

CHAPTER 3.

“NOT THE BOSS OF US:” A STUDY OF TWO FIRST-YEAR WRITING PROGRAM BOSS TEXTS

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We sometimes joke that Oakland University’s Department of Writing and Rhetoric must be the most written-about writing department in the United States. Our institutional home is the focus of a sizable number of scholarly works including program profiles, retrospectives, administrative and pedagogical scholarship, commentary, and more (see Allan et al.; Andersen; Chong and Nugent; Driscoll and Kitchens; Giberson et al.; Kraemer et al.; Ostergaard and Allan; Ostergaard et al.; Ostergaard and Giberson; Schoen et al.; Schoen and Ostergaard; Walwema and Driscoll). The depths of our department have seemingly been well-plumbed by this self-introspective body of literature. But in another, more transformational sense, we really haven’t even begun to fathom them: as Michelle LaFrance notes in *Institutional Ethnography: A Theory of Practice for Writing Studies Researchers*, our field is often preoccupied “with narratives of program design, curriculum development, and management discourses that tend to standardize, generalize, and even erase the identities, expertise and labor contributed by diverse participants” (20). Looking over them again now, we admit that the scholarly works emerging from and about our department exhibit the same set of preoccupations, as most of them have been drawn from the top-down standpoint that LaFrance characterizes. These works offer mostly accounts of our bureaucratic structuring, institutional arcana, and macro-level considerations of pedagogy while generally failing to account for the complex interplay of individual standpoints, ruling relations, and texts that account for how things actually get accomplished in our department.

In this chapter, we turn to the methods of institutional ethnography (IE) to fashion a radically alternative account of our department’s work. IE, as informed

by the scholarship of Dorothy Smith (*Institutional Ethnography as Practice; Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*; “Texts”) and as articulated most cogently by Michelle LaFrance and Melissa Nicolas, compels us “to uncover *how things happen*—bringing to light the experiences and practices that constitute the institution” and focusing “on the everyday work life of individuals, tracing work process and textual mediations as these reveal the interplay among the individual, the material, and the ideological” (LaFrance 22-23). By shifting our ethnographic “gaze from the ‘site’ (the writing center, the classroom, the writing program) to the ways people in or at a site co-create the very space under investigation” (LaFrance and Nicolas 131), IE is capable of providing deeper, more nuanced understandings of how work is actually achieved in our institutional context.

In this study, we examine our faculty’s engagement with two of our department’s primary “boss texts” (Griffith and Smith 12): our faculty handbook and our first-year writing guide. We present a textual analysis of both texts, and we discuss the results of a parallel survey of faculty we undertook to assess the role of boss texts in coordinating the work of our department. As we find—contra the tidy depiction of administrative processes offered by our earlier program profiles, retrospectives, and other top-down analyses—our boss texts serve to coordinate social activity in a surprisingly nuanced “interplay among the individual, the material, and the ideological” within our department (LaFrance 40). Additionally, by composing this chapter as a collaboration among full- and part-time faculty and administrators, we also seek to create a potentially generative program analysis that accounts for a wider array of institutional and individual standpoints. Together, we hope to not only make “visible the interindividual and rhetorical construction of the institution” (LaFrance and Nicolas 144) but to also demonstrate the unique insights and affordances of institutional ethnography as a method.

To be sure, IE as a method can have instrumental and strategic value for program administrators by offering more compelling models of how social activity is coordinated in institutions and providing “actionable intelligence” that can strategically guide program administration. But more important, we believe, are the liberatory ends that IE can support. In asking administrators to “look up” from where they stand, we believe that IE provides us with a framework for keeping our institutions engaged and ethically grounded within shared communities of practice.

While the kind of institutional knowing that IE enables may be of considerable use in upholding the organizational *status quo*, we believe it can also help program administrators recognize where institutional change and resistance are possible. For instance, as of this writing our department is poised to roll out and implement new policies regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-oppression

(DEIA). By understanding the complex ways that the two, relatively prosaic “boss texts” of our faculty handbook and our first-year writing guide coordinate the everyday work of our department, we may be able to avoid facile or superficial approaches to this important project. By coming to understand how all manner of texts are mediated by a complex process of activation by individual agents within our department—including important statements of communal value and identification such as our DEIA policy—we can help our policies to find their way into those few spaces that remain unthwarted by the institutional *status quo* and where some measure of progressive change is possible.

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: DISRUPTING OUR VIEW FROM ABOVE

Oakland University (OU) is a state university located just north of Detroit and home to over 15,000 undergraduate students. OU’s writing and rhetoric department was founded as an independent academic unit in 2008, the same year it inaugurated its major in writing and rhetoric. The following decade brought a number of new faculty hires and a considerable amount of program building. To create new institutional structures from whole cloth required a great deal of intellectual work and that work in turn inspired the flurry of self-introspective scholarship cited above. Much of that scholarship is in the form of program profiles—an inherently administration-centric genre. For instance, the 2015 volume *Writing Majors: Eighteen Program Profiles* was co-edited by three of our faculty members, and it declares “How do we do this?” as its central animating question (Giberson et al. 2). As noted in its introduction, the collection was intended to answer “demand from the field for administrative insight, benchmark information, and inspiration for new curricular configurations for writing major programs” (Nugent 2-3). To be sure, program profiles and other “top-down” research genres can be crucial for developing a collective, macro-level understanding of the work of our discipline. However, we find ourselves increasingly concerned about how those genres may serve to exclude particular standpoints and prevent finer-grained understandings of the social processes of institutions.

More recently, Megan Schoen et al. examine in their chapter “Written in Homely Discourse: A Case Study of Intellectual and Institutional Identity in Teaching Genres” how the textual genres of Oakland University’s writing department syllabi and assignment descriptions function to define the identities of our instructors and our institution alike. Seeking to avoid “chronicling our department’s emergence in the familiar form of an administration-centric historiographic narrative” (194), the authors interrogate how our program’s values and identity are enacted through the written teaching genres of individual instructors.

In doing so, the authors—all of whom are co-authors of the present chapter—began to see firsthand the value of shifting focus away from administration and toward the individuals performing work in, and on behalf of, the department. We now recognize this strategic shift in focus as part of what Smith terms “looking up” (*Institutional Ethnography as Practice* 5). As LaFrance notes, “One of the most powerful imaginative moves of IE is its insistence that we are the institution. . . . With ‘standing under’ (*qua* ‘looking up’ or ‘studying up’) as a foundational imaginative act, we begin to pay attention to more than simply what is happening, and we key into how what is happening takes shape as a reflection of the social” (133). LaFrance and Nicolas note that such uncovering reveals “what practices constitute the practice of the institution as we think of it, how discourse may be understood to compel and shape those practices, and how norms of practices speak to, for, and over other individuals” (131). As we see it, then, IE has the potential to vastly complicate the question “How do we do this?”—not just by confounding the agency implied by the question (who, exactly, are *we* and who are the *doers* in the stories we tell?), but also by revealing some of the micro-level particulars of *how* things are accomplished institutionally.

For this study, we sought to better understand the role of two texts that ostensibly coordinate the work of our department: *The Department of Writing and Rhetoric Faculty Handbook* (Ostergaard) and our first-year writing guide for students, *Grizz Writes: A Guide to First-Year Writing at Oakland University* (Schoen). The faculty handbook is compiled and maintained by the department chair to outline university-, college-, and department-level policies and practices for faculty. As a boss text, it functions to convey procedures and policies that coordinate the activity of contingent faculty and provides a contextual understanding of institutional practices. By contrast, *Grizz Writes* is a self-published, first-year writing textbook authored by full- and part-time faculty, edited by the WPA, and overseen by an editorial board of part-time faculty. Faculty are regularly invited to propose new chapters for the text—for which they receive a stipend—and they are regularly surveyed to find out which chapters and organizational schemes they find most effective or useful. *Grizz Writes* is constructive and communal by design, seeking to introduce faculty and students to pedagogical methods, values, and goals while attempting to account for both the diversity of faculty backgrounds and the needs of the student body.

As we demonstrate below, these two ostensible “regulatory texts” (Smith, *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* 84) may both affirm and belie the stories we have told ourselves and others about how we come to enact our disciplinary and departmental values within our institution. In the sections that follow, we briefly provide an analysis of both of these boss texts. We also discuss a survey of department faculty that provides details about how each text may be

activated and resisted by individual faculty. As we find, our texts participate in surprisingly subtle and dynamic processes of activation and resistance, potentiating ruling relations in a complex “interplay among the individual, the material, and the ideological” (LaFrance 40) within our department.

ANALYZING OUR BOSS TEXTS

We first sought to describe how our institution is represented and coded into our department’s primary boss texts by performing a textual analysis of them. As LaFrance reminds us,

As texts carry ideas, language, and rhetorical frameworks between individuals (even those with little personal interaction) to impose notions of ideal practice and affiliation, the texts are not just sources of information but shapers of thinking and practice. Likewise, through texts and textual practices, individuals are enabled to recognize, organize, and respond to processes of social coordination. (43)

By looking closely at the rhetorical and linguistic construction of our boss texts, we hope to reveal more about how these processes of shaping and social coordination occur.

For instance, grammatical agency—as conveyed through texts’ use of the passive and active voice—offers textual traces of how actual agency is apportioned to individuals within the institution. Similarly, the use of declarative, subjunctive, and conditional moods can suggest which facets of the institution are held to be immutable and which are presumably amenable to the exercise of individual agency. The use of the imperative mood in texts can reveal who is socially authorized within the institution to issue commands, and to whom. And diectic indicators within texts can convey the relative positioning of entities in time (such as using the past, present, and future tenses), in person (such as using the first, second, and third person), in discourse (such as referring to different texts or parts of the texts themselves), but also—and most crucially for this study—within social realms (see Cruse). In the following sections, we present an examination of our boss texts to discern how our institution’s various standpoints and ruling relations are coded linguistically and rhetorically within them.

THE FACULTY HANDBOOK

The handbook serves a number of administrative and rhetorical functions: (1) it is designed as a welcome to the department; (2) it is an authoritative voice

overviewing policies designed to regulate instructor activity; and (3) it offers new colleagues overtly persuasive texts to promote best practices for the first-year writing program. The handbook is a heterogeneous document whose tone, syntax, and grammar shift from section to section, and even from sentence to sentence. For example, the handbook adopts a welcoming and inclusive tone in an introductory statement about department values: “Because we view written language as a form of action, worthy of careful consideration by students, teachers, and citizens, we affirm its ability to create common interests and foster the understanding of differences” (Ostergaard 6). Not unlike a United Nations declaration in its intent, this statement’s use of the first-person plural pronoun, its sweeping scope, and its affirming, aspirational message seek to introduce faculty to a broader common cause that they are ostensibly united under as members of a shared discipline.

Elsewhere, first-person plural pronouns are used to further reinforce a sense of unity and common cause, even as the language switches to declarative statements and the conditional mood to convey how things ought to be done. For example:

We expect students to understand that they are emerging scholars involved in academic dialogue rather than reporters summarizing the experts; we encourage real research writing for a particular purpose/audience, where students engage with their topics as contributors to a discussion of key issues and ideas. This kind of academic research is a process, and the course structure and instruction should emphasize process at least equally with product. (Ostergaard 25)

In handbook sections where the chair lays out the rationales for our program’s embrace of rhetorical instruction, its dismissal of grammar instruction, and its approach to plagiarism prevention, the use of the first-person plural dominates, but it is frequently followed by use of the second person and the declarative mood as the implications for practice are drawn out in depth. In this way, the collective *we* of the department and the individual *you* of department faculty are subtly conflated, both grammatically and epistemically: “*we* all believe *this*, so as one of *us*, *you* are expected do *that*.”

Beyond the introduction, a more administrative and legalistic tone pervades. For instance, passages such as the following are reprinted verbatim from the faculty bargaining agreement, complete with an attorney’s instinctive concern for precise definitions and use of the legalistic verb “shall:” “A person rendering such service shall be titled ‘special lecturer’ and shall be represented by the union during such period. Employment periods shall be one year, commencing August

15, renewable indefinitely. After four years of such service, employment periods shall be two years, renewable indefinitely” (Ostergaard 8). The second person is often employed when explicit directions are being given, for example, a passage about impermissible use of copyrighted material states, “You cannot reprint more than two excerpts . . . You cannot copy more than nine items . . .” (16). The word “must” appears in the handbook over 40 times, typically when the information being presented is of a particularly bureaucratic or legalistic nature: “Before beginning work at OU, all faculty must complete their employment paperwork” (15) and “Contracts must be signed and returned immediately . . .” (7).

At least a dozen times, the handbook employs the passive-voice phrase “are expected to” to frame the demands the department is making of faculty. For example,

Special Lecturers and Lecturers in the department are expected to prepare syllabi, order textbooks, and construct their course schedules . . . Faculty are also expected to check and respond to OU email . . . Faculty are also expected to submit materials as requested for department or program assessment . . . Special Lecturers and Lecturers are expected to attend both of the department’s faculty professional development meetings. (Ostergaard 8)

This passive voiced construction has the rhetorical and grammatical effect of obscuring who, or what, is imposing the expectations, but still providing the reader with a faint sense of their individual and professional agency. It remains unclear who is doing the expecting or just how disappointed they would be—or what institutional consequences would be in store for the faculty member—if those expectations were not met. But while the grammatical agent may remain unstated, the agency of the institution is patently clear to everyone reading those sentences, and the implication remains clear that the “expectations” being described are not actually voluntary. The reception of this text is inescapably colored by the institutional precarity of part-time faculty employment at Oakland University.

GRIZZ WRITES

Grizz Writes is intended to initiate students—and less directly, faculty—into the department’s culture, values, and practices. The guide addresses a primarily student audience, typically through the use of a teacherly voice and the second person pronoun “you,” as in “you will learn to join the academic conversation taking place all over our campus, and this book will serve as your first guide . . .” (Schoen 1). A bureaucratic voice is also evident in appendices that outline course

policies and introduce students to campus support services. For instance, an appendix outlining the department's grade grievance policy invokes generic "students" as subjects rather than, say, individuals ("you") or members of a collective ("we"): "A student who has a complaint about a classroom situation involving an instructor teaching under the WRT rubric has, first, recourse to that instructor. Any member of the Department to whom the student makes his/her complaint must send that student directly to the instructor involved" (235). Unlike the handbook, which interleaves bureaucratic and communal authority as writers to address a reader that is both a bureaucratic subject and a member of a shared community, the student guide more strongly separates the instructive chapters from the bureaucratic edicts.

The language in the introduction to *Grizz Writes* initially addresses first-year writing students in much the same way that the handbook does. The guide asserts that:

The writing program at OU is guided by research, theory, and best practices in the field of composition-rhetoric, and we've received national recognition for our work with first-year students. In fall 2012, our first-year writing program was awarded a Conference on College Composition and Communication Writing Program Certificate of Excellence. This award is given to only a handful of writing programs every year, and it is a testament to our exceptional faculty and innovative first year writing curriculum. (Schoen 1)

Here the guide seeks to construct—in the eyes of the student audience—the course instructor as an agent of an academic unit that is shaped by current best practices and that holds a national award for writing programs. Because faculty are included as editors of the guide on the masthead and as authors of individual chapters, their pedagogical expertise is supported by the ethos of a published textbook. *Grizz Writes* further presents a vision to students of a department culture where teachers are unified by shared pedagogical experiences, goals, and values. It depicts the pedagogical principles of the department in practice, demonstrating writing as collaborative, constructive, and reflexive.

Of course, the formal linguistic features of our department's boss texts are not accidental, nor are they simply unconsciously employed components of their respective document genres. These textual features are an important part of how they coordinate the social activity of the department, even if the ruling relations they inscribe are not always consciously perceived. But as we see in the next section in our discussion of the results of our faculty survey, the ability of boss texts to coordinate social action in our department is complicated by a

number of social and material factors. We also see how “institutional ethnographers benefit from recognizing the organizational power and limitations of texts and institutional discourse, which can be rewritten, ignored, forgotten, or even lost or erased entirely” (LaFrance 40).

SURVEY RESULTS

To supplement our textual analysis of the handbook and *Grizz Writes*, we undertook a 16-question survey of our faculty to determine how these boss texts shape everyday practices. This survey was approved by Oakland University’s IRB under protocol #1527158-1. Twenty-one faculty participated in the survey (six full-time and 15 part-time faculty), representing a 53% response rate. The ratio of full- to part-time respondents roughly matched the makeup of the department as whole (at the time of the survey we had 14 full-time and 32 part-time faculty). We first asked faculty to reflect on their standpoints within the institution. When recipients were asked if they felt they had the autonomy to teach their courses the way they wanted, predictable differences emerged between full- and part-time faculty: every full-time respondent (6) indicated that they had “a great deal” of autonomy, while responses from part-time faculty ranged from “very little” (1), to “somewhat” (3), to “quite a bit” (7), to “a great deal” (4). These responses suggest that both full- and part-time faculty largely feel they are trusted by department administrators to independently structure their course content and materials. While full- and part-time colleagues differed in the degree of their perceived autonomy, it is notable that none of the part-time respondents felt they had no autonomy at all. The remainder of the survey asked faculty to reflect on their interactions with the faculty handbook and *Grizz Writes*.

When asked to identify parts of the faculty handbook that were important to their teaching, only six of the 21 responding faculty members (29%) identified a specific section that they found valuable. When asked to recall when they last accessed the handbook, responses fell within three groups: eight faculty members (38%) claimed they had consulted the handbook recently, six (29%) only viewed it when they were first hired, and the remaining seven respondents (33%) admitted they had never viewed it or could not recall when they last looked at it. Of those who had consulted the handbook, the information they were seeking was about pay and contract renewals, information about syllabus language and required textbooks, and information about policies related to student issues and needs. These responses suggest our colleagues have relatively limited firsthand interactions with the handbook. While this finding is not surprising to us, it does confirm that, to the extent that the handbook acts a boss text, it does so through indirect, socially mediated channels.

While only six respondents (29%) identified a specific section of the faculty handbook that they found valuable to their teaching, 18 out of 21 instructors (86%) identified a section in *Grizz Writes* that was. Of these instructors, 15 identified two or more specific chapters, and 11 identified four or more chapters. Despite widespread reliance on *Grizz Writes* in the classroom, however, most respondents felt that it only minimally constrained their teaching—when asked to rate the degree to which the text affected what they could or could not do as an instructor, four respondents (19%) answered “somewhat,” 12 (57%) answered “very little,” and five (24%) answered “not at all.” This suggests that while *Grizz Writes* may be our department’s most central boss text—serving to coordinate the institutional activities of instruction and encoding the pedagogical values of the discipline of writing studies—it also does not deterministically impose pedagogical beliefs and practices on individuals. As one full-time faculty member responded:

As the writing department, I think it is important to teach proper grammar rules (even if that is not the sole focus of our instruction). The “Why We Don’t Teach Grammar” chapter on *Grizz Writes* needs to be updated or removed as it contains only two outdated citations (1985 [Hartwell] and 1987 [Hillocks]). If we are truly preparing students for “professional writing,” then they need to know what those professional writing rules are and how they are rhetorical (just as the chapter pointed out). I feel that some students (and instructors) are using that chapter as an excuse for not educating themselves on proper grammar rules.

Here we see resistance not just to the boss text itself, but to a longstanding consensus in the academic field of composition-rhetoric. In registering their resistance to the *Grizz Writes* text and to how it is used by their colleagues, this faculty member illustrates LaFrance and Nicolas’ view that “Individuals are far from powerless in the face of institutional texts” and individuals “must actively take up the discourses presented and may do so in highly unpredictable and dynamic ways” (140). This process of activation is, as LaFrance notes, “as unpredictable and dynamic as the people we study” (44).

We also see in the above response—from a full-time colleague—a reminder that individual activation is required not only for this particular text to participate in the enactment of ruling relations within our institution, but for texts to be activated within the broader discipline as well (“outdated citations” or not). As Ruth Book characterizes it in Chapter 3 of this collection, resistance “is not merely stubbornness or inflexibility, but rather comes about from disjunctures in

the roles that instructors play in the institution and the values that accompany those roles.” Moreover, as LaFrance notes, “an individual’s social alliances, experiences, and sensibilities play an important role in how that individual negotiates everyday institutional settings (such as classrooms, programs, or departments). Our local practices may or may not reflect the ruling realities prescribed by disciplinary or professional discourses” (118).

IN THE SPACES BETWEEN: FINDING THE BOSS OF US

Both the handbook and *Grizz Writes* inscribe a complex set of ruling relations in our institution. The handbook operates both in its substance (its recitation of legal/bureaucratic polices as imposed from above and “best practices” for instruction as advanced by a broader community of writing studies scholars) and in its style (its diectic indicators, the very grammar of the text) to reciprocally co-instantiate the positionings and activities of instructor, administrator, student, etc. As we see in this study, however, the handbook text is not often experienced firsthand by our faculty: few faculty agreed that the handbook constrains their instruction and even fewer conceded to having read the text at all. As Smith notes, though, texts that remain unseen or are “otherwise out of action, exist *in potentia* but their potentiating is in time and in action, whether in ongoing text-reader conversations or in how the ‘having read’ enters into the organization of what is to come.” (“Texts” 174). We believe that the handbook largely functions in this way within our department, achieving a seemingly paradoxical “action-at-a-distance” through social processes among department faculty rather than through unmediated exposure to the text itself. These social processes occur “among people who are situated in particular places at particular times, and not as ‘meaning’ or ‘norms’” (Smith, “Texts” 161).

Meanwhile, the communally authored textbook *Grizz Writes* enjoys much more direct engagement with faculty, both pedagogically as a classroom tool and as a collective editorial endeavor. Like the handbook, this text serves to advance ruling relations for instructor, administrator, student, etc. But *Grizz Writes* differs from the handbook in at least two important ways with regard to faculty agency: even as it is a required textbook, it provides a sense of textual ownership by dint of being communally authored and edited and its modular design permits faculty to exercise some degree of professional agency as instructors by simply not assigning chapters that they do not want to. A diverse faculty committee is charged with soliciting and selecting *Grizz Writes* chapters, which are all authored by our faculty, and faculty receive a stipend for their writing. Additionally, some portion of the faculty exercise their agency through pedagogical choice: when asked if there were any chapters of *Grizz Writes* that

they deliberately avoided for any reason, two-thirds of respondents (67%, $n = 18$) said no, but 27% expressly named chapters that they avoid assigning. (In a parallel question, all respondents expressly named chapters that are particularly valuable to their teaching.) So *Grizz Writes* potentiates ruling relations that allow agentive space for our faculty to act out of concert with one another or with institutional prerogatives—even as the scope of action permitted within that space remains circumscribed by other operative ruling relations (including the fact that *Grizz Writes* is required of all first-year writing courses in the first place).

Looking beyond these two boss texts, the survey reveals some of the other significant ruling relations in our department. Respondents were asked to numerically rank the following items according to which they rely on most for information about teaching in the department: the handbook, *Grizz Writes*, the writing program administrator, the department chair, colleagues, and eSpace, the department's online repository of teaching resources. The top-rated source was colleagues (with an average numerical ranking of 2.53, with 1 indicating the highest rank). The writing program administrator was second-highest (3.00), followed very closely by the department chair (3.15) and eSpace (3.24). Notably, *Grizz Writes* (3.62) and the handbook (5.00) were the two lowest-ranked sources of information. In response to open-ended questions about the influence of our boss texts, one respondent noted “Most of what I feel I can or cannot do as an instructor is picked up through conversations with my colleagues. I very rarely consult the handbook for that information.” Another respondent noted, “I consulted with my colleagues more on department policy and practices than [what] instructors can and cannot do.”

These findings are consistent with interviews conducted by Schoen et al. in their chapter “Written in Homely Discourse.” In that study, the authors report that 11 out of 13 of Oakland University writing department instructors (85%) cited the role of their colleagues in shaping their course instruction, acknowledging that even informal conversations with colleagues significantly impacted their syllabi, assignment descriptions, and pedagogy. A major takeaway of that study was that the material context of writing instruction, including physical infrastructure such as office space, is essential for the “discourse community's ability to communicate and collaboratively innovate pedagogical genres.” As is the case at most universities, space is among the scarcest campus resources at our institution. Unfortunately, our department has been forced to physically separate our full- and part-time faculty into separate, inequitable campus locations. A portion of our part-time faculty (over-)occupy a small number of basement offices where full-time faculty occupy individual offices on the third floor, while other part-time faculty are relegated to a separate building across campus. The ruling relations inscribed by these divisions within space are not of our making,

and the odious upstairs/downstairs/cross-campus social dynamic it fosters is despised among our department faculty.¹ But this ruling relation is writ large within the text of our campus itself, serving very powerfully—and materially—to coordinate department activity on administration’s terms and to determine the possibilities for social and intellectual interchange.

This is an important reminder that our department’s boss texts act, react, and interact with one another in complex ways. To be sure, none of us suffered the delusion that our faculty were reading the handbook from cover to cover, internalizing its dictums, and instantly absorbing its schematic textual representations of the organization and conforming to the institutional identity depicted therein. And no one believed that our instructors were obediently following *Grizz Writes* as their one and only sourcebook for pedagogical knowledge. Still, all of our prior scholarship about Oakland’s writing department—our accounts of program building, curricular design, program administration, instructional space design, and so on—tacitly presumed a top-down imposition of disciplinary values, processes, and best practices from a larger scholarly community onto a local institution of our design. We did not attend to *how things happen* (LaFrance 40)—our accounts did not capture the nuanced ways ruling relations are enacted at our institution and certainly none of them acknowledged the ways faculty might resist, riff on, short circuit, or circumvent the ruling relations imposed on them. As LaFrance observes,

The actualities of pedagogical practice, I disclose, while often initially driven by national conversations of best practice and scholarly concern, take actual shape in relation to a number of shifting material conditions and systems of value—a recognition often missing in our field’s conversations about effective writing pedagogy. (135)

From the literal texts of our handbook and *Grizz Writes* to the material text of our office buildings, IE helps us to see our program as a more nuanced complex of ruling relations than our prior scholarship admitted.

As we write this, our department is in the process of approving a new diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-oppression policy (Carmichael et al.). This DEIA policy is an institutional product, having been authored by an *ad hoc* committee

1 Michele LaFrance and Anicca Cox explore the role of campus architecture to inscribe systems of labor and social inequality in “Brutal(ist) Meditations: Space and Labor-Movement in a Writing Program.” They describe a situation nearly identical to ours that occurred in their department at UMass Dartmouth: an upstairs/downstairs hierarchical division between full-time and contingent faculty. As they describe, on their campus “professional marginalization is built quite literally into the concrete” (282).

after many months of collaborative research, deliberation, and review. The policy was submitted to our department's governing committee for formal ratification and is now slated to achieve the same institutional and bureaucratic status as, say, our policies on who or who not may use the department photocopier. The DEIA policy obviously transcends and vastly outweighs the photocopier use policy, and it portends much greater liberatory and transformative potential for the institution. But, as an institutional product, the DEIA policy will undergo the same textual fate as all of the other policies in our department: it will be printed on the same pages in the same typeface as the other official policies enshrined in our department's boss texts.

But to understand how those policies will differ in their uptake—that is, how they are activated or not by individual agents of the institution and how social processes shape such activation—is to understand how these policies' textual fate differs from their institutional fate. The methods of IE, we believe, allow us to appreciate the nuanced and nondeterministic ways that policy texts move from the pages of our workaday department documents to coordinate the material and ideological activities of individuals within our institution. Of course, we believe that we have a moral calling to develop the kind of institutional self-understanding that only IE can foster. We also believe that IE can help us to strategically position initiatives like our DEIA policy, ensuring that an essential statement of our department's values does not languish on the pages of our boss texts but is instead enacted by individuals throughout our curricula, pedagogy, administration, and department relationships. Institutional efforts like our DEIA policy are often criticized—rightfully—for making performative, hortatory declarations that ultimately do little to inspire perceptible, material changes to the *status quo*. But with a fuller understanding how ruling relations are potentiated and come to coordinate our activity, we come to recognize that the official adoption of a policy marks a midpoint in a complex social process of uptake and activation, not its end. In this way, IE may help us to ensure that our DEIA policy will have an actual lasting affect within and upon our institution.

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