

4 Current Issues and Practical Guidelines

There are several books that give overviews of current issues as well as practical advice for WPAs. Although they were published in the 1980s, Edward White's *Developing Successful College Writing Programs* and Tomas Hilgers and Joy Marsella's *Making Your Writing Program Work* both have material that is still useful. More recently (2002), *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource: A Guide to Reflective Institutional Practice*, edited by Stuart Brown and Theresa Enos, provides essays by experienced WPAs on a range of topics, and includes an annotated bibliography on issues in writing program administration (Jackson and Wojahn). This book also has appendices that include the "Portland Resolution," the position statement from the Council of Writing Program Administrators on "Evaluating the Intellectual work of WPAs," and the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition." The *Allyn & Bacon Sourcebook for Writing Program Administrators*, edited by Irene Ward and William Carpenter, likewise has essays from experienced WPAs, and includes even more primary references in the appendices: the "CCCC Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing," the "Portland Resolution," the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition," the "Guidelines for the Workload of the College English Teacher" (from the NCTE College Section Steering Committee), the "CCCC Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of Writing," the "WPA Statement on Evaluating the Intellectual Work of the WPA," the Association of Departments of English "Guidelines for Class Size and Workload for College and University Teachers of English," the Buckley Amendment (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974), and the "Guidelines for Self-Study to Precede a WPA Consultant-Evaluators Visit." Linda Myers-Breslin's *Administrative Problem-Solving for*

Writing Programs and Writing Centers: Scenarios in Effective Program Management, provides case studies having to do with selection and training of staff and TAs, program development, and various professional issues, all written by experienced WPAs. In what follows, I will deal with resources specifically focusing on curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and accountability, staffing and staff development, and administrative and professional issues for WPAs.

CURRICULUM

First-Year Composition

The term *curriculum* can refer to a series of courses and also to the content of those courses. Most universities have at least one introductory writing course already in place, often “first-year composition” or “freshman composition.” Many also require a prior course in developmental or basic writing, and a subsequent lower-division course—an artifact of the time when English departments designed the first course to focus on “expository prose” and the second on “writing about literature.” Now, however, the subsequent course sometimes focuses on research, sometimes on argument, sometimes on other issues; sometimes there is a third course called “advanced composition” in the upper-division which often focuses on professional/technical writing. Further, the introductory course and sometimes a second writing course are almost always part of the general education program, meaning that the WPA in charge of the program is responsible not only to his or her department but to the institution at large. First-year writing courses are often part of what has become known as the “First Year Experience,” facilitating the transition from high school to college; the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition (housed at the University of South Carolina) holds conferences and seminars and publishes materials, some of which are relevant to curriculum development. Edward White’s book *Developing Successful College Writing Programs* devotes an entire chapter to the issue of the place of writing within the undergraduate curriculum, advising that one needs to

follow just a few commonsense guidelines that follow from conceiving the writing class as a critical thinking course fundamental to the liberal arts curriculum

[. . .]: focus on writing in the class, maintain an appropriate intellectual content, plan for discovery and revision, organize a series of writing tasks that relate to each other and call for a broad range of writing and reading skills. (67)

Unlike introductory mathematics or chemistry, there is no set body of knowledge that writing courses have to convey; writing courses are more like studio art or acting classes in that they focus on guided practice of a particular skill. What, then, should students be reading and writing about? The entries under the heading “Curriculum Development” in *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing* (Reynolds, Bizzell, and Herzberg) are so varied and eclectic as to be bewildering to a novice WPA. In “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” Richard Fulkerson attempts to make sense of the variety of approaches by trying to decide, based on scholarly publications and textbooks, what is actually going on in classrooms. Fulkerson traces various trends, including the growth of what he calls cultural/critical studies, the “quiet expansion of expressive approaches,” and the split of rhetorical approaches into three areas: argumentation, genre analysis, and preparation for the academic discourse community (654). Fulkerson concludes that the major divide in approaches “is no longer expressive personal writing versus writing for readers [. . .]. The major divide is instead between a postmodern, cultural studies, reading-based program, and a broadly conceived rhetoric of genres and discourse forums” (679). He notes that determining whether the cultural studies approach “is as widespread in composition classrooms as in our journals is actually an open question” that would require survey data we do not have (659). We will in fact have such data soon, from a project being run by Kathleen Blake Yancey and some of her former colleagues at Clemson University (“Portraits”). Data from more than 1850 respondents indicates that the overwhelming majority of these had curricula that focused on introducing students to the discourse of academic writing.¹

David Smit has attempted to trace the development of curricula in writing courses over time. In “Curriculum Design for First-Year Writing Programs” he describes the “current-traditional” approach that was inherited from the nineteenth century, the “burst of creativity in discourse theory” of the 1970s (in the work of Kinneavy, Britton and Moffett) and the accompanying rise of the process approach,

and the “social turn” of the late 1980s and 1990s that emphasized the contextual nature of meaning and the way writing varies according to that context (186–87). As a result of the social turn, most current theories of writing are now what Nystrand and his colleagues call functional, constructivist, contextual, and dialogic (301–12). Smit states that these four theories have produced four new frameworks for designing first-year composition: cultural studies and critical pedagogy, introduction to discourse, ethnographic, and service learning (195), all of which he discusses in detail. He concludes by listing some things WPAs need to consider when deciding on a particular curriculum, including theoretical issues (What is writing? How is writing learned? Is there a single writing process, or are there many different writing processes? What basic form of instruction should be used? How should writing in a course be evaluated?), and the practical implications of those issues (What background and experience in teaching writing have your instructors and graduate teaching assistants had? Should you have materials in common? What background and experience have your students had? What will the other stakeholders in first-year writing think about your new curriculum? Should first-year writing courses be required of all first-year students or only of those who “need” them? What resources have you been given to develop a new curriculum? Should you use available textbooks or develop your own materials?) (200–03).

In *Making Your Writing Program Work: A Guide to Good Practices*, Hilgers and Marsella provide advice about building a curriculum for a writing program. They point out that politics have a powerful role in disputes over writing pedagogy; WPAs are always dealing with constituencies that identify writing instruction with remediation, forms and formats, and correct usage, a view that most WPAs find reductive. As they state, “What is taught, how it is taught, and why it is taught are all inextricably intertwined” in a writing curriculum (27). Further, every curriculum is embedded in a particular site and context; an appropriate curriculum for one school and group of students may not be appropriate for another. Any curriculum must be guided by research and theories of learning and composing, have a philosophical coherence, and include good practices that are consistent with both theory and philosophy. Hilgers and Marsella lay out some questions for WPAs to ask as they think about curriculum construction: questions

about philosophical beliefs and values, about theories of learning and writing, and about practices. Among these are:

- Can the program's teachers work comfortably with the [program's] philosophy?
- Is the curriculum's view of learners consonant with how the program's learners act?
- Are the goals of the curriculum's philosophy related to the real goals of students, teachers, and administrators?
- Does the curriculum create real contexts for real learning?
- Are classroom teachers involved in every aspect of the curriculum, from construction through evaluation?
- Does the curriculum use writing in many different contexts in many different forms?
- Does the curriculum use writing for many different purposes?
- Does the curriculum make clear why the writing is being done—how it fits into the bigger picture?
- Does the curriculum place written texts in language-rich environments, and foster interactions involving students' texts?
- Does the curriculum provide varied resources to help students to improve different types of writing?
- Does the curriculum provide different forms of reader response to student texts, at appropriate points in the writing process?
- Do writing activities convey positive attitudes toward student writers and build on the diverse kinds of knowledge they bring to their classrooms?
- Do writing assignments encourage engagement and real thinking?
- Are course textbooks congruent with the values, theoretical positions, and practices [of learning theory and research]?
- Does the curriculum provide room for teachers to explore, adapt, and evaluate—in other words, to act as researchers in trying to improve instruction and student writing?

- Does the overall school environment allow good curricular practices to take hold?
- Does the curriculum reward good writing? (30–46)

Perhaps the most comprehensive statement about first-year curricula may be found in the WPA Outcomes Statement, adopted by the Council of Writing Program Administrators in April 2000, and posted on the organization's website. Given the variety of approaches to the content of the course, a focus on student outcomes as a unifying feature of first-year composition makes good sense. The specific outcomes are listed under four areas: Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; Processes; and Knowledge of Conventions. These outcomes are not meant to be standards (that is, precise levels of achievement), but simply a way of regularizing first-year writing courses by identifying those features that all in the field can agree upon. The Council encourages WPAs to take the outcomes statement and adapt it to suit their own particular institutions and student demographics.

Basic Writing

A WPA will often be called upon to develop a curriculum for under-prepared students for a course that precedes first-year composition.² Although this sort of course used to be (and sometimes still is) referred to as “remedial,” the term developed by Mina Shaughnessy to describe the wave of non-traditional students who arrived as a result of open admissions is the one now most commonly used: basic writing. Shaughnessy's book *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, published in 1977, was the first book to speak to the issues these writers have; it covers such issues as handwriting and punctuation, syntax, common errors, spelling, vocabulary, issues beyond the sentence level, and finally, a chapter entitled “Expectations” in which she reminds readers that the “expectations of learners and teachers powerfully influence what happens in school” and that “not all students who have been judged academically inferior are necessarily or natively so” (275).

A useful resource for developing curricula for basic writers is *A Source Book for Basic Writing Teachers*, edited by Theresa Enos. The book is divided into three parts: “Contexts for Basic Writing Teachers,” “Theories for Basic Writing Teachers,” and “Strategies for Basic

Writing Teachers,” along with a series of bibliographies. The piece by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky in this book is taken from their book *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: A Basic Reading and Writing Course for the College Curriculum*, which describes a curriculum that set the standard for many basic writing courses by assuming that the best way to engage all writers, including basic writers, is through intellectually challenging material rather than through workbooks and drill. Classroom materials are included in the book. A more recent book is Marcia Dickson’s *It’s Not Like That Here: Teaching Academic Writing and Reading to Novice Writers*, which provides advice on devising a curriculum that asks students to research a topic about which they have some experience, integrating library work with ethnographic research in order to introduce them to the genre of academic writing.

The *Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing* (Adler-Kassner and Glau) describes these and other resources for curriculum development (this book is also available on line). This bibliography was compiled by members of the Conference on Basic Writing (CBW), a special-interest group of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, now in its twenty-fifth year. Other sections of the book deal with the history and theory of basic writing, pedagogical issues, and administrative issues. *The Journal of Basic Writing*, sponsored by the CBW with support from the City University of New York, is also a useful resource for planning curricula for basic writing courses. Sometimes students with learning disabilities appear in basic writing classes, often undiagnosed. FAME (Faculty and Administrator Modules in Higher Education) is an online program developed by The Ohio State University; these modules are designed to take both faculty and administrators through best practices with regard to these students. The modules may be found on the Ohio State website.

Discussions of basic writing invariably turn to issues of grammar, but it is also an issue for all writing classes. Because so many outside the discipline think of writing in terms of correctness, grammar is an issue that cannot simply be ignored. Patrick Hartwell’s essay “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar” is an excellent introduction to the fraught issue of grammar in the composition class; he points out that although it seems clear that students do not learn to write by studying grammar rules, the issue is in fact rather complex, since there are a number of different things people mean when they use the term “grammar,” including those issues teachers often ask

students to address as they edit their penultimate drafts. Constance Weaver's *Teaching Grammar in Context*, discusses the place of grammar and related issues of usage and mechanics in the writing class.

ESL and Generation 1.5 Students

Students who speak English as a second language need a curriculum that requires a somewhat different approach, perhaps even a separate class. Dana Ferris discusses these needs in *Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing*, focusing on how to teach such students self-editing strategies. In *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice*, she and her co-author John Hedgcock discuss theoretical and practical issues in ESL writing, the reading-writing relationship for ESL writers, syllabus design, text selection, lesson planning, teacher and peer response to student's writing (including the place of grammar in the editing process), writing assessment and ESL writers, and the implications of computer-assisted writing for ESL writers. Barbara Kroll's *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing* has several essays that focus on curriculum options for ESL/EFL writing classes, including discussions of the connection between reading and writing and the assigning of literature in such classes. Plagiarism is sometimes a concern with ESL students, given different cultural attitudes toward the ownership of written text and the availability of electronic texts. In Diane Belcher and Alan Hirvela's *Linking Literacies: Perspectives on L2 Reading-Writing Connections*, there is a section entitled "[E]Merging Literacies and the Challenge of Textual Ownership" that includes three articles on the subject, discussing the varied attitudes of international students toward Western citation practices and advice on curricula, warning against penalties for inadvertent plagiarism among this group of students. *Writing in Multicultural Settings* (Severino et al.) contains a section on ESL issues, including an essay by Tony Silva on the implications of research on the differences between ESL writers and native speakers, as well as other sections having to do with linguistic and cultural diversity in the writing classroom, especially with regard to students of color.

In many institutions there is now another group of students for whom an ESL class is not appropriate, since they are very proficient orally, showing second-language interference only in their writing. These are students who were born in the U.S. or came with their families when they were very young and have received most or all of their

education here, speaking English at school and another language at home. Their language profiles fall somewhere between the recent immigrant or international student and a native speaker of English; they are termed “Generation 1.5” as a result. Volume 14.1 of the *CATESOL Journal* (2002) has one section devoted to these students. The lead article, “Working with Generation 1.5 Students and their Teachers: ESL Meets Composition” (Goen et al.), describes a research project that has identified a number of successful curricular practice for such students: using meaningful texts that are relevant to students, making basic grammar succinct and accessible, and helping students develop editing strategies that are very focused and individualized (150). The essay includes a helpful appendix that outlines a series of principles for teachers working with orally proficient second-language writers, along with examples of the sorts of activities that can be integrated into a curriculum for these students.

Articulation

Discussions of curriculum often involve discussions of articulation with feeder schools (that is, whether or not to accept composition courses at other institutions as equivalent to your own school’s course) and outreach to high schools, to build collaborative programs that facilitate the transition from school to college. In “Expanding the Community: A Comprehensive Look at Outreach and Articulation,” Anne-Marie Hall discusses various outreach programs, focusing particularly on high school-college cooperation. She cites the National Writing Project as a model, but also discusses mounting graduate seminars and institutes, bridge programs, young writers programs, and cooperative teaching programs, providing practical advice about the challenges of designing such programs. She also provides a list of resources, including Web sites, that give the most current sources of information about setting up and evaluating an outreach program.

Beyond First-Year Composition

Although the present reference guide focuses primarily on first-year composition, a writing program administrator will often be called upon to design courses beyond the introductory course, or at least to articulate that course with other courses at the sophomore or upper-division level. The curriculum of “advanced” writing courses varies considerably across institutions. The variations were the subject of es-

says in the early years of *JAC: Journal of Advanced Composition* (which now carries the subtitle “A Journal of Writing Theory”); there are also examples of course designs that have appeared since Fall 1997 as a regular feature of *Composition Studies*. The most comprehensive collection of essays and course designs may be found in Shamoon et al., *Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum*, which comes with an interactive CD-ROM that provides full course descriptions for each type of course discussed in the book. In the introduction to the book, Shamoon and her colleagues discuss the difficulty of defining what constitutes “advanced composition,” since much of what comes under that rubric seems to have been “left over from a period in which advanced undergraduate writing instruction was either very specialized (e.g., technical writing), an extension of the literature curriculum (the non-fiction essay), or an extension of first-year composition (more of the same, but harder)” (xiv). Choosing instead to focus on what an advanced writing curriculum should or could accomplish, Shamoon and her colleagues recommend three curricular objectives: providing students with a historical and theoretical awareness of writing as a discipline, preparing students for careers as writers, and preparing students to use writing to participate in the civic sphere—what they term the disciplinary, the professional, and the public (xv). The book describes and gives examples of various core courses in each of these three areas.

PEDAGOGY

As documented in Lad Tobin’s “How the Writing Process Movement Was Born,” the 1970s marked what has become known as the “process revolution” in composition pedagogy, ushered in by, for example, Donald Murray (“Teach Writing As A Process” and *A Writer Teaches Writing*) and Peter Elbow (*Writing without Teachers*). This revolution in teaching was brought about in part because of the larger national conversation about teaching and learning, sparked by the launching of Sputnik in 1957, but was also based on the intuitive notion on the part of such writers as Murray and Elbow that we should teach students to write the way that we ourselves write, going through multiple drafts and asking for feedback from peers. Linda Flower and John Hayes sought to confirm this intuition in their empirical research at Carnegie Mellon, comparing the writing processes of expert and nov-

ice writers. Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow (among others) developed a portfolio system for assessing student writing that honored the process of writing as well as the finished product. Although current-traditional approaches to pedagogy still exist, scholars in the field generally agree that best practices include careful assignment design (with attention to invention strategies and rhetorical context and including evaluative criteria), multiple drafts, collaborative work with peers/peer review, and portfolio evaluation (about which more will be said later). Most important, the role of the teacher is seen as one of coach as well as judge, of guide as well as critic. This change in pedagogy has been great enough that it has been termed a “paradigm shift” (Hairston “Winds of Change”).

In 1986, George Hillocks published the results of a meta-analysis of experimental research having to do with the teaching of composition, *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching*. The study examined four modes of instruction: “presentational” (where the teacher dominates the classroom), “natural process” (in which students choose their own topics, receive feedback from peers, and revise as they wish, with no structured problem-solving), “individualized writing conferences” (between teacher and student), and “environmental” (an approach that balances teacher, student, materials, activities, and learning tasks, and that uses small group discussions that are focused, using specific criteria to give feedback on papers, for example). He found that students who were taught using the environmental approach significantly out-performed their counterparts in the other modes of instruction. His later book, *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*, draws on this research as well as on theories of language and learning; after outlining basics for thinking about teaching writing, he devotes the rest of the book to describing successful environmental approaches, discussing the process model of composing, and giving practical advice about planning the course, including what he calls “gateway” (beginning) activities, sequencing of assignments, and the place of reflection in planning and teaching. Although the book is aimed primarily at middle school and secondary teachers, the synthesis of research and theory and the discussions of general teaching and learning principles are all applicable to college-level teaching.

The most recent book outlining various pedagogical approaches is *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (Tate et al.); the first essay, by Lad Tobin, provides a comprehensive overview of process pedagogy,

including critiques of early expressivist notions as the focus of the field turned toward teaching academic discourse, and the recent discussions of “post-process” pedagogy that focus on what the content of a writing course should be. There are also essays on expressivist pedagogy (Christopher Burnham), collaborative pedagogy (Rebecca Moore Howard), cultural studies and composition (Diana George and John Trimbur), critical pedagogy (Ann George), feminist pedagogy (Susan C. Jarratt), community service pedagogy (Laura Julier), basic writing pedagogy (Deborah Mutnick), and an essay on technology and teaching writing (Charles Moran).³

Moran’s essay discusses one of the most important recent developments in composition pedagogy, the emergence of multiple literacies, including electronic literacy. The essay provides an overview of sources and a useful section on various applications of technology, including word processing, electronic mail, online discussions, the Web/hypertext/hypermedia, and a section on the various issues that are raised by the applications of computer technology (most important, perhaps, the issue of access). Moran also provides a bibliography of both print and (of course) online resources. For information on the history of computers and composition, the standard references are *Computers and the Teaching of Writing in American Higher Education, 1979–1994: A History* (Hawisher et al.), and the more recent *Transitions: Teaching Writing in Computer-Supported and Traditional Classrooms* (Palmquist et al.), the latter of which contains an extensive bibliography of related readings. Two journals, the online *Kairos* and the print/online *Computers and Composition*, provide the most recent scholarship on technology and pedagogy in the writing class. Todd Taylor’s “Ten Commandments for Computers and Composition” offers specific advice to WPAs on using technology in the writing classroom: keep people first, identify and build from program principles, start simple, invest heavily on hands-on instructor training, revise strategies for instructing students, consult with others, expect the crash, consider access, be critical of technology, and use technology for positive change.

In order to manage the individualized pedagogy required for a writing class, it is imperative that class size be kept small, ideally no more than 15 for basic writing and no more than 20 for regular first-year composition. The recommended standards for class size come from three national organizations: the National Council of Teachers of English, the Conference on College Composition and Communica-

tion, and the Association of Departments of English, an affiliate of the Modern Language Association. These guidelines, which are posted on the organizations' websites, make the argument for class size in terms of workload issues.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

For WPAs, accountability is inextricably tied to assessment because WPAs are, by virtue of being in charge of what is often the only universal requirement in the institution, accountable to many stakeholders outside the department/program—faculty across the disciplines, administrators, boards of trustees/regents, and sometimes legislators. A good rule of thumb is what has become known informally among WPAs as “Ed White’s Law”—assess, or assessment will be done unto you. The university runs on data; WPAs are usually called upon to provide data that show what and how the students and program are doing. There has been much research and scholarship focusing on assessment, only some of which pertains to administrative issues. After a discussion of general overviews of the topic, the following section will focus only on those resources that deal with the intersections of assessment and administrative accountability for the WPA: placement, proficiency, and program assessment.

Overviews

Kathleen Blake Yancey provides a history of writing assessment in “Looking Back as We Look Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment.” She traces three waves of such assessment: multiple-choice tests, holistically-scored essay tests, and portfolio assessment, showing the move toward direct assessment and what has come to be termed “authentic assessment” (e.g., assessment of collective abilities rather than isolated skills [like editing]). *On a Scale: A Social History of Writing Assessment in America* (Elliot) provides a more comprehensive examination of the topic, starting with the first Harvard writing examinations in 1874; he traces what he terms “three master diachronic tropes in the history of writing assessment: an impulse for accountability recorded as student disenfranchisement, a struggle for methodological design resulting in a series of case studies, and a construction of literacy that varies across time and circumstance” (348). In his chapter “Using Tests for Admissions, Placement, and Instructional

Evaluation,” Edward White provides an overview of the purposes of these various types of tests: admissions, placement, first-year composition equivalency, exit from composition courses (including Advanced Placement and CLEP), certification of “rising junior” or graduation writing competency, and demonstration of “value added” (e.g., proof of academic improvement for students or groups of students over time) for program evaluation (“Developing”). He points out that each of these has two (sometimes conflicting) goals—administrative (selecting and classifying students) and instructional (helping students learn more effectively)—and each requires a different sort of assessment. Further, any assessment instrument needs to be context-specific; a basic writer at one institution might not be defined as such at another (118).

A more recent overview is Huot and Schendel’s “A Working Methodology of Assessment for Writing Program Administrators,” an essay that provides an extensive bibliography on the topic. These authors discuss the potential positive force of assessment mandates, as long as they are done in a way that allow WPAs to work effectively and ethically. They define the terms “reliability” and “validity,” and outline methods of assessment and the theories behind them, discussing placement and exit assessments and program assessments. They point out the importance of first establishing the validity of any writing assessment, and recommend bringing in experts to help with designing site-specific assessment instruments.

Willa Wolcott and Sue M. Legg’s *An Overview of Writing Assessment: Theory, Research, and Practice*, is just that. The authors provide chapters on direct measures of writing (that is, measures that examine student writing, as opposed to indirect measures—multiple-choice questions about editing, for example), topic design for writing assessment, portfolio assessment, training of raters, holistic, primary trait, and analytic scoring, reliability and validity, assessing writing in the disciplines, and issues of equity in writing assessment. In *The Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning*, George Hillocks gives an overview of how state mandated assessments have become politicized; although this book focuses on K-12 assessments, what is said about the difficulties of large-scale assessments that are divorced from instruction (and how assessment can drive instruction in negative ways) also applies to post-secondary education. Recently various commercial vendors have been offering assessment packages that in-

clude computer scoring of student writing, packages that appeal to upper administrators because of their perceived efficiency and comparative costs. Anne Herrington and Charles Moran give an overview of such scoring (“What Happens When Machines Read Our Students’ Writing?”), pointing out, among other things, how easy it is to fool the machines. Richard Haswell provides an extensive bibliography of resources on computer scoring of writing in his book with Patricia Freitag Ericsson, *Machine Scoring of Student Essays*. The Conference on College Composition and Communication has developed a Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments that opposes machine scoring of student writing.

Placement

In his chapter “Selecting Appropriate Measures,” Edward White outlines the case against using indirect measures, especially standardized tests from commercial vendors (“Teaching”). The issue, White argues, is fairness as well as an accurate assessment of student skills; he discusses the results of a study that compared the English Placement Test (EPT, offered by the California State University system) and the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE, a test no longer offered by the College Board). Black students and Asian American students did significantly better on the EPT, a direct measure, than on the TSWE; White theorized that one reason for this outcome was that the standardized test penalized non-significant features of minority dialects and the language of students whose home language was not English (188–91). White advises those designing placement instruments to first decide what information is needed for placement in such courses; only then can one proceed to designing an appropriate instrument. The next chapter in his book describes how to go about organizing and managing holistic essay readings or portfolio readings for that purpose. Holistic scoring, first developed by a team at the Educational Testing Service, is perhaps the most common method of scoring placement examinations. Leo Ruth and Sandra Murphy’s *Designing Writing Tasks for the Assessment of Writing* and Michael Williamson and Brian Huot’s *Validating Holistic Scoring for Writing Assessment: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations* are resources for designing and scoring such examinations.

A more streamlined system for such scoring was developed independently by William Smith at the University of Pittsburgh and

Richard Haswell and his colleagues at Washington State University. In “Assessing the Reliability and Adequacy of Using Holistic Scoring of Essays as a College Composition Placement Technique,” Smith reviews the research up to that time (1993) on direct vs. indirect measures, and describes the modifications he made to holistic scoring, which he terms “placement rating.” Instead of having raters score writing samples according to a scale of 1–6, this system relies on experienced teachers to rate the essays based on the curricula for each course students will be placed into. A similar “expert reader” model is described by Richard Haswell in “The Two-Tier Rating System: The Need for Ongoing Change” and “The Obvious Placement: The Addition of Theory,” both in his book *Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction Within a University Writing Program*. Haswell’s system relies on a two-tiered reading: the first by experienced teachers of both basic writing and first-year composition; the sample that suggests an “obvious placement” is not read again. Only the papers that are not so clear in terms of placement go to a second more experienced reader. The newest direction in placement is directed self-placement, described in detail in Daniel Royer and Roger Gilles’ book *Directed Self-Placement: Principles and Practice*. In such a placement system, students are given information and advice about the placement options (e.g., if you are this sort of reader/writer, this course is the most appropriate for you), but the ultimate decision about placement rests with the student. One major advantage of this system, as they point out, is that student motivation in the basic writing class is not a difficult issue because the students have chosen to take the class rather than having been forced to take it.

Proficiency

Placement tests ask an entry-level question: what writing course is most appropriate for this student, given his/her level of skill? Holistically scored timed writing is a narrow but appropriate measure to get at the answer to this question. Proficiency tests, on the other hand, ask a gate-keeping question: has this student achieved a level of skill to be able to pass first-year composition/go on to junior standing/graduate? To answer the second question, an assessment instrument must be based on the intended outcomes of the course, measuring how well students have achieved those outcomes. Portfolios have become the most common instruments for measuring students’ progress in process-oriented

courses. Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow pioneered portfolios as measures of proficiency; their system is described in a series of essays in *Portfolios: Process and Product* (Belanoff and Dickson). The system as they describe it has become not only a method of certifying students' writing proficiency, but also a method of faculty development; it relies on groups of teachers reading each others' students' work, hammering out agreement on collective standards. An entire section of this book deals with issues of using portfolios for proficiency testing, including case studies of such testing at various institutions. *New Directions in Portfolio Assessment: Reflective Practice, Critical Theory, and Large-Scale Scoring* (Black et al.) also has a section devoted to the large-scale use of portfolios for assessing proficiency, focusing on issues of scoring. Edward White has reviewed the difficulties with scoring portfolios using holistic methods, proposing instead that the scoring focus on the students' reflective letter (a usual component of portfolios). Such a system requires first that the program have a clear statement of goals (he includes sample goals statements from four different programs in an appendix); the evaluators can then determine, based on a careful reading of the reflective letter, how well the student has achieved those goals ("The Scoring of Portfolios: Phase 2"). Digital portfolios, the latest development in portfolio assessment, are reviewed in *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning*, edited by Barbara Cambridge, and in the fourth section of Yancey and Weiser's *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives*.

Program Assessment

As Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley showed in their 1983 discussion of program assessment, *Evaluating College Writing Programs*, program evaluation involves much more than simply asking the question of whether or not student writing has improved. After reviewing four studies conducted at different institutions, they outlined a framework for a comprehensive evaluation that would include five components: cultural and social context, institutional context, program structure and administration, content or curriculum, and instruction (40–65). At about the same time, Barbara Davis and her colleagues in the Bay Area Writing Project were working on an evaluation of that project funded by the Carnegie Corporation; their work was first published in 1981 in a volume entitled *The Evaluation of Composition Instruction*, and although it focused primarily on the effects of the BAWP on sub-

sequent instruction, it also provided useful guidelines that could be applied to program evaluation (for example, looking at student and teacher attitudes as well as program administration). In *Developing Successful College Writing Programs*, Edward White discusses program evaluation in some detail, suggesting that reducing it to a “value added” (popular in the late 1980s, when he was writing) was ineffective and inappropriate (195). He admits, reluctantly, that university administrators are likely to see “empirical” evaluations as the only ones that are convincing (197–98), and points to the failure of the studies cited by Witte and Faigley as examples of how difficult empirical studies can be. He has three recommendations: Learn from the past (e.g., from the empirical studies that have not worked), use multiple measures, and emphasize formative rather than summative evaluation (204). As an appendix, he adds the guidelines for the self-study that precedes the Consultant-Evaluator visit from the Council of Writing Program Administrators, a service behind which White has been a driving force. This service, information about which is available on the WPA Website, was started (as mentioned in the previous chapter) by Harvey Wiener, the founding president of WPA, who used his experience as an evaluator for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. It remains the single most valuable program evaluation tool available to WPAs.

An example of a comprehensive and ongoing program evaluation may be found in Richard Haswell’s collection of essays, *Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction in a University Writing Program*. Haswell and his colleagues at Washington State University describe the history of the writing program there, which includes the writing-across-the-curriculum program, the assessment instruments (a timed writing for placement, which provides baseline data, and a portfolio that includes a timed writing for the rising junior portfolio, which provides mid-point diagnostic data) and the feedback loop that the assessment provides back to the program. By comparing selected students’ work on the placement examination and on the timed writing for the portfolio, Haswell provided a striking example of how to do what earlier programs (as documented by Witte and Faigley) had failed to do: use empirical methods to show improvement in student writing (“Documenting Improvement in College Writing: A Longitudinal Approach”).

STAFFING, STAFF DEVELOPMENT, AND EVALUATION

Of all the issues facing WPAs, staffing has been and remains the thorniest. Although there are some institutions where only full-time permanent faculty teach composition, the vast majority of first-year writing courses are taught by contingent faculty and teaching assistants, many of them professionally unprepared to teach such a course. Kathleen Blake Yancey and her colleagues, in their survey of writing faculty, found that of 1,861 respondents from all institutional types (40 percent were at two-year institutions, the remainder at various kinds of four-year schools) only 27 percent indicated that they had a background in rhetoric and composition; 33 percent had a background in literature, 15 percent indicated “other,” with the rest in various fields (e.g., linguistics, English education) (“Portraits”). Further, the pedagogy of writing classes (requiring small sections) combined with the budget structure of some institutions (tied to enrollments), creates situations where last-minute hiring is the norm—for introductory science and mathematics classes, 20 more first-year students over the expected number of enrollments may simply require a larger lecture hall, but for first-year writing classes, that enrollment upsurge requires one more section and one more person to teach it. Providing quality instruction under such circumstances becomes a challenge.

As mentioned earlier, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the Association of Departments of English have responded to the issue of staffing with various policy statements meant to support a high quality of instruction. These guidelines collectively indicate that writing classes be capped at no more than 15 for basic writing and no more than 20 for first-year composition; they further recommend that no teacher of writing have more than 60 students to work with per term. Hilgers and Marsella, in Chapter 3 of *Making Your Writing Program Work*, advise that every program should have a clear staffing plan that takes into account these professional constraints, including the “Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (the Position Statement from the Conference on College Composition and Communication), as well as institutional and legal constraints (such as Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines). They recommend establishing a personnel committee for the program, an ongoing staff development program to upgrade the professionalism

of the faculty, looking for professional staff in non-academic areas for particular needs (for example, a business executive to teach business writing), and finding ways to make the positions attractive if the pay is low (providing flexible work hours or travel money).

Hilgers and Marsella also describe the hiring process in detail, from recruitment to sealing the deal. They go on in Chapter 4 to give advice on organizing faculty development programs to fit institutional and faculty needs, including a seminar for writing-intensive courses in the disciplines as well as one for new hires. This chapter also deals with performance evaluations of teachers. Edward White's *Developing Successful College Writing Programs* devotes Chapter 8 to the discussion of supporting, evaluating, and rewarding writing program faculty. White emphasizes the importance of providing a manageable student load for teachers, as well as supporting their professional growth. William J. Carpenter discusses strategies for professional development of staff, including writing reviews of textbooks, forming discussion groups, and holding in-house conferences. Christine Hult's *Evaluating Teachers of Writing* provides a series of essays that give an overview of the topic (how does one evaluate such teaching?), a discussion of various evaluation methods, and an examination of various faculty groups (including TAs, adjuncts, and faculty in writing-across-the-curriculum programs) and how to evaluate them.

At doctoral and comprehensive institutions (e.g., those that offer MA degrees), graduate teaching assistants usually comprise the largest group of staff teaching first-year writing classes. This is a group that presents particular challenges, since the position of TA elsewhere in the institution is understood as a true assistant—one who grades papers and perhaps leads a discussion section, but is not the teacher of record for the class. TAs in writing programs, however, are entirely responsible for their own sections, often from the creation of the syllabus to giving final grades. Because of this difference, some institutions have instituted graduate seminars in writing pedagogy, required of TAs either before they teach or concurrently with their first teaching term, or practicum courses that provide support during their novice period. Responses to a recent query on the WPA Listserv indicated that the most commonly used books for such courses were Roen et al.'s *Strategies for Teaching First-Year Composition*, Clark's *Concepts in Composition*, Glenn et al.'s *The St Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*,

Corbett et al.'s *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, and Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*.

Timothy Catalano and his colleagues have put together a useful annotated bibliography of resources for TA training, first published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and reprinted in Ward and Carpenter's *Allyn & Bacon Sourcebook for Writing Program Administrators*; the bibliography has sections on TA training and evaluation, descriptions of training programs, teaching duties, employment issues, and histories of TA training. Ward and Carpenter's book also includes two other essays on TA training that provide overviews of relevant issues and practices: Ward and Perry's "A Selection of Strategies for Training Teaching Assistants" (which provides a bibliography of additional resources) and Latterell's "Training the Workforce: Overview of GTA Education Curricula."

The most complete reference on TA training is Pytlik and Liggett's *Preparing College Teachers of Writing*, a collection of essays that focus on the histories, theories, programs, and practices involved in TA training. One essay by Stephen Wilhoit, "Recent Trends in TA Instruction," is a bibliographic essay that traces trends in three areas:

1. Program structure (longer and more extensive pre-service programs, in-service practica with more emphasis on theory, apprenticeship and mentorship programs with more experienced teachers, training TAs to tutor in a writing center);
2. Trends in program practices and content (classroom observations, role-playing, teaching journals and portfolios, encouraging reflective practice and research and publication, teaching about writing program administration);
3. Trends in employment concerns and working conditions for TAs, including unionization.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

Faculty members can operate fairly well without knowing what goes on outside of their home department, but once they become administrators they need to know how the university is structured and where the lines of authority lie. There is a vast amount of literature in the larger field of higher education administration that can be helpful to new WPAs in this regard. Jossey-Bass publishes a series of books

called “New Directions for Higher Education”; a good general reference is Birnbaum’s *How Colleges Work: the Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership*. Some of the issues new WPAs will deal with are understanding administrative discourse and budgets, legal issues, the politics of WPA work, their own tenure and promotion process, and—on a more personal level—how to handle the stress of administrative work.

Administrative discourse can take some getting used to. Doug Hesse offers a list of periodicals and references that university administrators read and discuss in “Understanding Larger Discourses in Higher Education: Practical Advice for WPAs.” Hesse recommends that WPAs familiarize themselves with these periodicals and with various organizations that focus on higher education (such as the American Council on Education, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, and the Association of American Colleges and Universities). Understanding the larger conversations can help WPAs tie their own local initiatives to broader national initiatives or agendas (assessment, for example). Joyce Kinkead and Jeanne Simpson offer advice on decoding Adminispeak in “The Administrative Audience: A Rhetorical Problem.” They discuss administrative shorthand terms such as FTE (full-time equivalent) and SCH (student credit hour), as well as terms like productivity and accountability—terms that have particular meanings in university contexts. For understanding budget issues, there are such reference guides as Born’s *The Jossey-Bass Academic Administrator’s Guide to Budget and Financial Management*, which gives a general background on managing academic budgets. Chris Anson’s “Figuring it Out: Writing Programs in the Context of University Budgets” gives more specific information on how writing program budgets work, pointing out that each university has its own budgeting process and idiosyncrasies; Anson describes a process of mapping budgets as a heuristic for understanding them.

The WPA is part of an administrative line of authority, which can in some cases result in liability; legal issues are crucial to understand, especially before the WPA meets up with that student who has the number of her father—the lawyer—on her cell phone’s speed dial. Goonen and Blechman’s *Higher Education Administration: A Guide to Legal, Ethical, and Practical Issues* provides an overview of both legal and ethical concerns. Pantoja et al.’s “Legal Considerations for Writing Program Administrators” outlines the major concerns that WPAs

deal with: contracts and who can sign them, syllabi and their legal status as contracts, disruptive behavior and student rights, sexual harassment, student records and FERPA (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which does not allow one to discuss a student's records with his or her parents without the student's permission), plagiarism and the proof required, copyright issues, responsibilities with regard to disclosures by students, hiring practices and personnel evaluations, letters of recommendation, and accommodating students with disabilities. The essay includes a listing of resources for each of these issues. Ethical concerns are addressed in Stuart Brown's "Applying Ethics: A Decision-Making Heuristic for Writing Program Administrators." Brown provides a series of common scenarios for WPAs (hiring part-time faculty at the last minute, dealing with TAs who deviate from the standard syllabus) and outlines a moral heuristic for helping to make decisions in such contexts. The heuristic involves mapping out "matters of fact" and "matters of consequence," the most important of which is probably "Based on my own personal values, can I live with this decision?" (161).

The politics of writing program administration within and outside of English Departments are always highly nuanced. In "The WPA and the Politics of LitComp," John Schilb discusses English Departments' traditional marginalizing of composition. Citing William Riley Parker's famous essay, "Where Do English Departments Come From?" and Maxine Hairston's "Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections," Schilb discusses what he terms "our vexed disciplinary history" (167) and gives advice about basic decisions WPAs must make about the relationship of the writing program to literature: What part will literature play in the curriculum? Who should the instructors in the program be? How should the graduate students be chosen and trained? How can you make sure that your literature colleagues understand and appreciate your work? Barry Maid discusses the advantages of moving entirely outside of the English Department to form a separate unit for the writing program ("Working Outside of English"). In "Politics and the WPA," Doug Hesse outlines some of the larger political issues involved, advising WPAs to know the system in which they operate, develop written policies and create processes, construct an effective ethos (one that combines expertise, competence, sensitivity to local issues, and pursuit of the greater good), and write strategic reports. At the institutional level he offers these maxims: have a place

at the table (even if the table is small), know the other participants, come to the parties (such as guest lectures and football games), and frame strategies by factoring in the resource situation. At the disciplinary level, he advises that WPAs be familiar with previous and ongoing political activities (such as official statements); become involved in local, regional, and national political efforts; and seek professional sponsorship for actions (such as the development of the “Outcomes Statement”). Finally, at the higher education/public sphere level, he advises that writing program administrators shape public opinion through speaking and writing, form coalitions, and have a place at larger tables (state-wide task forces, for example).

Tenure and promotion has been and in some cases still continues to be an issue for WPAs, since their administrative work is not always appreciated or understood as scholarship by their department colleagues or by personnel committees and deans. The Council of Writing Program Administrators position statement on evaluating the intellectual work of the WPA was created precisely because of this situation. In “Professional Advancement of the WPA: Rhetoric and Politics in Tenure and Promotion,” Jeanne Gunner gives advice about how to achieve tenure and discusses her own promotion and tenure case, showing how she revised her materials after a shaky probationary review. She includes an extensive annotated bibliography with the essay. Charles Schuster, in “The Politics of Promotion,” outlines how English departments should take responsibility for educating faculty about the work of the writing program administrator, sponsoring faculty colloquia, re-evaluating teaching loads and the importance of teaching, hiring assistant professors in rhetoric and composition as specialists and colleagues, and assigning the job of WPA to a senior writing specialist. The most complete general reference on tenure and promotion is Richard and Barbara Gebhardt’s *Academic Advancement in Composition Studies*, which includes essays on preparing for a successful personnel review, mentoring and finding mentors, and the importance of external reviews. The most immediately relevant essay is Duane Roen’s “Writing Program Administration as Scholarship and Teaching.” Roen provides a case study that demonstrates some of the issues involved, and then discusses the need for fair evaluation standards of the kind of work WPAs do, focusing on the need for complete job descriptions and a mapping out of the administrative work that counts

as scholarship or teaching (rather than service) in Ernest Boyer's terms (in *Scholarship Reconsidered*).

Finally but foremost, WPAs need to take care of themselves. Administrative work can be stressful; some stress is energizing, but too much can be debilitating. Irene Ward discusses this issue in "Developing Healthy Management and Leadership Styles: Surviving the WPA's 'Inside Game.'" Ward defines burnout, discusses the issues that may lead to burnout in WPA positions, and outlines strategies to avoid it. She gives very specific advice: get a reasonable job description and have an annual review with your chair/supervisor, involve others and build teams (empowering others to act effectively), seek out positive role models, negotiate for the training you need (for supervision, leadership, and management), develop realistic expectations, find ways to minimize interruptions that interfere with your duties, balance your life with interests outside work, stop thinking you are a victim and take control, and create a list of deal-breakers (those things that would make your position so difficult that you would step down). Ward closes her essay with a discussion of new management and leadership theories that should resonate with WPAs. Quoting from several books on management theory, she states that these theories are based on mutual respect, understanding, and empowerment, and speak of leadership as teaching and learning. Noting that WPAs often have to teach the university how to treat them, she states that we also need to prepare new WPAs to face the challenges of the job. With a clear understanding of what to expect, the work of the WPA can be energizing, fulfilling, and effective.