

CHAPTER 1

COMING INTO BEING: THE WRITING DEPARTMENT AT GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY IN ITS 13TH YEAR

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The origins of the Department of Writing at Grand Valley State University were described in the first chapter of O'Neill and Crow's collection, *Field of Dreams*. In that narrative, Royer and Gilles interpreted the emergence of this new university unit in terms of the staffing and academic values within the Department of English, but also in terms of a broader debate going on then, continuing perhaps even now, "not just about the discipline of English, but about social agendas, the humanities, the unity of a discipline, literature itself, and jobs" (2002, p. 21). Their argument then, over a decade ago, was that their separation narrative illuminated this broader discussion that the "time has come to restructure a discipline that has for too long taken itself for granted and lost touch with viable purposes and social commitments" (2002, p. 21). Though it was merely a dream to us in 1999 when we initiated a bid for department status (and a BA in Writing) for programs comprising first-year writing, creative writing, and professional writing, our department today is a high functioning unit in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Our unit is "independent" in the sense described by Bill Lalicker in this volume: "A writing program that has authority to make decisions answerable in a direct line to a dean or provost, or to the Academic Affairs or Student Affairs division, is independent; a writing program that answers first to department policy control, or is subordinate to Department of English budget priorities, is not independent." The Department of Writing has a unit head, budget, and reports to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences just like English, Biology, or History. Our department has achieved what Lalicker calls the "five equities," allowing us "to engage in and support the best practices that elevate the teaching of writing and the study of rhetoric as theory and act" (this volume). New faculty may take our existence for granted, and they come to us prepared to teach a

wide range of writing courses that were difficult for us to imagine a decade ago. It's hard to imagine how we could provide students with a robust major, strong advising toward careers and graduate school, and meaningful extra-curricular experiences were we working within the confines of our old shared structure in the English department. Indeed, given our own experiences, we view the rise of other independent writing departments around the country as structural necessities, even more than dreams, in institutions that are committed to writing as a set of thriving programs in the college.

In retrospect, moving the writing programs from English into an independent unit has allowed both English and Writing to flourish. In addition to better focusing their missions, both units have updated their curricula in ways that would have been very difficult given the competing disciplinary agendas of Literary Studies and Writing Studies, which can sometimes pit those who value, teach, and research the reception and interpretation of texts against those whose focus is on the value, teaching, and scholarship of the of textual production and rhetorical construction. One thing that made this move possible, even necessary, at Grand Valley State University was the steady growth in enrollment and an experimental, progressive tradition that survived the 1960s and 1970s and still resides in the climate of administration and faculty. In 1995 there were 13,000 students enrolled. In 2014 we enroll just over 25,000 students. The curriculum has shifted to include professional programs, but Grand Valley still identifies itself as a liberal arts university. During that period of great growth, but before Writing became its own unit, the Department of English was bloated with tracks in linguistics and language study, creative writing, teacher training, classics, and literature all wanting to grow in fresh directions. But we could hardly find a meeting room big enough on campus to put faculty around a single table. That difficulty became a metaphor for the continued specialization and fragmentation happening within the unit.

To accomplish the unit's work more efficiently, we split into working groups around core programs within English; increasingly, these working groups became more independent and focused on depth within those areas, rather than breadth across the English major. Innovation came from within these smaller work groups, and soon it was difficult for those of us in Writing to imagine continuing to grow the major, revise the curriculum, and hire effectively in the larger English unit. Where universities and programs are struggling to remain viable, and where consolidating units is viewed as way of cutting costs and finding better connections among smaller programs, the independence of a Writing department may not be possible. On the other hand, perhaps these kinds of instincts toward innovation are behind the steady growth of independent Writing units in the first place (see Ross, this volume).

The Department of Writing emerged over the last decade with its own conceptual and practical identity, which we outline below. Our effort in this essay is to focus primarily on the practical matters that describe four causes or dimensions of our emergence—material, efficient, formal, and final—that we hope will illuminate a wide range of principles and perspectives explaining what the department, its faculty, and our students have become. Aristotle introduced these “four causes” as a way of fully understanding a thing’s emergence or the nature of why something changes. This kind of analysis has survived the centuries because of its general applicability to all kinds of change. It serves us here as a heuristic, and as Aristotle intended, it reminds us that the explanation for change and emergence is found across many dimensions—past facts, the activity of busy agents, the shape of what something looks like, and a thing’s sense of meaningful purpose.

It’s not difficult to become cynical about mission statements, program goals, and strategic plans. But our own recollection of these dreams in 1999 is of precisely this kind of strategizing and conceptualizing of past, present, and future. No one cause would have been enough to build the program we have today and we see these causes continually at work as we seek to explain the department’s growth and change over the years.

THE MATERIAL OF OUR CRAFT: WHAT WE RESEARCH AND TEACH

Aristotle’s causes did not inform the narrative about our department in *Field of Dreams*, but they might be useful here by way of summarizing the content of that 2002 chapter. The creation of this department was not a smooth march. Indeed, there was a lot of argument, conceptualizing, explaining, and public counter argument. The epicenter of this argument had to do with a question about final cause: “where do these emphases or tracks belong and to what end do they serve?” For a few traditionalists, it just didn’t seem right to have an English Department without first-year writing. Even if teaching first-year writing was viewed as a “chore,” it was chore that we should all pitch in on. Those faculty less romantic about what they experienced as undergraduates were happy about the possibility of never having to teach freshman composition again. The track emphasis in creative writing was equally if not even more contested. There were just two faculty whose primary training was creative writing, but literature and classics faculty wanted badly to retain the artistic cache and panache that poets and fiction writers afforded the department. And the conflict was not merely about style and cultural tradition. There was a fundamental difference of opinion about the necessity of learning to read and interpret texts relative to learning

how to produce such texts. Professional writing—or what we called then “practical writing”—was a mystery to literature faculty (the dominant group that contested the proposal) and therefore the easiest for them to let go. Perhaps because the literature faculty’s own undergraduate programs had no such “practical writing” programs, they could see little harm in turning loose of it. In the end, our appeal to the historical tradition of rhetoric as a practical art and course of study and scholarship that engaged the world in many dimensions—professional, functional, and creative—was persuasive. So the appeals we made had to do with what such a program was made from, our material causes, but also the training and skills of new faculty in professional writing, our efficient causes, a program with conceptual coherence (how can we have a Writing Department without creative writing?), and most importantly, an appeal to the final cause of a twenty-first century department that engaged the practical world in ways consistent with the ancient tradition of rhetoric and liberal education (see also Hanganu-Bresch, this volume).

The unofficial subtitle for our department remains “A Department of Academic, Creative, and Professional Writing.” In other words, we view these three kinds of writing as important, inclusive, and representative of our academic and artistic expertise. Our pedagogical tradition, including the practice of peer review workshops, unites us in many ways. We see these emphases connected in content, faculty expertise and experience, and certainly in the lives of alumni in our programs who rarely retain anything like a “pure emphasis” in anything as they look for ways to make a living.

Today, the Department of Writing is a robust, large unit within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. In Fall 2013, we had 208 declared majors and 140 declared minors. In academic year 2013–14, the Department of Writing offered 125 sections (3,500 students) of first-year writing, multiple sections of creative writing workshops and non-creative writing coursework, including magazine writing, writing for the web, and professional writing. We staff these courses with 40–45 faculty that comprise 14 tenure track, 17 full-time, non-tenure track faculty, and 12 part-time adjuncts.

ACADEMIC WRITING

The university enrolls just over 25,000 students annually, translating into about 3,500 first-year writing students that enroll in WRT 098 (a 4-credit developmental writing course) and WRT 150 (the 4-credit composition course with research component required of all students at the university).

Grand Valley does not have graduate teaching assistants to rely on for staffing these courses. When we were in English, and in the early years of the

Writing Department's existence, adjunct faculty were teaching 3–4 courses a semester at about \$2,400 for a four-credit course—a real problem for people needing to put together a living wage. But for the last 10 years we have staffed 17 full-time positions with Masters-qualified writing teachers earning full university benefits, private single office space, a 12-credit load over a limited range of courses, and an annual salary of just over \$40,000 for a nine-month contract (a living wage in our region) renewed every three years. This Affiliate Professor position was created early on in our department history, not just for the Department of Writing (although our department is the major beneficiary of these positions), but as a way to avoid adjunct faculty turnover and as an ethical response to adjunct faculty employment conditions. In addition to teaching a full load, mainly of first-year composition, Affiliates participate in a portfolio grading system within the university's required composition course. The university gets excellent and loyal teachers in first-year writing courses. As Affiliate faculty stay at the university for many years, they are part of the life of students in all those important ways connected to retention and persistence: as mentors, reference letter-writers, and informal advisors (see also Rhoades et al.'s report on the effects of professionalizing NTT faculty at Appalachian, albeit with different results, in this volume). There is a Director of First-Year Writing with reassigned time each semester to guide and oversee this program and provide professional development and support to all faculty teaching within it. The use of a WPA with a Ph.D. in the field of writing to supervise, facilitate teaching evaluations, organize training workshops, and report to the department unit head and serve as liaison to other stakeholders at the university has worked well for us. Laura Davies describes a “bottom-up” administrative model at Syracuse in her essay in this volume, which values the expertise of instructors—a model that reflects our concern with engaging the fulltime, non-tenure-track faculty teaching in the first-year writing program.

Our department's earliest strategic plans did not include staffing the first-year writing program as a parallel program with this exclusive use of Affiliate faculty, but this staffing strategy is now a working fact and has served us well. When arguing for the need for a new unit, we requested that half of every tenure-track faculty teaching load would be in first-year writing—which would have required and justified a very large number of new tenure-track lines. This was naïve and optimistic—but that was the air we breathed in those days. The university gave us new lines each year for many years in a row (some of these as replacements as faculty naturally come and go), but these lines merely helped us keep pace with the growth of the writing major, and first-year and other academic writing courses remained primarily the work of the full-time, non-tenure track Affiliate faculty. We have conceded to this reality; the Director of First-Year Writing

supervises these faculty reviews, guides the curriculum, and keeps those tenure-line faculty with Composition Studies interests and concerns connected to the program.

Thus, the first-year writing program is to some extent an independent faculty group within the department, a situation that is working pretty well, but not without some concerns. Affiliate faculty have no research or publishing requirements beyond normal expectations that they stay current in their fields, and no college or university-level service expectations. These requirements reflect the fact that unlike tenure-track faculty, they have no reassigned time for research and their salary; their entire workloads consist of teaching, and in the Department of Writing, that mainly includes first-year writing—a very limited range of courses. Thus, their work lives engage a whole different set of worries and concerns as compared to tenure-track faculty. Affiliate faculty were hired as expert teachers of first-year composition, not because of specific scholarly expertise in the areas of professional or creative writing. They are participants in university-wide teaching conferences, they are eligible for the same teaching and travel grants as tenure-track faculty, and they have presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication with tenure-line faculty and on their own. That said, their job description and commitment to the university is measured in different ways from tenure track faculty; consequently, they work in what may look and feel like a different department—one without advising, extensive extra-curricular engagement of students, or professional advising duties. Including Affiliate faculty in the department as primarily first-year writing instructors means knowing how to be inclusive and professional without exploiting this group and treating them as shadow-line tenured faculty.

In 10 years, turnover among Affiliate faculty has been rare. In practice, their three-year reviews ahead of renewable contracts function as professional development and mentoring opportunities, with contract renewal being nearly automatic. It would be very difficult to run a coherent program with the 25 or 30 itinerant part-time faculty that would be required without this full-time Affiliate position. And the people in those part-time adjunct positions would be stretched thin and suffer the effects of not making a livable wage.

The first-year writing program itself has been described elsewhere in various essays, articles and book chapters (Royer & Gilles, 1998). Its key curricular and programmatic features include Directed Self-Placement on the front end, Writing Center consultants present in each class throughout the semester, and portfolio-group team grading at the end of the term. Despite our profession's familiarity with the concept of "portfolio group grading," our approach at Grand Valley is unique. We are unaware of any other program that weekly

norms teams of teachers as graders for reliability over the course of the semester and then requires two- and three-reader agreement on student letter grades (not merely pass/fail) at the end of the term. Our program thus provides complete agency for incoming students as to their placement in developmental or the regular first-year writing course. At the end of the term, a group of five or so teachers of this class that have been grade-norming all semester using drafts from the students and finished portfolios from previous semesters determine the grade as a team for each student. The grading standard is in this way a very public standard, not based on a once-a-term workshop norming session or, worse, private, teacher-specific standard that allegedly adheres to a program rubric. Instead we have a two- sometimes three-reader grading group that is hyper-local to the five teachers' sections that has been communicating this achieved public grading standard back to these students in these sections throughout the semester. Grades in our programs are truly not about figuring out what the “teacher wants” but about what these “five teachers want” and by implication, “what the program wants” given especially that these groups change each semester.

Academic writing at Grand Valley is, from the point of view within the department, a highly valued program, but one that is not particularly integrated with the major and minor curricula. It serves an important and unique role in the university's General Education program as a course that all students are required to satisfy before graduation, and because it has a special grading system as outlined above. It has, of course, special connections to both the Supplemental Writing Skills (WAC/WID) program and the Writing Center, which are housed in a separate college. These programs have historically been directed by faculty from the Writing Department with specializations in composition and rhetoric. So academic writing is the primary way that the Writing department makes connections with faculty and students across the disciplines and from around the university. It is, in many ways, the public face of the Writing Department—the most easily visible side of what we do because it involves so many teachers, students, and credit hours. But it is only one aspect of life in the Writing Department.

CREATIVE WRITING

The inclusion of creative writing faculty and courses in the department and major curriculum has had a powerful influence on the development of our program over the last decade. The inclusion of this track in our department was contested on grounds related to tradition and, really, the very nature of creative writing. The conflict was resolved by allowing one of the creative writing faculty

who felt that creative writing could not be torn from the teaching of Shakespeare to remain in the English department and teach occasional classes for the new Writing department, which was responsible for staffing the classes. Another piece of this resolution was the curricular requirement that students in the Writing Department's creative writing emphasis were required to take a certain number of required or elective courses in literature, requirements that have since been abandoned (as have the English department's requirements in Writing for some tracks). The "letter of curricular agreement" that seemed so important when Writing sought to become independent, and which guided our curricular decisions, was quickly superseded by new concerns in both departments.

It may not be possible at every institution to conceive of creative writing as a part of a Writing Department rather than of English. But we think the potential is there if one considers the organization of learning outcomes, co-curricular programming, and shared faculty expertise around the production of texts—the common thread that ties together our courses, faculty, our students.

More than half of our majors identify themselves as creative writers. Creative writing in our unit has provided the opportunity to recruit more majors than we would have if creative writing had stayed a part of the English Department; indeed, when new students come to Grand Valley, they often think "writing major" means "future author or poet." Additionally, we've realized opportunities for collaboration in scholarship between academic, professional and creative writing as well as curricular initiatives that are enriched by the multiple disciplinary perspectives of the tenure-line faculty in our department.

The creative writing courses in our department include fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and playwriting. We offer intermediate and advanced workshops in all four genres. A "Writers Series" organized by our faculty invites several regional creative writers each year, and a student writing series is organized with monthly student readings. A student literary journal, *Fishbladder*, is the focus of a year-long effort and an annual unveiling event that caps off these students' experience each May. The creative writing students in the department have a strong cultural identity within the program. These students, perhaps even more so than the professional writing students, have benefited a great deal from the singular spotlight within an independent writing department having moved to center stage from their lives on the aesthetic curricular margins in the English department.

The new curricular space in Writing allowed us to double the number of workshop courses a creative writing student could take toward the BA in Writing. Each of the four genres has an intermediate and advanced workshop taken after the foundational "Introduction to Creative Writing." Creative writing students, like all Writing majors, take all four core courses: Writing with Style

(i.e., intro to genre, history of style—workplace, creative, nonfiction), a course built around Ben Yagoda's *The Sound on the Page*; Introduction to Professional Writing; Document Production and Design; and Introduction to Creative Writing.

Hiring creative writing faculty within this rich teaching and scholarly context has been rather easy. Perhaps a few job candidates over the years have balked at job prospects not in a traditional English department, but most MFAs or Ph.D.s in creative writing welcome the opportunity to teach in an undergraduate curriculum where many of the majors are in pursuit of creative writing courses, an opportunity to teach in multiple genres at both the intermediate and advanced workshop levels, and participate in a robust creative writing culture that is at the center of the department's mission.

PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Faculty with teaching and research interests in professional writing, technical writing, document design, writing in electronic environments and composing with multiple media are hired from a deep pool of national job candidates. This area of the writing major does not enroll as many students as the creative writing area, though students who emphasize this area of the curriculum find themselves on a well-defined job track. Students who gravitate toward professional writing courses have graduated to take positions in web content development, social media strategies, technical writing, nonprofit organizations, hospitals, and advertising firms. Of course like many students from liberal arts programs, they also find themselves working in what seem to be non-related fields such as sales or restaurants.

Whereas academic and creative writing have clear and traditional curricular focuses, our professional writing program has been much more in flux as we, like the fields of Rhetoric, Technical Communication, and Business Communication more generally, have tried to define curricular boundaries. To date we have developed a diverse curriculum under the banner of professional writing that reflects the interests and expertise of our faculty. Thus we offer coursework in writing for the web, writing in multiple media, introductory professional writing, writing in global contexts, business communication, magazine writing, genre theory (our capstone course), manuscript editing and preparation, and document production and design. We have intermediate and advanced courses in these various areas.

Our professional writing courses provide what we view as a twenty-first century focus to the writing major. Our intermediate and advanced "Writing for the Web" courses, for example, give students significant exposure to the Drupal™

content management platform, teaching students to build, design, and create content for the web. Although rooted in the humanities, this coursework offers many social and applied applications for students with a broad background in Writing Studies. Indeed, when we describe our major to students who are also considering advertising and public relations, journalism, or English, we draw attention to the advantages of a broad background in Writing Studies as opposed to the more narrow focus of journalism and other alternatives.

Our professional writing faculty have also created course work that is offered to non-majors as service courses or general education courses, classes that are not required for the writing major such as Business Communication and Writing in a Global Context: Culture, Technology, and Language Practices.

Writing faculty that teach the majors courses have MFAs or Ph.D.s in any number of areas—technical writing, professional writing, computers and writing, composition and rhetoric, creative writing—but many of them, despite their disciplinary specialization, have publications and experience that spans and defies easy categorization. As described below, our curriculum offers coursework in areas where there's not singular or degree-specific preparation or where such preparation might be too narrow for our undergraduate curriculum. So we offer courses in the history and development of style, intermediate and advanced magazine writing, genre theory, working with manuscripts, consulting with writers but we have yet to pitch an MLA ad targeted at these specific areas, several of which may not exist in Ph.D. programs as a singular area of study. Our hiring practices tend to favor job candidates with multiple areas of expertise over those with narrowly defined scholarly and pedagogical interests.

The material cause of our new department is found in the content that we teach. Not to be confused with Aristotle's metaphysical notion of "first cause," the material cause—that out of which our department is made—is nevertheless first and foundational any many respects. The content of academic, creative, and professional writing determines the kind of faculty we hire, the kind of students we serve, the kinds of things we talk about in department meetings. The course work, the matter of writing within these academic and professional boundaries, united our various concerns under the banner of writing. Our program provides students with a BA in Writing—not a BA in professional writing or a BA in creative writing. We are united by our common concern with teaching students to write well. Our pedagogy across academic, creative, and professional writing shares common concerns with invention, development, style, and correctness per prevailing convention. The core course in style and the capstone course in genre theory abstract from the particulars and focus on the social livelihood of all texts, aesthetic or functional. These common concerns help student and faculty both to remember what all textual production shares in common.

HOW WE MAKE IT WORK: SERVICE, TEACHING, SCHOLARSHIP

The means by which the Writing Department has developed over the last decade—the efficient causes, if you will—have relied on a practical understanding of faculty governance, thoughtful hiring practices, and special attention to the way that our diverse scholarly backgrounds unite us under the banner of “writing” as we described above. The rapid growth of our major is directly related to the unit’s commitment to service work around the university. And of the many things we have learned over the years, among the most important is that faculty trained in composition and rhetoric programs are prepared in unique ways to serve on college and university-level writing-related and faculty governance committees. We have learned a great deal about the importance of how we hire, physical space, political space, and curricular space as those things relate to a successful major through our collaborations with these university-wide programs and committees.

A discussion of our department’s efficient causes thus begins with the practical positioning of ourselves together in physical space (for very different result of this quest for space, see Rhoades et al., this volume). One serendipitous event involved a request for some faculty in English to move their offices to a space across campus from the rest of the departmental faculty. Of course, nobody wanted to move offices, but the Writing faculty volunteered—some instinct to develop solidarity was already at work. Working together in the same space, offices side-by-side, facilitated conversation about identity and vision. Our status as a department was still two years out, but it seemed inevitable to us already. Political space and curricular space, albeit abstract, followed suit. Communities have to share something in common and physical space was the beginning point for us.

Our department status within the college and university is signaled to job candidates when they see our occupation of a grouping of 30-some offices in one of the new buildings on campus. But this physical space is also an important part of our identity vis-à-vis other faculty on campus. Signage, for example, is another bone fide that plays an important role in the creation of identity and status (our self-styled department logo was nixed by Institutional Marketing). The point is, physical, political, and curricular space are all of a piece, and they all conspire to create something more concrete.

We both have worked our entire careers at this one university, but of course we talk with regional and national colleagues, we participate in national discussions, and we belong to organizations like the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the Conference on College Composition and Communication. This disciplinary identity is also political identity. All units on campus

care about writing to some extent—like they all care about critical thinking for example. But our identity has been developed in ways that emphasize our professional expertise, our ability to organize work and promote programs like the Writing Center. Our presence at Unit Head meetings and among college and university committees establishes but also creates space for our wide-ranging concerns about student writing inside and outside our department.

Our reason for being is not our service to other units, but we embrace service as an important component of our identity and ethos on campus. Although we have as much disciplinary justification as English or Statistics, we have not, like many of our national colleagues resisted the mantle of “service program” (see also Hjortshoj and Thaiss et al., this volume). Instead, we view the service role of first-year writing, our Business Communication course (which is required of students in several majors), and the service we can lend the university in writing program administration, as value-added features of our department that have given us a strong voice with the dean, the provost, Admissions, General Education, and among colleagues in other, unrelated academic departments who could otherwise care less about our creative and professional writing courses. Our responsibility for first-year writing on campus is not so interesting even to new Ph.D.s we seek to hire these days—and our colleagues in English are still probably breathing a big sigh of relief to have it removed from their purview—but this program with its importance to student success in any major is what brought us into the campus limelight.

We realize that a few Rhetoric and Composition specialists in a department of English faculty committed to various other programs like language and literature face an uphill battle. We were fortunate to establish our independence in a time of intense institutional growth and change. A department of Classics was also formed out of English at the same time as Writing; between the time the Writing Department was formed in 2000 and now, the number of students at Grand Valley has grown from 18,579 to over 25,000.

Once established, the growth of our department was fueled by a growing university, a growing major, and writing department faculty involvement in faculty governance. We could now bid for new faculty lines based on students’ curricular needs. Our service to the university has been established by our first-year writing program and courses like Business Communication. Our service also extends to our participation on the University Senate and other faculty governance committees; having a seat at Unit Head meetings; directing the WAC and writing center programs on campus (which are housed in a different college), and participating on committees related to space/facilities, General Education, and enrollment management. As readers familiar with WPA and Writing Centers probably know, there is a culture of service that accompanies these fields in

particular, and that service-oriented approach made it natural for us to participate in the life of the university and build our programs.

Hiring new faculty has been perhaps the single most identity-building endeavor in the emergence of our department. Defining positions, creating job ads, building interview teams, answering job candidate questions, selling our program during campus interviews, and integrating new faculty into the department is the means by which we have defined who we have become. And the common theme throughout this work has been that all the work we do is united under the banner of creating and producing written texts.

The production of written texts, and teaching students to produce all kinds of texts, is what distinguishes us from English, but also Journalism (with its professional focus), Advertising, Public Relations and other liberal arts and professional programs. The writing major curriculum allows electives to count toward the major from these related programs, and these programs also list our courses as requirements or electives in their majors. For example, Accounting, Business, Computer Science, and other programs require our 300-level Business Communication course.

Our general curricular concerns are rooted in the liberal arts of rhetoric and writing, but also in the craft tradition of creative writing. While there are centrifugal disciplinary forces that might someday cause the three-part disciplinary boundaries of professional, creative, and academic writing to seek their own independent department status, there are currently significant centripetal forces that keep these concerns in orbit around the concerns for how we create and build written texts.

In fact, it's this gravitational center—producing texts—that we tried to feature in redesigning the new writing major described in the next section. We wanted students not just to see how different disciplinary forces conceive of the work of the writer in different ways, but also to consider how those different considerations work together to shape who *they* are as writers.

In summary, the practical means or efficient cause of our becoming an independent unit can be tracked through a set of pragmatic decisions about physical space and abstract focus on political and curricular identity. But without a vision for what we would look like (an interest in formal cause) or why we would want to create such an entity as a new department (an interest in final cause), the practical efficient causes of our department would be floundering.

WHAT IS A WRITING MAJOR? WHAT HAVE WE AND OUR STUDENTS BECOME?

Students seeking a BA in Writing complete a series of modules reflecting a wide disciplinary set that includes multimodal composing, poetry/fiction/

drama/nonfiction workshops, magazine writing, editing manuscripts, and an array of interdisciplinary writing-related courses offered in other departments, such as grant writing, journalism, science writing, and professional writing in foreign languages. This curriculum helps students to put together a truly integrated writing major that draws upon the various writing arts. In terms of the heuristic used in this essay, the shape of our curriculum represents what we have become—and this formal cause helps explain how we have shaped this curriculum.

The initial curriculum emphasized the “creative” and “professional” writing tracks. But as we grew we came to realize it was in our own and our students’ best interests to not insist on these curricular containers. We noticed, for one, that our students in both tracks frequently requested substitutions so that they could apply coursework from the other side of the aisle so to speak. We noticed too that students who emphasized creative writing often ended up looking for work using the practical skills in document design or web writing learned in the professional writing courses. Our surveys and discussions with students indicated that these boundaries may have meant more to us than to them. In 2011 we began a major revision of our curriculum, which is now in place. The curricula are compared in Figure 1.1.

With the new curriculum, our students now build their own emphasis that may look like a creative or professional writing track—or more likely, something in between. These nine modules give students 84 theoretically possible combinations. We explored in depth a wide range of these 84 combinations and are confident that each combination provides a thorough and in-depth scope of learning. Indeed, this concern about a “grab bag” approach is one reason why students are not allowed to simply pick any set of core courses to satisfy the modular requirement, but must instead always choose two courses in each module. We could add more courses to a module in the future, the goal will be to create ways for students to fashion a major that includes two-course depth in an area. The 84 theoretical combinations are actually nuanced variations on more typical patterns of coursework. In practice, for example, our advising model may use the following combinations to illustrate how students might choose to move through the modules and electives, and these four examples below illustrate how the module requirement can be “themed” to a student’s academic or professional aspirations (see bold headings with roman numerals). The examples also illustrate how the elective opportunities outside our unit can fit with our own program. Although all students take the same four foundation courses, our core, they might construct a track that looks something like the module selections shown in Figure 1.1.

I. MFA Future Focus:

Reading as Writers

WRT 310 Intermediate Style & Technique

WRT 410 Advanced Style & Technique

Poetry Workshops

WRT 320 Intermediate Poetry Workshop

WRT 420 Advanced Poetry Workshop

Fiction Workshops

WRT 330 Intermediate Fiction Workshop

WRT 430 Advanced Fiction Workshop

Interdisciplinary Electives

ENG 320 Studies in Poetry

ENG 330 Studies in Fiction

II. Freelance Writing:

Drama Workshops

WRT 340 Intermediate Drama Workshop

WRT 440 Advanced Drama Workshop

Creative Nonfiction Workshops

WRT 360 Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop

WRT 460 Advanced Nonfiction Workshop

Magazine Writing

WRT 365 Magazine Writing I

WRT 465 Magazine Writing II

Interdisciplinary Electives

CJR 256 News Reporting I

CAP 321 Media Relations Writing

III. The Editorial Desk:

Reading as Writers

WRT 310 Intermediate Style & Technique

WRT 410 Advanced Style & Technique

Writing with Technologies

WRT 353 Visual Rhetoric and Document Design

WRT 455 Multimodal Composing

Working with Writers

WRT 307 Consulting with Writers

WRT 308 Working with Manuscripts

Interdisciplinary Electives

CJR 256 News Reporting I

CJR 270 News Reporting II

IV. Corporate Living:

Writing for the Web

WRT 351 Writing for the Web

WRT 451 Advanced Writing for the Web

Writing with Technologies

WRT 353 Visual Rhetoric and Document Design

WRT 455 Multimodal Composing

Working with Writers

WRT 307 Consulting with Writers

WRT 308 Working with Manuscripts

Interdisciplinary Electives

CAP 220 Fundamentals of Public Relations

PA 335 Grant Writing

Figure 1.1. Curricula for Creative and Professional Writing Tracks.

Although we are still in just the second year of this new curriculum, we are already seeing the ways in which it benefits our students, and we can look ahead to how it might reinforce or shape students' extracurricular engagement. For example, we are seeing our students take very different kinds of paths through the curriculum. Some are using the increased number of professional writing courses to further specialize in that area. Other students keep their course choices rather balanced between creative writing and professional writing. And still other students gravitate to those courses that are on the boundaries between creative and professional writing: nonfiction and magazine writing, for example, and the style and technique courses.

After implementing this new curriculum, a recent assessment conducted by colleagues in our department found that students are already quite engaged in publishing their work. ("Publishing" was defined for this purpose very broadly, including things like disseminating poetry and prose, creating websites, and producing documents that circulate in workplace situations). They found that 89% of students enrolled in the writing major's capstone course in Fall 2012 and Winter 2013 had already published at least one piece while at Grand Valley. They further found that motivations for publishing came from multiple directions, among them:

- Wanting to have their work read by a larger audience (75%);
- Being motivated by the potential to earn money for writing (43%);
- Because publication was a requirement in a course (43%) or part of a service learning project for a course (13%);
- Because they wanted a publication credit on their growing resumes (77%).

What we notice about these reasons for publishing is that they span the sorts of needs and desires that arise from students wanting to make a living at writing professionally to students wanting to enter graduate school, or students simply wanting to live a life in which writing is a part of their artistic, civic, or professional engagement. Our new curriculum takes advantage of faculty members' interests and specializations and gives students a wide range of options and models that allow them to follow leads to these understandings about what writers do—and why.

In developing a program that is general and not so professionally focused as say Journalism or even Advertising and Public Relations, we are following the lead of our conceptual vision to equip students as writers, not as journalists or marketing professionals or technical writers or poets or children's book authors—yet we believe our students are competitive in these various job markets. We have a former newspaper reporter and copy editor on our faculty who notes that

many of his journalism colleagues over the years came out liberal arts programs other than journalism—English, American Studies—and that these hires are often preferred because of the strong critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that graduates of such programs exhibit. Our many students in technical writing jobs tell us that their employers liked their broad background in writing. In this regard our curriculum is not driven so much by a theory or even a pedagogy or the job market. Rather, the shape of the curriculum is driven by of liberal arts vision and belief in the power of general concepts and, with some qualification, the transferability of writing skills. Our students that emphasize creative writing and avoid technology-related courses like multi-modal design probably don't transfer their skill as lyricists to document design. But smart students make abstract connections, and our belief in the power of rhetoric to inform practice across genres—particularly given our rhetorical view of genre—does, we believe, equip students for a wide variety of jobs ground them in a solid tradition of scholarship and craft.

Our capstone course, *Genre and Writing*, immerses students in the notion of genre as social construct emerging from rhetorical function. The theory of genre to emerge from Writing Studies and beyond over the last 20 or 30 years has made us suspicious of categories like “creative writer,” “technical writer,” “magazine writer,” “fiction writer,” and for that matter, “poet.” Few of our faculty have a singular academic focus, except maybe when they first arrive out of graduate school. Exposure to teaching in our curriculum broadens their writerly horizons just as it does our students. We do try to make a distinction in our curriculum between magazine writing and creative nonfiction, but the distinction often seems arbitrary. We observe and prefer to believe that students pursue livelihoods and careers less on the container model and more on the model of practice and social function. Our students in creative writing workshops are producing artistic texts and thinking about their aesthetic and craft. Our courses in *Intermediate and Advanced Style and Technique* are courses not in reading as literary critics, but in reading as writers curious about how writers build texts, affect style, shape texts for creative, rhetorical purposes.

Those who intend to pursue an MFA in creative writing might stick as close as possible to this kind of learning. But many creative writing students also want to learn about writing for magazines, blogging, and document design—and to gain experience in the writing marketplace where writing skills earn money. Some want to push their art into digital forms and take our course in multi-modal composing. Many of us teach our capstone course grounded in genre theory and perhaps have come to lose respect for the received container model that dominates the MFA curriculum as well as the curricula of the Ph.D. in English or Writing Studies (despite the inclusion of course work in rhetorical genre). We

are teaching undergraduates who are not yet specialists in any field, but rather liberally educated in the rhetorical tradition, and whether they graduate with interests in poetry or web writing, we expect those interests to soon develop into something new.

THE ADVANTAGE OF THE WRITING MAJOR AMONG THE LIBERAL ARTS: WHAT'S THE POINT?

Why students feel motivated to publish—the range of reasons—reflects an ongoing conversation in our department—perhaps even a tension—between career-oriented notions of the writing major and the idea of the writing major as environment for students to start living the life of a writer. In simple terms, this can be expressed as the difference between professional writing courses and technical communication/professional writing faculty's orientations to the writing major on the one hand, and creative writing courses and creative writing faculty's orientations to the major on the other. This tension can be problematic as well as productive. But as discussed above, it's a tension on the wane and seems less interesting to us with each passing year.

Students who graduate with a BA in Writing are looking for professional lives and careers in a wide range of fields. They may compete for jobs with students in philosophy or English or History, but they finally define themselves in terms of their expertise as writers. Their job prospects may include book editor, publicist, or website content strategist—or, like their humanities counterparts, they make work as a teacher of English abroad, someone in the banking industry, or a community activist. The students' final goals could include getting a job that puts to use this rich range of interests and skills, or in living a writer's life in the off-hours. Some of our students have gone on to pursue creative writing in MFA programs and now have teaching positions in universities in a variety of fields.

Maybe what surprised us the most in our efforts thirteen years ago to form an independent department of writing were the early conversations with colleagues outside our department that required us to defend Writing Studies as a bona fide member of the "liberal arts" (see also Rhoades et al., this volume). Somewhere along the way of this two-and-a-half thousand year journey from antiquity, an "education befitting a free person" has, in the minds of a few anyway, come to exclude or diminish the importance of practical skills. The core liberal arts—grammar, rhetoric, and logic—took on many additional purposes over the years, later to evolve into something more like what we'd now call the humanities. Yet the education needed to participate as a Greek citizen did indeed hinge on one's practical skill at managing discourse with rhetorical effectiveness.

While one of the effects of becoming an independent writing department is

that we are better able to realize the goal of helping students to become engaged citizens through rhetorical effectiveness—the goal of a liberal education—we’ve also been able to stoke the “professional” side of things, too. Or put differently, we believe we’ve found ways to integrate liberal education and professional purposes. Our students are more apt to be oriented toward finding internships, and employers can grasp that a writing degree is good preparation for practical workplace needs. A writing degree makes it easy to point students into fields where writing is the main thing they’ll do and where producing texts is their main responsibility. We come from and celebrate our liberal arts roots, but we also understand how professional and practical work can be developed in our program and that our students graduate with the benefit of this two-fold ideal. That ideal, then, is the final cause that helps explain how our department came to be.

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