

CHAPTER 2

AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE: CURRICULUM DESIGN AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN A CANADIAN IWP

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In *A Field of Dreams*, the authors gave a narrative account of their Canadian writing program, which gained independence from the English department at the University of Winnipeg in 1995 (Turner & Kearns, 2002). We concluded the account by outlining two program initiatives: the development of a major in Rhetoric and Communications, and an application for departmental status. Both have subsequently come to fruition (the former in 2002, the latter in 2006). In this essay we examine the interaction and consequences of these developments, concentrating on four issues crucial to Writing Program Administration: student enrolment, labor issues, faculty engagement, and institutional status. Our main argument is that the success of our program in each of these matters has resulted not so much from the presence of a major per se as from the particular design of our major, especially insofar as that design responded to the felt need among faculty at all ranks for intellectual challenges and professional opportunities. Our position affirms that attentiveness to local circumstances may be crucial to the long-term sustainability of IWPs.

As our title makes clear, the discussion will be framed from a Canadian perspective. To a much greater extent than in the United States, attitudes towards writing instruction in Anglo-Canadian universities have been dominated by Arnoldian traditions in British higher education, which emphasize the appreciation of literature rather than the development of practical, productive skills. Canada has as a result no FYW tradition, and until quite recently, Anglo-Canadian universities have offered few graduate programs in rhetoric or writing, and indeed, very few writing programs at any level (see MacDonald, Procter & Williams, this volume). In the absence of strong normative national traditions and models for writing instruction, local circumstances have played an important role in shaping the character of our IWP at the University of Winnipeg, the

design of our major, and our handling of the issues listed above. Our program has frequently turned to American IWPs for strategic and structural options in the processes of inventing and re-inventing itself; and its efforts have always been driven by goals that our American colleagues share—above all, by the goals of avoiding production/analysis binaries and sustaining connections between writing pedagogy and rhetorical studies. We therefore think it likely that our program, problems, and chosen solutions will, despite the Canadian context, seem relatively familiar to our readers.

The first section of our essay describes this context through a compressed narrative of our IWP, beginning with our independence in 1995. Included are brief sketches of our undergraduate major and our degree/diploma program in Communications, offered jointly with a local two-year college. The second section then reports on resource issues, particularly the funding of the major, which was approved only after we had mounted strong arguments to University Senate and government authorities that our program was fiscally responsible. The following four sections then take up the issues described above.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though it has since become a mid-sized university of nearly 10,000 students and offers several graduate programs, the University of Winnipeg was a relatively small, primarily undergraduate institution focused on the liberal arts when, in 1986, its Senate approved the Writing Program. By fall of 1987, the program's seven-member faculty, operating out of the English Department, began offering the first-year courses that met the University of Winnipeg's writing requirement, newly instituted to respond to concerns about student writing that were at that time widespread across Canada and to support the university's access mandate. The initiative was unique in Canadian universities, which have no tradition of "first-year comp" and have more often submerged writing instruction in a first-year literature course or (given the general hostility to writing instruction of English Department members strongly committed to an Arnoldian approach) pushed it outside the liberal arts to courses in professional schools like Engineering or Business (see Hubert, 1994; Graves & Graves, 2006, especially Johnson, 2006, and Brooks, 2006). As Smith notes, because "Canadian composition does not share a unified site of research, inquiry, and teacher training," it "lacks a strong institutional presence" (2006, pp. 320–321). Thus the University of Winnipeg felt—rightly, the authors would argue—that it was being innovative and bold in instituting a writing requirement for all students, in framing that requirement not as remedial but as an essential part of a liberal arts degree, and in anticipating that future WID requirements would further the prominence of writing in every

student's academic program. Certainly the resources devoted to the endeavor support the university's claim to a unique commitment; by 1991, the number of full-time faculty members in the program, all on continuing or tenure-track appointments, had grown to ten. (That total would eventually reach thirteen.)

The authors have written elsewhere of the Writing Program's early development and of the curricular and administrative challenges highlighted in 1993 reviews (Kearns & Turner 1997; Turner & Kearns 2002, 2006). Similar to those of Everett and of Schendel and Royer (this volume), our analysis here focuses on the period following our separation from the English Department in 1995. That autonomy was just one of a series of changes that resulted from Internal and External Reviews of the Program. For eighteen months after the reviews were conducted, the entire faculty of the Writing Program met every second week with administrators to grapple with the issues raised by the reviews and to determine our way forward. One decision was the dean's alone: that the Writing Program would become not the Department of Rhetoric our external reviewers recommended, but instead a "Centre for Academic Writing" (hereafter CAW)—a distinction that was relatively subtle, but would have consequences, as we discuss below. The prospect of granting us departmental status, which would allow us to develop our own curriculum, raised fears we would abandon our first-year mandate. As the Internal Review Committee Report put it, "some elements of the present WP which serve broad university goals . . . might be neglected or even abandoned within a separate departmental structure" (De Long, 1993, p. 43). In short, caution had prevailed.

Nevertheless we would function, in most respects, as if the CAW were in fact a department. As we left English, we took with us the budget line that had been dedicated to the teaching of writing, a Writing Centre and a Computer Writing Lab, a peer tutorial system involving courses cross-listed with Education, and a "Rhetoric stream" of several upper-level courses. (In the earliest incarnation of the Writing Program, the only upper-level writing course available had been taught by English faculty, but two to three years before we separated, Writing Program faculty had been invited to develop a stream of five upper-level courses: Professional Style and Editing, Rhetorical Criticism, Modern Rhetorical Theory, Orality and Literacy, and Rhetoric in the Disciplines. These would form the core of our eventual major.) Members of the CAW selected a Director, whose responsibilities mirrored those of a Department Chair and were thus defined in the next *Collective Agreement*, and set up the committee structure common to University of Winnipeg departments.

Administrative reform was matched by curricular renovation—though because we were a Centre rather than a Department, the extent of this renovation was constrained by decanal oversight. Before the reviews, those students

who had to meet the university's writing requirement (some were exempted due to high entering grades) did so for the most part with a single one-term course; an additional preparatory course was required of students who had entered with low high school grades or had been identified by a cumbersome placement process as needing additional time to develop their writing abilities to a desirable level. Both courses relied on a common curriculum to which all faculty members were expected to conform. Our revisions introduced "Academic Writing," a course offered in multiple sections and various curricular incarnations. Some were full-year, now to be chosen by students who believed they would benefit from additional time rather than required. Some of these extended sections were designated for English-as-an-Additional-Language (EAL) students. Most, though, were half-courses, subtitled in such a way as to guide student self-placement (introduced less deliberately, but for similar reasons to the process described by Royer & Gilles, 1998). Sections focused on discipline areas (Humanities, Social Science, Natural Science) allowed for more specialized writing instruction than did the more general Multidisciplinary sections, which were intended for students not yet sure of what their major would be. The most specific were those sections linked to introductory courses in departments such as History and Sociology, later Environmental Studies, Biology, or Conflict Resolution Studies.

This redesign responded not only to diverse student needs and interests, but to other institutional factors. While the experience of getting the Writing Program up and running quickly had forged considerable "team spirit" and unanimity in the late 1980s, consensus around the common curriculum had been fractured by several factors, including the arrival of faculty who had not participated in those early years and (as in the field more generally) shifting attitudes towards the teaching of writing as a generalizable skill. The new options accommodated differing pedagogical convictions and in some cases, stimulated new research interests in the teaching of science writing or effective assignments for linked sections. As the disciplinary landscape had altered, so too had the institutional context, and curricular revision needed to take into account such factors as the waning of early enthusiasm for Writing in the Disciplines, for reasons that will be familiar to our colleagues: too much commitment of faculty time needed, too few resources or rewards for those who interested in developing WID courses, loss of the early stimulus provided by workshops and visiting experts. CAW faculty could not assume responsibility for sustaining this initiative, but more specialized writing instruction at the first year level could do something to lessen the gap created by the absence of WID courses in the university at large.

Another opportunity came our way from our former Chair. Fortunately, our separation from the English Department had been cordial and our potential

appreciated by a Chair who had himself been one of the few English faculty members to teach writing. As a result, when he was approached by a local community college that offers a two-year diploma in Creative Communications, he recognized—as few others could have done, at that point—a potential complement to the work of the CAW. He asked our Director to join the working group that eventually developed a cooperative venture between the two institutions, a Joint Program in Communications (JPC) that drew on the limited CAW courses available, amplified by the much more extensive offerings of the English Department. As originally designed, the JPC assigned block transfer credit of 45 hours for the completed diploma (which it placed in the middle years), and required students to take 75 credit hours of university courses, among which were first-year courses in English and in Academic Writing, one English course (Canadian Literature), two CAW half-courses (Professional Style and Editing, Rhetorical Criticism), and a range of elective courses in Communications drawn from several departments. Approved and launched in 1998, it looked something like this:

Year 1: 30 credit hours at the University of Winnipeg

Years 2 & 3: 2-year diploma in Creative Communications, with concentrations in Journalism, Broadcast Production, Advertising, and Public Relations (15 university credit hours, taken in evening and/or spring classes)

Year 4: 30 credit hours at the University of Winnipeg

That unusual back-and-forth design was intended to integrate the college's specialized training with the university's broader liberal arts education. Conceptualized as part of the final year but not developed was a Capstone Seminar intended to encourage critical reflection on students' earlier work placement and Independent Professional Project (part of their diploma studies). That seminar was to be designed and taught by CAW faculty, and as originally conceptualized, would have had two effects: increasing the integrative nature of the program and involving us more fully in the program. Though a failure on the first level, the course taught us—as the following sections indicate—significant lessons about curricular design, student interest, and faculty engagement.

The JPC was instantly popular; applications to the program increased from 73 students in 1999–2000 to 121 two years later. Nevertheless, it required considerable revision following its five-year review, during which surveys of students and faculty uncovered dissatisfaction with several elements of the program. Among them was its structure. As it turned out, the back and forth movement from one institution to another gave students little opportunity to familiarize

themselves with the culture of the university, and the central positioning of the diploma emphasized its “hands-on, career-ready” focus at the expense of liberal arts studies. Ready to embark on their first jobs once they received their diplomas, students were reluctant to return to the university and not much in the mood to engage in academic theorizing or critical reflection. This was especially disheartening for the CAW faculty who put considerable energy into developing and teaching the Capstone Seminar, but the lesson we took away from that experience was a valuable one: when structural demands predominate over student interest and faculty expertise, no one gains. The redesign eliminated the seminar, placed university coursework at the front end, and increased the proportion of CAW courses (at the expense of English) within the slightly reduced 72 credit hours to be completed at the university.

Relying on CAW courses to expand options for JPC students would have been impossible in 1998. But five years later, the situation was very different. By this time we had, following their approval by the University Senate and by the Council on Post-Secondary Education (COPSE), begun to offer three- and four-year BAs in Rhetoric and Communications, a process that entailed the development of additional upper-level courses that could now meet the needs of JPC students as well as majors. The relationship was, and continues to be, a symbiotic one. Though the idea of a major had originated much earlier—indeed, the “rhetoric stream” had been designed for students who might pursue such a specialization, though at that time it was imagined as being offered within an English degree—the experience of designing and delivering the JPC enhanced our understanding of the kinds of students who might want to study with us. Now independent, moreover, we were able to develop the major without the kinds of compromises that, as Balzhiser and McLeod (2010) note, may derive from departmental politics and pressures.

When launched, the JPC was the only opportunity for students to take communications courses, the only option for students who wanted to study and produce a wider range of texts than they would encounter in English courses, and its success confirmed what we had suspected: that there was an audience for a discipline not to that point represented in Manitoba’s three public universities. Some students, we discovered, were taking the JPC for this reason alone, not because they were aspiring journalists or public relations specialists. Anything but reluctant to engage rhetorical theory and analysis, they wanted more of the intellectual demands their university courses were making on them. Getting to know them through the Joint Program meant we could keep their interests and goals in mind as we developed the major. By the time we had done so and proposed that major to the university’s senate, moreover, our ethos had been strengthened by association with the remarkable success of the JPC.

Rhetoric and Communications is a more traditional major, one of a number taken by students at the University of Winnipeg for a three-year or four-year bachelor of arts degree. In advising students which program of study they should choose, we emphasize that the JPC prepares for a specific career while Rhetoric and Communications offers a broader liberal arts background stressing critical inquiry. The two avenues are not mutually exclusive, though, and our classes are likely to include students pursuing both options as well as those still deciding which is right for them. Far from disregarding “practical skills,” our program—in keeping with the rhetorical tradition—values them, but only insofar as they make attainable more important goals. As we argued in our formal proposal, “rhetoric [as a discipline] has traditionally taught communicative skills as a means to an end: to help students contribute to the life of their communities, to make them more judicious critics of language, more influential crafters of it—in short, better citizens.” The curriculum we developed was an attempt to fit into this tradition, to make students informed critical analysts and practitioners of communicative acts. It sought to do so by balancing courses that concentrate on text production (writing, speaking, and editing, for the most part; see also Schendel & Royer, this volume) with those that concentrate on theory and the analysis of a wide range of rhetorical acts.

The major that resulted is, to use Balzhiser and McLeod's categories, a “professional/rhetorical” rather than a “liberal arts” writing major. As noted, we were under no pressure to include English literature or creative writing courses, but the design of our major *was* influenced by local circumstances. Among these are the presence and popularity of the province's three-year degree, a fact that limits the number of courses many students take with us. Together with our high proportion of part-time students, it also meant that our major could not assume a cohort of students in any given year or be too rigidly sequenced. The design we developed is instead centered on the first-year course in Academic Writing and several core courses at the upper level. For both three- and four-year degrees, the latter are Rhetorical Criticism, Professional Style and Editing, and Contemporary Communication Theories; for the four-year degree, an additional core course, on qualitative research methods, is required. Beyond this, each student must take at least one course from each of four groups: 1) Rhetoric; 2) Written and Oral Communication; 3) Specialized Communication; and 4) Media, Communication, and Society. Given some course additions and deletions over the past decade, 27 courses are now available for students taking the major, supplemented by two (Politics and the Mass Media; Mass Communication and Popular Culture) delivered by other departments.

This design was the result of a complex balancing act among various interests. It was an attempt simultaneously to appeal to a government-appointed

agency for approval and funding, to persuade our academic colleagues that the first-year mandate would not be abandoned, to attract students to the program, and to ensure, if possible, that the house we built was one within which we could dwell happily for years. It is currently under revision by the department curriculum committee, but in general it remains at this point much the same as it was in 2002, when first delivered by CAW. A guiding principle remains the concept of “reflective practice”; this, as we will argue in the sections following, has helped to establish a set of practices and an ethos that has continued to reward faculty and appeal to students.

RESOURCES

In managing existing resources to develop the two programs described above and in drawing additional resources to sustain them, we began with some distinct advantages. Most prominent among them was the initial hiring of a cohort of faculty members sharing a commitment that would be honed through the challenging experiences of program development, review, and renovation—the “critical mass” that Lowe and Macauley advocate in their discussion of the undergraduate writing major (2010) and that emerging interdisciplinary programs like Women’s Studies have also discovered is essential to long-term success. Had we never developed a major or become a department, our students would still have benefited from the extraordinary fact of 10 full-time faculty members with long experience in the teaching of writing (see also Hjortshoj, Schendel & Royer, and Thaiss et al., this volume, for the role of hiring practices).

But that teaching capacity was, in 1995, primarily devoted to first-year courses that met the University of Winnipeg’s writing requirement, the mandate (as we have observed above) that our internal reviewers were anxious to sustain. We needed to find ways to stretch our resources while continuing to meet that mandate. A partial solution was student self-placement, a change that resulted in many fewer students opting for a six-credit-hour course than would in the past have been assigned to a two-course sequence (results similar to those reported by Royer & Gilles, 1998). Resources devoted to our peer tutorial system were also reduced. We eliminated courses on writing center administration, reduced the array of tutoring courses to a single course, and adapted its curriculum; instead of incorporating tutoring as a practicum component, instruction was offered in a more concentrated timeframe and students who passed the course were hired as peer tutors to work beyond the end of the course. Overall, these changes resulted in a considerable net gain of teaching resources that could now be directed towards developing and offering more upper-level courses.

Interestingly, debate over these measures was limited largely to CAW faculty. Our internal reviewers, though concerned about the mandate, had expressed the view that some students were taking longer than required to meet the writing requirement, and both they and our external reviewers had recommended streamlining the tutoring courses. Within the CAW, those in favor pointed out that an expanded, paid tutoring system meant expanded assistance for weaker students—and thus a safety net for students who may have been overly optimistic about their readiness for Academic Writing in its shorter version. Other advantages were more speculative. Many of us believed that expanding our upper-level offerings, especially if these courses proved to be popular, would encourage more positive attitudes to writing even at the first-year level, making it more likely that students would succeed and certainly making the teaching of academic writing more satisfying.

To a considerable extent, the results of our strategies have been positive. We do not wish, though, to paint too rosy a picture. Even with the changes outlined above, we were not able to propose as full a range of courses as traditional departments typically offer, and the design of the major needed to take this into account. The nature of Group 4 (Media, Communication, Society) allowed us to take advantage of courses taught by colleagues in the social sciences, extending our offerings into more interdisciplinary terrain nevertheless relevant to our students' program. More enduring problems have been our greater dependence on contract faculty and our class sizes. All sections of Academic Writing are capped by the dean at 28 students, and our upper-level courses at 25–35, numbers significantly above those our American colleagues reported in a September 2013 discussion on the FREEWRIT listserv. Increases in class size are certainly regrettable, but they are not unique to our department. They have resulted largely from institutional pressures—a commitment to increasing student numbers and a more recent decrease in professorial workload—and are thus felt by all departments. Indeed, our colleagues in English or History (not to mention the social sciences) face much larger first-year classes than we do, creating a kind of special status for writing instruction that makes us cautious in our arguments for the standards articulated by NCTE and other disciplinary bodies.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

The major was launched to immediate success. Convocation 2004 included the recipient of the first BA in Rhetoric and Communications, as part of a double major for a student who, having already taken many of our courses, was able quickly to meet the new degree requirements. The number of students choosing to major with us has been strong in the years since, underpinning the argument

for departmental status, as did the popularity of the Joint Program in Communications and the quality of our graduates. In the dozen years since the first combined degree/diploma (JPC) was conferred, a total of 213 students have completed the BA in Communications; in the 10 years that the BA in Rhetoric and Communications has been available, 34 students have received the four-year degree (5 as part of a double major) and 63 students the three-year degree (30 as part of a double major). “Communications,” a category that includes majors as well as graduates of the Joint Program in Communications, now appears as one of the top 10 majors at the University of Winnipeg.

We are not arguing that numbers should be the main justification for a discipline’s continuing existence in the academy. With other humanities colleagues, we disagreed with a recent, fortunately unsuccessful proposal at our institution to amalgamate the departments of Classics, Philosophy, and Religious Studies because of their small size. The threat posed to these long-established disciplines was quickly met by faculty support. Our department, by contrast, is very young; indeed, the institutional status of the “writing major” is still developing, our discipline still emerging. This is particularly so in Canada, where we lack graduate programs of the type that have raised the discipline’s American profile. What we are arguing, then, is that at this early stage, student numbers are one valuable measure of our new major’s health, supplementing the message that faculty members’ scholarly activities can send to colleagues and deans while they are still getting acquainted with our department and discipline.

Partly because we knew numbers would be especially significant as an early measure of our success, our COPSE proposal had included faculty release time for recruitment and advising for the first three years. The cost was small, the gains considerable. Other factors too worked to our advantage. We knew we would have to prepare explanations for audiences unfamiliar with the term “rhetoric” itself (a task our faculty advisor took on with a brochure on the new major), but we discovered—happily—that students majoring with us felt that there was something special about this new field, that they had “cracked the code” of a new way of seeing and talking. Our very novelty, then, held appeal. But it was an appeal bolstered by reassuring evidence of the practical benefits of studying with us, and here, too, participation in the Joint Program had advantages; Red River College publishes annual statistics about graduate employment rates, so students in the major are aware of opportunities in the field, whichever path they take towards a degree. (More than 80% of Creative Communications graduates find employment in related occupations, according to the College Graduate Satisfaction and Employment Report. Though the University of Winnipeg does not keep comparable records, we know that graduates of our three- and four-year BAs have found employment in edit-

ing, journalism, and public relations, and have gone on to a variety of post-graduate programs, such as communications, creative writing, cultural studies, and law.)

The complementary design of our major and the revised JPC keeps this interaction in mind. Students can meet several of the requirements for the Joint Program with the major's foundational and group courses, leaving open, for some time at least, the possibility of pursuing either a BA in Rhetoric and Communications or the combined degree/diploma. The latter appeals to many students (and parents) who find its career-ready focus attractive, but some students who enter with the Joint Program in mind are drawn to rhetorical study for its own sake and decide to remain at the university for a full three or four years. The major's emphasis on "reflective practice," moreover, means that this decision does not mean jettisoning practical skill development for abstract theorizing. Our *Calendar* entry declares that we teach "both practical communicative skills and critical thinking about communicative texts and contexts," and the balance has drawn a wide range of students, including those who combine our courses with majors in other areas.

LABOR ISSUES

The appeal of independence is not hard to understand when we consider some of the themes that haunt the literature on writing program administration, among them the isolation of the writing instructor(s) within an English Department, the hierarchy elevating literary study above Rhetoric and Composition, and the role of writing faculty as the workhorse of the academy, to use Schuster's analogy. But recent scholarship has critiqued the assumption that independence will lay these ghosts to rest. Scott, in fact, argues the contrary:

the emergence of rhetoric and composition as a distinct scholarly field has done little to address the fundamental terms of teaching labor in undergraduate writing. This is true not only in traditionally-structured English departments, but also in freestanding writing programs. (2007, p. 88)

He and Ianetta (2010) both cite statistics gathered by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce to indicate that independence has done little to redress historical inequities. Scott notes, for instance, that "93% of all introductory classes in freestanding writing programs were taught by non-tenure-track faculty" and that of the nine fields covered in the survey, such programs "had the lowest proportion of tenure-track faculty (14.6%)" (2007, p. 88). Ianetta concludes that there is little evidence to support assertions that emancipation from English

will bring institutional power, disciplinary prestige, and professional self-esteem (2010). (See also Johnson, this volume.)

In our own situation, certainly, independence alone was no panacea. When we left the English Department, we took with us a two-tier system of instructors and professors that held the potential for duplicating inequities we, like disciplinary colleagues elsewhere, had felt within English. And our university is no exception to recent trends that have seen postsecondary education become increasingly reliant on contract faculty, exacerbating the danger of facing a disadvantaged or disenfranchised tier of first-year instructors.

The dangers of this situation, however, are lessened by the fact that we are governed by *Collective Agreements*. Until very recently, for instance, instructors' teaching loads were the same as those of members of the professoriate, and professors' course loads were reduced without increasing those of instructors. Still, we know that secure employment on "the teaching track" is not enough; the benefits of job security may be outweighed by working conditions that limit curricular variety or participation in department decision-making, as was evident in several 2013 CWPA sessions on the new category of permanent non-tenured faculty (see also Rhoades et al., this volume). It clearly matters that our instructors can apply for research/study leave and compete for institutional research and travel funding. Some have taken educational leaves to pursue additional master's programs or doctoral studies. Professional development is further rewarded by opportunities to develop and offer upper-level courses (see Faculty Engagement, below) and by potential conversion to the professoriate. Nor are instructors alone in having their rights protected by our Faculty Association; contingent faculty have been organized since 2007, with rights of first refusal and a significant increase to the per-course stipend being among recent improvements made to their situation (for an American union context, see Davies, this volume).

These factors, we believe, have helped to ensure that the teaching of first-year writing courses does not become a second-class burden. The institutional context plays a broader role, as well. The University of Winnipeg has long prided itself on its focus on teaching, its small classes, and the chances it gives undergraduate students to work directly with their professors. Though the institutional mission may be under siege to shrinking budgets and pressure to increase enrolment, it has created an environment that encourages a shared commitment to first-year teaching—for us, loyalty to our original mandate. Professors may teach a higher proportion and greater range of upper-level courses, but all continuing faculty in our department teach sections of Academic Writing, usually at least two a year. As a result, in the upcoming year about 61% of single-term sections and 40% of full-year sections will be taught by full-time faculty with continuing appointments—percentages a good deal higher than those cited by Scott.

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

The dimension of our IWP that has benefited most from the design and delivery of our major is the engagement of our faculty. To the authors, “faculty engagement” seems less like calculated “buy in” (as the prevailing administrative metaphor calls it) than passionate connection. It is likely to be evoked and can only be sustained by an academic pursuit that is significant, complex, and challenging. An engaging course or research subject brings the teacher-researcher pleasure repeatedly over time, as s/he returns to it and discovers new patterns and potentialities.

Engagement of this kind may be the norm for academics with graduate students, sustained research programs, and a varied curricular diet; but for many of our IWP faculty—most had taught only required first-year writing courses before 2002—it was an attitude that, increasingly, needed to be summoned up, and it was becoming ever more difficult to sustain. The opportunity to deliver a major changed all that. For instructors and professors alike, the challenge of preparing new courses and the experience of teaching advanced students who had chosen to study writing and rhetoric were, in and of themselves, personally and professionally regenerative. For our professors, these experiences also piqued research interests, leading to more conference presentations, publications, research funding, and ultimately, a series of promotions. All of this has meant significant improvement in the lives of our faculty. Our students and our institution have clearly gained from these developments, and so too has our department in its ability to attract promising colleagues (as Clary-Lemon (2007) has observed).

Since we have made the claim that these benefits derive mainly from the specific design of our program's major rather than the presence of a major *per se*, some background information about our faculty is necessary. Put simply, a curriculum that elicited engagement must, we reasoned, be founded as much as possible on what *our* faculty would consider significant and challenging, rather than on some abstract notion of disciplinary norms. Norms, of course, would play an important role in our planning, as would our first-year mandate and our limited resources. But as many of our readers will know from experience, and as an increasing body of research confirms, identifying the norms on which to base a major in Composition, Rhetoric, Writing Studies, Communication, or some combination thereof is no simple task, given the multi-dimensional, difficult-to-define character of our discipline (or is it a field?). If this creates difficulties in curricular design—especially in Canada, where the dearth of programs in the 1990s left us without national norms, much less templates—it also affords considerable freedom. To our curriculum committee, a major built on the current and potential research interests of our faculty seemed, potentially, not only pragmatic and sustainable, but disciplinarily responsible.

Composition Studies were not foremost among these interests. Like many programs at the time, ours was comprised mostly of faculty with post-graduate degrees in English. Five of our seven Ph.D.s were from English departments, as were the MAs of most of our instructors. Unlike our American counterparts, however, our Canadian IWP collectively had almost no training in composition, at any level. Only two assistant professors, their Ph.D.s from American universities, had done work in composition, and in one case this was a single post-graduate course. A major in “Rhetoric and Composition” or “Professional Writing” would have been ill advised, given this portfolio. Rather than faculty engagement, it would probably have brought about a split between teaching and research, forcing professors up a research learning curve steep enough to jeopardize promotion. Students would not have been well served.

The interest we did have in common was text analysis. In most cases, this had begun with the kind of a-rhetorical, for-its-own-sake, well-wrought urn formalism once common in undergraduate English courses; but during the course of post-graduate training, at a time when “the canon” was increasingly seen as a class-inflected, gendered construct, even those of our faculty who had focused on canonical authors became attuned to rhetorical dimensions of texts and contexts and learned to value close analysis as a means to an end rather than an end in itself—part of one’s equipment, as Burke would say, for identifying “strategies for encompassing a situation.” Textual analysis understood this way (*rhetorica docens*) could be a platform on which to build a rhetoric-centered major, provided its potential connection with textual production (*rhetorica utens*) was realized. It helped that two members of our faculty had written dissertations in rhetorical criticism and one in discourse analysis; this gave us a core rhetoric background that was rare for a Canadian university, and it pulled CAW in the right direction. But the other Ph.D.s in our department, far from being “literature people,” had also acquired what might be called a rhetorical sensibility. One lit Ph.D. had examined gendered narratives; another, Renaissance personae. Just as important, our collective pedagogical experience after post-graduate school had been mainly in composition rather than literature courses. By the time deliberations about a major began, in 1999, most of our faculty had been with the program for at least eight years, teaching between four and six sections of writing courses each year, often sharing assignments, strategies, or approaches to course design. This included a period in the early nineties when the excitement of making something new in Canada also had us experimenting with cross-departmental links and debating the rhetoric of inquiry or the merits of WAC and WID.

It was this blend of post-graduate training and hands-on experience that was to underpin the major. To make greater use of faculty research interests while sus-

taining the program's commitment to writing instruction, we tried to strengthen the bridge between text analysis and text production—to design a curriculum in which the former would more clearly and deliberately become a means of facilitating the latter. Representative of this approach were several courses that drew on faculty interest in creative nonfiction: New Journalism, Professional Style and Editing, and Writing on the Environment. Our goal in these courses was not to train freelance writers (though some students might turn in that direction), nor was it to hold up belletristic styles as models of best prose (as had been the practice of English courses at Canadian universities for many years). Rather, in the tradition of *imitatio*, it was to diversify the range of genres and styles that our students might analyze and “try on,” thereby improving both their rhetorical flexibility and their prose-writing abilities. A balance of attention to study and practice, to academic and non-academic discourses, to varied audiences, genres, and styles, was the goal throughout. Almost a third of our upper-level courses (and our required first-year course) concentrated *primarily* on writing, either in academic styles and genres (e.g., Rhetoric in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Strategies for Technical and Professional Communication, and [Qualitative] Forms of Inquiry) or in non-academic (e.g., Professional Style and Editing, Intermediate Editing, Reading and Writing Online). The other two-thirds concentrated *primarily* on theory (Modern Rhetorical Theory, Contemporary Communication Theories), history (Orality and Literacy, Revolutions in Communication), or analysis (e.g., Rhetorical Criticism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Writing on the Environment, New Journalism, Visual Rhetorics, Rhetorics of Gender). A guiding objective was to develop habits of “reflective practice” in our students. BA graduates in Rhetoric and Communications would, we hoped, be able not only to assess the technical, epistemic, and ethical dimensions of their own and others' communicative acts but also to produce rhetoric that reached for the highest standards governing each of these dimensions.

We are under no illusions that our department's solution is perfect. Nor has reaching it been without cost. Faced with demanding preparation of new courses or unfamiliar research paradigms, some faculty have not developed the research profiles they might have. As consultation with Fulbright Scholar Louise Wetherbee Phelps in spring of 2011 reminded us, the balance struck in our original design cannot remain static, and our curriculum committee has recently recommended significant revisions. In fact, the major will likely be forever under revision, as the disciplinary landscape and/or our faculty changes. But this, we think, is a necessity rather than a consequence of bad decisions about the original design. After more than 10 years, our faculty remain engaged, the major remains popular, and the decision to prioritize faculty engagement still seems sound. The imagined alternatives, the routes we might have taken in planning, still seem less promising.

We want to close this section with an example that contrasts one of these alternatives—what might have been—with what we have actually done in our major. It's a reminder that placing faculty interests first is no more "selfish" than placing student first is "selfless." Prioritizing faculty engagement benefits everyone.

As explained previously, the original configuration of the Joint Program in Communications included a Capstone Seminar, to be taken by all students who had completed their credits at Red River College and returned to the University of Winnipeg to take their final year. Notionally, it was a course unanimously approved by members of the committee responsible for the Joint Program; the specifics of its curriculum were left to CAW faculty. If this seemed at first to be a wonderful opportunity—at that stage, CAW faculty still relied heavily on a diet of first-year writing courses—complications quickly became apparent. Because the students in the program were enrolled in one of three streams, Advertising, Journalism, or Public Relations, their knowledge base, their skill sets, and their interests varied widely. Less varied were their attitudes towards academia; after two years at college, students in all three streams returned to university highly resistant to anything they perceived as "theoretical." Into this situation stepped one of the authors, with a Ph.D. in Renaissance literature.

It would be pointless to rehash her course goals and outcomes here. Suffice it to say that the author, appreciating the weight of the "capstone" designation and the need for a curriculum that "engaged" students with divergent interests, concentrated on media analysis, including the visual. The results were disappointing, to say the least. Soon after, the other author, with a Ph.D. in rhetoric, joined the fray, thinking that team-teaching and a foundation of semiotic theory might improve matters. That approach similarly floundered. Students did the required work, passed, and graduated, but the instructors felt that the course had been little more than an exercise in credentialing. On the threshold of employment, student had no interest in reading Roland Barthes or theorizing about signs.

While aware that some responsibility for this failure was ours, we believe the main problem lay in the original decision to offer a capstone course, insofar as that decision was based on a notion of what programs "of this sort" ought to deliver rather than on local circumstances, particularly the strengths of faculty. We are reminded of Donald Bryant's claim: as much as rhetoric is about "adjusting ideas to people," it is about adjusting "people to ideas" (1974, p. 211). Attempts to tailor our courses or larger curricula to our students are admirable; no one is arguing for a return to the "great ideas." But when the adjustments move too far in the direction of students, teachers not only sacrifice what we know best but also risk selling out, and in the process losing respect.

Later successes with our communication history course provide a telling contrast. "Revolutions in Communication," as we named it, took the author, our

Renaissance Ph.D., into territory *almost* as unfamiliar as the capstone. Out of her comfort zone, she found preparations for the course time-consuming and its delivery stressful. In this case, however, she was able to draw on and extend her strengths by centering the curriculum on the emergence of print culture and its social-epistemic impacts, subjects in which she had long-term interests. It was the students who did more of the adjusting, and they benefited from it. In this course, the stress experienced by the instructor was accepted almost as a means to an end, one of those unfortunate but ultimately beneficial by-products of personal and professional growth—unlike the pointless and debilitating stress experienced in the capstone.

The argument we are trying to make is not simply that each member of faculty is better suited, by training and inclination, to teach some courses than others. Rather, it is that, within the parameters of our discipline/field, the curricula of all courses must serve such training and inclination rather than vice versa.

INSTITUTIONAL STATUS

In some respects, becoming a department has entailed only minor changes to the operations and status of our IWP. As the independent CAW, we had our own budget line, our director had a seat on University Senate, and our faculty served on major university committees. In other, more important respects, however, the impact of becoming a department has been significant. It is difficult to say how much these benefits have been a result of the major and how much the result of being granted departmental status, though one certainly made the other possible.

The most immediate gain has been control over our own curriculum. Though it has served us well to date, our major in Rhetoric and Communications will no doubt undergo extensive revisions over the coming years. Indeed, such renovations have already been set in motion by new faculty with new perspectives. But now and in the foreseeable future revisions are almost entirely up to us. They will be restrained, as curricular decisions must be, by budget lines, staffing resources, and student enrolment, and they will sometimes provoke vigorous disagreement among faculty; but within those parameters, it will be the department rather than university administrators or university committees who will decide on the direction taken by revisions, and consequently the decisions will be informed by disciplinary knowledge about the purpose, practicability, and value to students of a given curriculum. There is no going back to a service role. Faculty—and student—engagement are in our hands, to be sustained by our curricular adjustments. This is among the most obvious benefits of gaining departmental status, but as readers will appreciate, it is invaluable.

A benefit more gradually accrued has been a changed attitude among students. Because support from administrators and colleagues created a culture in which writing is taken seriously, our IWP has always been relatively fortunate in such matters. Nevertheless, in its early years the Writing Program did face student resistance to its courses. This was noticeably reduced when we separated from the English Department in 1995, in large part because of the curricular changes that accompanied separation, which softened the impact of the writing requirement by giving unexempted students greater freedom of choice in their compulsory writing course. Even so, departmental status and the presence of the major have led to a palpable improvement in student attitudes, at all levels. Before we offered the major, the common attitude in first-year academic writing courses was acceptance of what was understood to be “useful.” Though we can hardly claim that this attitude has now been universally transformed into engagement, we have observed that the presence of two or three strong writers who see Rhetoric and Communications as a legitimate field of study sometimes effects subtle attitudinal changes across an entire class. Not surprisingly, our upper-level courses have benefited even more from the existence of a major. Once limited to taking our courses as part of a BA in English (and restricted in the number they could take), majoring students are now realizing—like their peers in history or psychology—the pleasures of accumulating disciplinary knowledge and entering their chosen discourse community. They have formed a student group, organized meet-the-faculty events, presented papers at national and international student conferences, and won prestigious scholarships to support their post-graduate studies. The quality of our students is noticed. Colleagues may be unaware of conference presentations made or scholarships won by students “from” other departments, but they can hardly fail to notice the presence of exceptional students in their own classes. The performance of our best and brightest majors in cognate and elective courses—politics, conflict resolution, international development studies, philosophy, and English—reflects well on our entire department.

Indeed, the *ethos* of our IWP has noticeably improved since we began delivering the major and became a department, adding our experience to other accounts of the positive impacts of independence and a major (Howard, 2007; McCormick & Jones, 2000; and Mattingly & Harkin in Gibberson & Moriarty, 2010). The authors would hazard a guess that a handful of older faculty still think of us as a service, a non-essential, pseudo-discipline masquerading as an academic department and sucking up valuable resources. But guess is all we can do, because disparaging comments about the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications are no longer made publicly. Our “rhetorical energies” need not be spent in demoralizing attempts to educate colleagues and gain their

respect (see Lalicker in this volume). Almost all of them, it seems—and all of the younger, relatively new faculty—simply see us the way they see other departments. We can ask for no more.

Finally, and most difficult to assess, is the impact of our changed status on the national stage. As far back as 1992, the Writing Program garnered national attention when it was described by Canada's best-selling national magazine as "a model for universities across the country" (*Maclean's*, 1992, p. 78). This was not the sort of praise one turns down, of course, but it was clear that faculty engagement, opportunities for promotion, and the great tradition of rhetoric in the humanities had been overlooked in *Maclean's* assessment. Our current status feels like the real thing.

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