

Editor's Introduction

Commuting Campuses

JUST BEFORE CLASSES BEGAN LAST YEAR, I HAD LUNCH WITH AN ENGLISH COLLEAGUE, A member of the department at our university for more than twenty years. Over burritos and chimichangas, we discussed various projects that would require our traveling the twenty-five miles between our open-admission regional campus in Middletown and the school's selective central campus in Oxford. We also found ourselves talking about the drive itself, a commute which snakes us through the working-class streets of Middletown and Trenton, pauses us for long periods at railroad crossings, spans stretches of arching country road along Routes 73 and 127, and ends at Oxford's renowned Georgian campus, even perhaps, depending on the time of day, one of its quaint uptown restaurants. "You know," my colleague said, "after all these years, there's still one point on that drive where I freak out and start wondering if I missed my turn."

"I know just where you're talking about," I said.

"Right after 73 merges with 127."

"Yeah," I said. "It happened to me yesterday. I started saying things to myself like, 'Where'd that barn come from? I never saw that before. And what's this bridge?'"

"It never fails," he said.

Representing some thirty-five years of campus commutes, we were both talking about the same stretch of road. On the way to Oxford, one must make a left at a BP station off of 127 onto Route 73; and coming from Oxford, one must make a left onto 73 from Route 127 at the Tropix Saloon. Miss either left—as I have—and you drive miles out of your way on roads that might be described as indistinguishable from the stretch you had been traveling, that section where Route 127 joins 73. I say these portions of road "might be" described as indistinguishable because nothing really keeps them from being described in great detail: there are indeed markers (BP station, Tropix, barns, bridges, etc.) along the way that I could, and should, and do at times use to orient myself, especially of late.

In the course of preparing with Bill Thelin this inaugural issue of *Open Words* and discussing with editorial board members our goals for the journal, I've started to pay some additional attention—albeit a theoretized, politically-motivated kind of attention—to the geography of my campus commute. Resisting the hypnosis that would have me experience this everyday task as a reductive blur of "country roads," I've grown more alert to signs of life along the way, and I've been giving myself hell: What forces would teach anyone that these

places are indistinguishable, and why have I fallen into cahoots with these forces? Certainly, more than sheer terrain separates the city of Middletown—where the median household income, as of the 2000 census, was just over \$36,000 and where nearly 11 percent of house-

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holds listed incomes of less than \$10,000 per year (United States)—and the Oxford campus—where 62 percent of its first-time, full-time, first-year students in 2003 came from families with annual incomes more than \$100,000 and where nearly 24 percent came from families whose incomes exceed-

ed \$200,000 per year (CIRP). In routinizing this everyday practice of my work—this commute—my mind had drawn a stereotype (“indistinguishable country road”) in place of a complex geography.

Far from being sheer terrain, the 73/127 merger between Oxford and Middletown courses through the western edge of Seven Mile, OH, population 720, of which—despite its location between campuses—the number of residents with postsecondary degrees registers “significantly below” the state average (“Seven”). Aside from the Tropix Saloon and BP Station, you’ll also find along this particular slice of Seven Mile two drive-thrus, two farms, an automotive shop, a portion of the Norfolk Southern railroad, and a mill—sure signs of life I’d somehow lost driving in hazes between my basic writing classes at Middletown and graduate seminars in Oxford, between my meetings with non-traditional student groups maneuvering new financial aid policies and students preparing reading lists for their doctoral examinations, between senate and committee meetings at both campuses, each with distinct yet overlapping agendas. Indeed, this two and one-half mile 73/127 merge itself persists in various historical, institutional, cultural, and economic dynamics that produce policies, practices, and attitudes that not only dictate traffic density, but also differentiate and distance students, administrators, and teachers along the way. Carrying, among other things, West Virginia bituminous coal to steel mills and power plants around the world, and serving Jefferson Smurfit Corp, Middletown’s fifth largest employer (City), the Norfolk Southern has delayed my arrival at more than one committee meeting. At the same time, a state mandate to allow open access to state universities for any graduate of any Ohio charter high school within commuting distance does little to detain Oxford’s ability to maintain its “Yale of the West” image (Moll 43), which it manages through the open-access branches that accept the commuting students who might not otherwise meet Miami’s selection criteria (58). Without this state mandate, the traffic flow upon this road would look slightly different—slightly but, nonetheless, different.

Even accounting for this complex geography (and perhaps more so now in light of it), I still occasionally freak out on my commute between campuses, but I've begun to understand these freakouts in a radically different manner. In essays such as "Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place-Ballets," David Seamon has discussed ways everyday movements, like the drive to work, take the form of habits. He talks about "the inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviors of the person intelligently, and thus function as a special kind of subject which expresses itself in a preconscious way usually described by such words as 'automatic,' 'habitual,' 'involuntary,' and 'mechanical.'" (155). For Seamon, there are sequences of preconscious tasks we undertake for most daily routines. He would call the undertaking of such a sequence—like my hypnotically following 73 through Trenton, through its merger with Route 127, left at the BP—a "body ballet."

When travelers like myself sustain such "body ballets" over a length of time, the dances become "time-space routines." And when you have many such "time-space routines" combined in a particular area, you get what Seamon describes as a "place-ballet," which produces in us our senses of place—"a feeling," adds cultural geographer Tim Cresswell—"of belonging within a rhythm of life in place" (34). Seamon's vocabulary helps to

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describe what I should experience after a dozen or so years of driving the same route between the regional and central campuses: a time-space routine marking my participation in and capitulation to the ballet rhythm that constitutes the place(s) in which I work.

Given this, I find added significance (beyond what my co-editor terms basic defects in my driving) in that I still periodically freak out while driving between the open-access and selective campuses that are Miami University. In light of Seamon's vocabulary, I can see the freakout my colleague and I experience along that 73/127 merge as the mosh-pit middle of the place-ballet that might otherwise haze over my commute's complex geographies. Our particular time-space routine—the commute and its freakout—refuses hegemonic illusions of seamlessness, challenges higher education's uncomplicated promise of enlightenment and upper mobility: our time-space routine is correlative to a place-ballet that, rather than capitulate to hypnosis, startles at the twists and turns (or lack there of), inclusions and exclusions, pedagogies, course policies, administrative decisions, grant proposals, and life circumstances that can link or distance selective institutions and open-admission schools, as well as mainstream and non-mainstream constituencies at any one site. Thinking of access more generally—in regard

to any teacher, administrator, or student representing any nontraditional (whatever this might mean at whatever place at whatever given time) constituency—I read the freakout as a critical perspective on a broader place-ballet that at various times and various points can resist or affirm boundaries between academic achievement and cycles of poverty and exploitation. In this sense, I consider the freakout that I share with at least one English colleague (and how many others?) as not just symptomatic of my job's peculiar geography, but as necessarily adjunct to any map charting transections of access and English Studies.

I cannot think of the goals our board has set out for *Open Words* and not know the road linking my campuses entails a map broader and more nuanced than any Mapquest version. We unfold a map that must take into account, among other populations, the 4.4 million minority students attending Title IV institutions in the United States and its outlying areas. Our map notes nearly 39 percent of all college students will attend two-year campuses (National Center 3), recognizes that close to that same percentage of students, at all colleges and universities, will be above the age of 25 (“College Enrollment” 22), and acknowledges students coming from poor families are six times less likely than students of affluent backgrounds to achieve SAT scores that will make them competitive for admission to selective institutions (Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin B18). Our map identifies, as well, the institutional, pedagogical, and local factors that might arrest such students' movements along the way to postsecondary degrees (standardized tests? tuition costs? anti-intellectualism? remedial courses? an undependable automobile? an inflexible boss or spouse or attendance policy? the digital divide?), invite border crossings (scholarships? student loans? “Great Books” programs? open admissions? Head Start? public assistance? mass transit? distance learning? handicap stalls?), or demand new maps be drawn (critical pedagogy? canon critique? writing centers and studios? queer theory? the Posse Foundation? service learning? universal design?). Given the difficulties in drawing to scale such a map, I'd be surprised to learn of any individuals committed to the development and maintenance of a democratic society who didn't find themselves bedazzled now and then along their route. In the same light, I'd be wary, especially, of any compulsion to discern distance in terms of space alone—wary of any invitation onto any academic or social or career “path” that tells us there is only neutral terrain and individuals need only navigate accordingly.

Open Words provides a map that reflects accurately and responds creatively to the place ballets that teachers, students, administrators, politicians, and community leaders experience, disrupt, transform, or generate when they engage issues of democratic access arising through work in English Studies. The journal's contributors, in other words, dwell in the tension between opportunities they seek for the educationally and economically underprivileged and the realities of the undemocratic world in which we live. Rather than view as sheer

terrain the path through academic achievement, career advancement, and personal fulfillment, they mark the diverse and oftentimes conflictual ideologies, theories, and practices shaping higher education, and they suggest ways that we in the field can negotiate its complex geographies, if only to be more aware of the cultural, social, and institutional forces that impact our goals to ensure access for a maximum number of students representing a diversity of interests and concerns.

Open Words publishes, then, articles focusing on political, professional, and pedagogical issues related to teaching composition, reading, creative writing, ESL, and literature to open admissions and other “non-mainstream” student populations. We seek critical work in areas such as instructional strategies, cultural studies, critical theory, classroom materials, technological innovation, institutional critique, student services, program development, etc., that assist educators, administrators, and student support personnel who work with students in pedagogically difficult settings. We also seek a variety of forms to represent adequately the dynamics and documents that shape college life for the economically and educationally underprivileged: not only conventional papers such as the classroom studies, teaching narratives, in-class ethnographies, and empirical work on students that already comprise the field, but also works that help us to represent a broad range of places and interactions in which access is developed or denied.

Such works might take the forms of histories of basic writing programs and other institutional histories, multi-genre texts, new theoretical approaches to the concerns of the field, interdisciplinary work, work on digital writing and new medias vis-à-vis “access,” work that engages the politics of open-admissions education, interviews with or autobiographies and biographies of administrators, politicians, teachers, students, activists, theorists, and more collaborative work, such as dialogues between people working in different college divisions like student services and deans’ offices, as well as academic departments, or between authors and students, or pairings of reviews of authors’ books with brief dialogues between teachers, students, and author. Taking into account the complex geographies comprising roads of access, articles should consider the particularities of their settings—issues, for example, surrounding the identifier of “open access,” intersections of race, region, class, disability, gender, and sexuality—in light of the aims of English Studies to empower students’ critical and creative endeavors.¹

We value works pertinent to specialists yet accessible to non-specialists, and in this vein, our editorial board has discussed what it means to dwell in the tension between selec-

1. My thanks to our editorial board for participating in a listserv dialogue devoted to our journal's mission. For points in this paragraph on topic and genre possibilities, I especially want to thank Bill Thelin, Jennifer Beech, and Bill DeGenaro. I am indebted as well to Ira Shor, who suggested we revisit our CFP.

tive functions that typically attend the production of a scholarly journal (submission, resubmission, acceptance, rejection) and the aims of open access. Just as “open admissions schools at their best provide multiple routes of access to higher education,” one of our board members has suggested, “the journal might open multiple routes of access to scholarship.” While considering the articles that comprise this first issue, our board has, then, reflected upon “gatekeeping” issues that might arrest access of scholars whose professional experiences or relationship to issues of access might not lend themselves to generating texts one might conventionally regard as scholarly. At the same time, we’ve resisted an “anything goes” approach to selection not only by valuating pieces that might, ultimately, be of use to people committed to open-access education, but also by complicating notions of “use” so as not to confine ourselves to a limited view of academic genre or subject matter. With each submission, our reviewers consider the work’s relevance to the teaching of English with regard to issues of access, but we have not welded notions of relevance to any particular time frame, as pieces might have relevance to how teachers, students, administrators, and community members think about higher education in the long term, but not necessarily how they might function in classrooms today. In the same light, we’ve also measured relevance in terms greater than that which might be tied immediately to class work, as so many attitudes, beliefs, and practices constitutive of higher education throughout an array of sites (faculty lounges, committee rooms, chairs’ and deans’ offices, barrooms, kitchen tables, factories, archives, even billboards) impact teaching at some point. We also sought not to tie relevance to any over-specialized notion of “open admission,” as theories and practices influencing teaching and policy at even selective locations may have applicability (if not directly) to struggles for democratic access, and we felt that overspecialization might serve only to stigmatize open-admissions work, rather than bridge gaps between mainstream and marginalized factions of higher education.²

This inaugural issue, in particular, traverses multiple areas across higher education institutions and beyond that can determine degrees of access. Beth Virtanen’s contribution, for instance, charts the life circumstances of working-class students and the ways these circumstances shape their first-year college writing experiences, and Sandra Young examines the politics infusing the administration of grant monies, particularly how pressure to quantify outcomes might adversely affect the “at-risk” population one grant had originally intended to serve. In addition, Ann Larson’s article looks critically at ways open-admission schools articulate their aims to the public and how these articulations eventually shape the identity of the institutions themselves in ways that can eschew historical and persistent struggles;

2. My thanks here to Chris Gallagher, Pegeen Reichert Powell, Mike Rose, Seth Kahn, Bill Macauley, Helene Androne, and once again, Bill Thelin, for their thoughts on evaluation criteria.

and William DeGenaro argues for the necessity of engaging the historical debates shaping basic writing instruction at specific sites, noting that access is often won or lost in discourses that long precede the entry of any one new teacher upon a scene.

Moving through and amongst many such scenes, this and future editions of *Open Words* will scrutinize issues integral to access and, at the same time, indicate that no one scene is inviolate. The struggle for democratic access to higher education begins in countless places at any one time, and each of these places is scored to various degrees with the interests and tensions that shape the struggle to begin with. My own drive between Middletown and Oxford, for instance, does not reflect two distinct poles representing democratic access

“access to higher education begins in countless places at any one time”

and elitism. As transected as the road that takes me there, policies and practices originate at the central campus in the name of access, such as provisions in the Miami Plan for Liberal Education that ensure students take courses focused on non-dominant perspectives and such as revisions in eligibility requirements for the Honors Program that focus less on standardized tests

scores and grade-point averages, thus allowing for a more diverse collection of Honor Scholars. At the same time, stringent course policies in some classes and decreasing night offerings at the regional campus are among factors that continue to block, or at least slow, access of students to associate and bachelor degrees. Even what first might appear as an interstice between competing notions of access, the 73/127 merge, is itself enmeshed in forces constructing these sites on either end of it, forces that determine its traffic density—who travels, how fast, and in which direction, and the degrees to which travelers respond to signs of life along the way, or not.

Open Words represents an attempt to indicate and examine all of these places that impact access to English Studies in higher education and all of those places in which English Studies impact access, drawing newer, more complicated maps to help us all drive faster and more alertly and more deliberately. This is a journal designed to help us see well-worn areas in new and helpful ways and to draw critical attention, as well, to areas we often fail to see either due to old exclusions or our own capitulations to the place-ballets that routinely situate us and that could stand to be performed differently.

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