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### Learning as we G(r)o(w): Strategizing the Lessons of a Fledgling Rhetoric and Writing Studies Department

Jane Hindman

*CUNY Guttman Community College*

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## Field Of Dreams

Peggy O'Neill

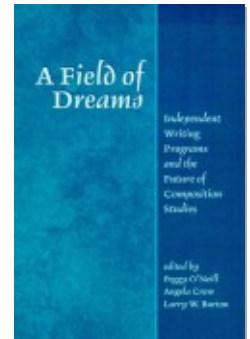
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# 7

## LEARNING AS WE G(R)O(W)

### *Strategizing the Lessons of a Fledgling Rhetoric and Writing Studies Department*

Jane E. Hindman

Even before the Wyoming Resolution and certainly ever since, compositionists have debated how we might improve the material conditions of teaching writing. Like the promise of the New World shone for many an immigrant, our vision of a legitimate discipline and—even better—a stand-alone department of rhetoric and writing seemed to guarantee the changes we'd longed for and knew we'd earned. In actuality, however, this dream of independence has been less than liberating for many. Some argue that the status of the profession has improved at the expense of the material working conditions of many professionals. While the discipline of composition studies has apparently survived its legitimation crises, the expertise and authority of a majority of its practitioners are persistently and willfully ignored on a massive, institutional scale.

Understanding the causes of and solutions to this seemingly incontrovertible split between the material labor interests and the more “academic” (that is, abstract as well as disciplinary) objectives is the goal of much recent scholarship. In the September 2000 issue of *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), for instance, Joseph Harris considers the conflicting interests between “tenure-stream” faculty and adjunct, part-time, and graduate writing instructors or “comp droids,” a term Harris borrows from Cary Nelson. These lecturers, adjuncts, and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are the qualified teachers of writing whose status the Wyoming Resolution strove to improve. In reality, however, their labor has made possible the relative leisure of an upper-class type of scholar, one whom Harris calls—following James Sledd—the “boss compositionist” who’s sold out his former peers. This “new” boss, Harris argues, is no different from the old boss: like the privileged literature professors before them, tenured writing instructors enjoy the luxuries of light teaching loads comprised of small graduate seminars while the “droids” bear the weight of undergraduate education.

In order to trace the cooption of writing instructors' objectives, Harris refers to Jeanne Gunner's analysis of the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) response to the Wyoming Resolution—from its original initiative and on through the 1989 "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." Gunner demonstrates how CCCC rhetorically shifted the focus and values of the Wyoming Resolution and thus appropriated the resolve to improve instructors' labor conditions, transforming it into a means for authorizing composition's growth as a disciplinary community, creating more tenure-track positions in composition, and—by implication perhaps—more independent departments of writing studies. Harris uses Gunner's warning about seduction that lures our attention away from present working conditions to note the folly in our destructive illusion that stabilizing the disciplinary status of composition studies will ultimately enfranchise all writing instructors.

Harris's warning is clearly well intended and relevant. So too are James Sledd's criticisms of boss compositionists who side with the interests of management and Jeanne Gunner's cautionary words to those "blinded by the allures of what might be called 'MLA-like' power and status" (108). Our continued professional and disciplinary evolution depends on our identifying the ways our professional commitment to improving working conditions can be and indeed have been co-opted. However, successful integration of the concerns of labor *and* legitimacy within composition requires us to avoid shortsighted, naive, or decontextualized analyses of how our efforts to improve working conditions and disciplinary authority are appropriated. I do not mean to imply that the critiques I've cited are categorically simplistic or restricted; yet, they do seem similar in their tacit assumption about the nature of the problematic shift from material to abstract concerns.

A careful examination of Harris's perspective on the origins of the inequitable caste system in composition reveals that assumption. Here are the alternative methods for improving working conditions that he presents: requiring tenure-stream faculty to teach first-year composition regularly; revising the first-year course so that it becomes less labor-intensive; "mak[ing] the training, supervision and review of adjunct instructors part of our own [i.e. tenure-stream personnel's] regular work as faculty" (61); and creating departmental autonomy or at least "pressing for more direct control over staffing and curricula" (64). As we can

see, a change in values and perceptions is as crucial to these alternatives as the changed behaviors they describe, for the problem—as Harris understands it—emanates from

the attitude of English towards composition in all its unconscious self-righteousness. For English *does* want full-credit for teaching composition, *does* want the full-time equivalents and graduate teaching assistantships and ethos of collegial responsibility that comes from such work. But English doesn't want to pay for it. This situation has led to a multi-tiered workforce. (60)

What particularly interests me in this analysis is its implication that getting out of English will provide compositionists and composition what they long for. Carried to its logical conclusion, Harris's diagnosis implies that creating stand-alone departments of composition will not only eliminate the multitiered instructional workforce and equalize ratios between full-time equivalents (FTEs) and salaries, but also enhance the collegial ethos of those who are responsible for the literacy of university students.

#### SEEING THE LARGER PICTURE: RECOGNIZING OUR UNTENABLE UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Because I am now—but have not always been—a tenure-stream associate professor in a stand-alone department—a department that seceded from English over seven years ago, I consider myself particularly well situated to assess these assumptions. Accordingly, one of my goals here is to interrogate this perspective on the sources of the continued inequitable material conditions in which we academic professionals labor. As I see it, Harris inadvertently creates another diversionary seduction, namely the temptation to blame English and its attitudes for problems in composition and/or to believe that we will or can be immune to the professional and institutional realities. Beguiled by this seduction, we imagine that creating a department of our own will be the answer. I can assure you it's not: neither English departments nor "MLA-like" power structures nor our own individual ambition for job security and position is solely or even collectively responsible for academia's persistent caste system and co-optive processes. The multitiered work force, as indeed the process of co-option itself, is a predictable outcome of the academy's institutionally sanctioned hierarchy. Gunner's explanation of how CCCC appropriated the concrete concerns of the creators of the Wyoming Resolution is, to my view, 100 percent accurate, but that shift from the material world (instructors'

concerns) to an abstract, self-authorized, professional (e.g., “MLA-like”) authority is not a shortcoming of composition or compositionists. As I’ve argued elsewhere, it is a definitive and inevitable feature of professionalization. The shift that works to authorize our field as a discipline establishes an authority that is part and parcel of our *eventually* being able to improve labor conditions for our professionals. In other words, it is a necessary (though often not very useful or even “right”) requirement of building a discipline. Building disciplinary authority is crucial to changing any material conditions within an institutionally sanctioned hierarchy structured on binary oppositions like these: theory/practice; research/teaching; knowledge/experience; discipline/subject; abstract/material.

I agree that achieving Harris’s goal “to forge a more collective view of our work” (43), as well as the goals of the Wyoming Resolution and the CCC’s “Statement of Principles and Standards,” does depend, as he says, on our “turn[ing] more attention now to the institutional structures in which we work” (58). But we need to understand those structures within a larger context; we must further attend to the nature of the academy itself and of professional authority. It’s clear to all of us that disciplinary status does not necessarily change material conditions, that only changed practices alter material conditions. But I fear that the changes in practice that Harris suggests will have no noteworthy or long-term effect on the inequities in a multitiered work force, for they do not address the institutional sanctioning of the hierarchy that creates them.

Thus, my second goal here is to identify the professional practices that perpetuate institutional hierarchies and undermine our local, material goals. I also hope to suggest innovative ways to construct new practices that address the hierarchical structures and values of the institution. To provide a local example and a common frame of reference, I offer the case of the stand-alone department where I’ve worked since August 1996.

#### A BRIEF STAND-ALONE HISTORY: SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY’S DEPARTMENT OF RHETORIC AND WRITING STUDIES

The origins of SDSU’s Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (DRWS) are typical—and not. As is usually the case, most of DRWS’s initial tenure-track faculty, as well as lecturers and graduate teaching assistants, were formerly housed in English (the Department of English and Comparative Literature, DECL). Atypical, however, was the union of that group with other faculty formerly housed in an entirely independent and separate unit, namely the Academic Skills Center (ASC). ASC

provided developmental writing, ESL, and math instruction to approximately one-third to one-half of the SDSU (incoming as well as transfer) student population; all other lower-and upper-division writing courses had been offered through English. The academic vice president, in response to a faculty team's review of the Academic Skills Center program, first suggested establishing a department devoted solely to composition and rhetoric. Many English faculty opposed this merger of ASC and English composition faculty, at times vigorously and resentfully; however, the proposal was supported by upper administration, particularly the dean of the College of Arts and Letters. In addition to detailing the benefits of a coherent composition program that would encompass nearly all student writing instruction from students' entrance through their fulfillment of the upper-division writing requirement, the proposal specified that an independent graduate program and upcoming minor in rhetoric and writing would add to the academic status of the newly formed department. Originally presented to the vice president for academic affairs in December 1991 and revised in March 1993, the proposal was approved by SDSU's senate in spring 1993.

In fall 1993, DRWS officially opened its doors, elected its first chair, and began to establish priorities. The faculty consisted of the chair, four additional FTEs of tenure-track faculty and approximately thirty lecturers and sixty GTAs offering writing instruction. Tenure-track faculty collaborated with lecturers, whenever university policy allowed, in creating policy regarding evaluation and rehiring of the lecturers, but worked alone to develop departmental structure, as well as retention, tenure, and promotion guidelines for tenure-track faculty. During 1993 one of DRWS's tenure-track faculty members spearheaded the Freshman Success Program, an all-campus initiative to integrate writing instruction with content material from introductory courses in various majors typically taken by first-year students. Faculty teaching both the developmental and 100-level composition courses took an active part in curriculum design, scheduling, and program promotion of Freshman Success.

In fall 1994, DRWS hired a distinguished visiting professor to examine and revise the Lower Division Writing Program and develop the Teaching Associate Program. In fall 1995, that position, the director of the Lower Division Writing Program, became permanent when one of the original proponents of the stand-alone department accepted a position elsewhere. In academic year (AY) 1995–96, DRWS initiated its proposal for a graduate program, a proposal that—in light of English's

strenuous objections—DRWS was forced to revise substantially; the department also conducted another formal search when it was awarded an additional tenure-track position. That search actually resulted in two new assistant professor hires since another of the original tenured proponents of the department, the former director of the Professional and Technical Writing Certificate Program, returned to English.

At the beginning of AY 1996–97—the third year of its existence—DRWS supported six tenure-track FTEs. During that year DRWS's graduate committee rewrote the proposal for a freestanding M.A. program.<sup>1</sup> When that effort was approved, the same body constructed the subsequent M.A. program implementation plan.<sup>2</sup> During AY 1997–98, both of the new DRWS tenure-track hires and one additional tenured professor were recruited to work with faculty from other departments to create an interdisciplinary class cluster, the Integrated Experimental Core Curriculum (IECC). One of the DRWS assistant professors was asked to coordinate upper-division IECC efforts in spring 1998; the other taught in the first nine-unit IECC program during spring 1999 and was asked to serve as program codirector in fall 1999. The tenured DRWS professor was recruited to teach a nine-unit IECC course in spring 2000.

AY 1998–99 posed many challenges to DRWS. In fall 1998, the chair accepted a position as associate dean of the College of Arts and Letters, and thus the department's scheduled search for a new director of Technical and Professional Writing was quickly matched by a search for a new chair. The interim chair, the only full professor remaining in DRWS—who also served half-time in linguistics—took over in November 1998. DRWS's faculty was to be reduced even further when one tenured member accepted a postponed-once-already Fulbright sabbatical. And finally, Executive Order (EO) 665 additionally complicated the department's labor. EO 665's mandate that students complete developmental requirements within their first academic year resulted in more than five thousand students enrolling in DRWS. At that point, when DRWS became the largest university department in terms of student load, an additional tenured faculty member—hired in 1993 as a joint appointment in English and DRWS, but stationed at a satellite campus—joined DRWS to assist the interim chair and two lecturers with the overwhelming scheduling and lecturer hiring issues that accompanied EO 665. These same faculty began (and continue even now) to work with local schools to educate secondary teachers about the English Placement Test and the Entry Level Mathematics Examination; to meet with staff from



other campus units (e.g., the advising center, test office, undergraduate studies) to coordinate on-campus responses; and to administer DRWS's agreement with San Diego Community College District to offer thirty composition classes and seventy-two mathematics classes on the SDSU campus during each academic year. These already heavily burdened faculty members joined the others conducting two search committees and promoting the graduate program in efforts to complete the self-study required for the department's first external review.

In fall 1999, two new hires—the chair and the director of professional and technical writing—joined DRWS, and the department underwent its first external review. Reviewers recommended additional tenure-track positions, an especially fortunate decision since the former interim chair was appointed faculty coordinator of the Teaching Resource Center, another tenured person took a semester's leave, and two tenure-track faculty resumed their agreement to teach at least one class annually in English. The department conducted yet another tenure-track search, this time for a coordinator of technology and pedagogy. During AY 1999–2000, the department's ongoing revisions of its upper-division curriculum resulted in a major revision of the primary upper-division writing requirement and two new technical and professional writing courses.

As of fall 2000, ongoing projects in DRWS included continuing to respond to EO 665, administering IECC, conducting another departmental search for a coordinator of upper-division writing, continuing to expand the Technical and Professional Writing Certificate Program, developing an undergraduate minor, lobbying for the still-pending approval of a stand-alone graduate program, and responding to the provost's campuswide initiative to revise and/or develop assessment practices.

#### MATERIAL WORKING CONDITIONS IN DRWS

As you can see in this whirlwind tour, DRWS's first seven years brought several new tenure-track hires. However, several tenured faculty also departed. In fact, of the original five proponents of the proposal for establishing an independent department, only one remains as an active member of the department, and her appointment fluctuates from zero to .50 FTE, depending on the semester. Only one fully active tenure-track faculty member has been with the department since its inception. It's important to remember that throughout the history I detailed above,

as few as four and until fall 2000 never more than six tenure-track faculty members were available to share the work load. Thank goodness, highly qualified lecturers, many of whom had experienced considerable power and administrative responsibility in the Academic Skills Center or in coordinating GTA training in the English department, have contributed significantly to the administration of DRWS. In some cases, however, university policy dictates that only tenure-track faculty (e.g., for evaluation of lecturing faculty, teaching graduate courses) or only tenured or full professors (annual review of probationary tenure-track faculty, review of sabbatical and grant applications) are authorized to serve. In most cases, these faculty efforts are not recognized or rewarded.

Thus, and especially because of EO 665, the formation of DRWS has resulted in more work done by fewer faculty. Keep in mind too that all the efforts I've detailed here have been in *addition to* customary faculty duties. These traditional duties include, of course, teaching: three classes each semester for tenure-track faculty (with some of the faculty who administer programs receiving one or two course releases a semester) and five classes each semester for full-time lecturers. Of the very few lecturers who are granted 100 percent contracts, each receives one course release a semester for such administrative duties as assisting with GTA training (two lecturers); coordinating the assessment projects and a developmental portfolio grading project (two lecturers); hiring, training, and evaluating tutors (one lecturer); administering and coordinating the evaluation of developmental students' proficiency exam (one lecturer); directing the developmental writing program (one lecturer) and general math studies program (one lecturer); coordinating departmental technology labs (one lecturer). In addition to teaching, tenure-track faculty must evaluate all nontenured and non-tenure-track faculty annually; individually apply faculty merit increases (FMIs) and form committees to consider FMI applications; serve on the DRWS Executive Council as well as other department committees assigned; serve on various university or college level committees; direct or act as second or third readers of M.A. theses; and so on. Oh yes, and publish, at the minimal level of one refereed journal article each academic year.

I hope it's copiously clear that—at least here in DRWS—a tenure-track position does not a “boss compositionist” make, not even for the Boss. You may even agree with my hypothesis that neither my own position—nor that of any of the other four, five, or six tenure-track faculty members in DRWS—has not been “advanced” as a result of my gaining tenure-track

status in a stand-alone department. In fact, and even though tenured members do enjoy the privilege of job security, it seems more likely that the reverse is true. Perhaps you can also agree that it's hasty to contend that "privileged" tenure-track status comes at the expense of non-tenure-track faculty's labor.

If none of these claims seem evident, then try this: compare my work conditions of the last five years with those of my previous appointment as an assistant professor in an English department at another state institution (quite similar in size and reputation to San Diego State). Not that my former post was a cakewalk: there, I was charged with revising the entire first-year composition program; and because I was the only degreed compositionist on the faculty, perhaps in the entire state, I had to coordinate all theoretical and practical matters relating to the writing curriculum. Nonetheless, the sheer size of the English department (in which, by the way, all literature faculty were assigned to teach first-year composition at least once every three years) translated into a drastically different distribution of departmental duties. I, for instance, chaired the Composition Committee, served on the First-Year Composition Task Force, and attended regular department meetings—five fewer committees than in *any* of my semesters in DRWS. My teaching load at that institution was two courses a semester. The university's expectations of research and publication for tenure were similar to those here at SDSU. Which material working conditions sound better to you?

Let me assure you that I don't make this comparison necessarily to argue against creating or joining an independent department of writing: leaving that earlier position to accept a post here at SDSU has suited my enthusiasm to work in a more independent writing program. But it definitely did not improve my material labor conditions. On the contrary—it has greatly expanded my administrative tasks and my teaching load and greatly reduced my time for writing and reading.

Neither did creating a stand-alone department improve the workaday lives of most of our lecturers. In fact, for those adjuncts who came to DRWS from the Academic Skills Center (ten to fifteen of them), working conditions worsened: they lost office space (ASC lecturers formerly enjoyed private, individual offices, and now many of them share one office, computer, and phone with fifteen or more others), forfeited autonomy (according to the policy of an academic department, they now are evaluated and governed by tenure-track faculty who probably don't know them or their work, rather than by colleagues familiar with and

dedicated to developmental writing), and surrendered a certain degree of job security (former ASC lecturers now compete with former English department lecturers for the very few renewable one-year contracts and full-time assignments in DRWS). Previously well respected in ASC for their administrative expertise and their success rates with developmental students, these adjunct faculty now face some tenure-track faculty's disdain for "remedial" programs and have been forced to increase their teaching repertoire (with no subsequent upgrade of salary or benefits) to include first- and second-year as well as upper-division composition.

Lecturers joining DRWS from English, on the other hand—another ten or twelve in total—witnessed some improvement in departmental attitude toward their contributions and expertise. Also for some in this group of adjuncts, the smaller number of tenure-track faculty in DRWS (as compared to English) meant increased administrative responsibility (and release time). However, lecturers joining DRWS from English forfeited their former opportunities to teach upper-division literature and creative writing courses. Until fall 2000, none of these lecturers were awarded more than a 60 percent position, a situation that forced many to find additional employment at other schools or outside of academia.

Job security for all these lecturers became more precarious in the stand-alone department: along with departmental status, the dean gave DRWS the mandate to "meet the need" of all students who wanted to register for all writing courses. This newly instituted requirement was further complicated by English's former practice of turning away potential first-year writing students and the subsequent backlog of upper-division students needing to complete their first-year composition requirements. As a consequence of this mandate to "meet the need"—added to EO 665's scheduling nightmares—DRWS's student enrollment fluctuates widely. Accordingly, not only has the size of writing classes increased, but also part-time lecturing faculty have had to be hired for one semester at a time with little to no opportunity for consistent or future employment. Full-time lecturing and tenure-track faculty both are forced to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to predict and/or respond to the sporadic enrollment numbers, which in turn necessitates hiring, firing, and evaluating part-time lecturing faculty. In one particularly horrendous semester, for instance, the four active DRWS tenure-track faculty members were required by university policy to observe, evaluate, and rank approximately thirty new part-time lecturers by the end of the sixth week of the semester.

DRWS, backed by the policies of the California Faculty Association—the faculty union of the California State University system—has pushed for more permanent contracts for lecturing faculty, but even for the lecturers who have been “temporary” at SDSU for more than twenty years, two-year renewable contracts have marked the limits of formally recognized “permanent” status. Very few of these contracts are offered (perhaps four out of the current forty or so lecturers have them). Likewise, very few lecturers are offered 100 percent employment (approximately eight in writing and six in general math studies). Thus, lecturers not yet awarded but competing for full-time employment are likely to try to earn favor by taking on additional, uncompensated administrative tasks, such as presenting workshops during GTA training orientations and regular seminars, organizing an annual textbook fair and review, or editing a departmental newsletter.

In addition to these institutional conditions affecting job security, university attitudes toward lecturing faculty are less than supportive (to say the least). Note, for instance, upper-administration’s response to the department’s determinations for faculty merit increases: though the DRWS FMI committee unanimously voted to distribute its merit allocations equally among all meritorious lecturing and meritorious tenure-track faculty, that decision (and its concomitant monetary amounts) has been reversed by the college dean and the provost for the last two years. Also reversed were the department’s allocations of “highly meritorious” dollar amounts to the lecturers charged with addressing the administrative nightmare caused by EO 665. As you can see, DRWS has not been the formative site for improving lecturing faculty’s labor status.

For GTAs, on the other hand, the formation of DRWS has brought some crucial improvements in working conditions in the shape of greatly enhanced teacher training. The two or three workshops that English used to offer newly appointed graduate writing instructors have expanded into a week of orientation that includes DRWS’s annual Conference on Pedagogy. That orientation is followed by a full semester of weekly meetings wherein graduate student instructors and trainers discuss issues of evaluating student writing, directing class discussions, and assigning essays according to a common curriculum.

GTA salary has not improved, however: English GTAs of six years ago were actually paid more than DRWS GTAs are now. In fact, DRWS GTAs are among the lowest paid at SDSU. Furthermore, English can lure trained GTAs out of DRWS by parceling out its coveted introductory

literature and creative writing courses to the most talented young teachers DRWS can produce. Moreover—since the DRWS stand-alone master’s program has yet to be approved—English continues to share equal decision-making power with DRWS in the hiring, education, and socialization of DRWS-trained GTAs.

#### STAND ALONE DEPARTMENTS AND THE [IM]POSSIBILITY OF RADICAL CHANGE

This experience has opened my eyes wide to some basic realities of work in an academic institution, realities about which I had been totally “clueless.” Here’s one: if it isn’t “English [that] *does* want full-credit for teaching composition . . . [but] doesn’t want to pay for it,” then it’s the dean. And if it isn’t the dean, then it’s the provost or the president. And even if English or the dean or the provosts *did* want to pay for it, they couldn’t afford to. Thus, the CCC’s 1989 “Statement of Principles and Standards”—especially in its contention that “to provide the highest quality of instruction, departments offering composition and writing courses should rely on full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members” (331) and in its recommendations that writing classes be limited to no more than twenty students and no faculty member teach more than sixty writing students a term (335)—is in a word, unrealistic. Richard E. Miller, whose article “Let’s Do the Numbers” details some of his experiences as a writing program administrator at Rutgers University, assures us “a change of this order of magnitude . . . is never going to happen at my institution” (1999, 101). As Michael Murphy likewise argues in “New Faculty for a New University,” requiring tenure-track faculty to teach all sections of composition “would obviously increase total instructional costs prohibitively,” double or even triple them (22). And Murphy also points out,

for better or worse, most university central administrations seem to have decided once and for all that in certain disciplines there simply is not enough of the work that traditional teacher-researchers do to go around, or at least a large enough budget to support that work without reservation. (22)

It is *this* situation—not simply the attitude of English but also the decisions of central administrators, as well as the traditional, hierarchical structure of the academic institution—that has led to a multitiered work force in the academy. Clearly then, creating a stand-alone department will not of itself resolve the class problem in composition. Neither will requiring tenure-stream faculty to teach first-year composition,

revise its curriculum, or participate in the training, supervision, and review of adjunct instructors. Such measures may well improve intradepartment collegiality and enhance senior faculty's respect for the rigors of first-year writing instruction. These are, therefore, worthy practices. But they have little if any impact or effect on the source of the academy's hierarchical hiring practices. This hierarchy dictates the fact that *no* academic department has "direct" (in the sense of complete or pioneering) control over staffing and curricula, particularly not one charged with administering what may be the only course(s) required of every student who attends the university.

Here's another harsh reality: what Harris labels as "unconscious self-righteousness" in the attitude English has toward composition is far more pervasive than his standpoint allows. In DRWS, our atypical origins in a "skills center" (as well as in an academic department, but others across campus tend to forget that half of the history) certainly contribute to the common SDSU perception that ours is a service department, that what we do in DRWS is correct grammar, that our tenure-track faculty's "research" is unlikely to be "rigorous," even less likely to be "theoretical." Unless and until our stand-alone graduate program takes off, that view of our marginal academic status will probably prevail. But this attitude is not uncommon, it isn't maintained by English alone, and it's not based only on the fact that first-year composition is usually taught by graduate students and lecturers.

Rather, and once again, this problem for composition is instituted in the structure of the academic institution itself. Historically, ideologically, and practically, a familiar and often rehearsed set of binary oppositions not only allows the very existence of the academy, but continues to authorize its reality and assign value to the various forms of work conducted therein. A list of the most characteristic binaries includes research v. teaching, theory v. practice, knowledge v. experience, abstract v. material—where, of course, the privileged value is listed first and the "v." indicates an ongoing battle. Seemingly omnipresent in the Western tradition (and dating at least as far back as Socrates's privileging philosophy over rhetoric), these oppositions sustain the "class consciousness" that separates tenure-track research faculty from lecturing teaching faculty *throughout* the university. They likewise separate rhetoricians from compositionists even within our own discipline, theoretical from applied researchers in other disciplines, soft from hard scientists in other colleges.

Thus, it's from within *and without* English departments that the academic expertise and rigor of rhetoric and composition tenure-track faculty are questioned by those who view "real" research and "real" academic work as distinct from practice. These academic edicts do not fade away when writing and rhetoric gets out of English. In fact, it is occasionally the English literary faculty who justify to others in the academy the theoretical complexity of our "service" discipline and thus support compositionists' efforts to earn authority according to institutional practices and ideology. If and when English faculty do not lend such support, creating a stand-alone department of writing studies can help to ensure that at least one's immediate colleagues appreciate the (sometimes) highly theoretical, academically rigorous, and competitive quality of research in rhetoric and composition. It can guarantee that one's colleagues can recognize and attest to the respectability of the journals wherein one is published. But creating a stand-alone department has not yet eliminated the hierarchical levels of review nor the institutional evaluative standards that discipline tenure-track as well as lecturing faculty. It's not likely that it ever will: equitable or not, the process of professionalization is for now the only means we have by which composition can establish professional authority and thereby justify individual compositionists' demonstrations of how they meet the academy's hierarchical standards. And that process is enabled by the transformation of material concerns into a more abstract "MLA-like power and status."

#### MANAGING THE (BEFORE AND AFTER) MATH OF MINIMAL INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

If creating a stand-alone department doesn't necessarily change material working conditions for composition instructors, then what will? If achieving legitimacy as an academic discipline in our own right results in disavowing individuals' concerns, then how are we to reinstitute those goals? To my mind—as you've probably guessed—Michael Murphy and Richard E. Miller are traveling in the most promising direction. As Murphy's move "Toward a Full-Time Teaching-Intensive Faculty Track in Composition" demonstrates and my own experience verifies, the argument that it's immoral to offer such low pay and little job security for adjunct faculty has had little effect on administrative practices; in the face of the large pool of willing workers, it's not likely to have positive effect in the foreseeable future. Thus, Murphy focuses his attention on the larger context of work in composition, that is on the practices



and perspectives of university administrators; and in doing so, he makes an important rhetorical shift in the ways we might improve material working conditions in composition. Conventional disciplinary thinking—including the CCCC “Statement of Principles and Standards”—has implied that because a “professional,” that is, a tenure-track Ph.D., is most intellectually prepared to teach composition, the quality of education is compromised when departments employ large numbers of lecturers on a consistent basis. But as Richard E. Miller reminds us, “the truth is that the question of who’s qualified to teach first-year writing was settled a long time ago by the market” (1999, 99). Additionally, the conventional arguments regarding the qualifications for teaching first-year writing are not verified. It’s quite possible they aren’t even true. I, for one, am not convinced that any tenure-track professor would necessarily be a better writing instructor than any lecturing faculty, nor that research in composition necessarily improves one’s teaching. In fact, at the three state universities where I’ve taught—especially at the major research institution—undergraduates *benefitted* from the expertise, focus, energy, and commitment of graduate student and lecturing staff. Thus, the rhetorical shift Murphy makes is a shrewd as well as sincere strategy. He explains that

as the work of part-time faculty relates to *the sustained intellectual integrity of the discipline*—that is to the discipline’s ability to offer students consistently rigorous and effective instruction in advanced literacy. . . . [T]his argument stands a much better chance of success with program and university administrators, as well as with the education-consuming general public, who will ultimately have to be convinced in order for significant changes ever to be realized. (18, original emphasis)

Because he served as a long-term lecturer himself, Murphy’s argument for formalizing lecturers’ professional status and job security—vis-à-vis a form of teaching-tenure contingent on their teaching ability and their commitment to staying current with research in the discipline—is ethically as well as strategically persuasive. Thus, I’ll do no more to reconstitute it here and refer interested readers to the original. Let me only underscore my conviction that the strength of Murphy’s vision lies in his recognition of the larger institutional and professional context within which composition instructors and programs operate. His proposal for how we might initiate institutional change *and* sustain our discipline’s scholastic integrity addresses not only the structure of the

institution but also conventional administrative practices. It integrates material with professional concerns.

Murphy's proposal also gestures to the increasingly common belief that "except in its most rarefied and privileged corners, . . . [a]cademia is simply no longer in an economic position to maintain even the pretense of aloofness from the daily concerns of the world outside it—beginning with the market forces that shape student demand" (16). Joseph Harris also recognizes this imperative, declaring that "we . . . need to admit that we are indeed workers in a corporate system that we hope to reform"; however, he continues, "almost all the routine forms of marking an academic career . . . militate against such a view of our work" (51). Like Harris, I find sound ways to revise our routine in Richard E. Miller's *As If Learning Mattered*, particularly in Miller's contention that an academic who produces abstract critiques of the systems within which she works is much less likely to effect change than one who embraces her position as "intellectual bureaucrat" and uses her positioned authority to argue for local changes. In other words, we could use this implication that academics must learn to be accountable to consumers of education to uncover further strategies for improving material working conditions in composition.

The same reasoning applies to our methods for proposing and implementing a stand-alone department within the current academic system, a system in which—Miller argues—"the boundary between academic and corporate culture is being steadily eroded" (1999, 98). Though the ideology of corporatization may appall us, we must recognize the fact that abstract, ideological battles do not affect institutional outcomes. However, our tactical maneuvers might. I support Miller's notion that "we'd be better off facing, head-on, what it means to work in the corporatized University of Excellence" (1999, 98). Thus, in an earnest gesture to Miller's call for us academics to imagine ourselves as intellectual-bureaucrats, I turn to a volume he recommended to me, Eliezer Geisler's *Managing the Aftermath of Radical Corporate Change*.

Let me reiterate: my invocation of the expertise of a corporate management consultant is not meant to sanction the corporatization of the university, but rather to make the most of others' wisdom in assessing the success and failure of attempts to institute change in large organizations. In turning to Geisler's analysis of business process reengineering's (BPR's) failure to sustain successful change in corporations, I hope to uncover further explanation for why, against all in-house intentions, creating a stand-alone department here at SDSU continues to serve the interests of the few rather than the many. In suspending my disbelief at

least long enough to conceive of BPR and creating stand-alone departments as similarly conceived solutions (instituting radical organizational change) to similar problems (ineffective management of resources and work processes), I hope to find some useful tools or strategies to grow by.

Geisler's crucial argument is that BPR, "the latest in a long series of proposed solutions and 'revolutions' in business thinking," has been a dismal failure because it was ill conceived and applied (3). A "systematic, synergetic, and synthetic approach to corporate problems," Geisler argues, is the key to sustained and comprehensive organizational change (36). Because it did not "provide adequate answers to pressing issues and to identifiable problems at *all* levels of the organization," BPR not only failed to accomplish the improvements it promised, but in some cases further weakened the corporations banking on its promises (52, my emphasis). This explanation jibed with my intuitive understanding of why creating a stand-alone department of writing, the latest in a long series of "revolutions" and proposed solutions to the problems in composition, not only failed to solve those problems (at least here at SDSU), but in some cases intensified them.

Time and space do not permit me to detail how Geisler's accessible analysis of BPR's weaknesses, as well as his ideas for restoring balance after organizational changes, suggests to me some very practical guidelines for DRWS's future. Many of my department's specific applications of Geisler's methods to our challenges would probably not apply to other contexts, for academic problems demand local solutions based on local contexts. How else can a good manager discover a "systematic, synergetic, and synthetic approach"? Nonetheless, I will present here a brief overview of how Geisler's analysis of the process of organizational changes might apply to the history and the future of DRWS, and I'll hope that my presentation triggers imaginations and inspires interested readers to turn to Geisler's volume themselves.

In a concise table (See Figure 1), Geisler categorizes the reasons for the failure of BPR, a list comprised of weaknesses in groundwork, implementation, and organizational structure, as well as in the "untenable underlying assumptions" of BPR itself (50). Even a cursory glance at those assumptions reveals conceptual similarities between BPR and the dreams some of us have had for the changes to be wrought by creating stand-alone departments. Consider, for instance, the particular untenable assumption Geisler calls "transferability of culture" (50). Is not composition's desire to reduce or eliminate class consciousness in its labor force an example of an attempt to create a culture that—so far—

has not been transferable to its larger organizational context? If Geisler is correct that “even in a situation where a new vision is thrust upon the organization, the existing culture remains as an institutionalized frame of mind,” then it’s no wonder that our efforts have failed (45). Whether corporate or academic, a manager who misrecognizes these tacit labor laws evokes visions of change based on false assumptions.

Figure 1

*Categories of Reasons for Failure of BPR*

GETTING READY

Lack of adequate preparation  
 Unrealistic expectations  
 Lack of measurable targeted goals  
 Creation of overly optimistic backdrop  
 Lack of a coherent vision

IMPLEMENTATION

Cynicism and resistance to change on part of employees  
 Lukewarm support by senior management  
 Delegation of task to consultants without adequate direction  
 Lack of employee involvement  
 Focus on cost-cutting and narrow technological objectives  
 Inadequate investments in cross-functional teams and in information technology  
 Choice of wrong champion  
 Too little time to implement and evaluate the changes  
 Focus on tasks, not processes  
 Overhaul of parts, not entire systems  
 Generally, taking the easy way

WEAKNESSES OF THE ORGANIZATION

Lack of coherent organizational strategy  
 Absence of slack resources needed for adequate implementation  
 Entrenched hierarchy and its rigidity  
 Resistance from middle managers who feel threatened

WEAKNESSES OF BPR: UNTENABLE UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Vision precedes obliteration  
 Full understanding of work processes  
 Unabridged, unbiased and definite evaluation criteria  
 Obsolescence of current logic  
 Improvements are no longer enough  
 Transferability of culture

(Geisler 50)

An equally false presumption we may rely on is that people outside the culture of composition and English (e.g., “senior managers” within the academy such as the dean, provost, and president, as well as “stakeholders” within the community such as employers or parents) have adequate or accurate information about the work that gets done in composition. Similarly, we may assume that others agree with each other or with us about what an independent unit should be or do. “Another false assumption [among the organizations Geisler reviewed and in academia as well]: that managers possess undisputed and definite criteria to evaluate work processes” (43).

Clearly, unless we recognize such untenable underlying assumptions about how change happens and address their inadequacies, our hopes for substantive change in composition (whether it be housed in English or in an independent department) will be dashed. And Geisler’s analysis of the assumptions that are likely to undergird plans for change helps me to understand what were previously befuddling realities: for instance, DRWS pays its faculty to train English GTAs, some of whom never take a course in DRWS and teach only one semester of composition; furthermore, our own department chair has no statistical evidence of DRWS’s remarkable success in educating more students at less expense than any other department on campus.

Geisler’s summary of the specific weaknesses of organizational architecture also helps me detail what I already understood in the abstract, namely that the academy systemically opposes and co-opts the material goals of individuals and even of departments. For instance, the resistance to change that results from an “entrenched hierarchy and its rigidity” certainly describes the academic institution’s persistently multi-tiered work force; likewise, that phrase explains why my department’s unanimous decisions to undermine class consciousness (e.g., by awarding equal dollar amounts to meritorious lecturing and tenure-track faculty) prove unsuccessful. Geisler’s explanations regarding “resistance from middle managers who feel threatened” account for the source of the campus and state-level lobbies against DRWS’s graduate program, which have delayed approval for more than five years. And the “absence of slack resources needed for adequate implementation” describes the DRWS situation wherein four to six tenure-track faculty have been faced with administrative tasks previously divided among thirty or forty or more; it could also explain why only one of the original five tenure-track faculty in DRWS remains.

As you can see, even though they are based on his experience as a corporate management consultant, Geisler's explanations of the structural actualities of an organization—as well as his views on the untenable underlying assumptions about how to effect change therein—clarify the reasons why proposed “radical” changes in a university usually fail. They can explain why creating a stand-alone department may well yield minimal improvements in the material working conditions of compositionists. Put to good use, they can also stimulate realistic expectations of what an independent writing department can do. Thus, I'll conclude by suggesting how Geisler's categorizations of the failures of BPR—as they are applied to what I've presented in the brief history of DRWS—suggest a plan for creating a stand-alone department. Again, and as I hope I've made clear, no plan for a stand-alone department will succeed unless proponents take into account the limitations and opportunities of their unique local contexts. Nonetheless, the following may provide useful thinking.

My own analysis of the restrictive hierarchical structure of the university notwithstanding, Geisler's views on the shortcomings of implementation plans show me ways that improved preparation could facilitate success in addressing the limitations of the multitiered work force. At the outset, it's important for proponents of a stand-alone department to account well and liberally for labor and resources. In the proposal for DRWS, however, lecturers' labor status was not mentioned at all. A proposal that includes a specific labor plan for lecturing faculty—addressing such issues as renewable contracts and permanent status, opportunity for merit awards, adequate office space—has a better chance to counteract the rigid and entrenched hierarchy of the academy's work force. If the creation of an independent writing department is suggested and/or strongly supported by upper administration, as was the case with DRWS, then proponents may have an even better opportunity to address labor inequities in their proposal.

The “choice of a wrong champion,” Geisler tells us, is another way that proponents fail to implement change successfully. In retrospect, we might see DRWS's lending so much of its severely limited tenure-track faculty's time and energy to, say, the IECC project as an example of choosing the “wrong” champion. Perhaps the department could have better negotiated the dean's requests for DRWS faculty's expertise in curriculum developments, insisting on more space or permanent faculty resources in exchange. Likewise, the department's intense concentration on EO 665 concerns consumed an inordinate amount of its limited resources. Championing developmental efforts may seem particularly self-destructive

when here at SDSU—as everywhere in the CSU system—upper administration has vowed to eliminate all “remedial” writing programs within the next three years. Thus, applying departmental resources to efforts to restructure the assessment methods that determine “remedial” status or the curricular mechanisms that integrate developmental writers, for instance, may have been more strategic than additional support for current practices.

Overcoming the lack of resources necessary for adequate implementation of an independent unit is another potential pitfall that strategic planning may prevent; in the case of DRWS, time quickly became the most precious commodity, especially time to reflect. Crisis management and a lack of coherence inevitably result when there is “too little time to implement and evaluate the changes” in a fledgling program (Geisler 50). I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to budget for and liberally allocate release time for all those involved in preparing the documents and decisions required in the formative years of a stand-alone. Planning for these needs is crucial because in most contexts, creating a stand-alone writing department will greatly reduce the ratio of tenure-track to lecturing faculty and at the same time greatly increase the number of administrative tasks typical in any academic department, many of which must be done by tenure-track personnel. Furthermore, the circumstances of a newly formed department exponentially increase the number and importance of the institution’s seemingly incessant calls for “official” departmental documents, crucial testimonials that, in turn, delimit the terms and conditions of a department’s future. A departmental mission statement (preparing this alone can take months); proposals and implementation plans for graduate, major, or minor programs; promotion and tenure guidelines for tenure-track faculty; procedures and policies for hiring and evaluating lecturing faculty; self-study documents; a five-year strategic hiring plan; assessment plans; new course proposals—each of these crucial documents requires group collaboration, careful planning, forethought. In a perfect world, each of the tenure-track faculty members of a new department contributes to these tasks and nonetheless performs administrative duties comparable to those of her peers in other departments. Barring that luxury, faculty—especially untenured members—of a new department should be awarded release time corresponding to the amount of administrative time they commit. Accordingly, proponents of any new department should take care to include in their proposals sufficient release time (no fewer than one course each semester; even two credits of course release did not compensate for the number of administrative hours some DRWS faculty worked), an adequate number of tenure-track faculty

(five is not enough), and sufficient “soft” monies to fund the faculty who take over the teaching responsibilities of those who receive release time.

Other observations and applications of Geisler’s advice to DRWS’s case history are surely possible. It’s quite likely that you readers have insights that my own involvement obscures. Furthermore, it’s obviously true that my own perspective is based on the advantage of hindsight and that, as they say, everything looks clear in the rearview mirror. I was not among the group who formed the committee, and thus I have no direct experience of that context. It may well be true that the original proponents did not advocate improved labor conditions for lecturers or insist on greatly reduced teaching loads for tenure-track personnel during the first years because to do so would have compromised the proposal’s success. Facing severe opposition from English, as well as the professional and personal trauma of severing ties with former colleagues, the proponents of DRWS faced remarkable challenges and clearly succeeded in numerous ways. In addition, and as we must recognize, institutional contexts necessitate complex negotiations of many factors. To some if not all faculty in DRWS, the commitment to championing developmental students and programs takes precedence over any other concern, regardless of its success. Likewise, while DRWS’s tenure-track faculty participation in special projects like the IECC may not have supported the department’s most pressing needs, it was politically savvy. So who’s to judge its ultimate success?

In Stanley Fish’s typically glib, but nonetheless wise, words (this time on the topic of administration),

it is only in the situation that you will know what you want . . . and once you know what you want, what you then decide to do will depend heavily on the history of the institution, the resources at your command, the calculation of short-term and long-term risks, the structures of reporting and responsibility, the degree to which you can afford to ignore these structures of reporting and responsibility, and so on. (2000, 109–10)

The point, then, of reviewing DRWS’s first years is not to pinpoint culpability or create a blueprint for others’ success but to reflect on where we thought we wanted to g[r]o[w], where we’ve been, and where/how we want to be. I’m convinced that applying Geisler’s analysis of the process of organizational change enhances that reflection, for it allows us to locate and learn from others’ failures. Furthermore, because it isolates potentially unrealistic expectations for radical change in organization, it helps us avoid disappointment and conceive of revised institutional practices that have a chance to be effective.



One last thing: in the less-than-pretty picture I've painted of the actual working conditions in the early years of DRWS, I do not want to imply that joining a stand-alone department does not have significant benefits, some of which cannot be measured in terms of office space, course loads, or numbers of committee assignments. On the contrary, my five years in DRWS have been exhilarating in many ways: I've worked with a small group of more or less like-minded people to develop an innovative graduate program that is responsive to the needs of the particular students it (will) serve(s); I've participated (but not had a vote) in the hiring of three new tenure-track colleagues and a new chair—even chaired one of those committees; I've collected data concerning the actual and perceived needs of upper-division writing students at SDSU and developed an upper-division writing requirement that addresses those needs; in addition to developmental, intermediate, technical and professional, and advanced composition courses, I've taught at least one different graduate course each year, two of which I originated. As you can see, a stand-alone department does indeed offer opportunities for autonomy and growth not available in other contexts, even if it is not the utopian work place some of us had hoped for.

Neither do I mean to be pessimistic about a stand-alone department's, or even the profession's, capacity to effect change in the academy. I do believe in the possibility of improving the material working conditions for compositionists. But I also believe that—because the nature of the institution insists upon traditional chains of command and an ideological commitment to binaries—the possibilities for change are much more limited than we like to dream. Nonetheless, change can and will eventuate if and when we get a perspective large enough to identify the institutional strictures within which we labor. Let us not be afraid to use whatever means necessary to acquiring that perspective.

#### NOTES

1. Even prior to the formation of DRWS, graduate students could choose an M.A. in English with an emphasis in rhetoric and writing studies. In proposing a stand-alone master's degree, DRWS added to its original graduate offerings to include a full graduate curriculum.
2. Though sent through all campus committees and approved by the full SDSU senate in spring 1999, at this writing—over a year and a half later—the plan has still not been approved by the California State University system's chancellor.