a question he had every right to ask and that was a necessary one for him to pose. As I look back, I can see that I could have, for instance, talked openly with the group about my reasons for establishing the workshop, what I imagine as its purposes and goal as well as my own motivations for making the long trip to prison late at night twice a month. When new students join the workshop, I ask them to tell the group a little about their motivations for wanting to join the workshop; asking them to guess at my own goals for facilitating the workshop implies an unequal relationship that is contradictory to the workshop goals of critical self-reflection, respect, and individuality. Prison is a place of borders, divisions, and differences; literacy teachers and facilitators in prison need to recognize the role their classes or workshops can have in at least beginning to break down those divisions and creating a space for human interaction. Recognizing that each of us in the workshop may have questions about the presence of others and the numerous differences of race, gender, economic class, and criminality that can potentially divide us is a step towards what Tannenbaum sees as perhaps the most basic transformation that needs to happen if society is to re-think issues of crime and criminality—the need to see each other as complex and complicated humans.

While access to prison education has declined in many instances over the past few years, increased opportunities for access to literacy for many other students previously excluded from higher education increases the chances that the students sitting in our classrooms will be unlike ourselves. It is in these classrooms that some of the most passionate and engaging discussions take place as students bring very urgent and real needs for education and literacy to these classes as well as competing motivations and feelings about their educational experience. We need to assume that they bring these feelings about our presence in the classroom and our motivations for teaching them. We also need to understand that what we may initially perceive as "disruptions" and challenges may be calls for increased understanding and communication. We must take advantage of these moments so that we can become open to the need to both understand our students' human need for communication as well as the necessity to examine our own motivation and reasons for teaching before we can ask our students to "trust us" as we ask them to write to us.

Works Cited

Biscoglio, Frances. "In the Beginning Was the Word: Teaching Pre-College English at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility." *Writing on the Edge* 16.1 (2005): 23-43. Print.

Burzynski, Joseph. "Conflating Language and Offense: Composing in the Incarcerated Space." *Open Words: Access and English Studies* 4.1 (2010): 11-30. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. Print.

Freire, Paulo. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum, 1970. Print.

Hedin, Raymond. "Teaching Literature in Prison." *College English* 41.3 (1979): 280-83. Print.

Hruska, Thomas. "What Do You Expect? We're All Crooks." *CEA Forum* 12 (1981): 13-15. Print.

Jacobi, Tobi. "Foreword: Situating Writing and Literacy Education in Prison." *Reflections: Special Issue on Prison Literacies, Narratives, and Community Connections* 4.1 (2004): 62-75. Print.

—. Writing Workshops as Alternative Literacy Education for Women." *Corrections Today*. American Correctional Association, February 2009, n.p. 19 July 2010. Web.

Knoblauch, C.H. "Rhetorical Constructions: Dialogue and Commitment." *College English* 50.2 (1988): 125-40. Print.

Lamb, Wally. *I Know This Much Is True: Wally Lamb and the Women of York Correctional Institution (Testimony from our Imprisoned Sisters)*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004. Print.

Lockard, Joseph. "Prison Education as a Human Right." Conference on College Composition and Communication, Atlanta, Ga. 7 April 2011. Print.

Martin, Philip. "Literature Lessons from Prison." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 40.33 (April 20,

1994): B3-4. Print

New York State Department of Corrections: Division of Volunteer Services. *Volunteer Information* Packet. Print.

O'Connor, Patricia E. "Afterword: Rewriting the Story of Prison Literacies." *Reflections: Special Issue on Prison Literacies, Narratives, and Community Connections.* 4.1 (2004): 199-208.

Roswell, Barbara, and Pamela Sheff. " Revising Confinement: Transformations in a Prison Writing Workshop." Community Arts Network Reading Room, 2008.Web.

Shafer, Gregory. "Composition and a Prison Community of Writers." *English Journal* 90.5 (2001): 75-81. Print.

Stanford, Ann Folwell. "More Than Just Words: Women's Poetry and Resistance at Cook County Jail." *Feminist Studies* 30.2 (2004). 277-30. Print.

Tannenbaum, Judith. *Disguised as Poem: My Years Teaching Poetry at San Quentin*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2000. Print.

Thelin, William H. and John Paul Tassoni. *Blundering for A Change: Errors and Expectations in Critical Pedagogy*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook, 2000. 1-7.Print.

Laura Rogers *is the Writing Center Director at the Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. She has also been teaching and volunteering in correctional facility programs since 1984 and has taught a voluntary correctional facility creative writing group since 1995. Her work has appeared in* Reflections: Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy. *She is currently working on a project investigating prison writing groups in the 1970s.*

In our commitment
to support the
composition community,
Pearson Higher Education
is pleased to sponsor
the publication of
OPEN WORDS.

PEARSON

Open
WORDS

Access
and
English
Studies

Co-Editors

John Paul Tassoni
Miami University Middletown

William H. Thelin
University of Akron

Assistant Editor

Leann Bertoncini
College of Wooster