

## EDITOR'S COLUMN

As I write this Editor's Column, fall is fast approaching Flagstaff, Arizona, the mountain town I have made my home for the last twenty-one years. There's a clear crispness in the air. The sky's a robin egg blue. The fluttery aspen leaves are turning from green to gold. The fern on the Kachina Trail up near Mt. Humphrey's are going brown now. The herds of elk are moving from the higher elevations, instead being sighted on the trails in town, even roaming through the backyards of certain neighborhoods. Birds are gobbling up sunflower seeds for the winter, many of them readying themselves for the long flights ahead. There's a sense of anticipation of the winter to come.

I have approached the process of editing two special volumes on Basic Writing and Graduate Education with this same feeling of anticipation. For many years I have been teaching graduate courses in Basic Writing. During those years, I've presented on my work of teaching such classes at the Conference on College Composition and Communication and taken part in crucial discussions about graduate teaching at the Council on Basic Writing. All along I have been hopeful that one day I could bring together some of the key voices of teacher-scholars in our discipline to consider why teaching our graduate students about Basic Writing theory and practice is increasingly important and how we might best do so. I want to thank Hope and Cheryl so much for giving me this terrific opportunity to serve as guest editor.

Barbara Gleason's very insightful 2006 essay written for the twenty-fifth volume of *JBW* has long influenced my desire to do this work— "Reasoning the Need: Graduate Education and Basic Writing." As she notes in that essay, Basic Writing training for teacher-scholars has been a concern for Basic Writing Studies from the 1980s onward. Turning to her present moment, Gleason examines various syllabi created for graduate courses in Basic Writing history, theory, and practice from 2000-2005, noting that we need to examine "the value a knowledge base may have for improving the opportunities and lives of individuals, families, and entire communities" (67). In essence, Gleason was calling for us all to examine exactly how we teach graduate students about the theory and practice of Basic Writing. She was calling for us to understand the wide-reaching effects this work might have. And, most of all, she was calling for more of us to engage in this crucial work.

Teaching our graduate students about Basic Writing theory and practice remains very relevant— though some twelve years later the specific contexts within which we are attempting to address such concerns have somewhat shifted. This first volume's essays involve a group of thinkers who

are deeply concerned with how we might best work to empower our graduate students who are or who will become teacher-scholars of Basic Writing in today's educational landscape.

These essays address questions such as the following: How do we help to engage our graduate students in the histories, theories, and pedagogies of our discipline when we are facing increased budget cutbacks to Basic Writing programs and ever-greater difficulties in working conditions? How can we effectively empower and train our graduate students in Basic Writing when we have few or even no courses within our curricula that are specifically designed to do this kind of work? When we do have the opportunity to offer such classes, what are the essential assignments we might use and approaches that we might take? Finally, how can we move to a place in Rhetoric and Composition Studies where Basic Writing history, theory, and practice are not simply add-ons, smaller units within larger courses, but constitute powerful courses of their own?

Susan Naomi Bernstein's "An Unconventional Education: A Letter to Basic Writing Practicum Students" provides an invigorating start to this special issue by taking a creative approach to empowering our graduate students in Basic Writing history, theory, and practice. She speaks to our graduate students studying Basic Writing Studies directly by writing a letter to them, sharing her own experiences as a teacher and as a student alongside those of the Basic Writing discipline itself. As I read and re-read Bernstein's essay, I see it most clearly as a major form of advocacy, a call to action— one for faculty of graduate students in Basic Writing as well as graduate students. As she notes, "Our job as teachers and as administrators is to become a forceful presence that creates visibility for our work and the work of our students." Specifically, Bernstein encourages graduate students to question and observe practice, to develop a broad rather than a narrow perspective, and to break rules that call to be broken. Along the way, she examines the importance of taking on issues such as gender non-conformity and racial literacy with our Basic Writing students. In the end, Bernstein's essay shows us that we have very important roles to play in the future of Basic Writing Studies since "BW allows us to envision a place where the different lived experiences of the world may collide and perhaps even connect."

The second essay, Victor Villanueva and Zarah C. Moeggenberg's "A Tale of Two Generations: How We Were Taught, and What We Learned (Or Not)," suggests that we have some significant work to do in empowering our graduate students to conduct research and teach in Basic Writing as a discipline. In this essay, we get the invaluable thoughts and analyses of one

senior scholar and one junior scholar, both of whom have been schooled in Basic Writing history, theory, and practice in very different ways. Villanueva describes how his graduate student experiences were shaped by the publication of Mina Shaughnessy's work and characterizes the role Basic Writing Studies has played throughout his career as a teacher-administrator and a scholar. Moeggenberg, a junior scholar interested in issues of queer composition and Basic Writing and whose graduate studies are not yet far in the rearview mirror, describes her own deep desire to learn about Basic Writing Studies as part of her graduate training when no such courses were in fact available. Her story is essentially one of how she came to study Basic Writing in her independent work with Villanueva himself: "Three years of one-on-one mentoring and my own independent study are how I came to understand Basic Writing." Moeggenberg offers this challenge to the discipline of Basic Writing Studies: "We need to rely less on chance encounters and put more energy into constructed ones. While my mentoring with Victor may have been sparked by a couple of chance encounters, it sustained itself by proactively making more encounters possible and accessible in spaces that do not necessarily sustain conversations pertaining to basic writing politics and pedagogies." The two authors' voices are woven together yet each is distinct, Villanueva speaking to the long history as well as the present of politics in Basic Writing and Moeggenberg speaking to how graduate students are negotiating this ever more complicated landscape. Fundamentally, as Villanueva suggests toward the end of their piece, we need to "engage in a greater awareness of the ideological implications that rhetoric can carry" and "try to engage (and have students engage) in more critical, politicized metalinguistic awareness."

Karen S. Uehling's "Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty: Finding and Enacting a Professional Identity in Basic Writing" is concerned with empowering graduate students to create professional identities for themselves within the Basic Writing discipline. Uehling describes the texts she selects and her major assignments for her graduate class titled "Issues in Writing, Teaching, and Learning," a course in Basic Writing theory and practice that focuses heavily on issues of professional development. As she notes, "we explore important issues in the field, such as adult learners, assessment, diversity and valuing difference, English language learners, the history and politics of basic writing, learning styles, reading and writing instruction, the teaching of grammar, and teaching and learning perspectives." This course is mainly online but also has some crucial in-person gatherings on her university campus to

supplement the on-line work. The class is heavily involved not only with teaching students about key texts and concepts in Basic Writing theory and practice but also with mentoring them in the professional business of the discipline and discussing issues of contingent faculty members' workloads. As she beautifully articulates, "Depending largely on contingent instructors devalues these students we serve. If we are willing to hire people at the last minute to teach under exploitative conditions, we are saying that that is all the planning and support that students deserve." In her graduate class, Uehling introduces her students to the Council on Basic Writing discussion list, helps them to create material to post on the Composition Frequently Asked Questions wiki on basic writing, and aids them in presenting their work at conferences as well as in submitting manuscripts for publication. Uehling's essay ends with a series of critical questions we all need to consider as we move forward as well as some potential paths we might consider as we search for answers.

In my own article, "Re-examining Constructions of Basic Writers' Identities: Graduate Teaching, New Developments in the Contextual Model, and the Future of the Discipline," I reach back into the history of Basic Writing Studies as a way to better train our graduate students. Like Uehling, I explain the structure of a graduate course titled "Teaching Basic Writing" that I have taught for twenty years (both in person and online) to graduate students from a wide range of backgrounds. However, unlike Uehling's class which focuses on professionalization, my course structure draws from my previous research in Basic Writing Studies that has charted a series of shifts in how the discipline constructs Basic Writers' identities in terms of "developmental and grammar-based models (1970s), academic discourse models (1980s), conflict models (1990s), and contextual models (2000s)." I then examine some new, intriguing trends in research that appear in *JBW*, ones that I find hopeful for the future of the discipline and will help me reconceive my graduate course itself. As I note, some work in Basic Writing is now concentrating upon "our basic writers' constructions of their own identities in ways that do not put pressure on them to solve the many problems of the discipline but instead feature their fluctuations, their messinesses, their moments of contradiction." Finally, I describe some of the intriguing projects that my graduate students have produced over the years and offer my thoughts about the future of the discipline.

All of these essays advance crucial ideas about how we can empower our graduate students to better understand Basic Writing history, theory, and practice. Bernstein encourages teaching Basic Writing as a kind of activism

while Villanueva and Moeggenberg call for a methodology of critical self-reflection as well as stronger education in Basic Writing Studies. Uehling encourages us to examine the importance of professionalization while I return us to our history in a search for clues about our potential futures. In some sense, upon finishing reading the last essay, the reader should be even more prepared to return to the issues raised within the first essay. As such, the essays are meant to offer the reader a kind of circle in thinking such that one essay feeds directly into the next. These essays continue a decisive and ongoing discussion in Basic Writing Studies about the absolutely crucial role of graduate education.

Soon the Flagstaff ponderosa pine trees will be caked with snow and we will all be donning skis and snowshoes to hit the trails, leaving our dusty hiking boots in closets until next spring. A new, colder season will commence. This winter season promises to be a wonderful time to contemplate our next steps in Basic Writing and graduate education. In our next special issue, we will be expanding and developing the questions posed here even a bit further. I look forward to visiting with you again then.

**--Laura Gray-Rosendale of Northern Arizona University,**  
Guest Editor

### **Works Cited**

Gleason, Barbara. "Reasoning the Need: Graduate Education and Basic Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2006, pp. 49-75.